

# World War II and McCarthyism

Was World War II the “good war”? In the twenty-first century, young people increasingly wonder if war can ever be “good.” As they examine the wars of the twentieth century, the rhetoric used to propel us into war, and the bloody consequences for the world at large, many students have become increasingly skeptical about the “benefits” of war in general and about the so-called humanistic motivations behind World War II in particular.

In order to encourage such critical analysis of the policies that led us into World War II, it is essential that our students hear as many voices as possible. All too often, the only voices they have heard are those supporting, and often glorifying, the war. But there are ample first-hand accounts of Americans who opposed America’s involvement in World War II, the horrific manner in which we ended the war through the introduction of nuclear weapons, and the domestic and international consequences of the war effort. When our students hear these voices, it gives power to their own questions about war, their own desires to oppose war, and their own fears of and implications about what being in a war means to them as young men and women.

## Document-Based Questions

### PAUL FUSSELL

1. What evidence does Paul Fussell provide to support his statement, “As the war went on, ‘precision bombing’ became a comical oxymoron relished by bomber crews with a sense of black humor”? Why didn’t the “home folks” recognize this fact?
2. How and why was the accuracy of “precision bombing” used as a propaganda tool during the war? How and why was it finally exposed as inaccurate?

3. Do you agree or disagree with Fussell's contention that the faith in area bombing "led inevitably . . . to Hiroshima and Nagasaki"?

### **YURI KOCHIYAMA**

1. Why did the FBI immediately imprison all the men who had anything to do with fishing? Why did the next wave of arrests include all "those who were leaders of the community"?
2. What were the federal justifications for the curfews, the 9066 evacuation orders, the placement in relocation camps, and freezing Japanese assets?
3. Why did Yuri Kochiyama think that what happened to her and other Japanese Americans was so "unbelievable"? How and why did her attitude change?

### **YAMAOKA MICHIKO**

1. How are Yamaoka Michiko's personal experiences at Hiroshima different from textbook accounts of the dropping of the bomb?
2. Why did the United States government oppose bringing the so-called Hiroshima Maidens to the United States for medical assistance? Do you agree or disagree with the reason for such opposition? Why would the government oppose such action but later, in 2003, support bringing some child victims of the war in Iraq to the United States for treatment? How are the two situations similar and dissimilar?
3. What kind of education do we receive in most history textbooks about atomic bombs? Do you think that Michiko would approve of such education? Why, or why not?

### **UNITED STATES STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY**

1. What is the overall tone of this report? How does it compare with Yamaoka Michiko's report of the effects of the atomic bomb?
2. Years after the dropping of the two atomic bombs, is it true that "there are no indications that radioactivity continued after the explosion to a sufficient degree to harm human beings"?

3. How do you think the United States public responded to the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Do you think the public's opinion changed after the release of this report? Explain.

### **ADMIRAL GENE LAROCQUE**

1. Admiral Laroque stated that being stationed at Pearl Harbor "sounded romantic." What do you think he meant? How is romantic imagery used to recruit people to join the military?
2. How would you compare Laroque's post-World War II beliefs with those of the Vietnam Veterans for Peace?
3. How have we "institutionalized militarism" since World War II? Do you think that the military continues to run our foreign policy? What would be the effect on our economy today without the military industrial complex?

### **KURT VONNEGUT**

1. Why do you think Howard Zinn included this excerpt from *Slaughterhouse Five* in this chapter? What new information about war does it contribute?
2. What does Kurt Vonnegut mean when he describes both the people of Dresden and the American prisoners of war by writing, "Here were more crippled human beings, more fools like themselves"? How were both the Germans and Americans crippled, and what made them fools?
3. Why do you think Vonnegut describes the march through town as a "light opera"?

### **PAUL ROBESON'S UNREAD STATEMENT**

1. Do you think the reasons provided by the State Department lawyers were sufficient to prohibit giving Robeson a passport, free movement, and access to public exposure? Why, or why not?
2. How do you think the white American public would have responded if this speech had been given? The black American public? Do you think Robeson should have been allowed to present his speech? Why, or why not?

3. Why do you think Robeson's speeches and songs were welcome throughout the rest of the world but not in the United States?

### **PETER SEEGER**

1. What do you think accounted for the anti-Communist hysteria that occurred at Peekskill? Why didn't the police intervene in the violence?
2. Why did some people think that Peekskill "was the beginning of fascism in America"?
3. Why didn't Peter Seeger see the actions at Peekskill as fascist? Do you think his beliefs about ordinary Americans were realistic or unrealistic? Explain.

### **I. F. STONE**

1. Why do you think so many people—Senators, the President, famous Americans, and ordinary folks—were afraid to challenge Joseph McCarthy?
2. Support or refute Stone's question, "If there is indeed a monstrous and diabolic conspiracy against world peace and stability, then isn't McCarthy right?"
3. What is the "Bogeyman Theory of History"? Does the McCarthy era qualify? Can you think of other times in our history that would also qualify for this description?

### **ETHEL AND JULIUS ROSENBERG**

1. Do you believe that Ethel and Julius Rosenberg could have received a fair and impartial trial during the McCarthy era? Why, or why not?
2. How does one "defeat the executioner"? Did Ethel and Julius accomplish this?
3. Why do you believe they were so confident that "others would carry on after us"?

## Main Points in *Voices*, Chapter 16, “World War II and McCarthyism”

After reading Chapter 16 in *Voices*, students should be encouraged to identify what they believe to be the main points therein. Following are five possible main points.

1. Even though World War II was the most popular war the United States ever fought, it was not simply a “good war.”
2. Despite widespread American support for World War II, there were many Americans who opposed the war.
3. In the fifty years after World War II, most historians glorified and romanticized the reasons for American involvement in the war, our conduct during and after the war, our decision to use the atomic bomb to end the war, and its domestic and international consequences.
4. The use of the atomic bomb to end World War II continues to be surrounded in controversy.
5. Although it was dangerous to speak out against the hysteria of the McCarthy hearings, many Americans risked their lives and careers to oppose the challenges McCarthyism posed to our civil liberties.

## Main Points in *Voices*, Chapter 16, “World War II and McCarthyism,” and in *A People’s History*, Chapter 16, “A People’s War?”

If your students are also reading *A People’s History*, they should be encouraged to identify what they believe to be the main points in Chapter 16 in both books. Following are five additional points to be stressed when *Voices* and *A People’s History* are used together.

6. The wartime policies of the United States at home and abroad did not reflect the democratic values for which the nation claimed to be fighting.
7. Before the war’s end, the administration was planning a new international

economic order that relied upon a partnership between big business and the federal government.

8. The dropping of the atomic bombs in Japan was the first shot in the Cold War with Russia.
9. After World War II, the United States was in a position to dominate much of the world and to create conditions to effectively control unrest on the home front.
10. The anti-Communist hysteria was so pervasive during the 1950s that many Americans believed that anti-Communism was heroic and patriotic, while those who opposed any effort to root out Communism were seen as unpatriotic.

### General-Discussion Questions for *Voices*

While the following questions are designed for classroom discussion about all the voices read in Chapter 16, they can also be rewritten and included as evaluation tools.

1. Can war ever be “good”? How and why?
2. Do you think it was inevitable that a great deal of “hysteria” arose about Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor? Was there anything the federal, state, and local governments could have done to discourage such hysteria? Why wasn’t something done? What role does the promotion of hate and fear play in convincing people to go to war?
3. Find examples to support Yuri Kochiyama’s statement, “Historically, Americans have always been putting people behind walls.” Why do you think this is part of our history?
4. After the attacks in New York City on September 11, 2001, many Americans compared anti-Arab thoughts and actions with anti-Japanese thoughts and action after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Do you think they are comparable? If so, what should we do to prevent any further erosion of the human and civil rights that should be afforded to Arabs and Arab Americans?
5. Do you think the United States was determined to use the atomic bomb regardless of any realistic or unrealistic expectations? Is this argument

similar to the one raised in 2003 that the administration of George W. Bush was determined to go to war with Iraq, regardless of any real proof of weapons of mass destruction and Iraqi involvement in the events of September 11, 2001?

6. What is romantic about joining the military? About fighting a war? Should romantic imagery be used to recruit for military enlistment? Why, or why not?
7. Do you agree with Admiral Larocque's statement that "Old men send young men to war"?
8. What is "subversive" activity? Do you think the Hollywood Ten were involved in subversive activity?
9. Arthur Miller wrote his famous play *The Crucible* at the height of the McCarthy hearings. How and why did his play, written about the Salem witchcraft trials in 1692, speak to the McCarthy hearings in the late 1940s and early 1950s?
10. What was the "reckless irresponsible 'brink of war' policy" of John Foster Dulles?

## General-Discussion Questions for *Voices* and *A People's History*

These general-discussion questions are additional questions for students who have read Chapter 16 in both books. For all questions, discussion must focus on ways the materials in both chapters help students formulate and articulate their answers.

1. Do you find it troubling that the United States fought for the freedom of Europeans during World War II at the same time that it denied many American of color their own freedoms? How and why?
2. Do you agree or disagree with Howard Zinn's statement that "Roosevelt was as much concerned to end the oppression of Jews as Lincoln was to end slavery during the Civil War" (*People's History*, p. 410)? How does he support this assertion?
3. Do you agree or disagree with Assistant Secretary of State Archibald MacLeish's statement that the peace that followed World War II would be

“a peace of oil, a peace of gold, a peace of shipping, a peace, in brief . . . without moral purpose or human interest”?

4. Describe various racist policies and actions that legally discriminated against African Americans during the war years both at home and abroad in the military.
5. Do you think the placement of Japanese into relocation camps was a mistake or a policy entirely consistent with “a long history of racism”?
6. Was World War II an example of what Howard Zinn has called a war that benefited the wealthy elite?
7. Why do you think that proportionally, there were three times more conscientious objectors (COs) in World War II, the so-called “good war,” than in World War I?
8. Do you think COs should be imprisoned for refusing to go to war on the basis of their own spiritual beliefs? Why, or why not?
9. What does Howard Zinn mean by the statement that “A few voices continued to insist that the real war was inside each nation” (*People’s History*, p. 420)? What was the “real war” that existed within the United States?
10. What credence do you give to the belief that the United States was eager to drop the atomic bomb in order to prevent the Russians from entering the war with Japan? Why was it so important to Harry Truman that Stalin not be allowed to enter the war?
11. Why do you think the Korean War is often called “the forgotten war”?
12. What did it mean to be “soft on Communism” in the 1950s? How did the fear of being so perceived influence politics at the federal level? What happened to those who were willing to take such a risk? Did anyone in power choose to do so? Why, or why not?
13. Why do you think Congress supported HUAC for such a long period of time? Why was there so little opposition to HUAC’s?
14. What were the political and economic motives of the Marshall Plan? When George Bush announced in 2003 that he wanted to extend a new Marshall Plan to Afghanistan, what did he mean? Do you think this was an appropriate aim for our foreign policy? Why, or why not?



## Evaluation Tools

### SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS

These assignments can be adapted to meet any classroom need—homework, short- or long-term research projects, individual or group work. The end product should be flexible, depending on teacher interest and student abilities—papers, journals, oral reports, visual aides, and the like.

1. In his book *Brothers in Arms* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004), Kareem Abdul-Jabbar concludes that the 1.2 million African American veterans of World War II returned to America questioning “whether the first fully democratic nation on paper would fulfill its promise” (p. 253). Such questioning of the real meaning of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, he contends, “developed into the American civil-rights movement.” Learn more about the role of African Americans in World War II and support or refute Abdul-Jabbar’s contention.
2. View the PBS production of *The Good War*. If you cannot locate the movie—or after you have finished viewing the movie—visit the PBS website [www.pbs.org/itvs/thegoodwar](http://www.pbs.org/itvs/thegoodwar). Learn as much as you can about the role of Conscientious Objectors and other pacifists in World War II. What have been the role of COs and other pacifists in previous wars? In wars since World War II? How is the experience of the COs in World War II different from and comparable to the experiences of COs in other wars? In general, how has the American public responded to the needs and actions of COs and other pacifists in time of war?
3. View at least three (out of a total of eight) episodes of the HBO production of *Band of Brothers*. If you cannot locate the movie—or after you have finished viewing the movie—visit the HBO website [www.hbo.com/band/landing/currahee.html](http://www.hbo.com/band/landing/currahee.html). How did this movie bring home the realities of war? Is there anything romantic in this portrayal of war? Why do you think producers Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg felt that this story was so important that it must be told?
4. In her book *Stubborn Twig* (New York: Random House, 1993), Lauren Kessler argues that the decision of the federal government to place 120,000 Japanese into “relocation camps” during World War II was a logical outcome

given almost 100 years of federal and state anti-Japanese policies and actions (especially in California, Oregon, and Washington). Learn as much as possible about these policies and actions, as well as the wartime Supreme Court decisions in regard to the camps, and then support or refute Kessler's contention.

5. In the movie *Rabbit in the Moon*, the director Emiko Omori states that the camps for the Japanese were not relocation camps but rather concentration camps. Yuri Kochiyama makes the same point in *Voices*. Learn as much as possible about the camps and then support or refute this contention. Do you think the Supreme Court cases about the constitutionality of the camps, as well as subsequent actions of the federal government, lend credence to this belief? Explain.
6. Some critics felt that in his academy-award-winning movie *On the Waterfront*, director Elia Kazan made a bold statement defending his decision to "name names" during the Hollywood "witch hunt" of the McCarthy era. Watch *On the Waterfront* and then learn more about Kazan, his decision, and his testimony. Then compare the decision of Marlon Brando's character to name names with that of Kazan's decision. How do you think his colleagues in Hollywood accepted Kazan after his testimony?
7. Watch the movie *The Best Years of Our Lives*. At the beginning, the movie's three main characters are on their way home after surviving the war and are discussing their plans and dreams for the future. What are their dreams? How do you think their dreams were shaped by their wartime experiences? Might they have been different had they not gone to war? Do they achieve their dreams? How and why? How do their lives and story illustrate the ongoing search for "the American Dream"? How do you think the dreams of the World War II veterans compare and contrast with those of veterans from the twenty-first-century wars in Afghanistan and Iraq?
8. Learn more about the fire bombings of Dresden and Tokyo. Why don't we hear much about these events in our textbooks?
9. In 1995, the Smithsonian Institute released preliminary plans for an exhibit that would mark the fiftieth year anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb. The planned exhibit, "The *Enola Gay*," named after the airplane that carried the bomb dropped over Hiroshima, was not well received by American veterans of World War II or by Congress. Learn more about the

initial exhibit plans, the resulting controversy, and the opening of the final exhibit. If you had been a member of Congress, how would you have responded? Explain. Do you think Congress should determine what is and is not history?

10. Read *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller. What is a Catch-22? Why do you think twenty-five publishers refused to publish the book? Why did it resonate with so many Americans? How does what you learned about the war in *Catch-22* compare and contrast with what you have read about World War II in these chapters?
11. Learn more about Peter Seeger and his folk-singing career. Listen to some of his songs and carefully read his lyrics. What can you learn about the post-war period in American history from his music? What other people were writing and singing about the same things? Pick one of Seeger's songs that you feel is especially relevant to the period under study and share it with your class.
12. Learn more about recent information concerning the involvement of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg in passing military secrets to the Soviet Union. How does this new information serve to support or detract from the Supreme Court's decision to allow them to be executed?
13. Explore the causes and consequences of the Korean "war." What did we achieve after several years of fighting? What did we lose? Describe the peace. Then learn as much as possible about the early twenty-first century relationship between North and South Korea and between the United States and the two Koreas. How did the Korean conflict during the Cold War shape the political realities and foreign policies of the twenty-first century?
14. Learn more about the life and political career of Joseph McCarthy. What was his background? How and why did he become involved in politics? What led to his success and ultimate failure with HUAC? What are the most important lessons Americans must learn from McCarthy's rise to power and his control over HUAC? Do you think any other personality has since arisen in Congress that comes close to rivaling the power of McCarthy? Explain.

**SUGGESTED ESSAY QUESTIONS**

1. The only real organized opposition to placing Japanese in relocation camps came from the Quakers and the American Civil Liberties Union. Remembering the voices you have read from American society in the 1920s and 1930s, why do you think more people did not oppose the relocation policy?
2. Comment on Yuri Kochiyama's statement that "[t]he more I think about, the more I realize how little you learn about American history. It's just what they want you to know." Do you agree or disagree? Be sure to use examples from all of your reading in *Voices* (and *A People's History*) to support your answer.
3. Support or refute Admiral Gene Larocque's statement that "we have to compete with communism wherever it appears. Our mistake is trying to stem it with guns"? How does it compare with I. F. Stone's statement that, "There can be no real peace without a readiness for live-and-let-live, i.e. for coexistence with Communism"? Do you think the Admiral and Stone would support or be critics of the twenty-first-century "war on terrorism"? Explain.
4. I. F. Stone claimed that the United States "will destroy itself now unless and until a few men of stature have the nerve to speak again the traditional language of free society." Drawing from what you have read in both *Voices* and *A People's History*, challenge his assertion that "men of stature" must step forward. What role have ordinary men and women played in not only speaking the language of freedom, but also putting their lives on the line for such freedom? In the twenty-first century, how would you define the language of freedom? Do you use such language? Why, or why not?
5. Why do you think there was very little organized opposition to World War II? What types of opposition arose?
6. Howard Zinn indicates that after World War II, the two victors—the United States and the Soviet Union—began "to carve out their own empires of influence." In so doing, they eventually controlled "the destinies of more countries than Hitler, Mussolini, and Japan had been able to do." What are the implications of this statement? Do you agree or disagree with this assessment? How and why?

7. Many historians have criticized President Truman for creating an atmosphere of crisis and fear in which the Soviet Union was portrayed as an immediate and evil threat to democratic peoples everywhere. Using information from the readings, support or refute this critique of Truman. This accusation is similar to that aimed at President George W. Bush during the 2004 presidential election—except his “axis of evil” was centered in Iraq. How do the policies of Truman and Bush compare and contrast?
8. Many people have argued that the October 2001 passage of the PATRIOT Act is the most recent chapter of many efforts by the federal government to encroach upon the civil liberties of ordinary Americans. Using examples from your reading, explain how civil liberties for ordinary Americans were violated during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Why do you think there was so little opposition during these years? Do you think the PATRIOT Act similarly violates our civil liberties? Is there opposition to the Act today?
9. Using ample examples from the reading, demonstrate the success of the “liberal-conservative coalition in creating a national anti-Communist consensus” in terms of both domestic and foreign policies.
10. Howard Zinn argues that in the fifteen years after World War II, the “liberal-conservative” coalition worked hard to destroy the legislative effects of the New Deal and to eliminate the opposition from radicals and Communists. Do you agree or disagree with this assessment? How and why? In the early twenty-first century, what are the remnants of the New Deal? How had various administrations since 1960 worked to either eliminate or salvage various New Deal policies?
11. Using examples from the readings, explain how the Cold War grew directly out of the consequences of World War II. Do you think there was anything that could have been done by our government to avoid the Cold War? Explain.

### **SIMULATIONS AND OTHER CREATIVE APPROACHES**

1. Write a children’s book that tells the story of the Conscientious Objectors and other pacifists who refused to fight during past American wars.
2. Interview a member of the local Veterans for Peace organization in your community. Develop a series of questions that will give you good information

about how and why he or she joined the military service, the war in which he or she fought, the reasons for becoming active in Veterans for Peace after he or she left the military, and what he or she feels about the efforts in the early twenty-first century to recruit young people for military involvement in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. If he or she is willing, issue an invitation to speak to your entire class.

3. Create a conversation between George W. Bush, Harry Truman, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt that takes place in mid-2004. President Bush is deep into sleep when his dreams are interrupted by a visit from former President Harry Truman. Truman feels it his duty to convince Bush to “stay the course” as he did in World War II, when he worked to convince the American people that the Soviet Union posed a real threat to democracy. Roosevelt, however, feels it essential for Bush to remember that nations can peacefully coexist. Both former presidents draw from their extensive experiences with the Soviets to help Bush think about his current problems. Document this three-way conversation and then present it to your class.
4. Draw three large maps—one of Europe and the Ottoman Empire before World War I, the second of Europe and the Middle East after World War I, and the third of Europe after World War II. Present these maps to the class and explain the geographical, political, and economic shifts that occurred as a result of war and shifting boundaries. Be sure to explain how these maps help us to better understand the geo-political realities of the twenty-first century.