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# **From Reform to Rights: The American Culture of the Citizen Soldier and the Transformation of the Crusading Metaphor, 1917-1945**

## **Abstract**

The “crusading” imagery attached to American soldiers in the 1917-1945 period performed an important function in assigning meaning to the wars of the United States. This was the result of a complex interplay between “official” and “vernacular” culture. The doughboys of the First World War at times fought a romantic “crusade” to reform the nation, world and themselves from a morally privileged position. In the post-war era, the romantic “crusade” survived but was more in tune with the conservative corporatism of Republican administrations. By the Second World War, GIs had become the agents of a very different “crusade”. Americans now embraced statist common effort in a realist prospective vision for human rights. This fundamental change in the meaning of “crusade” attached to the experiences of American soldiers suggests a protean nature to the metaphor and problematises notions of an ideologically cohesive American “crusade” in the world during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Keywords**

Crusade, crusader, crusading, public memory, language, imagery, progressivism, liberalism, Doughboys, GIs, American soldiers, First World War, Second World War, American identity, American foreign policy.

## **Introduction**

The idea of an American “crusade” in the world during the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a powerful and recurring one but clearly does not infer an exact replication of the crusading motivations and experiences of the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Instead, the term functions as a visual and linguistic metaphor that relies on apparent similarities to create meaningful connections and comparisons to the past or visions of the future. When President Woodrow Wilson took his country to war in 1917, he also embarked on a liberal internationalist mission to make the “world safe for democracy” through his schemes for global reform. Americans then, and commentators and historians since, likened the war to both a secular and religious “crusade” and this has remained a staple description attached to American participation ever since.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, they have also attached the label of “crusaders” to the American Expeditionary

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<sup>1</sup> For example see David Traxel, *Crusader Nation – The United States in Peace and the Great War, 1898-1920* (New York, 2006).

Force (AEF) that fought in Europe during the First World War. The doughboys became, in effect, holy warriors who fought to impose Wilson's schemes for democracy, religious freedom, self-determination and collective security on a broken world. This imagery was not all encompassing and there was plenty of contemporary opposition to American involvement. The war's horrific reality also prompted the revisionism of the interwar period that pictured Wilson and the troops he sent into battle as naïve idealists or the dupes of foreign powers, arms manufacturers and bankers.<sup>2</sup> Yet the "crusade" metaphor survived and received a new lease of life during the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt. This time it was a "crusade" for global human rights rather than reform. It was an American led attempt to meet the twin challenges of the Great Depression and fascist aggression through an emphasis on economic welfare and security. However, historians of both Wilson's and Roosevelt's grand world schemes often miss these very real differences between their "crusades". After the Second World War, realist scholars used the label of "crusade" to encapsulate the hopeless reform idealism of Wilson's foreign policy and that of his Democrat successors. This created an effective shorthand for the policies of the period that has proved a remarkably resilient, if imprecise, description used by opponents and supporters alike.<sup>3</sup>

This article attempts to trace the transformation of meaning in the American crusading metaphor from reform to rights in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By setting out the relationship between the conscripted soldiers (and eventually veterans) who embarked on the "crusade", official culture centred on the state and vernacular culture centred on individual or sectional interest, this transformation in meaning becomes clearer. The focus is very much on

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<sup>2</sup> Most famously with H. C. Engelbrecht and F. C. Hanighen. *Merchants of Death: A Study of the International Traffic in Arms* (New York, 1934). On wider interwar revisionism, see Warren I. Cohen. *The American Revisionists – The Lessons of Intervention in World War I*, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> See George Kennan. *American Diplomacy* (Chicago, 1951) and Robert E. Osgood. *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations* (Chicago, 1953).

the citizen soldiers conscripted to fight in the “crusades” rather than their professional counterparts. True, there was a regular army throughout the period, that likely held very different motivations, but their numbers were miniscule compared to the millions of conscripts that the national “crusades” drew in. In 1914, the American army numbered some 98,000 and had only reached 200,000 (including 67,000 National Guard) by the time the United States entered the war in 1917.<sup>4</sup> Even with a stated intention to preserve regular coherence in the first twenty divisions, by 1918 new recruits swamped these organisations and made up 77 per cent of the total 4 million soldiers by war’s end.<sup>5</sup> The National Defence Act of 1920 authorised 18,000 officers and 280,000 regular troops but poor funding levels from Congress kept actual numbers below 138,000 for twelve of the twenty years that followed.<sup>6</sup>

Russell Weigley observed that the United States often fights better for unlimited or transcendent goals that motivate its citizens but struggles to explain the more limited aims of smaller conflicts to its people.<sup>7</sup> This article probes the symbolic meaning of the transcendent goals that drove Americans in the great causes of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The historiography has largely neglected the ideologies that motivated the conscripted forces of the First World War to fight.<sup>8</sup> Studies of the Civil War and the Second World War have devoted some attention to the question, though they have often steered away from ideological explanations. Bell Irvin Wiley pictured soldiers of the Civil War era as largely motivated by a sense of adventure and excitement while Gerald Linderman viewed them as driven by a deep

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Coffman, *The Regulars – The American Army, 1898-1941* (Massachusetts, 2004), 203 and 205.

<sup>5</sup> Coffman, *Regulars*, 205.

<sup>6</sup> Coffman, *Regulars*, 234.

<sup>7</sup> Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War – A History of the United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Indiana, 1973), xxii.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Meigs, *Optimism at Armageddon: Voices of American Participants in the First World War* (Basingstoke, 1997), 8.

sense of courage and honour. Studies of the Second World War have faced a similar reluctance to assign ideology an important role. The studies of Samuel Stoffer pictured men wanting to end the war and get on with their lives and a similar focus on unit pride and comradeship as S. L. A. Marshall's famous work.<sup>9</sup> All of these explanations may well apply to the conscripted forces of the First World War, but most historians are content to portray the troops as the willing tools of Wilson and the propaganda of the Committee of Public Information (CPI). For David Kennedy, "the widely made equation between the official and the personal definition of the war's significance" meant, "many doughboys accepted, without reflection, the official definition of the war's meaning". Mark Meigs pictured the doughboys as the object of the first highly organised propaganda campaign.<sup>10</sup> More recently, Richard Faulkner saw them as knowing nothing about the principles for which they were fighting until the CPI aided them in understanding it was a war to protect democracy.<sup>11</sup>

Given the lack of nuance evident in notions of American "crusade" and the sometimes blanket application of it to the conscripted forces of the United States in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it seems appropriate to examine the concept in greater depth. Historians who have investigated the intersection of official and vernacular culture suggest a more dynamic reciprocity in the relationship between soldier, state and the American people. John Bodnar has explored the tensions between "official" and "vernacular" culture in wider American society from which public meaning emerges.<sup>12</sup> He defines public memory as a symbolic language with the capacity to mediate both the vernacular loyalties to local and familiar

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<sup>9</sup> Samuel Stoffer, *Studies in Social Psychology in World War II – The American Soldier* (New Jersey, 1949) and S. L. A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire – The Problem of Battle Command* (New York, 1947). Faulkner, *Crusaders*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Meigs, *Optimism*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Faulkner, *Crusaders*, 26-28.

<sup>12</sup> John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (New Jersey, 1992), 13.

places and official loyalties to national and imagined structures. Public memory is, therefore, a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present and, by implication, its future.<sup>13</sup> This scheme can be useful in understanding the function of what might be termed a “crusading metaphor” in American life during the 1917-1945 period. According to Bodnar, official culture relies on “dogmatic formalism” and a restatement of reality in the ideal or in propaganda terms that manipulate or distort facts and ideas rather than in complex or ambiguous terms. It presents the past on an abstract basis of timelessness and sacredness to encourage loyalty to large political structures of the state and is reliant on cultural leaders from a broad group that includes middle class professionals, government officials, editors, lawyers, clerics, teachers and military officers. In actual terms, it can be anything from literature, poetry, film, art, music, sculpture, speech, sermons or letters as long as the official discourse guides it. Vernacular culture for Bodnar, on the other hand, represents an array of specialised public interests not directly associated with the state. They are diverse, changing and subject to reformulation from time to time by the creation of new social units such as soldiers and their friends who share an experience of war and express what social reality feels like rather than what it should be like. In contrast to official culture, ordinary people express vernacular culture and “do not hesitate to privilege the personal...dimension of patriotism over the public one”.<sup>14</sup> Again, these can be any form of cultural output but they lack the close official sanction of the state and can often be but are not necessarily always in opposition to the official discourse.

In the case of the First World War, the American people and soldiers were subject to the “official” representation of the war as a “crusade” but people also made the war

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<sup>13</sup> Bodnar, *Remaking*, 14-15.

<sup>14</sup> Bodnar, *Remaking*, 14-16.

comprehensible on their own terms. Barry Schwartz has described the particular importance of an imagined past in this process. He describes how looking backward enables people to “frame” or “key” their contemporary experience of the world. Frame images are cultural devices that define the meaning of present events by linking them to great and defining events of the past.<sup>15</sup> Leaders use them to calm anxiety about change or political events, to eliminate indifference toward official concerns, to promote exemplary patterns of citizen behaviours and stress citizen duties over rights. Ordinary people use them to explain difficult or taxing circumstances or give meaning to their complex experiences.<sup>16</sup>

The clear illustrative example of keying would be the American government and people using a romanticised crusading metaphor to hide or disguise the trauma originating on the battlefields of Europe. The metaphor did perform this function but disillusionment with such evasions has long been the dominant representation of the “Lost Generation” of the First World War.<sup>17</sup> If we are to explain the persistence of the metaphor into the 1940s, we must also explore the more positive, even romantic, meaning that survived and permitted eventual transformation. The origins of this romanticism were diverse and coalesced in a form of medievalism that emphasised honour, chivalry, heroism, service and sacrifice in American and Western culture. Clerical notions of “Holy War” as a route to redemption through faith certainly played a role but so too did 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalism and popular literature, the romantic legacy of the Civil War, the progressive response to the perceived emasculating effects of modern industrial life and the soldier’s own lived experiences in Europe. Wilson’s

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<sup>15</sup> Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Illinois, 2000), 225-26 and 232.

<sup>16</sup> Bodnar, *Remaking*, 15. See also Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities – Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983) and David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country – Revisited* (Cambridge, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Steven Trout, *On the Battlefield of Memory – The First World War and American Remembrance, 1919-1921* (Alabama, 2010), 2.

propaganda machine thus picked-up a language already spoken by Americans and supercharged it.

Discovering the interaction and reciprocity in the crusade metaphor as used by the American people and troops allows a more nuanced understanding of meaning creation. This article first explores the interaction between the official and vernacular meaning of “crusade” when a romantic and retrospective element served to help explain a modern, collective war effort in the First World War. It then moves on to examining the crucial role of veterans in ensuring the survival of the crusade metaphor as an official culture in the interwar period when opposition to Wilson’s “crusade” was ascendant and a corporatist emphasis on individualism was resurgent. Finally, the article examines the crusade metaphor in era of the Great Depression, the New Deal and the Second World War. Here a renewed emphasis on collectivism and technocratic modernity by the US government, and the new multilateral institutions it sponsored, combined with a preference for securing American and international human rights over reform as an outcome from the global war. What emerges is a story of transition in the meaning of “crusade” founded on reform and medieval romance in the First World War to romance and rights in the interwar period and finally to rights and realism during the Second World War. The “crusade” of the Second World War was certainly still romantic at times but it was now less overtly retrospective and had its eyes firmly fixed on the future rather than an imagined medieval past. Not only does this suggest that the crusade metaphor was protean rather than fixed during the period but that a good deal of its importance to Americans rested on that very flexibility and changing nature.

### **“Crusade” as Reform and Romance**



Styling American participation in the First World War as a righteous “crusade” in part originated in the domestic sphere. For Americans in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the commonly used terms “crusade” and “crusading” often referred to vigorous campaigning for political, social or moral reform to combat the many challenges brought to society by increased industrialisation, urbanisation and immigration. Many progressives could therefore support participation in the war by viewing it through a reforming lens. They sensed an opportunity in the use of federal power for rapid results and envisaged the dawn of a new age for the nation and the world, imagining it with almost “millennial expectancy”.<sup>18</sup> What for many in August 1914 might be a “retrograde step in civilization” quickly became a war of deliverance, advancement and renewal for others.<sup>19</sup>

State control in wartime might bring efficiency and fairness to the economy but it also offered to solve some of the dilemmas facing the country. It might head off the social disruption brought about by mass immigration and the many “hyphenate” groups through its necessary mass collective effort. African Americans also saw an opportunity for the fulfilment of Lincoln’s promise of emancipation. W. E. B. DuBois wrote an editorial in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) *The Crisis* calling on his readers to “forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy”.<sup>20</sup>

Serving with distinction was an opportunity but many African Americans encountered a

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<sup>18</sup> Richard M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation* (Delaware, 2003), 66.

<sup>19</sup> Gamble, *Righteousness*, 182. This is not to suggest any unity of purpose or position among progressives. See Daniel T. Rodgers, “In Search of Progressivism”, *Reviews in American History* 10 (1982): 123 and John Milton Cooper Jr., “Progressivism and American Foreign Policy: A Reconsideration”, *Mid-America* 51 (1969): 260-277.

<sup>20</sup> William Edward Burghardt Dubois, “Close Ranks”, *The Crisis* 16 (1918) <https://transcription.si.edu/project/22606> accessed 5 February 2021. On the motivations of African Americans, see Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy – African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (North Carolina, 2010).

resilient wall of discrimination, violence and exclusion that blocked their ambitions. The limitation of combat roles, endemic discrimination and racial violence in places such as Houston in 1917 and Charleston in December 1918 indicated there would be little social change. For this reason, DuBois, and those making similar calls, faced heavy criticism from the black community when the war failed to deliver the expected advancements. The “crusade” for many African Americans thus became a tainted one.<sup>21</sup>

As German atrocities appeared to mount in the European war, some Americans experienced a sense of guilt at continued United States neutrality. Pro-Allied American politicians, such as Theodore Roosevelt, responded with a call for an Old-Testament style “righteous war” to deliver retribution for such egregious German acts.<sup>22</sup> Yet religious justifications for sometimes war went beyond moral outrage to notions of “Holy War” to defeat the forces of evil. As Jenkins suggests, for a genuine “Holy War,” there must be an “intimate alliance” with a particular faith tradition and the organs of church and state “must repeatedly declare the religious character of the conflict”.<sup>23</sup> This was certainly true with the allies where clergy continually made claims of a Christian war against the pagan barbarianism of the enemy.<sup>24</sup> When the United States entered the war, American politicians and clergy sounded a similar note. The American churches with the closest historic British orientations often sounded the most similar, especially the Episcopalians. Randolph McKim, the Episcopal Rector of

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<sup>21</sup> Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Maryland, 2001), 91-91 and Jennifer D. Keene, “The Memory of the Great War in the African American Community”. In *Unknown Soldiers: The American Expeditionary Force in Memory and Remembrance*, ed. Mark A. Snell (Ohio, 2008), 63-65.

<sup>22</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York, 1916).

<sup>23</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War – How World War I Changed Religion For Ever* (Oxford, 2014), 6.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth Siberry, “Images of the Crusades in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries”. In *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*, ed. Jonathan Riley-Smith (Oxford, 1995), 381-382.

Washington's Church of the Epiphany, believed "this conflict is indeed a crusade. The greatest in history – the holiest. It is in the profoundest and truest sense a Holy War".<sup>25</sup>

For some, the war in Europe assumed apocalyptic significance with the Germans and the Ottoman Empires cast as the enemy in the final climatic battle on earth. This was especially clear in the eyes of the British media when General Allenby entered Jerusalem in December 1917 suggesting an actual crusade to recapture the Holy Places from the "Turk".<sup>26</sup> The American media were also keen to promote Allenby's campaign as a "crusade". Leading American newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* followed Allenby's story and gave readers detailed histories of the original crusades from which to draw meaningful comparisons.<sup>27</sup> Coming, as it did, hard on the heels of the Balfour Declaration confirming British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine that November, events also excited premillennialist enthusiasm for Armageddon and the end times.<sup>28</sup> American evangelist Cyrus Scofield exclaimed, "for the first time, we have a real prophetic sign."<sup>29</sup>

While participation in a "crusade" and "Holy War" suggested redemption in a spiritual sense for both the United States and the world, its symbolism could not ultimately deliver real salvation along the lines suggested by Pope Urban II in 1095. Those with extreme views, such as Baptist preacher Samuel Zane Battern, might believe "this war for the destruction of injustice and inhumanity is a holy crusade and a continuation of Christ's sacrificial service

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<sup>25</sup> Jenkins, *Holy War*, 10.

<sup>26</sup> "Driving the Turks" *Washington Post* 28 April 1918. On the Allenby "crusade" see Anthony Bruce, *The Last Crusade – The Palestine Campaign in the First World War* (London, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> "British Army is Knocking at Gates of Jerusalem" *New York Times* 18 March 1917; "Stormy Career of Holy City" *New York Times* 25 November 1917; "Jerusalem Falls to British" *New York Times* 11 December 1917 and "Jerusalem Wrested from Turks" *Washington Post* 11 December, 1917.

<sup>28</sup> Jenkins, *Holy War*, 16; Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith – Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York, 2012), 257; Jonathan H. Ebel, *Faith in the Fight – Religion and the American Soldier in the Great War* (New Jersey, 2010), 34.

<sup>29</sup> Jenkins, *Holy War*, 19.

for the redemption of the world” but the mainstream religious hierarchies could not accept this view.<sup>30</sup> Christians could agree that soldiers were followers of Christ but their sacrifice was not necessarily penance that “washed away previous sin” or automatically “gave an instant place in paradise”.<sup>31</sup> The war certainly eroded the distinctions between “spiritual and secular causes” but ultimately even the World Evangelical Alliance had rejected the idea of automatic salvation by 1917.<sup>32</sup>

Pacifists, unsurprisingly, found the notion of “Holy War” problematic. When war broke out in 1914, many clergymen and church members looked to ending the fighting and maintaining American neutrality based on the ethics of the New Testament and Social Gospel.<sup>33</sup> As the reality of the war in Europe and the Atlantic became apparent, this pacifist position became more difficult to maintain from a moral perspective as calls for intervention gained strength. Yet a moral consensus on intervention remained elusive. By the time the United States entered the war in April 1917, President Wilson couched American entry in religious terms, in part, to allay these moral concerns. For Wilson, the war would not be for “selfish or sinful” aims but rather a transcendent act of sacrifice by a Christian nation for others, following the example of Christ himself. No doubt intending to close down alternative religious opinions, he dramatically announced to a joint session of Congress “God helping her, she can do no other”.<sup>34</sup> Wilson also refused to draw a strict moral division between the combatants famously calling for “Peace without Victory” in his Fourteen Points speech of January 1918 and maintaining American impartiality as an “Associate Power” rather than instituting a

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<sup>30</sup> Preston, *Sword*, 254.

<sup>31</sup> Jenkins, *Holy War*, 106.

<sup>32</sup> Jenkins, *Holy War*, 107.

<sup>33</sup> Preston, *Sword*, 240.

<sup>34</sup> Preston, *Sword*, 252. Woodrow Wilson, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress Requesting a Declaration of War Against Germany”, 2 April 1917 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/207620> accessed 15 February 2021.

formal alliance with the Allies. The United States was, for Wilson, the instrument of God's plan on earth and not that of the Allies.

The religious leaders and structures of the United States largely fell into line with Wilson's spiritual framing of the war. Congregationalist theologian, Lyman Abbott called it "a crusade to make this world a home in which God's children can live in peace and safety".<sup>35</sup>

Importantly, this collective religious support of the war was not exclusively Protestant. In Andrew Preston's view, the war saw a fusion of Protestants, Catholics and Jews in the collective effort that represented an early "maturation" of an American civil religion of all faiths.<sup>36</sup> The Irish and German American Catholic leadership might have little time for the British Empire but the decision to fight as an "Associate Power" for a league of nations appealed.<sup>37</sup> The Jewish leadership held a similar position with an additional rejection of the antisemitism of their homelands and growing enthusiasm for a war of self-determination resulting in a Zionist homeland founded in the ruins of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>38</sup>

A further important aspect of the American wartime "crusade" was the strength it drew from the official and vernacular cultures of individualism. Henry May, in his seminal work, *The End of American Innocence* saw a collapse of individualism and laissez-faire thinking across the political, cultural and economic spheres in the United States emanating from participation in the First World War. The process of mass mobilisation of the population and resources combined with the unprecedented carnage of the fighting to challenge long held American

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<sup>35</sup> Jenkins, *Holy War*, 93-95.

<sup>36</sup> Preston, *Sword*, 237. See also David Mislin, "One Nation, Three Faiths: World War I and the Shaping of Protestant-Catholic-Jewish America", *Church History* 84 (2015): 828-862.

<sup>37</sup> Jenkins, *Holy War*, 92 and Preston, *Sword*, 268-270.

<sup>38</sup> Preston, *Sword*, 270-273 and 285.

beliefs.<sup>39</sup> The form of modern warfare fought in Europe was a regimented and mechanised industrial process. Americans drafted by the government to do the fighting had to submit to its will but so too did those at home. The state took a controlling regulatory role in vast swathes of industry and commerce to ensure production and supply for the war effort. It also demanded support for the war across the political spectrum. Those who resisted, such as Socialist Party of the United States leader Eugene V. Debs, found themselves imprisoned under the Espionage Act of 1917 or the Sedition Act of 1918. The “Get in Line” sentiment of the Selective Service Act of May 1917 and anti-hyphenate one hundred percent Americanism of the period crushed difference. “War” wrote progressive intellectual Randolph Bourne, “is the health of the state” that provided “those irresistible forces for passionate cooperation with the government in coercing into obedience the minority groups and individuals which lack the larger herd sense.”<sup>40</sup>

This statist approach was not an entirely new experience, but Americans had not witnessed it on such a grand or ambitious scale before. Emotionally, many remained committed to an older, individualistic, laissez-faire and voluntarist ideology that eschewed a large role for the federal government in their lives. Americans needed to imagine the war as something more in tune with their own understanding of national identity. If the war was to have purpose, the individual must remain in sight amongst the vast impersonal forces. For this reason, a romantic medievalist crusading metaphor stressing contemporary parallels with past honour, chivalry, heroism, service and sacrifice proved a useful official and vernacular language to give meaning to the war. A retrospective framing of the war with Americans as both the

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<sup>39</sup> Henry May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Time, 1912-1917* (Illinois, 1964). Ron T. Robin, *Enclaves of America – The Rhetoric of American Political Architecture Abroad, 1900-1965* (New Jersey, 1992), 54.

<sup>40</sup> Randolph Bourne, “War is the Health of the State”. In *War and the Intellectuals, Collected Essays, 1915-1919*, ed. Carl Rese (New York, 1964), 65-106.

subject of and creative agents in a modern “crusade” provided a more relatable experience than anonymous collectivism in challenging times. This imagined retrospective and individualistic “crusade” drew on progressive and religious thinking but also had its origins in a complex amalgam of European and American medievalism, memory of the Civil War, government propaganda and the war experiences of the American troops themselves. Together they contributed to a powerful crusading metaphor that provided the necessary imaginative landscape to obscure partially the realities of modern war.

A romantic image of the crusades and an associated medieval discourse were long standing features of western culture that came to surround soldiers from many nations during the period.<sup>41</sup> Nationalism certainly played a role in this process, from Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign of 1798 to the establishment of European consulates in the Holy Land during the 1830s and 1840s such imagery was important and useful. It generated national heroes in the form of Richard the Lionheart for England, King Louis IX for France and Godfrey of Bouillon in Belgium and prompted a visit to the Holy Land by Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1898.<sup>42</sup> It was, however, in the world of novelists, playwrights, poets, musicians and artists where the crusades, medievalism and the Holy Land in particular became, in Edward Said’s words, a “place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes”. Historians trace the original western inspiration of this romantic imagery to Torquato Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581), but a succession of writers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century popularised the medieval trope. Kenneth Henry Digby’s enormously popular *The Broad Stone of Honour* (1822) attempted to revive chivalry and inspire men to heroic actions. For sheer romance, however,

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<sup>41</sup> Megan Cassidy-Welch and Anne E. Lister, “Memory and Interpretation: New Approaches to the Study of the Crusades.” *Journal of Medieval History* 40 (2014), 228 and Allen Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice and the Great War* (Illinois, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> Carole Hillenbrand, “The Legacy of the Crusades”. In *Crusades – The Illustrated History*, ed. Thomas F. Madden (London, 2004), 202-203 and Siberry, *Oxford Illustrated*, 369.

the historical novels of the prodigious Walter Scott such as *Ivanhoe* (1819), *Tales of the Crusaders* (1825) and *Count Robert of Paris* (1831) did most to spread the medievalist and crusading fantasy.<sup>43</sup>

Historians have suggested that when the United States entered the war, the crusade medievalism crossed the Atlantic “in all its shining glory” expanding from Britain for the Wilson administration to adopt wholesale.<sup>44</sup> Many Americans certainly drew on their European heritage to conceptualise the conflict, in David Kennedy’s words “the common soldier...went to France with his head full of ideas and images from the past...filled with memories of a kind of warfare that would never again be waged”. It is an overstatement, however, to suggest that this discourse was solely recent in origin. Medievalism was already a strong strand in American life that shared many of the same cultural references with the old world.<sup>45</sup> Mark Twain wrote of the sacred relics displayed in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in his *The Innocents Abroad* (1869).<sup>46</sup> Before he was killed in 1916, the work of American poet, Alan Seeger, sought directly to contrast the “materialism and sophistication of modernity” with his “medievalist imagination”. For Seeger, according to Tim Dayton, “the war offered relief from the values of modernity”, “an ideology through which a modern, industrialized war was embraced in terms derived from the imagined medieval past” creating “an alternative to the industrialist capitalist modernity from which the war emerged”.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Siberry, *Oxford Illustrated*, 369-374 and Hillenbrand, *Crusades*, 202-203. David M. Kennedy, *Over Here – The First World War and American Society* (Oxford, 1980), 215.

<sup>44</sup> Linda R. Robertson, *The Dream of Civilized Warfare – World War I Flying Aces and the American Imagination* (Minnesota, 2003), 157 and 175.

<sup>45</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 178.

<sup>46</sup> Siberry, *Oxford Illustrated*, 367 and Hillenbrand, *Crusades*, 204.

<sup>47</sup> Tim Dayton, “Alan Seeger: Medievalism as an Alternative Ideology”, *First World War Studies* 3 (2012); 125.



More importantly, Americans had a tangible example of war from their recent past with which to frame the new conflict and give it romantic meaning. The memory of the Civil War was still fresh for Americans but had ceased to be a significant point of national division. As David Blight has described, the sectional reunion after so terrible a civil war was a political triumph by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Spanish-American War of 1898 with its imperial language, nationalism and racial supremacy, gave Americans, north and south, ways to heal the wounds of sectionalism. The First World War was a continuation of this reconciliation underpinned by a narrative that romanticised the Old and New South. Both were welcomed in a new nationalism in which “devotion alone made everyone right and no one truly wrong”.<sup>48</sup>

This conceptualisation of national reunion also facilitated a romantic imagining of the individual in war. Indeed, it gave an American accent to the European chivalric trope and provided an antidote to some of the more distasteful imperial and monarchical associations of the unedited version.<sup>49</sup> A romantic view of the war in Europe gained a hold because the American mind still “throbbed with memories of the Civil War”.<sup>50</sup> It was a doubly powerful image because many of the veterans were still alive. The First World War generation of soldiers had grown up surrounded by them and local military commanders fully knew the worth of parading veterans to see the new generation off to war.<sup>51</sup> President Wilson knew their worth too. On registration day 5 June 1917, following the passing of the Selective Service Act, Wilson addressed a convention of Confederate veterans and recalled “the old spirit of chivalric gallantry”.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion – The Civil War in American Memory* (Massachusetts, 2001), 4.

<sup>49</sup> Robertson, *Dream*, 157.

<sup>50</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 178 and Edward A. Gutierrez, *Doughboys on the Great War – How American Soldiers Viewed their Military Experience* (Kansas, 2014), 2.

<sup>51</sup> Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 13.

<sup>52</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 178.

Walter Lippmann described Woodrow Wilson in 1914 as a president “who knows that there is a new world demanding new methods, but he dreams of an older world. He is torn between the two”.<sup>53</sup> Wilson knew that modern America needed stronger government to deal with the many challenges of industrialisation, urbanisation and largescale immigration. Yet in his successful 1912 campaign, with his call for a “New Freedom”, Wilson rejected this call for a more activist government. Wilson’s progressive background and concern for the individual helped him later understand the need to communicate the meaning of the war in an official language Americans could comprehend. For this reason, he set up the CPI under George Creel to make sure Americans understood the message. Creel, as an expert in the developing field of public relations, was well aware of the importance of this language and imagery for propaganda. The CPI deluged Americans with propaganda that included sending out a team of 75,000 “four-minute men” to give one million speeches to 400 million people.<sup>54</sup>

It was with film that the crusading metaphor really took hold in propaganda terms. The release of *Birth of a Nation* in 1915 prefaced this and etched into the American consciousness a picture of national redemption after the Civil War by members of Ku Klux Klan dressed as crusading knights.<sup>55</sup> Wilson viewed the film in a special White House screening and raised no challenge when film promoters quoted him directly at the start of the film. Aware of the power of cinema, the CPI produced *Pershing’s Crusaders* released in the spring of 1918 with a series of special screenings in flag draped theatres. Both the opening shot of the film and promotional posters showed American doughboys alongside a crusading knight. The film

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<sup>53</sup> Robin, *Enclaves*, 61.

<sup>54</sup> Susan A. Brewer, *Why America Fights – Patriotism and War Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq* (Oxford, 2009), 63.

<sup>55</sup> Brewer, *America*, 67. Blight, *Race*, 394.

itself then shows American soldiers as “redeemers” of civilization, rescuing innocents and defeating a vicious enemy.<sup>56</sup>

Historians have claimed a significant impact for the CPI and particularly *Pershing's Crusaders* in creating the idea of a crusade for American soldiers. Mark Meigs notes that soldiers mentioned the film in many diaries and letters and Faulkner agrees that the poster captured how the doughboys saw themselves.<sup>57</sup> David Kennedy viewed this as a largely top-down phenomenon in which soldiers echoed, “however pathetically, the epic posturings of George Creel and the elaborately formal phrasing of Woodrow Wilson...if Creel and Wilson spoke of “Crusade” then it followed that American troops were crusaders”.<sup>58</sup> This explanation leaves little room for vernacular agency in meaning creation. Propaganda certainly played a role but a broader view highlights the cultural and religious foundation on which government and personal voices could build hopes of a romantic war experience.<sup>59</sup> Wilson, Creel and others used the crusading metaphor because it was apparent that modern, collective action did not always inspire individual Americans to support the war effort. Individuals responded to this official language but also drew meaning from a romantic language that religious, progressive and wider American culture already spoke fluently.

Individuals could certainly draw meaning from the war in a secular sense. The war for some promised to reinvigorate an “effeminate” American manhood crushed by the requirements of modern life. War could be a glorious adventure to fulfil manhood’s destiny and was the very epitome of Theodore Roosevelt’s “strenuous life”.<sup>60</sup> For Roosevelt, “the timid man, the lazy

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<sup>56</sup> Brewer, *America*, 47 and 65.

<sup>57</sup> Meigs, *Optimism*, 20. Faulkner, *Crusaders*, 3-4.

<sup>58</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 213.

<sup>59</sup> Ebel, *Faith*, 26.

<sup>60</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 179.

man, the man who distrusts his country, the over-civilised man, who has lost the great fighting, masterful virtues” might find the antidote in war.<sup>61</sup> The media pushed similar imagery. One advertisement in *Collier's Weekly* 30 November 1918 stressed the changes war would bring stating “when that boy of yours comes marching home a victorious crusader he will be a very different person from the lad you bravely sent away with a kiss, a tear and a smile. He will be strong in body, quick and sure in action, alert and keen in mind, firm and resolute in character, calm and even tempered”.<sup>62</sup> The purpose of this with a domestic audience was to use the patriotic sacrifice of the troops to encourage sacrifice at home. Another poster called on Americans “To carry on this crusade of modern righteousness” and “give up many things that are dear to us; sacrifice, that our Crusaders may save us and our children from the horrors that have come to the little ones of Belgium and France”.<sup>63</sup> American soldiers certainly saw their war in this way at times. Infantry officer Vinton Dearing wrote in March 1918 “we get the real thing here as regards uncovering what men are made of. We all have our petty failures, but whatever we have the stuff that stands under real strain proves in the end”.<sup>64</sup> Soldier Hervey Allen wrote of a comrade transformed by battle “His face was flushed, and his eyes wide and brilliant with excitement. He was a different man. Something had come to him which had not yet come to us. No one who passes through that is ever quite the same again”.<sup>65</sup>

There was also a strong religious impetus for individual participation in the war. As Phillip Jenkins has shown, religion persisted as a strong motivating factor for many soldiers in the

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<sup>61</sup> Ebel, *Faith*, 49. Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (Michigan, 1901) cited in Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Illinois, 1996), 193-194.

<sup>62</sup> Brewer, *America*, 75.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Brewer, *America*, 62.

<sup>64</sup> Ebel, *Faith*, 51.

<sup>65</sup> Brewer, *America*, 47.

First World War and it was not, as it is often thought, a predominantly secularising experience that marked the “end of illusions, and of faith itself”.<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Ebel has further argued that many soldiers believed in the personal spiritual value of the call to arms that was also a call to faith.<sup>67</sup> The ability of war experiences to “reveal new truths” and “transform atrophied souls” gave them both a redemptive symbolism and a possible route to actual redemption by confirming or generating new religious faith.<sup>68</sup> Service and sacrifice was suggestive of spiritual redemption even if it could not actually confer that benefit. The ultimate witness of symbolic wartime redemption through faith is, of course, Sergeant Alvin C. York. Illiterate and a self-confessed ruffian in his youth, the conscientious objector and pacifist found a path to individual redemption through heroic action in the Meuse-Argonne in October 1918 that led to his capture of 120 enemy and the subsequent award of a Medal of Honor to the “Soldier of the Lord”.<sup>69</sup>

The cultural discourse of medievalism and “crusade” described in this first section meant that a significant number of doughboys understood the war in romantic terms. Private Clarence Lidner wrote in June 1918 that he was “dreaming on the edge of supreme adventure” and was “a part of a great army of an ancient crusade, with all the pomp of armored men and prancing steeds, and the romance of the thing came to me as it had not before”.<sup>70</sup> On 9 June 1918, Raymond Fosdick wrote of his fellow soldiers, “The men...swept by like plumed knights, cheering and singing. I could have wept not to be going with them”. *New York Tribune* correspondent, Heywood Hale Brown, believed “There’ll never be anything like it in the

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<sup>66</sup> Jenkins, *Holy War*, 2-5.

<sup>67</sup> Ebel, *Faith*, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Ebel, *Faith*, 47.

<sup>69</sup> “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 26 April 1919. Alvin C. York, *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary* (New York, 1928).

<sup>70</sup> Ebel, *Faith*, 36.

world again. I tell you it's better than 'Ivanhoe.' Everything's happening and I'm in it".<sup>71</sup> The soldier's own newspaper, *The Stars and Stripes*, regularly reported the historical crusading connections via an "America in France" series. On 28 June 1918, it noted, "From Picardy came Peter the Hermit, the strange, swarthy little man who led the Peasants' Crusade, the first of the gallant expeditions which Christendom sent to rescue the Holy Sepulchre from the desecrating hands of the Turks".<sup>72</sup> In September 1918, the newspaper described the Marne as the "holy land of French arms" and noted that "Joinville lived Sieur de Joinville close friends and follower of St. Louis (the ninth), whom he followed on his first crusade".<sup>73</sup> The American soldiers in Europe thus made tangible connections with the castles and cathedrals of Europe's crusading past grounding their medieval romanticism in lived experience and confirming in their minds their role as the secular and spiritual successors to the historical crusaders.<sup>74</sup>

Describing, as Kennedy does, the writings of soldiers as "tourist-brochure boilerplate" perhaps misses the broader point.<sup>75</sup> The participation in an imagined "crusade" formed a collective shared experience from vernacular cultural reference points. Thus, the crusading metaphor for American troops during the First World War performed two key functions. First, it enabled both the American populace and the troops themselves to understand the war and give it meaning in terms the individual could understand. Some of this was certainly down to the desired official meaning, but it also emerged from vernacular progressive, religious and cultural experience of Americans. Second, it helped bind some troops into an imagined "crusading" community of shared experience based on patriotic service and

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<sup>71</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 216.

<sup>72</sup> *The Stars and Stripes* (Paris, France), 28 June 1918.

<sup>73</sup> *The Stars and Stripes* (Paris, France), 6 September 1918.

<sup>74</sup> Brewer, *America*, 73.

<sup>75</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 211-212.

sacrifice. Importantly, both this individual romantic meaning of the war and sense of shared community would survive the war and transform in important ways during the interwar period.

### **“Crusade” as Romance and Rights**

Wilson’s “crusade” ultimately disappointed the hopes of many Americans. With the war over in November 1918, the unity of purpose that served to support the official ideal began to dissolve and left Americans divided once more.<sup>76</sup> Although President Wilson’s administration had made a good deal of use of the crusading metaphor, he declined to use the words directly himself until January 1919 and then for very specific diplomatic and political reasons.<sup>77</sup> In Wilson’s view, the sacrifice of the American troops for the “crusading” ideals he formulated gave the world an obligation to accept his peace proposals. “Do you suppose” he said to the Peace Conference in Paris on 14 March “that having felt that crusading spirit of these youngsters...I am going to permit myself for one moment to slacken in my effort to be worthy of them and of their cause?”.<sup>78</sup> There was domestic political purpose too in Wilson’s use of the crusading metaphor. The 1918 mid-term elections added to the political difficulties faced by Wilson when the Republicans gained control of the House and Senate and most importantly, for the President’s peace proposals, control of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Now headed by a sworn enemy of Wilson, Republican grandee Henry Cabot Lodge, the committee set about frustrating Wilson’s attempts to achieve United States membership of the fledgling League of Nations.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Brewer, *America*, 86.

<sup>77</sup> A search of Woodrow Wilson’s public pronouncements on the American Presidency Project database failed to reveal any use of crusade or related terminology prior to 1919. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/> accessed 30 January 2021.

<sup>78</sup> *The Stars and Stripes* (Paris, France), March 14 1919.

<sup>79</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 231-291 provides a good summary of the domestic political situation in the United States at this time. The League of Nations fight is beyond the scope of this paper. The literature is extensive with the two most important and detailed studies being John Milton Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World* –

Wilson's attempts to get the United States to join the League of Nations in November 1919 and March 1920 ultimately failed and his political opponents would turn the crusade metaphor against him. This heralded a wider attack on state collectivism and a return to corporate voluntarism under the Republican administrations of the 1920s. Warren G. Harding famously called for a return to "normalcy" and wanted to "embark on no crusade".<sup>80</sup> Calvin Coolidge wanted to reverse Wilson's legacy by freeing property from government control stating "You are...engaged...in a great crusade. You have made mighty progress. But not until you are done will American opportunity again belong entirely to American youth, or the restraints and servitudes be removed which will leave America entirely free".<sup>81</sup> Clearly, Coolidge favoured a return to the individualistic, voluntarist and laissez-faire American heritage. This was something that Herbert Hoover continued with his corporatism as Commerce Secretary and President.<sup>82</sup> His rejection of collective endeavours controlled by the state and therefore the wartime "crusade" was clear. In the 1928 presidential election campaign against Al Smith, Hoover argued that after the war "the most vital of issues in our own country...was whether government should continue their wartime ownership and operation of the instrumentalities of production and distribution. We were challenged with a peacetime choice between the American system of rugged individualism and a European philosophy...of paternalism and state socialism". For Hoover, "this would impair the very basis of liberty and freedom" that he located in "the principles of decentralized self-

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*Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge, 2001) and Lloyd E. Ambrosious, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition – The Treaty Fight in Perspective* (Cambridge, 1990).

<sup>80</sup> Warren G. Harding, "Address on the International Court of Justice in St. Louis, Missouri" 21 June 1923 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/329284> accessed 3 February 2021.

<sup>81</sup> Calvin Coolidge, "Address at a Meeting of the Business Organization of the Government" 25 June 1925 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267349> accessed 3 February 2021.

<sup>82</sup> See Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover, Forgotten Progressive* (Massachusetts, 1975).



government, ordered liberty, equal opportunity, and freedom to the individual”.<sup>83</sup> Hoover’s “rugged individualism” did not inhibit the military enacting government policy around the world but like other Republican presidents during the 1920s, he preferred unilateralism and eschewed extended idealistic adventures. Indeed, Hoover appears to have never used the term “crusade” or related terms publicly as president.<sup>84</sup>

This rejection of “crusade” by Republican politicians created a tension with the surviving crusading metaphor now attached to American veterans. The experience of the war generated a good deal of disillusionment amongst Europeans who fought in it. As Paul Fussell has noted, the British Army “fully attained the knowledge of good and evil at the Somme on July 16, 1916”.<sup>85</sup> For the old world, the real experience of the war often worked to sever the connections between the fighting and “romance, adventure, and medieval chivalry”.<sup>86</sup> American “crusading” enthusiasm, however, did not die completely on the battlefields of Europe, but instead survived into the post-war era. Recent work on the British and French experience of the war supports this idea of a survival of the crusading ideal. Philip Jenkins has traced how contrary to the “secular legend”, the war did not see an “end of illusions” and the “ideals and chivalry that rode so high at the start of the conflict” did not perish “miserably in the mud of France and Belgium”. Soldiers, instead, maintained a religious world-view and “resorted frequently to Biblical language and concepts of sacrifice and redemptive suffering”. The religious and supernatural “pervaded the rhetoric surrounding the war...and clearly had a popular appeal”.<sup>87</sup> Jay Winter, too, has traced the survival of and “enduring appeal” of traditional motifs with a much less complete “rupture” between traditional and modern

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<sup>83</sup> Hebert Hoover “Speech” 22 October 1928 <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/october-22-1928-principles-and-ideals-united-states-government> accessed 5 February 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Search on US Presidency Project Database <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/> accessed 5 February 2021.

<sup>85</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1975), 29. Kennedy, *Over Here*, 213.

<sup>86</sup> Robertson, *Dream*, 57 and 161.

<sup>87</sup> Jenkins, *Holy War*, 2-4.

languages shaping the bereavement process and commemoration of the dead following the war.<sup>88</sup> These findings support the earlier work of Paul Kennedy on the American experience. In his words, “these developments on British battlefields and in British literature had no American analogues. Saint-Mihiel was not the Somme”.<sup>89</sup> The American crusading enthusiasm never completely gave way to “weariness and resignation”. For Kennedy, the season and terrain, the lateness and brevity of American belligerency and relatively open warfare on their front helped sustain the old attitudes among the troops.<sup>90</sup>

Recent historical work suggests the doughboy’s romanticism remained remarkably resilient in the post-war era making cultural life a scene of “disruption and splintering” with no single version of the war dominating.<sup>91</sup> This was certainly evident in some post-war American literature with Kennedy suggesting the “life cycle” of American war literature “was truncated” and never completely devolved into disillusionment and bitterness.<sup>92</sup> Willa Cather’s 1923 Pulitzer Prize winning novel *One of Ours* was ambivalent about the war but still pictured a “romantic realm of male freedom and chivalry” that facilitated personal fulfilment. Edith Wharton’s *A Son at the Front* also published in 1923 tells the story of a father moved to commitment to the war as a sacred cause by the idealism of his son.<sup>93</sup> A larger section of American literature did have a clearer disillusioned anti-war tone, such as Dos Passos’s *Three Soldiers* (1921), E. E. Cummings *The Enormous Room* (1922), William Faulker’s *Soldier’s Pay* (1926), Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), William Marche’s *Company K* (1933) and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night* (1934).<sup>94</sup> Yet,

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<sup>88</sup> Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning – The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 2009), 3-4.

<sup>89</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 214.

<sup>90</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 215.

<sup>91</sup> Trout, *Battlefield*, 3 and 5.

<sup>92</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 215.

<sup>93</sup> Trout, *Battlefield*, 3 and Kennedy, *Over Here*, 218-21.

<sup>94</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 219-222.

unlike with British literature, there was less transition from “mimesis to irony” in American writing.<sup>95</sup> The target of these authors was not always the horror of the battlefield, but authority itself. Indeed, Trout speculates that the writer’s trauma came not from the wartime violence but the denial of the war records of “real men” with Cummings, Dos Passos and Hemingway serving as ambulance drivers and Faulkner and Fitzgerald missing the war in Europe entirely.<sup>96</sup> Interestingly, Hemingway was enthusiastic about Thomas Boyd’s bleak *Through the Wheat* (1923), not for its harrowing depiction of the war but for its tale of comradeship and heroism.<sup>97</sup> Kennedy suggests the conflict was actually an ongoing battle between tradition and modernism that had shown early cultural shoots before the war. It was not complete disillusionment but a cultural transition. The brief intervention in the war did not kill the older culture rather it lived on and retained an important position in American life.<sup>98</sup>

In art as in literature, disillusionment was evident but not overwhelming. Isolationist John Steuart Curry created the mournful burial scene in *The Return of Private Davis* (1928-1940). Wounded African American soldier and former “Harlem Hellfighter,” Horace Pippin’s war experiences led him to produce modernist paintings such as *Outpost Raid: Champagne Sector* (1931) that appeared to pay tribute to his comrades yet struggled with the enormity and trauma of his war experience. Yet a romanticised artistic view survived beyond the output of the official AEF war artists. Harvey Dunn, in his popular covers for *American Legion Monthly* often emphasised the heroic over the mournful during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>99</sup> In film too, the cultural dissonance was evident. The enormously popular and explicitly pacifist

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<sup>95</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 215.

<sup>96</sup> Trout, *Battlefield*, 3. See also Keith Gandal, *The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner and the Fiction of Mobilization* (New York, 2008), 33.

<sup>97</sup> Trout, *Battlefield*, 7.

<sup>98</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 224-229.

<sup>99</sup> Trout, *Battlefield*, 158, 177, 188 and 210.

film *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) won rave reviews and two Academy Awards. Part of the film's success was that it keyed into the growing American revisionism that questioned the origins and justifications of the war. This flowered fully in the 1930s with books such as H. C. Engelbrecht's and F. C. Hanighen's *Merchants of Death* published in 1934 and the Senate Special Committee on Investigation of the Munitions Industry run by the Republican Senator, Gerald Nye between 1934 and 1936. Nevertheless, there was still a contested quality to the memory of the war. King Vidor's film *The Big Parade* (1925) certainly showed the trauma of battle but also ascribed a heroic and romantic quality to war. In the same year as *All Quiet*, Howard Hughes released *Hell's Angels* with a muted anti-war message that avoided the trenches entirely and looked to the sky for its heroes.<sup>100</sup>

After the war, the collective identity and unity of experience among American troops became a source of concern to conservatives who eyed events abroad involving troops such as the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the Spartacists Revolt in Berlin in January 1919 with disquiet. In an extraordinary review article for the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* on 21 September 1919, Captain Arthur E. Hartzell, a former first Lieutenant in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division attempted to probe "The Mind of the Doughboy". Although largely discussing relations with the French, the picture Hartzell painted was not particularly flattering. He reported that at one point during the summer 1918 some 30,000 officers and men were absent without leave and that there was "a growing list of crimes charged to the Americans, murders and robberies, assaults and rapes". The American soldier had become, "deeply impressed with his own importance" and full of "the feverish enthusiasm that had been pumped into him suddenly...without an outlet".<sup>101</sup> The establishment of the Third International in Moscow

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<sup>100</sup> Trout, *Battlefield*, 6.

<sup>101</sup> Captain Arthur E. Hartzell "The Mind of the Doughboy" *New York Times* 21 September, 1919.

dedicated to worldwide agitation for revolution that March added to these concerns.<sup>102</sup> The United States had its own series of strikes that year in cities such as Seattle, a nationwide steel strike that September and even the Boston Police walked out the same month. An apparent terrorist bomb plot targeting public officials in April and June with one device demolishing part of Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer's home in Washington added to public anxiety. Palmer strengthened the Justice Department with a new anti-radical unit and in early November mounted a series of raids that led to widespread deportations, imprisonments and a full-blown nationwide "Red Scare".<sup>103</sup> Set against unsettling tensions between urban and rural, wet and dry, immigrant and native, religious liberal and fundamentalist, black and white, the doughboy's wartime crusading identity assumed even greater importance.

Other forces emanating from the doughboys themselves tried to steer their memory in a more conservative direction. On 15 February 1919, Col. Theodore Roosevelt Jr. chaired a meeting of twenty AEF officers in Paris to found the American Legion that sought to "preserve the memories and incidents of our association in the great war" and to "to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship".<sup>104</sup> Members of General John J. Pershing's staff wanted to encourage a veteran's organisation centred on remembering the comradeship of the war experience as a diversion from radical and left wing thinking that might appeal to the idle troops in France. It was far better to stoke the fires of nostalgia with proposed names for the new organisation such as "American Crusaders", "The Grand Army of Civilization" and the "Grand Army of the World" than risk bringing dangerous political doctrines home. The American Legion, as it

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<sup>102</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 288.

<sup>103</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 289-291.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in Kennedy, *Over Here*, 218.

became, proved the most successful veterans organisation claiming 843,013 members a year after founding and a leadership dominated by the political and economic elite of the day.<sup>105</sup>

The new organisation defined patriotism in conservative terms that strongly supported the state against those who challenged its authority. The first Legion caucus offered the “services of its individual members to the constituted government authorities for use in any time of public crisis to preserve law and order”.<sup>106</sup> Chaplain John Inzer of the American Legion was forthright asking, “What is the use of fighting and dying, suffering and wading, cold and hungry, through the mud for the sake of democracy if we are going to sit down and let a lot of long-eared politicians, wild-eyed profiteers and mangy Bolsheviki run the country?”. He went on “Patriotism is the thing that we shall perpetuate. The spirit that made us fight and win the war will guide the American Legion. It is an anti-traitor alliance. The only place in the United States for the crazed agitator, the profiteer and the Bolshevik is the burying ground”.<sup>107</sup> In 1923, the Legion went further creating a “Creed of Citizenship” pledging loyalty to the government and calling on “subjects which cannot be decided by the finite mind...be subordinated to love of our fellow man and for the country in which we live”.<sup>108</sup> This translated into direct prejudicial actions against enemies domestic and foreign. The Legion opposed the pardon of imprisoned socialist leader Eugene Debs, engaged in violent confrontations with the International Workers of the World and even ended up working closely with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and lobbying for the creation of the Dies Committee that became the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1938.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 218. Stephen R. Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March and the GI Bill – How Veteran Politics Shaped the New Deal Era* (New York, 2009), 16. Ebel, *Faith*, 171.

<sup>106</sup> Ebel, *Faith*, 175.

<sup>107</sup> John Inzer, *The America Legion Weekly* 1 August 1919 quoted in Ebel, *Faith*, 168.

<sup>108</sup> Ebel, *Faith*, 187.

<sup>109</sup> Ebel, *Faith*, 178-182.

The return for a close alliance with conservative forces within the state was an increasing acceptance that veterans deserved compensation for the sacrifices they made leaving their civilian lives and careers. In essence, although couched in terms of a “levelling” of the playing field with civilians, veterans aimed to establish the principle that they were still a unique community deserving special or entitled treatment. Both the major veteran’s organisations, the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars spent the 1920s campaigning for improved medical care, insurance and widows benefits for veterans. A major area of campaigning was over the issue of a “Bonus” to be paid to veterans for their wartime service. President Wilson opposed any measure beyond the award of minimal discharge pay, as did Harding and Coolidge, on fiscal grounds and because it would “demean” the spirit of wartime sacrifice. Nevertheless, in the election year of 1924 the Republican Congress passed the Adjusted Compensation Act over the nominee Coolidge’s objections payable in 1945.<sup>110</sup>

The state also undertook to commemorate and memorialise the heroic service and sacrifice of the troops by validating and perpetuating their romantic crusading mythology. The government was happy to downplay the mass regimentation and mechanised nature of the war that turned soldiers into cogs in a machine directed towards killing on an industrial scale and instead emphasise the romantic individualism of the endeavour.<sup>111</sup> This theme was visible in the eight official American war cemeteries located in Europe and constructed during the early 1930s. Here the American Battle Monuments Commission (AMBC) allowed some “medieval artefacts” that evoked “comparisons between the Great War and the Crusades” because the self-appointed civilised nations joined hands in a struggle for a

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<sup>110</sup> Ortiz, *Beyond*, 20 and 25-29.

<sup>111</sup> Robin, *Enclaves*, 57.

supposed holy cause.<sup>112</sup> As Ron Robin notes, depictions of American soldiers on these sites were as “individual fighters,” contemporary versions of medieval warriors or “juxtaposed with representations of knights, the symbols of a personal style of warfare never again to be waged” but representative of the personal war most American thought they had fought.<sup>113</sup>

By the 1920s, the war had highlighted that the majority of Americans were now part of a modern, urban, industrialised society. The cemeteries thus represented both an “illusory, romantic ethos of voluntarism” and a growing self-confidence in centralising government control and indicated the beginnings of a psychological transition in the relationship between Americans and their government.<sup>114</sup> American society espoused technology and technocracy, but was “emotionally committed to pre-industrial values”.<sup>115</sup> The memory of the doughboy’s “crusade” formed a vital part of this by helping to define the meaning of patriotic service and sacrifice. The notion of an American wartime “crusade” had shifted in meaning. No longer was it idealistic and impartial but increasingly conservative and prejudicial. While it retained its romanticism towards the individual and eschewed collectivism, the close relationship with the state was evident in the provision of special rights and the commemorative alliance with the former doughboys. This closely reflected the corporatism of the Republicans but the Great Depression and the Second World War would soon transform the crusading metaphor once more.

### **“Crusade” as Rights and Realism**

The thirty-second President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was very aware that the crusading ideal had lost its collective political utility after the First World War. He had

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<sup>112</sup> Robin, *Enclaves*, 55.

<sup>113</sup> Robin, *Enclaves*, 55.

<sup>114</sup> Robin, *Enclaves*, 7 and 34.

<sup>115</sup> Robin, *Enclaves*, 6-7.



served in Wilson's administration as Assistant Secretary of the Navy and had witnessed the president's tragic demise first hand. Even so, in his acceptance speech for the Democratic presidential nomination in Chicago on 2 July 1932, he publicly announced his desire "to win in this Crusade to return America to its own people". Facing re-election in 1936, he reiterated his clear intention to the crowds of supporters in Madison Square Garden to lead a "Crusade".<sup>116</sup> The "crusade" he proposed, however, was very different to that embarked upon by the doughboys in 1917. It was clearly prospective rather than retrospective. It did not attempt to frame the solutions to present problems in the past as the First World War "crusade" had done but instead was forward looking. By 1933, the United States was in the depths of the Great Depression with 13 million unemployed and financial collapse facing the economy and banking system. After the laissez-faire drift of Hoover's response, the country wanted to turn its back on the disappointments of the First World War and the catastrophe of the Depression in search of happier days. Roosevelt's political skills in constructing and maintaining a coalition of the West and South got him elected but it was also his buoyant optimism about the future and finding a solution to the country's economic woes. The past no longer provided comforting answers, the "country" according to Roosevelt "needs and...the country demands bold, persistent experimentation."<sup>117</sup> Accepting the nomination in Chicago, Roosevelt pledged Americans "to a new deal for the American people".<sup>118</sup>

Roosevelt's "crusade," in contrast to previous Republican administrations was also openly collective rather than individualistic in focus. Making a direct comparison to war "the lines of

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<sup>116</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Acceptance Speech at Chicago" 2 July 1932 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/275484> accessed 1 February 2021 and Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Speech at New York" 31 October 1936 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/208385> accessed 5 February 2021.

<sup>117</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Address at Oglethorpe University", 22 May 1932 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/288094> accessed 1 February 2021.

<sup>118</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt "Address at Chicago", 2 July 1932 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/275484> accessed 1 February 2021.

attack” would be organised action by government dedicated to the role of protecting citizens via a plethora of departments, agencies and interventions. Roosevelt was unashamed of this and chose not to hide behind a cloak of individualism. He called for “broad Executive power to wage war against the emergency, as great as the power that would be given to me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe”.<sup>119</sup> The government would “put people to work,” by “direct recruiting” and would operate “strict supervision of all banking and credits and investments”. Roosevelt also made clear that the American people would be part of the collective effort stating that, “if we are to go forward, we must move as a trained and loyal army willing to sacrifice for the good of a common discipline, because without such discipline no progress is made”. He went on, “the larger purposes will bind us all as a sacred obligation with a unity of duty” and “I assumed unhesitatingly the leadership of this great army of our people dedicated to a disciplined attack upon our common problems”.<sup>120</sup>

Roosevelt was clearly leading his nation on a “crusade”, but to face a domestic enemy and to a fight that had the future in its sights and confident government activism as its method.

Roosevelt was, at first, unsure what role the military, and particularly the doughboy veterans, would play in his “crusade”. Their identity, after all, was a construct maintained in alliance with Republican administrations that effectively gave them a privileged position in American life through the provision of the adjusted compensation bonus. Serious problems arose when this group identity collided with the hard times of the Great Depression and caused significant numbers of veterans to believe the US Government was reneging on their special category status. In 1932, the so-called “Bonus Expeditionary Force” of 40,000 largely

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<sup>119</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt “Inaugural Address”, 4 March 1933 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/208712> accessed 1 February 2021. For a detailed discussion of Roosevelt’s repeated reference of the war analogy derived from World War I in dealing with the economic crisis, see William E. Leuchtenburg “The New Deal and the Analogue of War” in *The FDR Years: On Roosevelt and his Legacy* (New York, 1995), 35-75.

<sup>120</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt “Inaugural Address”, 4 March 1933 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/208712> accessed 1 February 2021.

unemployed and homeless veterans marched on Washington to demand Congress pay the bonus early. After Congress refused, the army forcibly evicted the Bonus marchers from their encampment.

The harsh treatment of the veterans hardened the image of Hoover, but Roosevelt was no supporter of the marchers either. In 1933, he stated “no person, because he wore a uniform, must thereafter be placed in a special class of beneficiaries over and above all other citizens...The fact of wearing a uniform does not mean that [a veteran] can demand and receive from his government a benefit which no other citizen receives”.<sup>121</sup> The Economy Act of 1933 that cut \$400m from veteran’s pensions and benefits reflected this position.<sup>122</sup> While Roosevelt saw no special place for the veterans in his new “crusade”, Congress was more sensitive to their demands and granted early payment of the bonus in 1936.<sup>123</sup> This was partly down to powerful veteran lobbying but was also due to a growing public and governmental willingness to incorporate the veterans into the body of New Deal social provisions in the face of the Great Depression.<sup>124</sup> The veterans therefore played a part in transforming the role of government in their lives, a transformation usually attributed solely to New Deal labour agitation for social welfare.<sup>125</sup> The resolution of the bonus issue had several important implications. It served to restore and reinforce the strong bonds between service personnel and the government based on special category status for veterans. More importantly, it firmly tied ideas of patriotic service and sacrifice to government led collective action in the New Deal era reinforcing the trends apparent during the 1920s and setting up a further strengthening to come during the Second World War with the GI Bill.

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<sup>121</sup> Ortiz, *Beyond*, 2 and 5.

<sup>122</sup> Ortiz, *Beyond*, 10.

<sup>123</sup> Ortiz, *Beyond*, 6.

<sup>124</sup> Keene, *Doughboys*, 7 and 211.

<sup>125</sup> Ortiz, *Beyond*, 10.

Initially, there was little consistency in the New Deal response to the Great Depression and debate rages over whether it was liberal or conservative in approach. Indeed, there were few “basic principles” or “creed” to coalesce around up to 1940. Instead, the “bold, persistent experimentation” continued to develop as the Great Depression and then war progressed.<sup>126</sup> The so-called “Roosevelt Recession” of 1937-38 and the ill-judged “court-packing” plan of 1937 prompted a conservative reaction that ultimately provided a check to activist government. Two distinct strands of liberal reform became more apparent at this point. The first called for an administrative regulatory state to govern the structure of capitalism to mitigate its negative effects. While it favoured combative language such as “economic royalists” and “crusades”, and was similar to the New Nationalism of Theodore Roosevelt, it no longer claimed, like the early reformers to be able to resolve all conflict in the economy.<sup>127</sup> The second approach aimed not to directly intervene in the economy, but to use government fiscal powers to stimulate growth coupled with compensatory measures to resolve imbalance in the economy without meddling with the internal workings of the system itself.<sup>128</sup>

The Second World War ultimately led to the decline of support for the administrative state and a rise in fiscal management and a compensatory approach to smooth economic inequalities. This originated in the negative experience of state regulation during the First World War that fed into the corporatism of the interwar era.<sup>129</sup> While conservatives saw their strength increase from 1938, liberal reformers lost confidence and enthusiasm for a powerful

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<sup>126</sup> Alan Brinkley, “The New Deal and the Idea of the State”, in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, eds. Gary Gerstle and Steve Fraser (New Jersey, 1989), 85-86.

<sup>127</sup> Brinkley, *New Deal*, 87-89 and 96.

<sup>128</sup> Brinkley, *New Deal*, 94.

<sup>129</sup> Brinkley, *New Deal*, 100.

regulatory state. Totalitarianism provided a stark warning about state power while labour activism and strikes proved unpopular during a total war effort. The war also tested some of the managerial tasks reformers advocated and found them wanting. The government drifted with multiple committees and boards until the creation of the War Production Board in 1942. Even then, in the words of Brinkley, despite the war forcing the government to try aggressive managerial techniques it was still no match for the level of control granted to Bernard Baruch in the First World War and did little to increase faith in government control.<sup>130</sup>

The war, after long years of doubt, also brought revival and boom to American capitalism. Fear of what would come after led to a desire to keep the wartime growth boom going. Full employment via a fiscal policy to promote consumption helped legitimise the idea of a primarily compensatory government.<sup>131</sup> Such an approach meant that government no longer had to intervene directly and redeemed American capitalism after the disaster of the Great Depression. Keynesian management of the economy was the lesser of two evils when compared to the alternative of a regulatory state. This still left the problem of what to do about the fluctuations in the business cycle and weaknesses in the system. Welfare and insurance might handle this but it required a benchmark of rights to be set.<sup>132</sup> By 1945, liberal reformers, in setting out these basic American rights made an accommodation with capitalism that settled the conflicts of earlier in century by committing the United States to economic growth as surest route to social progress and compensation to deal with the flaws still in capitalism.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Brinkley, *New Deal*, 100-103.

<sup>131</sup> Brinkley, *New Deal*, 100 and 105-106.

<sup>132</sup> Brinkley, *New Deal*, 110.

<sup>133</sup> Brinkley, *New Deal*, 112.

What began as a response to the Great Depression became a core of American foreign policy and programme for victory. As Roosevelt famously said, “Dr. New Deal” became “Dr. Win the War”.<sup>134</sup> Domestic policies to mitigate the flaws in capitalism followed the 1942 report on “Security, Work and Relief Policies” known as the “American Beveridge Report”.<sup>135</sup> In his January 1944 State of the Union Message, Roosevelt called for an “economic bill of rights” because “true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. Necessitous men are not free men. People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made”. He then spelt out a series of American rights to a “useful and remunerative job”, “to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation”, “to a decent home”, “to adequate medical care”, “to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment” and “to a good education”. Roosevelt had his eyes firmly on the future rather than the past when considering the return for the American people’s collective effort. “After this war is won”, he proposed, “we must be prepared to move forward, in the implementation of these rights, to new goals of human happiness and well-being”.<sup>136</sup>

The prospective focus on rights and state compensation rather than regulation and reform to achieve them had its analogue in American foreign policy that formed a clear attempt by some democracies to confront the challenge of fascism as the international situation deteriorated.<sup>137</sup> In his State of the Union speech in 1941, Roosevelt set out essential human rights to democracy, religious conscience, economic well-being and security or freedoms of

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<sup>134</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt “Press Conference”, 28 December 1943  
<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/resources/images/pc/pc0155.pdf> p.44 accessed 3 February 2021.

<sup>135</sup> Brinkley, *New Deal*, 107 and 111.

<sup>136</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, State of the Union Message to Congress 11 January 1944  
<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/210825> accessed 5 February 2021. See Cass R. Sunstein, *The Second Bill of Rights - FDR's Unfinished Revolution and Why We Need It More Than Ever* (New York, 2004).

<sup>137</sup> Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World – America's Vision for Human Rights* (Massachusetts, 2005), 5.

“speech”, “religion”, from “want” and “fear” as he put it. Taking an expansive view of his theme, he said each should apply “everywhere in the world”.<sup>138</sup> In August the same year, the Atlantic Charter signed jointly by the United States and Britain, focused again on human rights that should “afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want”.<sup>139</sup> The following January, the charter became the United Nations Declaration eventually signed by forty-seven nations. As Borgwardt rightly suggests, this was a defining moment for the modern doctrine of human rights because it linked fighting fascism to the economic and social well-being of individuals both at home and abroad.<sup>140</sup> The lived experiences of the Great Depression and the global crisis brought an increasing American openness to large-scale multilateral institutional solutions that could reach through boundaries of state sovereignty to protect individuals.<sup>141</sup>

The Nuremburg Charter of 1945 was a demonstration of this new focus on international accountability under law for human rights but so too were a host of new international institutions. The Dumbarton Oaks Conference in 1944 laid the foundations for the United Nations, sealed at the San Francisco Conference in 1945, setting out a commitment to “fundamental human rights” and undertook to “employ international machinery for the promotion of economic and social advancement of all people”.<sup>142</sup> The Bretton Woods Conference secured the management of the world economy in line with an ideology of freer trade with the establishment of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to ensure the economic health of large sections of humanity.<sup>143</sup> This was a New Deal focus on human

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<sup>138</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union”, 6 January 1941 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/209473> accessed 5 February 2021.

<sup>139</sup> “Atlantic Charter”, 14 August 1941 <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp> accessed 12 July 2021.

<sup>140</sup> Borgwardt, *New Deal*, 4.

<sup>141</sup> Borgwardt, *New Deal*, 7-8.

<sup>142</sup> “Charter of the United Nations”, 26 June 1945 [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/unchart.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/unchart.asp) accessed 5 February 2021.

<sup>143</sup> Borgwardt, *New Deal*, 5 and 8.

rights, justice and fiscal management of the economy rolled out to the world with a similar eye on the future rather than the past. While the national “crusade” in the First World War had been reform orientated to fix a broken system and draped in retrospective imagery, that of the Second World War was focused on securing individual rights and ameliorating imperfections rather than banishing problems entirely in its prospective vision for the world to come.

When President Roosevelt, in his prayer on D-Day, called for “Faith in our united crusade,” and Eisenhower told his troops they were embarking on a “Great Crusade” it was for conceptually very different reasons to the doughboy “crusaders.”<sup>144</sup> Wilson had aimed to lead an impartial “crusade” that privileged the American moral position. In the Second World War, the Americans were not so ambivalent. Where Wilson had called in 1914 for Americans to be “impartial in thought, as well as action”, Roosevelt in 1939 believed “even a neutral cannot be asked to close his mind or his conscience”.<sup>145</sup> The Americans and the Allies united in a formal “Grand Alliance” to pursue unconditional Axis surrender.

The First World War had also been a collective spiritual “crusade” that saw an acceptance of a broad definition of faith in a domestic civic religion but its diplomacy also recognised the spirituality of the enemy. Again, there was no such ambiguity in the “crusade” of the Second World War. Roosevelt saw the war as a holy enterprise and defined religion as broadly as possible.<sup>146</sup> His setting of a “Judeo-Christian” identity against a lack of faith had important

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<sup>144</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Prayer on D-Day”, 6 June 1944 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/210815>  
Dwight D. Eisenhower “Statement to Troops”, 6 June 1944 <https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/todays-doc/?dod-date=606> accessed 5 February 2021.

<sup>145</sup> Woodrow Wilson, “Message on Neutrality”, 19 August 1914 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/206513>.  
Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat” 3 September 1939 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/209990> accessed 21 February 2021.

<sup>146</sup> Preston, *Sword*, 317-319 and 333.



implications.<sup>147</sup> Framing the war in explicitly religious terms identified the enemy with the forces of darkness. He believed faith brought morality that in turn supported democracy and a state choosing to restrict individual faith was therefore both ungodly and tyrannical.<sup>148</sup> The largely Christian crusading imagery of the First World War became in the Second World War a “crusade” for broad religious tolerance and liberty in the world.

Roosevelt understood, however, that a wartime “crusade” was problematic for some Americans and actually used the term very sparingly.<sup>149</sup> While liberal internationalism was still important to his administration, he realised that those who had never supported it or those who had had their fingers badly burnt by Wilson’s idealism would be reluctant to join the cause. For this reason, he embarked on a much more cautious “crusade” in the Second World War.<sup>150</sup> The root of this caution was the realism that tempered Roosevelt’s approach to international affairs. There were plenty of secular sources to this appreciation of the limits of American power in his earlier career from Theodore Roosevelt, naval theorist Capt. Alfred Thayer Mahan and his own experience as Assistant Secretary of the Navy in the Wilson administration.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Preston, *Sword*, 321 and 332.

<sup>148</sup> Preston, *Sword*, 317-319.

<sup>149</sup> Roosevelt only used the term “crusade” three times in his public utterances during World War II. Only his D-Day Prayer related the term directly to the war while the two other occasions 30 January 1942 and 28 February 1943 referred to very specific Polio and Red Cross campaigns. See Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Radio Address on the President’s Sixtieth Birthday”, 30 January 1942 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/210306>; Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Statement Opening the Red Cross Fund Drive”, 28 February 1943 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/209844> and Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Prayer on D-Day”, 6 June 1944 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/210815> accessed 5 February 2021.

<sup>150</sup> Steven Casey, *Cautious Crusade – Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War against Nazi Germany* (Oxford, 2001).

<sup>151</sup> See J. Simon Rofe, “Under the Influence of Mahan: Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt and their Understanding of American National Interest,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 19 (2008), 732-745 and Graham Cross, *The Diplomatic Education of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1882-1932* (New York, 2012).

There was also now, however, an important spiritual grounding to American realism. Even when the attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the war, some religious liberals had difficulty forgetting the shame and disappointments of the First World War. Unlike that conflict which saw thousands of Christian clergy eventually rally to justify the internationalist “crusade”, they now firmly stuck to their pacifism and anti-interventionism. The *New Republic* thought it significant enough to comment in June 1942 “It is not a Holy War. On the civilian front, it is being waged with less benefit of clergy than any major war in our history” and that the mainline protestant churches faced “spiritual immobilisation”.<sup>152</sup>

Now though, there was the Christian realism emanating from liberal ministers such as Reinhold Niebuhr. This position had begun to be visible during the First World War, but now became mainstream. Niebuhr challenged the notion that progress toward the eradication of sin was possible by human action and instead believed that humanity was inherently depraved. Thus, in a similar fashion to the secular focus on rights rather than reform, sin could only be mitigated and not eradicated.<sup>153</sup> The implication of this for foreign affairs was a deep concern about the dangers of nationally self-righteous “crusades” coupled with a belief that sometimes the use of force was justified because evil would always exist.<sup>154</sup> According to Niebuhr, the choices facing the United States were somewhere between good and evil; democracies certainly had their faults but they were preferable to totalitarianism.<sup>155</sup> Christian realism, according to Andrew Preston, offered a reformed Wilsonianism that gave Americans a new theology and morality of military intervention.<sup>156</sup> As such, it could aim to destroy the particular evil currently afflicting the world as necessary but could never hope to banish it

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<sup>152</sup> Preston, *Sword*, 373-374.

<sup>153</sup> Preston, *Sword*, 260-261 and 307.

<sup>154</sup> Preston, *Sword*, 305 and 308-309.

<sup>155</sup> Preston, *Sword*, 307, 309 and 354-55.

<sup>156</sup> Preston, *Sword*, 310 and 314.

entirely or even end all wars. This conservative certainty of a war for religion, democracy and security provided an alluring alternative to liberal disillusionment and marked a “decisive shift in religious attitudes towards patriotism”.<sup>157</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The First World War saw the birth of truly large-scale activist government control of the collective efforts of the American people. Yet, the traditional laissez-faire individual ideology of the United States was not yet ready to acknowledge this change. When Americans imagined the war, they reached back individually into the past. A metaphor of “crusade” provided a frame of reference with which to understand the unfathomable present. This imagery drew on progressive thought and a religious symbolism of redemption. It also drew on European and American medieval romanticism and particularly the memory of the Civil War and the doughboys own experiences in Europe. The Wilson administration also crucially understood this need for individualistic nostalgia and its propaganda machine latched on to the “crusade” discourse as a way to advance support for their war.

The brief experience of the AEF in Europe did not kill the “crusading” ideal entirely for Americans or the doughboys. For them, elements of the war remained a largely positive experience. There was less artistic transition from “mimesis to irony” in the memory of the war for Americans than is commonly described. Its very survival, however, led to its transformation. Wilson’s politicisation of the “crusade”, the unsettling domestic tensions and the return to corporatism in the 1920s challenged the “crusading” memory of the war. American veterans responded with a transformation of the metaphor into a prejudicial

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<sup>157</sup> Preston, *Sword*, 371.

conservatism closely aligned to the state and secured by preferential rights for soldiers and a perpetuation of the romantic “crusading” mythology in official commemorations.

The depths of Great Depression called for modern, technocratic solutions from an activist government, solutions that were both collective and prospective as they looked to transport Americans into a brighter future. At the same time, the government continued the transformation of soldiers into close adjuncts of the state rather than the people via disbursement of rights and appropriate commemoration. With the Second World War came their ultimate transformation into agents of the government in a righteous “crusade” that aimed to secure vengeance but also rights in the world rather than reform. The disappointments of Wilson’s original “crusade” combined with the Great Depression and the Second World War to make many Americans ready to accept this new meaning. This very different “crusade” for rights and realism co-opted a new generation of “crusaders” through the Selective Training and Service Act of September 1940, the first peacetime draft in American history. The relationship was formalised for the new crusade with the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the GI Bill providing guaranteed access to low-cost loans and mortgages, unemployment benefit and education from the government to aid with their post-war readjustment and future.<sup>158</sup>

As Jennifer Keene suggests, Roosevelt was happy to stay neutral in the legislative debates surrounding the bill because the veteran lobbyists now wisely avoided contentious terms such as “adjusted compensation”. The political ground had also shifted with many of its provisions having their civilian New Deal parallels such as the Home Owners Loan Corporation and the

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<sup>158</sup> Ortiz, *Beyond*, 6.

Social Security Act of 1935.<sup>159</sup> This was, however, a lasting achievement for the doughboy “crusaders”. The lobbyists successfully attached themselves to the government’s new “crusade” by persuading it to accept them as a unique social class and admitting a responsibility for redistributing the effects of civilian advantage to veterans.<sup>160</sup> It proved to be an extraordinarily legacy. Under the terms of the GI Bill, some 9 million veterans claimed unemployment benefits, 4.3 million purchased homes, farms or businesses with loans and 7.8 million took advantage of its educational provision.<sup>161</sup> The benefits from the legislative offspring of the GI Bill remain important recruitment factors for military personnel today and, even with much reduced benefits, continue to underpin a special category status for military personnel.<sup>162</sup>

Victory in the Second World War did not make the United States perfect and the focus on rights and compensatory measures prompted many new post-war reform “crusades” such as fighting for civil rights, eliminating poverty and opposing communism.<sup>163</sup> Harry Truman was certainly enthusiastic for “crusades” using the term sixty-one times in his public pronouncements.<sup>164</sup> Yet the focus on rights rather than reform and the binding of the collective patriotic service and sacrifice of American troops to that idea, increasingly demanded that American military forces be in the vanguard of social change. African Americans consistently faced discrimination and exclusion from a racialised nationalism throughout the period. Their experience of “crusade” was therefore very different in that the

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<sup>159</sup> Keene, *Doughboys*, 208 and 211.

<sup>160</sup> Keene, *Doughboys*, 212 and 214.

<sup>161</sup> Keene, *Doughboys*, 212. Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (Oxford, 2005), 6-7.

<sup>162</sup> Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens*, 170.

<sup>163</sup> Brinkley, *New Deal*, 112. Borgwardt, *New Deal*, 8 notes the focus on human rights served to highlight the contradictions and hypocrisies in the democracies.

<sup>164</sup> From a search of Harry S. Truman’s public pronouncements as president on the American Presidency Project’s database. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/> accessed 30 January 2021.

disappointments of service in the First World War helped radicalised the struggle for black equality.<sup>165</sup> Many African Americans were prepared to join the “crusade” in the Second World War but for a contingent “Double V” of victory over fascism abroad and over segregation and discrimination at home. The focus on rights at home and overseas meant that increasing numbers of Americans were beginning to understand their demands. It was no coincidence that a former doughboy, Harry Truman, signed an Executive Order to desegregate the American military in July 1948, six years before the Supreme Court began to desegregate education.

The experiences of doughboys in the First World War and their maintenance of a crusading metaphor helped set the United States on a very different course after the Second World War. That change in course was particularly visible in government commemorations of America’s second “crusade”. As Ron Robin has noted, official memorials to the Second World War “paid no tribute to traditional values and were abruptly future-orientated”. In these memorials, “superior American technology and management skills” had won the war.<sup>166</sup> For Robin “centralizing pressures...had eclipsed traditional conceptions of laissez-faire government and unfettered individualism”. “A complex government-run battle machine” now replaced the individual American soldier as the ultimate hero of the war. The voluntarism and individualism emphasised by the previous batch of cemeteries were gone. Victory, according to the new iconography, was the result of a sophisticated machinery and intricate coordination that only activist government could accomplish.’<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible – Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (New Jersey, 2001), 4.

<sup>166</sup> Robin, *Enclaves*, 6.

<sup>167</sup> Robin, *Enclaves*, 7.

General Eisenhower perhaps recognised there was a significant difference with the national experience of the First and Second World Wars when he wrote, “the war became for me a crusade in the traditional sense of that often misused word”.<sup>168</sup> The new collective, prospective and prejudicial realism of an American “crusade” for rights would survive until the cultural revolution of the 1960s stemming from another American war, this time in Vietnam. The crusade metaphor would break down in the face of loud demands for rights and inclusion from women, African Americans and other groups marginalised by consensus. Military failure in Vietnam also saw the birth of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) in January 1973 that severed the direct, democratic connection between the American people and their military through conscription. As Bacevich notes, Americans now saw military service increasingly as a matter of personal choice in a “limited liability” model of citizenship. The current 1.4 million active personnel, less than 1 per cent of the population, starkly illustrates this withdrawal of Americans from their military.<sup>169</sup> The motivations of a fully professionalised force that was 42 per cent from ethnic minorities, with only 6.5 per cent of its 18-24 year old enlisted personnel holding some college education, in the year 2000 are now possibly even more isolated from the concerns of wider America. Yet although Americans might not know the soldiers who operate the “New American Militarism”, they increasingly admire them.<sup>170</sup> Ironically, these developments have led to a cultural revival of an imagery of heroic individualism with Americans and in the rhetoric of politicians. While the word “crusade” itself has now become controversial in a world more aware of its pluralism, its romantic echo persists. A focus on the individual service and sacrifice by American soldiers, and particularly the fathers and grandfathers who fought the “crusade” of

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<sup>168</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (London, 1948) quoted in Siberry, *Oxford Illustrated*, 205.

<sup>169</sup> Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens*, 170.

<sup>170</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism – How Americans Are Seduced By War*, rev. edn. (Oxford, 2013), 28.

the Second World War, serves once again as a comforting frame image in bewildering times.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> See Graham Cross, "The Meaning of Madingley: Anglo-American Commemorative Culture and the Cambridge American Military Cemetery," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* (2021 forthcoming).



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