

PROTESTING THE GOOD WAR: Charles Lindbergh, A.J. Muste, and the Second World War

Evan Royds

Understudied in the history of American protest and activism, my research advances an understanding of the period of the second World War as a crucial transition in the history of the American anti-war movement. Whereas anti-war activism and protest in the early twentieth century held an ideological foundation in isolationism and/or Christian pacifism, the second World War denigrated both doctrines as unsuitable for the modern world. My research shows the thin veneer of the American wartime moral consensus as it did not prevent the US from committing atrocities of its own. This moral dissonance created an opportunity for a new galvanized anti-war movement, one based in humanitarianism and an emphasis on human rights, that would come to fruition protesting the wars of the latter twentieth century. My paper examines these shifts in relation to two prominent anti-war protestors in the era, who had profoundly different reasonings for protest despite their shared dissent: America First Committee spokesman Charles Lindbergh and the Fellowship of Reconciliation executive director A.J. Muste.

In December 1941, after Europe had been in conflict for more than two years, the United States declared war on Japan, Germany, and Italy. United with Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union, the Allies defeated the Axis powers three and a half years later in the summer of 1945. Today, the war is widely heralded as the ‘Good War’ in both a repudiation of the horrors of the Nazi regime, but also a testament to the honor and virtue of the ‘Greatest Generation’ of men and women that fought against it, a popular title attributed to the generation by journalist Tom Brokaw in his “The Greatest Generation.”¹ This notion of a ‘Good War’ is a product of our modern understanding of the war, as it was not used in contemporary times, and has been consistently attacked by historians such as Kenneth Rose in “Myth and the Greatest Generation” as a mythologized romanticization of the period. However, while war raged on, not all Americans believed it a just and virtuous conflict. Protests towards joining the war were prominent among two distinct groups— isolationists and pacifists—led by Charles Lindbergh and A.J. Muste, respectively.

Charles Lindbergh was the figurehead of the most influential isolationist organization of the period, The America First Committee (AFC). The AFC was founded by Yale students in 1940 to voice concern over the potential United States involvement in the war. Isolationism was the principal ideology of the AFC, and it found wide support across the country. Not only did the AFC have 800,000 members across sixty-five chapters, but polls show that Americans generally agreed with its message, as they were not keen on another foreign war just two decades after the First World War. At the onset of war, after Poland was quickly conquered by Nazi

¹ Kenneth Rose, *Myth and the Greatest Generation: A Social History of Americans in World War II*. *Myth and the Greatest Generation* (London: Routledge, 2007), 1.

PROTESTING THE GOOD WAR

Germany, seventy-one percent of Americans responded ‘NO’ to the question, “If it appears that Germany is defeating England and France, should the United States declare war on Germany and send our army and navy to Europe to fight?”² Isolationism has been a powerful force in the American political tradition. George Washington encouraged non-interventionism in his Farewell Address of 1796. Thomas Jefferson warned his colleagues against entangling alliances with European powers. Even Woodrow Wilson won his election of 1916 with the slogan ‘He kept us out of war.’ Although isolation from European events had long been part of the history of the United States, World War I was a catalyst bringing isolationism to the of American minds in the 1930s.³

The AFC was committed to keeping this idea in American political discussion, and Charles Lindbergh gladly served as its spokesperson. Throughout Lindbergh’s life he kept a journal and wrote nightly entries regarding his personal life as well as his thoughts on the state of politics, war, and America’s role in the world. The contents of this journal are published, and this article utilizes these excerpts to examine his perceived experience of the war, both during the period as well as in reflection of his wartime activity years later.⁴

Whereas Lindbergh led the isolationist faction of the anti-war movement, A. J. Muste was the ideological leader of the pacifism wing of the anti-war movement. Just as isolationism has a long history in the American political tradition, pacifism also has roots in the founding of the country. The Quakers, a sect of Protestantism whose followers, including William Penn, were responsible for founding Pennsylvania and played crucial roles in advocating for native rights as well as the abolition of enslaved peoples centuries later.⁵ A key tenet of their religious and moral philosophy was nonviolence. Muste himself was a Presbyterian, but he shared with the Quakers a sacred belief in the virtue of pacifism. It was this belief that led Muste to become the executive director of the United States chapter of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FoR).

The FoR was founded in 1914 to advocate for nonviolence and peaceful solutions to humanity’s grievances with the First World War as its initial focus. The FoR was an adamantly Christian organization and saw their mission of nonviolence and pacifism as a religious duty. Founders Henry Hodgkin and Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze pledged, “We are one in Christ and can never be at war.”⁶ Muste firmly believed in this duty as well. He wrote extensively on the topic after his return to pacifism in 1936. In his essay “The True International,” he proclaims, “Today, at the beginning of 1939, I am again a Christian pacifist. Though in my own thinking and feeling there is no separating these two terms.”⁷ Being a Christian meant being a pacifist, it was a duty for any truly religious men according to Muste. He saw Christ in every one of his fellow men. Thus violence, and war the supreme violence, was an attack made against God.

This article will not only examine these two figures in relation to the anti-war movement but also in relation to each other. In 1941, Charles Lindbergh and A.J. Muste both thought that joining the war was not justified. Muste, in his Christian

² “How Did Public Opinion About Entering World War II Change Between 1939 and 1941?” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

³ James M. Volo, *A History of War Resistance in America* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2010), 330.

⁴ Charles Augustus Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970).

⁵ Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*, 74.

⁶ Peter Brock and Nigel Young, *Pacifism in the Twentieth Century* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 24.

⁷ Nat Hentoff, *Essays of A. J. Muste* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1967), 208.

pacifism, believed that no war was ever justified. By contrast, Lindbergh believed that war was important and good, but just that this specific war was not his country's fight.⁸ Lindbergh despised pacifist ideology and frequently bemoaned how he was forced to work with pacifists.⁹ Muste as well had many moral disagreements with those who saw war as justifiable, which Lindbergh did despite his specific views on the Second World War. Additionally, this article will examine whether Muste had any similar grievances about working with non-pacifist anti-war protestors. Lindbergh and Muste were not the only Americans opposed to war at the time. Public opinion on whether it was just and reasonable to enter the war to aid Britain and France was never unanimous prior to the bombings of Pearl Harbor. To prove this point, this article utilizes Gallup polls conducted during the period as well as data from the Office of Public Opinion Research.¹⁰ These surveys convey the mood of the American public at different stages of the war starting in September 1939 with the Nazi invasion of Poland until the immediate aftermath of the Pearl Harbor bombings in December of 1941. This data is used throughout the paper to locate the two figures' views in relation to the general American opinion at the time, especially as that opinion began to diverge from their own after 1941. Next, the paper will focus on whether for Muste and Lindbergh, the Nazi policy of mass murder during WW II, collectively now known as the Holocaust, justified intervention in the Second World War. The paper will determine this knowledge through data on *The New York Times*' (NYT) coverage of these policies and actions during wartime.¹¹ I am focusing the examination on the because it was the most prominent paper of the times and set the tone for all smaller papers.

Dissent

It is unlikely that Charles Lindbergh and A.J. Muste ever met one another. Neither of their writings mentions the other. Despite their united dissent, the two men lived very different lives. Lindbergh was a Colonel in the Air Corps, and Muste a Presbyterian pastor. They disagreed fundamentally on the purpose and nature of war. Lindbergh believed that war would not help his country yet believed that war itself did have a place in society. Muste also believed that this war would not help his country but believed this to be true about every war. Yet they were united through their dissent. Both men agreed that the United States should not go to war in Europe and that the toll that war would have on the country would be absolutely devastating. Although the two would not see themselves as standing united, others would see no difference between the two figures. Both men would face attacks that they were Nazi appeasers. Both would face cultural and political ridicule for displaying supposedly unpatriotic views. Both would be continuously ignored by the Roosevelt administration.

War is rarely unanimous. The tax it takes on a society is immense. Families are uprooted. Economies are devastated. Soldiers are traumatized. More often than not, ordinary men and women bear the brunt of this tax. The American public knew this, and after a year of fighting the first 'war to end all wars,' Americans were not

⁸ Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*, 478.

⁹ Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*, 320.

¹⁰ "Americans and The Holocaust," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

¹¹ Robert M. Shapiro and Marvin L. Kalb, *Why Didn't the Press Shout?: American & International Journalism during the Holocaust: a Collection of Papers Originally Presented at an International Conference* (Jersey City: Yeshiva University Press in association with KTAV Publishing House, 2003).

PROTESTING THE GOOD WAR

keen on fighting a second, with almost forty-eight percent stating that the U.S. should not send troops abroad in September of 1939.¹²

Despite a lack of popular support for a renewed war effort, Muste and Lindbergh each realized the precarious position they occupied in the late 1930s. Both men were weary that the tides could change and growing popular support would only embolden and encourage the Roosevelt administration to officially ask Congress for a war declaration. In preparation, pacifists and isolationists created a united front from 1938-1941. During the pre-war period, Muste encouraged his supporters to stand with other anti-war activists regardless of their underlying ideology. This included far more conservative individuals such as Senator Hamilton Fisk and Charles Lindbergh himself.¹³ However, Muste was clear to assure supporters that “the forces with which pacifists collaborated must not be allowed to obscure or hamper [our] own objectives.”¹⁴ Although united, the pacifist movement was keen to make sure their actions aligned with their value of nonviolence, wary that they might be overshadowed by the substantially larger isolationist faction of the anti-war front.

Lindbergh too had reservations about a united front with the pacifists. His connection to the pacifism movement did not come from Muste or the FoR but rather from Fredrick Libby, an executive secretary of the National Council for Prevention of War. Libby and Lindbergh shared similar social circles at the time and the two met incidentally in March of 1940. In his journal Lindbergh wrote of the encounter, “He is apparently rather a pacifist but showed unusual understanding and intelligence (if one can apply the latter term to a pacifist).”¹⁵ Lindbergh did not view pacifism as a virtuous or particularly pragmatic ideology. Despite Lindbergh’s contempt however, the two eventually formed a close relationship and met often throughout the pre-war period, helping both parties engage a larger audience.

Prior to December 1941, the isolationist’s main argument against joining the Allies was that this was a foreign war across oceans, thus America had no sanction to involve itself. The extent to which the US should play a role in the war was debated amongst the movement. In March 1941, President Roosevelt signed the Lend Lease Act, allowing food, oil, and materials to be sold to Allied nations, notably Great Britain which was desperately standing alone against the Nazi occupation of Europe after France fell a year earlier. President Roosevelt advocated for the bill as a defensive measure protecting U.S. interests. When it came to a vote, support fell on party lines with many isolationist Republicans viewing this measure as an overreach by the Roosevelt administration to involve itself on one side of the war. From March until December, the United States was in a quasi-war stance that sought to appease both sides and provide at least minimal support to Britain.

The United Front would not stand long though. Pearl Harbor and the implications of an official war declaration divided the isolationists and the pacifists on strict ideological lines. The bombing of Pearl Harbor challenged both ideologies with tangible trials to the theoretical scenarios that they had been debating. On December 7th, war was brought to the shores of Hawaii. The United States was not committed to war at this point, but sensing that support for the war was rising and increasingly aggravated from United States advancement into the Pacific, the

¹² “Americans and The Holocaust,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

¹³ Jo Ann Ooiman Robinson, *Abraham Went out: A Biography of A.J. Muste* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 89.

¹⁴ Robinson, *Abraham Went out: A Biography of A.J. Muste*, 77.

¹⁵ Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*, 320.

Japanese navy launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor.¹⁶ The attack destroyed four battleships, three destroyers, 168 aircraft, and resulted in 2,300 American casualties. The next day, December 8th, President Roosevelt issued his Infamy Speech and the United States formally declared war on Japan. American support for the war soared to its highest levels in the aftermath of the attack, and isolationist Americans had no inhibitions about this fact.¹⁷ Only three days later, on December 11th, the AFC dissolved and issued the following statement, “No good purpose can now be served by considering what might have been, had our objectives been attained. We are at war ... the primary objective is not difficult to state. It can be completely defined in one word: Victory.”¹⁸

Whereas the isolationist movement would direct its focus towards victory, the pacifist movement would turn its focus towards preventing catastrophe. During the course of the war, many pacifists transitioned towards humanitarianism, which accepted the inevitability of violence, but sought to mitigate its worst effects.¹⁹ This included Muste as well. In the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor, Muste was perplexed as to a proper response for pacifists should the United States mainland be bombed. One option that he advocated greatly was encouraging pacifists to acquire first-aid instruction.²⁰ This was a pragmatic step by Muste to ensure that his values and ideals translated into tangible results. Understandably, first aid was a natural option for pacifists, following in the footsteps of organizations such as the Red Cross, and avoiding the channels and mechanisms of war that Muste wanted his movement to be separate from. Muste’s focus was not solely on the American homefront, though. Aware of the situation in Europe, he pressed the Roosevelt administration to alter its foreign policy to save European Jews from Nazi persecution.

Knowledge

Contrary to popular belief, reports of the attacks and aggression against European Jews did reach the American public throughout the war. In fact, “The *New York Times* ran stories relating to anti-Jewish mass violence on average every other day. On June 30, 1942, the *Times* reported, “The Germans have massacred more than 1,000,000 Jewish people since the war began in carrying out Adolf Hitler’s proclaimed policy of exterminating the people.”²¹ The *Times* was the most read newspaper in the United States throughout the era and the standard bearer for reporting on the war. Thus, this news included in its pages carried a sense of significance. Information on the situation in Europe was not just coming from the press though. Even the American State Department confirmed reports from Europe. In December 1942, Great Britain and the Allies also issued an official declaration condemning the Nazi government which was featured on the front page of the *New York Times*.²²

However, this information was largely overshadowed by news of the war itself. Reports on the attacks against European Jews were relegated to the inside pages of the paper, rarely displayed on the cover. This key distinction is what led historian

¹⁶ Noam Chomsky, “The Revolutionary Pacifism of A.J. Muste: On the Backgrounds of the Pacific War,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 1:3 (1969): 22-25.

¹⁷ “How Did Public Opinion About Entering World War II Change Between 1939 and 1941?” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

¹⁸ “America First Group to Quit,” *The Telegraph-Herald*. Dubuque, Iowa. United Press International. 1941-12-12. p. 13. Retrieved November 14, 2020.

¹⁹ Geyer, and Tooze, *The Cambridge History of the Second World War. Volume 3, Total War: Economy, Society and Culture*, 475.

²⁰ Robinson, *Abraham Went out: A Biography of A.J. Muste*, 88.

²¹ Shapiro and Kalb, *Why Didn’t the Press Shout?: American & International Journalism during the Holocaust: a Collection of Papers Originally Presented at an International Conference*, 43.

²² Shapiro and Kalb, *Why Didn’t the Press Shout?*, 45.

PROTESTING THE GOOD WAR

Laurel Leff to conclude that the American public in fact did not ‘know’ about such attacks. Although the average American reading the Times would be privy to information on the genocide as it happened, due to a multitude of factors including skepticism from exaggerated rumors of war crimes during the first World War, distrust, and general inability to comprehend the horror, the American public did not ‘know’ what was happening to the Jewish population in Europe as it was perpetrated by the Nazis.²³

Muste was distinct from the American public, though, as he was aware of what was being carried out by the Nazi regime. It is important to note here the difference between Muste’s ideology of pacifism with an ideology of passivism, with which he was so often labeled by opponents. Passivism would imply that Muste was in favor of sitting in an apathetic high ground which he certainly did not, in neither words nor actions. Muste was not naive of the horrible toll of this war, especially for civilian non-combatants. This acknowledgement led him to act in ways outside of traditional channels to enact change, primarily through nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience.

Civil disobedience was a crucial component of the pacifist movement during wartime. Because pacifists outside of the US, in occupied territory and/or under authoritarian rule were subjected to execution and such draconian punishment, historians often overlook the situation of pacifists in the world’s liberal democracies.²⁴ American pacifists were harassed and even jailed under the auspice of interfering in the war effort. Muste, as late as 1946 was still pleading to the Truman administration to release many of his peers.²⁵

Another channel that Muste would frequently use was advocacy. However, at no point did Muste ever advocate for war itself, even if this meant that it could end the suffering quickly. In his 1936 essay, “Return to Pacifism,” Muste argued against “the end justifies the means theory,” which introduces “the methods, standards, and motivations of war into the labor movement.”²⁶ A year later, in 1937, he published another essay, “Sit Downs and Lie Ins” which further advocated against ‘the end justifies the means’ mentality, believing that “[e]vil means can never lead to good ends.”²⁷ Straddled with this mentality, his task for reducing the suffering of European Jews was a complicated one. How does one intervene in foreign warring powers, without participating to any extent in the war itself?

The solution that Muste found was through immigration and providing aid to the refugee crisis. Throughout the 1930’s and into the war, Jewish refugees attempted to escape Europe through immigration into friendly nations such as Britain, France, and the United States. In the States, there was a strong backlash to increasing levels of immigration, especially Jewish immigration. Ships carrying thousands of Jewish refugees were turned away, most notably the M.S. St. Louis. This was a substantial dilemma, as returning Jewish refugees back to Europe meant certain death for many if not all.²⁸

Muste was a vocal advocate for raising the immigration quotas for Jewish refugees from Europe. Pleading with the Roosevelt administration in September 1943, Muste urged that “unless something is done soon, virtually none of the Jewish

²³Shapiro and Kalb, *Why Didn't the Press Shout?*, 51-53.

²⁴ Michael Geyer, J. Adam Tooze, and Devin Pendas, “Against War,” *The Cambridge History of the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 488.

²⁵ Robinson, *Abraham Went Out: A Biography of A.J. Muste*, 87.

²⁶ Nat Hentoff, *Essays of A. J. Muste* (New York, NY: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1967), 200.

²⁷ Nat Hentoff, *Essays of A. J. Muste*, 206.

²⁸ “Americans and The Holocaust,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

population native to Poland and Germany and who are still there or in any other Axis-held territory will survive the winter.”²⁹ This message illustrates not just Muste’s active pacifism ideology, but also that Muste was aware of the magnitude of the destruction and was resolutely attempting to minimize the scale of the terror inflicted. Although Muste does not clearly state that the Nazis are what he believes to be the cause of this extermination, this does not diminish his understanding of the Jewish situation in Eastern Europe. Muste singles out Jewish people in this message as a group that is uniquely at risk currently. War, famine, and a lack of shelter could all have been reasons for groups not to survive the winter, but if Muste believed this to be the case, then why would he have singled out the Jewish population. Muste was deeply committed to ending the suffering of all peoples. His concentration on alleviating the suffering of one specific group, in a time when victims of the Nazi regime ranged across Europe from Londoners to Russians, shows that he was acutely aware of the unique Nazi threat posed to the Jewish population of Europe.

Understanding

In explaining the various ways in which the American public did not ‘know’ about the Holocaust during wartime, skepticism from false reports during the first World War, as well as American antisemitism played a large role in casting doubt on the legitimacy of the claims made in the *New York Times* and other papers. Subsequently, the American public were accustomed to apparent “old stories” of Jewish massacres by the time of the war. Time magazine even referred cynically to the latest “atrocious story” of the week.³⁰ Lindbergh aligned with this cynicism. As adamant as Muste was in his belief of the reports coming from Europe regarding the genocide, Lindbergh was equally skeptical and unsympathetic.

Lindbergh had a strained relationship with American news media. In fact, a primary reason for him to write his wartime journal was to keep a record of his viewpoints, to counter the “propaganda and extreme bitterness that was so commonly conveyed by the prewar press.”³¹ Just a young adult at the age of 25, he was catapulted to fame after winning the \$25,000 Orteig Prize, given to the first nonstop solo flight from New York City to Paris. Five years later, Lindbergh was thrust back into the spotlight when his infant son, Charles Jr., was kidnapped and murdered. The kidnapping was a ransom attempt against Lindbergh, his newfound wealth and notoriety likely making him a target. National coverage of the case and additional threats against his family forced Lindbergh into exile in Europe, creating a distrust and animosity towards the press.³²

While his encounters with the press years before certainly played a role in his skepticism towards reports about the Holocaust, Lindbergh’s anti-Semitism had a large influence as well. Even before war broke, as early as June 1939, he blamed the European and American Jewish populations for pushing the country towards war.³³ A week prior to the Nazi invasion of Poland, in August of 1939, Lindbergh wrote in his journal, “There is talk of war everywhere. The press is full of it ... [I am] disturbed by the Jewish influence in our press, radio, and motion pictures.”³⁴

Lindbergh and many others distrusted the liberal press, especially the *New York Times*, largely out of antisemitism. Every story the *New York Times* carried

²⁹ Robinson, *Abraham Went out: A Biography of A.J. Muste*, 89.

³⁰ Shapiro and Kalb, *Why Didn't the Press Shout?: American & International Journalism during the Holocaust: a Collection of Papers Originally Presented at an International Conference*, 44.

³¹ Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*, xvi.

³² A. Scott Berg, *Lindbergh* (New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1998), 341-345.

³³ Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*, 218.

³⁴ Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*, 245.

PROTESTING THE GOOD WAR

about Jewish suffering reinforced this distrust. American antisemitism flourished in the period. Approximately one in four Americans as late as 1944 viewed Jewish people as the greatest threat to America.³⁵ The *New York Times* was a Jewish owned newspaper and was cognizant of this image. Historian Marvin Kalb questions whether it was this image itself that kept the *New York Times* from fully exploring the genocide, asking “Was it because the *Times* was owned by Jews and they did not want to seem to be “pushing” a Jewish issue?”³⁶ This self-restraint then would keep the full scale of the horror from being brought to the public, setting a precedent down to other papers across the country, as the *Times*’s coverage set the standard for all other American newspapers.³⁷ Thus Muste was in a small company acting in the moment to attempt to save European Jewish population from the Holocaust. Lindbergh, by contrast, fell into the majority of Americans that did not ‘know’ about the Holocaust as it was perpetrated.

Lindbergh’s infamous September 1941 Des Moines speech gives insight into his thoughts as well. Speaking at an America First Committee rally in Iowa, Lindbergh argued again that “the three most important groups who have been pressing this country toward war are the British, the Jewish, and the Roosevelt administration.”³⁸ Although he received backlash, notably from Republican presidential candidate Wendell Willkie, the speech was received well by his supporters. This was not just a political play from Lindbergh to appeal to American anti-Semitism, even though he consistently named ‘the Jews’ as a major supporter of the war effort, but a sincere belief he held at the time. A month following his speech, assessing the anti-war movement in his journal, Lindbergh wrote, “Our strength and influence is growing rapidly, but the power of our opposition is great. Their ranks include the American government, the British government, [and] the Jews”³⁹ In Lindbergh’s mind then, if Jewish people were pushing for war, were they then still innocent non-combatants, or perhaps he instead believed that they were responsible for their own destruction and terror?

Regardless of his position and despite his lack of sympathy for the European Jewish population during the war, Lindbergh was taken aback by his ‘discovery’ of concentration camps during a post-war trip to Europe. I put discovery in quotation marks because like much of the American public, it was only after the war, after relief and reflection that people began to ‘know’ about the Holocaust. This understanding came sooner for Lindbergh though. In June of 1945 while gathering knowledge regarding aircraft technology for the United States government and reuniting with peers from his time in Germany, Lindbergh was driven by American military personnel through Camp Dora, part of the larger Bergen-Belsen camp. He was initially skeptical, “Their clothing was dirty but seemed adequate for the season. From their bodies and faces one would judge that they were not too badly fed. The odor ... could be ascribed to the practice of urinating in the open.”⁴⁰

However, not long into his inspection, Lindbergh would see the gas chambers and incineration rooms. Immediately any skepticism he had ceased to exist in his mind. On the furnaces, he contemplated,

³⁵ Robert M. Shapiro and Marvin L. Kalb, *Why Didn't the Press Shout?: American & International Journalism during the Holocaust: a Collection of Papers Originally Presented at an International Conference*, 47.

³⁶ Robert M. Shapiro and Marvin L. Kalb, *Why Didn't the Press Shout?*, 8.

³⁷ Robert M. Shapiro and Marvin L. Kalb, *Why Didn't the Press Shout?*, 57.

³⁸ “Lindbergh Accuses Jews of Pushing U.S. to War,” Jewish Virtual Library.

³⁹ Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*, 545.

⁴⁰ Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*, 991

Here was a place where men and life and death had reached the lowest form of degradation. How could any reward in national progress even faintly justify the establishment and operation of such a place? When the value of life and dignity of death are removed, what is left for men? ⁴¹

It was at this moment that Lindbergh truly ‘knew’ of the Holocaust, writing in his journal, “Of course I knew these things were going on; but it is one thing to have the intellectual knowledge ... and quite another to stand on the scene yourself, seeing, hearing, feeling, with your own senses.”⁴² As a testament to the shock and grief that he had just encountered, Lindbergh ended his wartime journal three days later. Although the war continued for two more months, Lindbergh did not chronicle his daily thoughts in writing during this time as he had for the past half decade. And despite this shock and pain from understanding the toll of what happened to the Jewish population in Europe, in 1945 Lindbergh and Muste were still in small company among Americans who truly understood what had occurred over the last few years. The war in the Pacific and the defeat of Japan overshadowed any real understanding about the Holocaust in America during the period.

Agreement

Two months after Lindbergh’s experience at Camp Dora, on August 14th, 1945, the *New York Times* triumphantly displayed, in bold type, the headline that Americans had been waiting to read for months, if not years, “JAPAN SURRENDERS, END OF WAR!”⁴³ Almost immediately Americans celebrated the victory. The next day, the *Times* reported on mass rejoicing in their city, as millions of New Yorkers gathered in Times Square.⁴⁴ Thousands of churchmen and women shared in the joy by giving thanks at a special service held at St. Patrick’s Cathedral.⁴⁵ The shared joy of victory and peace united every New Yorker in the city. That is, every New Yorker except two.

Lindbergh and Muste would not share in the same sense of pride or honor that most Americans enjoyed at the end of the war. Surrender did not mean victory for Muste. The bleak impact of the war remained, and thus he continued to advocate against the Truman administration on behalf of war resisters that were still imprisoned months after war’s end.⁴⁶ Despite his own personal efforts and those of the FoR, American war resisters stayed imprisoned long after the Japanese surrender.⁴⁷ In the coming months, Lindbergh, too, turned his attention to advocacy. His focus was not war resisters, but the atomic bomb and creating an organization that could protect against nuclear fallout. This new power available to warring nations terrified Lindbergh, and he was convinced that if left be, atomic destruction was not a matter of if, but of when.⁴⁸ For Lindbergh, among others, the fact that the US had decided to use these weapons supported the idea that nuclear fallout was an imminent possibility.

America’s war actions in the Pacific, including the use of nuclear weapons, were a source of great shame and grief amongst both Lindbergh and Muste. A year earlier, in 1944, Lindbergh was requested by US General Douglas McArthur to fly to the Pacific for consultation on aviation technology and strategy for the war effort. Lindbergh naturally obliged but was subsequently horrified by the sights of past battlegrounds between American and Japanese forces. Exploring the island of Biak, a

⁴¹ Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*, 995

⁴² Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*, 996.

⁴³ “JAPAN SURRENDERS, END OF WAR!” *New York Times*, August 15, 1945.

⁴⁴ Burns, “THOUSANDS PRAY AS VICTORY COMES: Japan Surrenders! And Thousands in Times Square Hail the Victory,” *New York Times*, August 15, 1945.

⁴⁵ Alexander Feinberg, “All City ‘Lets Go,’” *New York Times*, August 15, 1945.

⁴⁶ Robinson, *Abraham Went Out: A Biography of A.J. Muste*, 87.

⁴⁷ Robinson, *Abraham Went Out: A Biography of A.J. Muste*, 87.

⁴⁸ Berg, *Lindbergh*, 473-474.

PROTESTING THE GOOD WAR

former Japanese stronghold, Lindbergh was provided “with the most grotesque images of war that he had ever seen, images that would haunt him forever.”⁴⁹ Mangled bodies littered the coral reefs, corpses were thrown in with garbage, and American soldiers smashed the skulls of Japanese soldiers, pillaging their remains looking for golden teeth. “I have never felt more ashamed of my people,” Lindbergh wrote in his journal that night.⁵⁰

In fact, even before the Japanese surrender, both men equated United States actions in the Pacific with Nazi atrocities in Europe. Just days before the Japanese surrender on August 14th, Muste and millions of other Americans learned that the US had utilized nuclear weapons against the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Although accustomed to the horrors of war, Muste was in disbelief when news reached him that President Truman had authorized the attack. Upon hearing the reports while lecturing in Calgary, Muste was “stunned, tempted to go back to New York, but at a loss as to what to do or say when [he] got there.”⁵¹ Muste also noted the hypocrisy between American ideals and their actual war decisions. Muste decried, “It was the United States, ‘Christian America’ which perpetuated the atrocities. It was we and not the Nazi swine as they were called, the Fascist devils, the Japanese militarists, or the Russian communists.”⁵² Here we can understand how American victory for Muste was inconsequential. When this war would end, it would be but a victory of one warring power against another. V-J Day was not the triumph of democracy or justice, but a triumph of the war machine and the forces that advocated for it. Whereas Muste was felt more affected by the nuclear bombings, Lindbergh felt the most shame due to United States conduct on the Pacific front amongst American towards the Japanese.

This realization from Lindbergh represents his peering through the veneer of the mid-century American moral liberalism. Although the wartime ‘good war’ consensus elevated the conflict against the Axis powers as a moral imperative, a profound and entrenched racism disrupted this thin veneer and drove the American wartime atrocities in the Pacific. This hypocrisy was noted as early as 1946 when American historian Allan Nevins penned, “Probably in all our history, no foe has been so detested than the Japanese ... Emotions forgotten since our most savage Indian wars were reawakened.”⁵³

While in Germany, a year after his experience at Biak in the Pacific theater, reflecting on the horror of Camp Dora, Lindbergh recalled these same images from the Pacific, mangled corpses, and the defilement of Japanese bodies, and the great impression of shame that he felt there. He did not see a major difference between the Nazi crimes and the America’s own in the Pacific. He writes, “It seemed impossible that men—civilized men—could degenerate to such a level ... we who claimed to stand for something different. We, who claimed that the German was defiling humanity in his treatment of the Jew, were doing the same thing in our treatment of the Jap.”⁵⁴ This comparison shows the scale of his horror, as he was writing within days of his visit to the camp, aware of the atrocities of the Nazis.

Despite their disagreement up until this moment, Lindbergh arrived at the same ideological ground that Muste had started the period in, a disgust for, a hatred of, and even a repudiation of war itself. Lindbergh and Muste, two men united in their dissent against the war, now at this moment stood united in their agreement that this

⁴⁹ Berg, *Lindbergh*, 452.

⁵⁰ Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*, 882.

⁵¹ Johnson, *Abraham Went Out: A Biography of A.J. Muste*, 90.

⁵² Johnson, *Abraham Went Out: A Biography of A.J. Muste*, 90.

⁵³ Allan Nevins, “How We Felt About the War” in Jack Goodman, ed., *While You Were Gone: A report on wartime life in the United States (1946: Simon and Schuster)*, 13.

⁵⁴ Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*, 996.

war was by no means a ‘Good War’ as it is known today. Both men viewed the United States as not a hero, but just another co-conspirator of war. However equally ashamed and vocal about their indignation as the two men were, it was Lindbergh who faced the most backlash in the aftermath of the bombings. Carrying pain in his heart at America’s wartime actions, Lindbergh returned to New York in June of 1945, ashamed, horrified, and traumatized by the visions of the war that he had recently encountered.

Shame

Lindbergh had no time to grieve, though, as news of the Japanese surrender reached the United States shortly thereafter. Immediately upon his return, the American public “delighted in rubbing Lindbergh’s nose in news clippings—old ones full of his defeatist predictions,” as well as “new ones detailing Nazi atrocities.”⁵⁵ A long column was published in *Harpers* magazine by American historian Bernard DeVoto reminding readers that

It didn’t seem to matter to Charles A. Lindbergh that the Jew were being exterminated. The Jews didn’t seem to matter nor the Poles nor the Czechs nor the Greeks. The destruction of France didn’t seem to matter, nor the invasion of Russia, nor Holland, Belgium, Norway, Denmark. Massacre, the bombing of Coventry or Warsaw or Rotterdam didn’t seem to matter, the enslavement of millions, the starvation of millions, the slaughter of millions.⁵⁶

To a certain extent, we can see how a good war consensus was beginning to emerge in the period. Although those exact words were not used, the moral clarity with which DeVoto dispatches the anti-war crowd, carries the same notions. However, the basis for this moral clarity is not the same as the one with which modern observers would classify the war. As evidenced by the column, throughout and before the war, Jewish people were a victim of the Nazi regime, but not the prime victim.⁵⁷ This may seem like a minor difference, but the implications are important. It serves to relegate the Holocaust to a status occupied by more unremarkable aspects of war. It was but another horrible yet somewhat expectable product of war, on the same terms with invasions, bombings, and destructions. Reading this column, one would think the Jewish population was exterminated to the same extent as the ‘Poles, Czechs, and Greeks.’ Even when the word ‘massacre’ is used by DeVoto it refers to bombings that claimed hundreds of casualties as opposed to the millions of Jewish casualties that were also inflicted by the Nazis.

However better understood by war’s end, the Holocaust, as we know it in the 21st century, did not factor largely into American’s understanding of the conflict they had just endured. Holocaust in our contemporary popular dialogue has a singular meaning, referring to a specific event in history. It did not gain this meaning until the 1970’s and 80’s.⁵⁸ This use of the word Holocaust did not exist in the early years after war’s end. Holocaust as referred to by those living in the period was merely a synonym of destruction or massacre. The massacre of the European Jewish population was but one example of Nazi terror, not the prime example of the regime’s cruelty, nor did it play largely into Americans’ conceptualization of the conflict they had just endured.⁵⁹

Although World War II is often discussed through a Eurocentric lens with the Holocaust as a key event, for Americans during the war and in its immediate aftermath, the Pacific Theatre played a much more prominent role in conceptualizing

⁵⁵ Berg, *Lindbergh*, 470.

⁵⁶ Berg, *Lindbergh*, 470.

⁵⁷ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 26.

⁵⁸ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 21.

⁵⁹ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 65.

PROTESTING THE GOOD WAR

the conflict.⁶⁰ Many Americans, as observed by playwright Arthur Miller, believed Adolf Hitler was only our enemy because he was allied with Japan.⁶¹ It was the Japanese who attacked the American Homefront, not the Nazis. Japan was the first foreign power to wage a substantial attack on American soil since the Mexican American War almost a century earlier. The fear, fury, and vengeance in the hearts of Americans after the attack was intensified due to this fact. In American minds, the prime atrocity perpetrated by the Axis powers was Pearl Harbor, not Auschwitz.⁶² The war in its understanding for Americans in the 1940s was not Eurocentric, but rather centered around the Pacific.

To an extent, Lindbergh and Muste held this understanding as well. In Lindbergh's writings, the coral caves of Biak are spoken of as an equal to Camp Dora in terms of the scale of the cruelty.⁶³ As for Muste, the extermination of the Jewish population played minimally in his life after the war, rarely mentioned throughout his post-war writings. It adopts a space as just another atrocity brought on by war. The use of nuclear bombs against Hiroshima and Nagasaki, both massacres which occurred on the Pacific front, not the European, were much more foundational in Muste's shame and grievance towards the war than any event in Europe.⁶⁴ Most Americans looked with satisfaction towards the fight waged against Japan, yet Lindbergh and Muste could not share in this pride. Beginning the era as reluctant allies, united in dissent against a potential war, the two men stood in agreement. Although their beliefs would shift and their circumstances would change, the two men would stand in agreement at war's end again, dissent no longer the primary unifying force, but shame.

Reflection

Anti-war protests before and during the Second World War represent a crucial turning point for the history of the American anti-war movement in the twentieth century. Whereas isolationism provided the strongest base of sentiment against foreign intervention before 1942, it became a weakened force throughout and after American involvement in the war. The bombings of Pearl Harbor showed Americans that they were no longer isolated from the rest of the world, and the threat of nuclear fallout refuted the notion that American neutrality could shield them from foreign threats and conflicts. Isolationism largely fell out of the public discourse until just recently emerging as a response to the perceived threat of globalism.⁶⁵

Charles Lindbergh epitomized this evolution of thought. Although at the start of the war, he firmly believed that war had a necessary place in human relations, the unique horror he felt he witnessed in the Second World War quashed these thoughts. Lindbergh increasingly became weary towards the future of war and dedicated his energy and knowledge to projects and efforts that he believed essential to preventing future war, such as Strategic Air Command (SAC).⁶⁶ Strategic Air Command was a combined Department of Defense and Air Force command responsible for maintaining the United States' nuclear arsenal and estimating potential international nuclear threats.

During the latter half of the twentieth century though, as isolationism faltered, humanitarianism and an emphasis on human rights led the anti-war movement.

⁶⁰ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 26.

⁶¹ Paul Fussell, *Wartime*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 137-38.

⁶² Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 26.

⁶³ Berg, *Lindbergh*, 469.

⁶⁴ Robinson, *Abraham Went Out: A Biography of A.J. Muste*, 93-95.

⁶⁵ Ron Elving, "Pat Buchanan On 'America First' Under Trump," *NPR* (NPR, January 22, 2017).

⁶⁶ Berg, *Lindbergh*, 476.

Although humanitarianism had not yet emerged as a coherent ideology in the 1940s, pacifism utilized a similar moral framework. During the period, pacifism shifted from an ideology of passive resistance to conflict towards an active minimization of harm.

A.J. Muste witnessed not only this shift in his personal ideology, but he also continued to lead the anti-war movement for twenty-two years after 1945. During the Second World War, Muste came to see civil disobedience as the best method to enact his goals, maintain his values, and bring attention to his movement. Muste remained resolutely committed to nonviolence for the rest of his life, both at home and abroad. He protested the Korean War in the 1950s and was one of the crucial minds behind the mass demonstrations against the Vietnam War until his death, dying from old age soon after meeting with Ho Chi Minh in 1967.

Until his death, Muste attempted to relieve suffering across the world, but he never neglected the conflict and pain of his fellow Americans. Muste advised Martin Luther King, Bayard Rustin, and many other members of the Civil Rights Movement on both his ideology and on methods of nonviolent demonstration. Alluding to this mentorship that Muste had on the movement, Rustin noted, “[D]uring all my work with Martin King ... I never made a difficult decision without talking the problem over with A.J. first.”⁶⁷

The mass genocide of the European Jewish population had an impact on isolationism, pacifism, and the ways in which these two central figures in those movements viewed war and their relationship to it. However, the Holocaust as we know it today did not have the same profound effect on the American public during and immediately after the war. It would take time for Americans to come to terms with the unique horror of the war. Eventually this understanding would emerge, and with it, a mythologizing of the virtue of the ‘Greatest Generation,’ who rose and defeated this uniquely evil force.⁶⁸ However, without the knowledge and understanding of the atrocities of the Second World War at the time, can we aptly subscribe such virtue to them? Additionally, while Americans have come to terms with the horrors committed by their enemies during the Second World War, the atrocities committed by the United States remain largely unrecognized by the American public. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki remain to this day the only two uses of nuclear weapons against an enemy, let alone the use against civilians of said enemy. This then begs the following question. Who should be sanctified for their actions during the war, the men who fought the ‘Good War’ or the men who protested the ‘Good War’?

⁶⁷ Robinson, *Abraham Went Out*, 118.

⁶⁸ Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation*, xix.

PROTESTING THE GOOD WAR

References

- Berg, A. Scott. *Lindbergh*. New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1998.
- Brock, Peter, and Nigel Young. *Pacifism in the Twentieth Century*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999.
- Brokaw, Tom. *The Greatest Generation*, New York: Random House, 1998.
- Burns, "THOUSANDS PRAY AS VICTORY COMES: Japan Surrenders! And Thousands in Times Square Hail the Victory," *New York Times*, August 15, 1945.
- Chomsky, Noam. "The Revolutionary Pacifism of A.J. Muste: On the Backgrounds of the Pacific War." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 1 (3): 22–50. 1969.
- Dunn, Susan. *1940: FDR, Willkie, Lindbergh, Hitler-The Election Amid the Storm*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Elving, Ron. "Pat Buchanan On 'America First' Under Trump." NPR. NPR, January 22, 2017.
- Feinberg, Alexander. "All City 'Lets Go.'" *New York Times*, August 15, 1945.
- Fussell, Paul. *Wartime*. New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Geyer, Michael, and Adam Tooze. *The Cambridge History of the Second World War: Volume 3: Total War: Economy, Society and Culture*. 2015.
- "JAPAN SURRENDERS, END OF WAR!" *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Aug 15, 1945,
- Jewish Virtual Library "Lindbergh Accuses Jews of Pushing U.S. to War." Jewish Virtual Library.
- Lindbergh, Charles A. (Charles Augustus). *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*. [1st ed.]. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. 1970.
- Muste, A. J. (Abraham John), and Nat Hentoff. *The Essays of A. J. Muste*. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1967.
- Nevins, Allan. "How We Felt About the War" in Jack Goodman, ed., *While You Were Gone: A Report on Wartime Life in the United States*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1946.
- Novick, Peter. *The Holocaust in American Life*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
- Robinson, Jo Ann Ooiman. *Abraham Went out: a Biography of A.J. Muste*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1981.
- Rose, Kenneth. *Myth and the Greatest Generation: A Social History of Americans in World War II. Myth and the Greatest Generation*. London: Routledge. 2007.
- Shapiro, Robert Moses., and Marvin L. Kalb. *Why Didn't the Press Shout?: American & International Journalism during the Holocaust: A Collection of Papers Originally Presented at an International Conference*. Jersey City, NJ: Yeshiva University Press in association with KTAV Publishing House, 2003.
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum "How Did Public Opinion About Entering World War II Change Between 1939 and 1941?" United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.
- Volo, James M. *A History of War Resistance in America*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010.