

# **The Good War: An Oral History of World War Two Study Guide**

**The Good War: An Oral History of World War Two by Studs Terkel**

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# Plot Summary

The Good War: An Oral History of World War Two by Studs Terkel, is one of the most memorable, comprehensive records of personal stories of World War II in literature. The book is a collection of interviews done by Terkel following World War Two. Terkel takes readers on a journey from the first bombings of Pearl Harbor to the excitement of war to the horrors of concentration camps to the dropping of the A-bomb.

The stories range from the humorous exploits of young GI men to the adoring memories of young women attracted to young soldiers to the horrifying accounts of men coerced by their government to assist with tests of deadly bombs. Terkel does not interject his own opinions, but simply allows those interviewed to tell their stories. Terkel then combines these accounts into subjects, so that each topic is covered from a variety of different angles and viewpoints. In this way, Terkel allows the reader to make his or her own conclusions as to the merits of World War Two. The interviews begin with personal accounts of the attack on Pearl Harbor and stories of young men and women as they experienced the beginnings of the war as soldiers, entertainers, pilots, women workers, and boys too young to fight. In the next book, Terkel interviews those high in political command, pilots, journalists, and entertainers to examine their role in the war. In book three, Terkel examines the benefits of World War II including the financial gains and examines the political sides as the war continued to be fought. It also examines the war from the pilot point of view and from the view of journalists on the front lines. Book four examines criminal aspects of World War II, the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the horrific effects of the bomb, and the generations that followed those of the soldiers in World War II. Throughout the novel, Terkel guides the interviews with occasional questions but allows each individual to tell their stories in full. He includes information about when each person shows emotion such as anger or sadness, which helps to convey the raw emotion of the recounts of war.

World War Two was a unique time in the world, when the United States in particular was coming out of a Great Depression into a time of great wealth, innocence, and happiness. Men and women, in general, were willing and ready to join the fight to win the war. However, as the war continued, more men and women began to question the propaganda of the United States government and the methods used to win the war. With the dropping of the bomb, many began to outwardly question the choices of the government. Terkel, in his organization of interviews, presents a view of the war that ranges from positive to horrific but consistently tells personal stories full of a hope and sadness common to all mankind.



# Introduction, A Sunday Morning, and A Chance Encounter

## Introduction, A Sunday Morning, and A Chance Encounter Summary and Analysis

The Good War: An Oral History of World War Two is a novel about World War II, told as a collection of interviews from various individuals who lived before, during, or after the war. These interviews tell of World War II from a variety of perspectives, including those of U.S. soldiers, young women of the time, Japanese soldiers, German soldiers, and refugees.

The "Introduction" is a collection of small pieces of the interviews collected within the book. Throughout these snippets, Terkel explains that the book is designed to present the war not from a political or military standpoint but from a human standpoint. The collection is an introduction to themes in the novel such as political agendas, propaganda, discrimination, segregation, death, destruction, and rebirth.

In "A Sunday Morning," John Garcia discusses his experience as a native Hawaiian during the attack on Pearl Harbor. He is recruited by the military to assist in bringing dead soldiers from the waters and learns about racism when he joins the military and is sent overseas. Next, Dennis Keegan describes his experiences in San Francisco as Pearl Harbor is attacked. He explains that the town explodes in fear that the Japanese will attack the coast. In the next story, Mayor Tom Bradley of L.A. is a police officer in 1941, and is forced to respond to a city that is panicked about Japanese invaders. Ron Veenker recalls the Japanese of his own neighborhood disappearing following the attack on Pearl Harbor, as they are placed in internment camps. Peter Ota, a Nisei, was born in L.A., and is the son of Japanese parents. His father is arrested following the attack on Pearl Harbor, and sent to labor camp while Ota and his sister are sent to internment camp. They are reunited a year later and sent to a camp in Colorado where education is sparse. Ota is drafted as a U.S. citizen, but all Nisei are segregated into their own units. After the war, Ota tries to hide his past and assimilates into white American culture. The third generation American-Japanese express anger at the Nisei for their refusal to fight back. Yuriko Hohri recalls having the FBI at her door as a youth. Her father is taken to camp, and her family goes to live with her grandmother, and then to a camp. They live in unclean horse stalls, eat very little, and are given poor education. Hohri's father is released and is sponsored by a Quaker in Iowa who helps him obtain employment and housing. Hohri notes her Caucasian classmates were racist, but the blacks were not. Frank Keegan admits he and his friends went to the woods to wait for the Japanese they knew would come following Pearl Harbor. He thinks the bomb ended the war and supports its use.

In "A Chance Encounter," Bob Rasmus begins by noting many of his friends were part of the battle of the Bulge, but that he was not because he became ill during training and



was removed from his unit. He recalls arriving in Germany and seeing a group of veteran soldiers. Moments later, they are attacked, and many are killed. That night they are cold, hurt, and scared, and he realizes they are now soldiers. He also recalls realizing the Germans are just like he and his fellow soldiers. In the next interview, Red Predergast notes he went to the Battle of the Bulge and was in basic training with Rasmus. Red explains the horrors of his first patrols as he is shot at on all sides by Germans. His squadron surrenders, and the men are marched in the snow without shoes or coats for several days. They are taken to a camp, but the soldiers are treated well. They are rescued by Russian soldiers and sent back to the states to prepare for war with Japan. When the U.S. drops the bomb, Red retires.



# Tales of the Pacific and The Good Reuben James

## Tales of the Pacific and The Good Reuben James Summary and Analysis

In "Tales of the Pacific," E.B. "Sledgehammer" Sledge notes the Japanese would commit suicide rather than surrender during the war. He recalls an incident where he and a friend pulled a wounded Japanese soldier from a building, only to have him pull a grenade. He admits he became tired of being afraid and began to take it out on the Japanese. He recalls several acts of cruelty and mistreatment toward the Japanese. Robert Lekachman admits he was a horrible soldier and so became a clerk. He wrote letters home to families of killed soldiers. Maurice Wilson is the company historian for 192nd tank battalion, which defended Bataan and was at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese attacked. His team moved to Manila, where he was in charge of feeding the men. As they fight in Bataan, his outfit decides to surrender. Some try to escape but are tortured and killed. Wilson and others are taken to work in the fields, and Wilson develops sores from infection. He is transferred to prison by train, and they are then marched twenty miles. At the labor camp, Wilson befriends a cat, only to watch him be eaten one night by the hungry soldiers. Wilson is paralyzed while working. The men return home after Japan surrenders, and Wilson has to fight for his pay. Peter Bezich fought as infantry and was stationed in the Philippines. He was part of a medic unit and saved many lives. Anton Bilek was stationed at Clark Field in the Philippines during the war. The field is bombed by the Japanese, and Bilek and his company eventually evacuate to Bataan but are captured by the Japanese. They and other soldiers are forced on a sixty-mile walk with little food, dysentery, and rampant malaria. Bilek is blinded from malnutrition and contracts beriberi and dysentery. When well, he is put on a detail in Japan where he is treated fairly well by most. The bomb is dropped on Nagasaki, and the prisoners are freed. Bilek agrees dropping the bomb was a positive thing.

"The Good Reuban James" begins with Bill Bailey, a young man joined the military at fifteen. He is in Europe as Hitler comes to power. When a seaman is taken, beaten, and thrown into prison in Hamburg, Bailey and his friends decide to protest in New York. In a crowd of people, they launch themselves onto a German boat and rip down the swastika. They are severely beaten, and the "Bremen Six" as they are called, are arrested. Years later, he becomes an engineer, and goes to war. He and his mates are en route to the Pacific when the bomb is dropped. David Milton was a journalist. He is placed on several Liberty ships and travels the Pacific. He tells many stories of ships being torpedoed and of ships being sunk to form a makeshift port at Normandy. He arrives in Russia and finds the crew to be hardy and friendly.



# Rosie, Neighborhood Boys, and Reflections on Machismo

## Rosie, Neighborhood Boys, and Reflections on Machismo Summary and Analysis

In "Rosie," Peggy Terry notes she worked in a shell loading plant during the war. She was naive, and knew little of the war. The women had few rights but appreciated employment. She learned about the Nazis and concentration camps from the Polish workers and realized she was being lied to by the government. She knows the bomb was dropped to stop the war but believes it was wrong to drop it on working men and women. Sarah Killingsworth, a black woman, notes she worked in the production factory as well. She laments that the world was highly discriminatory at the time and prides herself in her achievements. She thanks the war for helping to end racism. Dellie Hahne admits she bought into the propaganda of the government when they told women they should marry soldiers. She becomes a nurse's aid and marries a man she doesn't like. She is forced to move around the U.S. with him to several bases. She feels cheated because movies, books, and the government portrayed the war as a positive, when she saw only negatives. She credits the war for beginning the women's movement. Pauline Kael, a film critic, notes that films at the time were designed to make viewers despise the Japanese and the Germans, while adoring the American soldier. Evelyn Fraser was a recruiting officer and discovered many high school women with syphilis and others who believed WAC women were immoral, which showed her the world was not as innocent as she thought. She credits the army for her courage and determination. Betty Hutchinson becomes a nurse during the war. She is sent to Santa Barbara on military assignment. Soon, she is moved to Menlo Park as a plastic surgeon nurse, caring for those misshapen by the war with eyes, legs, and arms missing. When the war is over, the men are allowed outside to celebrate, and the people of the town are angry and disgusted. Hutchinson finds such opinions horrible and cruel.

In "Neighborhood Boys," Mike Royko explains he was in Chicago when the war started and recalls the women going to work and the men leaving for war. When the war ended, people moved from the neighborhood as the economy picked up. Paul Piscano is a Sicilian from New York who remembers Mussolini as a hero but Hitler as the enemy. When the Italians gave up, his neighborhood celebrated. He believes the young Italian men identified with Italy, but the war caused them to identify with America and lose their culture. Jack Short notes that when lower income families came home, they found themselves educated and able to be middle class. Don McFadden recalls the war at home between Mexican-Americans and military boys, often referred to as zoot suit riots. Many were hurt, and several were killed. Mayor Tom Bradley also was serving to stop the riots when he was drafted and was thus exempt from the draft as essential home personnel. Mickey Ruiz recalls being one of twenty-two Mexican Americans in the Sleepy Lagoon case, where the zoot suiters crashed a party, and an individual was



killed. Ruiz was sentenced to life for the murder, but the decision was overturned. He was drafted following his release, continued to get into trouble, and went back to prison following the army. Dempsy Travis is a black man who describes his experiences with a segregated army. One night, several blacks talk about going to the white theater. Soon, white soldiers arrive who open fire. Several blacks die, and many more are wounded. Dempsy is wounded, but recovers. A white major teaches him to type and to run a PX. Soon, he is in charge of both the black and the white PX. Win Stracke discusses his own experiences in the war as he teaches a German soldier that culture is a shared commodity by helping him sing a German opera. Johnny DeGrazio is a Chicago man, who was discharged with a skin condition. He was shamed, since his neighborhood was highly patriotic, and to not serve was to be a sissy. His best claim to fame in the war was his gambling ability.

In "Reflections on Machismo," John Abbott reflects on his classification as a CO, or conscientious objector. He was sent to camps that complete non-war duties but refused to continue work. He was called yellow, physically and verbally attacked, ostracized, and treated as an outcast, but his father supported his decision. He was imprisoned, paroled, but lost his right to vote. He fought to reinstate the rights and won. Roger Tuttrup tells his story of loading ships in the Pacific. His unit was then transferred to protect the corrupt Chinese government. Ted Allenby speaks of his experiences as a gay soldier in WWII. He believes gay men tried to prove how rugged they were in the army. He fought on D-Day and recalls many casualties. He also speaks of secret love affairs and pressure to be straight. He became a chaplain and helped homosexuals to escape the military but was eventually caught and discharged dishonorably. However, a lawyer assisted him, and he regained his benefits by obtaining an honorable discharge.





# High Rank and The Bombers and the Bombed

## High Rank and The Bombers and the Bombed Summary and Analysis

In "High Rank," Admiral Gene Larocque discusses his time as a serviceman. He is in Pearl Harbor at the time of the attack and thought because they had been told the Japanese couldn't see well and didn't have working torpedoes, that the attack was a mistake. He believes there is a deep-seated belief in the "great white race," even in America. He believes militarism has been institutionalized and that war is now part of politics. General William Buster discusses his training of young men in WWII, and of the new weapons they learned to use in the field. He also notes his belief in the treachery of the Russians and his belief that while peace is a good thing, someone has to care for the peacekeepers.

In "The Bomb and the Bombers," John Ciardi tells of his time as a gunner in WWII. Labeled as a "premature anti-fascist" by the army because of his pre-war antifascist activities, he is unable to be a pilot or a navigator. He says this and other flukes, saved his life. He discusses the horror of the Tokyo bombings and of war in general. Akira Miuri tells his story of being a Japanese youth at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack. Schools were closed so the young could work in war factories, and bombings were frequent and deadly. They were told the Americans would rape their women and mistreat them. When Japan surrendered, they were relieved, although disappointed. They soon learned America was not cruel. John Galbraith laments that although Americans fought the war until 1945 using their air force, the bombings were unsuccessful, because their targets were inaccurate. Galbraith and others were on a committee that determined the value of the air force and determined the air force was failing to win the war. He is convinced the Japanese were already ready to surrender when America dropped the A bomb, although he admits Washington did not know of this probability. Eddie Costello and Ursula Bender discuss their roles in WWII, as well. Costello was a pilot in the war and flew with his friend to bomb Frankfurt. Ursula, a friend of Costello's, was in Frankfurt the night he bombed it. She recalls hiding in a shelter and recalls her heroic mother learning to trade and barter goods to stay alive. Costello admits he still feels discrimination against Germans and the Japanese. Ursula admits she knew nothing of concentration camps until later in life when she began to demand answers from her father. Costello notes when the war ended, the fun was over, and Ursula remembers watching a man blow up from a grenade the day before the war ended, symbolizing two very different views of WWII. Jean Wood was a dancer and a mother when the war began but soon was forced to evacuate to the seaside. She lived with a cruel boarder, and her husband joined the army. She speaks of being shot at by gunners in airplanes, using public air raid shelters, and of seeing neighbor furniture blown into nearby houses. She tells of seeing schoolchildren die as a Woolworth's is

bombed. When the war ended, housing was terrible, and many were in poverty. She sees herself now as a pessimist.



# Growing Up: Here and There, D-Day and All That, and Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy

## Growing Up: Here and There, D-Day and All That, and Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy Summary and Analysis

In "Growing Up," John Baker recalls growing up in war and finding it adventuresome as they climbed in and out of shelters. He also recalls the various sirens used, being issued gas masks, and being shot at by planes overhead. Yasuko Kurachi Dower grew up in Japan, and recalls the strictness of the government. During the war, they were poor and hungry, and were relieved when it was over, but there was food, clothing, and housing shortages after the war. Yasuko admits she hates authority because of the war. Werner Burckhardt speaks of German teachers who risked everything to teach against the Nazi regime. He recalls Crystal Night, or the night the Jews were attacked and arrested, and antisemitism really began. He admits now he saw the horrors of antisemitism but dared not refuse to obey commands. Oleg Tsakumov is from Russia and remembers extreme poverty, starvation, and hunger during the war, as well as devastation to Leningrad from bombings. Sheril Cuning recalls the disappearance of her Japanese friends from Long Beach during the war. Galatea Berger recalls growing up in Germany with constant war. She was exposed to sex early as the British and German soldiers raped women. Her mother traded in the black market for survival, and Galatea sees herself as a survivor. Jean Bartlett grew up in Berkeley and found herself the center of attention from young military boys. She brought many of them home, was engaged fourteen times, drank, and was thought of as loose. She believes the war ruined her because of such early attention and pressure to be with the boys of the military. Marcel Ophuls was with his family, hiding, in France during the war. His father was a celebrated Jewish filmmaker, an anti-Nazi speaker, and a member of the French army. They escaped France and came to the US where his father tried to be successful. He admits he knew much of the horrors of racism but still found himself being racists against others. Later, he sought to show others the horrors through film making.

In "D-day and All That," Elliott Johnson recalls leaving for Normandy. He watches as the beach explodes with gunfire and rockets, and his commanding officer refuses to take them on the attack. He tells of being shot at by German 88s, snipers, and of killing men, although he hates to admit he has done so. He also tells of young men killed by friendly fire, taking German soldiers hostage, and letting German civilians free. Charles A. Gates was a member of the first black tanker group used in combat. He recalls fighting the army for equal rights. He tells many stories of exemplary behavior and superior fighting abilities. He claims the U.S. intelligence attempted to poison the minds of the people against the blacks. Rosemary Hanley tells of her husband, Kevin, and their happy marriage before the war. She became pregnant, and he left for the Battle of the Bulge, where he was killed. Joe, his best friend, came to tell Rosemary of his death and of their last moments, and the two fell in love, and eventually married. Joe says he feels



sometimes as though he betrayed his friend. Timuel Black recalls race riots in Chicago and Detroit, and as a black man, he understood the hardship of segregation and discrimination. Blacks were segregated on leave, in quarters, in mess halls, and often accused of rape and violence. He recalls battles and death, and their arrival in France, where they were welcomed as equals. He believes POWs were treated better than black US soldiers. Dr. Alex Shulman recalls doing neurosurgery during WWII as a Jewish man. He kept a diary recording the lives saved and lost. He notes that Americans do not know war as others in Europe do, and that he is proud he saved the lives of human beings, both Nazi and American alike. Frieda Wolff worked in navy public relations during the war and then joined the Red Cross. As a concert singer, she put together a show for the men on a ship she was on and was asked to perform at various hospitals while she was working in overseas.

In "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy," Maxine Andrews speaks of her time working with her sisters Patty and Laverne as the singing group, the Andrews Sisters. They sang for troops all over the world and performed for wounded men; she admits it was difficult not to cry. She recalls singing for men who were driven insane by battle and singing for the USO. She recalls performing one night when the announcer broke in to declare the end of the war. She still meets boys for whom she performed.



# Sudden Money and The Big Panjandrum

## Sudden Money and The Big Panjandrum Summary and Analysis

In "Sudden Money," Ray Wax discusses his time as a manager of a PX. He set up the first PX in England and handled a lot of money but assures readers he never stole. His employees, however, made a fortune stealing from the military. Wax left the PX and set up movie theaters for battle fatigue patients and live show stages with a band. Elsie Rossio recalls the influx of people and business into Seneca Ill., when the government built a shipyard there in 1942. Georgia Gleason recalls working as a cook for the local grill for the new workers. The local bar patrons recalls the bar packed with workers on weekends. George C. Page recalls his own venture into industrial development, selling low cost buildings to defense contractors for high rent. He also operated a food dehydration plant for army foods and generally succeeded in investments. Lee Ormont speaks of his venture into the supermarket business. During the war, he notes that people purchased whatever they could, and thus, his business was lucrative. He refused to barter in the black market but instead simply sold what he could obtain legally. He also succeeded in housing development.

In "Big Panjandrum," Tommy Corcoran notes that he was put in charge of Chinese Defense Supplies. He used maps to calculate imports and exports of various goods before entering into pharmaceutical exports. James Rowe explains that over time, he has become more confident that business was good for the war and that government was the problem, although he felt differently at the time. John Kenneth Galbraith was, during the war, put in charge of price control. He notes that producers continued with quality products, even though prices were set. He realizes he was hated by industry but also recognizes the need for his position. Joe Marcus was appointed the head of the Civilian Requirements Division. His position was to ensure that there were enough goods for both the military and the civilian populations. He explains the laws of supply and demand in a depression and in war. He firmly believes business now controls Washington. W. Averell Jarriman was in charge of giving aid to Russia and Britain and says that we assisted Russia only in an effort to stop Germany. Hamilton Fish was responsible for the first committee to investigate communism in the US. He claims he attempted to stop the U.S. from going to war, but after the attack on Pearl Harbor, he supported the decision. He believes the American people owe him thanks. Labeled as a premature anti-fascist by the army was a strong advocate for civil rights in the South. She fought the poll tax in 1940, and lived in a household which included a Japanese national as a butler and an English woman and her child. Soon, the FBI began coming to the house, as the Japanese national and the English woman were under suspicion because of their ties to their countries. Following the war, her office was ostracized for their relations with blacks, so the family moved south and began practicing law for black rights. Joseph L. Rauh also fought for civil rights and helped to introduce the fair employment practices laws, giving blacks the rights to equal employment. Earl B.

Dickerson was appointed to the first Fair Employment Practices Committee and saw to it the defense contractors employed blacks as well as whites. Dickerson is proud of his aggressive fight for fair opportunity.



# Flying High and Up Front with Pen, Camera, and Mike

## Flying High and Up Front with Pen, Camera, and Mike Summary and Analysis

In "Flying High," Lowell Steward is a black man who had little experience with discrimination, having grown up in LA. Unable to join the military with his white friends, he was eventually sent to Tuskegee, the black air force base. He encountered bigotry both on the base and off with his family. On assignment, the black men were not given the same luxuries as the whites. The black pilots began to succeed dramatically. They often flew alone overseas but were eventually accepted as fighting partners for whites. They never lost a bomber to enemy action. He returned to civilian life, but found he was unable to become a pilot or buy a Beverly Hills home due to his race. He was driven to study real estate, and he has been dedicated to finding nice homes for blacks ever since.

In "Up Front with Pen, Camera, and Mike," John Houseman was among many in Hollywood who began working for the Voice of America, which was a part of the Office of War Information overseas. They broadcast information and news for American troops. All material was censored by the State Department, but broadcasts were picked up and retransmitted across the globe. Henry Hatfield worked with white radio and taught aerial navigation via the radio. He also transmitted German POW messages to other German soldiers about the kindness of the US forces. Milton Caniff drew posters for Washington to explain topics such as air raids. He also drew cartoons that reflected the war, with such characters as Terry, Dickie Dare, Dragon Lady, and others. Another comic, Male Call, was a GI only cartoon with X-rated material. Bill Mauldin wrote a cartoon called Up Front, with GI soldiers Willie and Joe, who reflected the life of the typical dogface soldier. Herman Kogan wrote for newspapers during the war and described the battle from the front lines. Alfred Duckett was a black news writer who wrote of issues in bases such as discrimination, bias, and racism. Roosevelt himself requested that news writers stop such work, and black news columnists agreed, provided that the case was investigated. The investigator assigned to the bases Duckett wrote about was black but declared everything was fine. Later, Duckett discovered the investigator insulted the men but refused to help. In another case, Duckett finds two black soldiers are shot for refusing a white soldier's orders. Duckett later marries one of the men's widow. Garson Kanin made movies of real battles during the war. He also acquired copies of German and Italian films through the black market. Richard Leacock became a combat cameraman. He burned villages and killed many Burmese. He filmed much of this so others could see the improper behaviors of US troops. Walter Rosenblum was another combat photographer who discusses his experiences taking pictures of combat on D-Day. At Cherbourg, his friend, Val, was killed by snipers, and Rosenblum becomes the movie photographer. He recalls a fight with German SS, where the SS surrenders, and

are executed by American soldiers. He also recalls taking footage at concentration camps and bringing in a number of German soldiers who surrendered to him.





# Crime and Punishment, A Turning Point, and Chilly Winds.

## Crime and Punishment, A Turning Point, and Chilly Winds. Summary and Analysis

In "Crime and Punishment," Alvin Bridges was an MP in the war and spent much time searching for AWOL soldiers in brothels. He also notes there were often problems with racism. Many blacks were shot for their crimes, while whites received a light sentence. Joseph Small discusses his experiences as a black navy soldier working with bomb materials in California. The black men were in constant danger as they loaded and unloaded munitions, and one night, two hundred black munitions handlers were killed as they unloaded the ships and the munitions exploded. The rest of the men refuse to return to work. Fifty of them are transferred to Yerba Buena Island and held for court martial. They were sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor with dishonorable discharge. In the end, the fifty were honorably discharged due to pressure from the NAACP. Hans Gobeler was a soldier on a German submarine that was sunk by the U.S.S. Guadalcanal, on which John Sanders was a crew member. Gobeler states he fought for his country, not for Hitler; whereas, Sanders fought to remove Hitler. Gobeler and his crew are fired on by Americans and surrender. Sanders notes his men were happy to save nearly all the crew from the German sub. Gobeler admits no one was willing to give their lives to Hitler. Charlie Miller recalls being shot down and captured by German soldiers, who were very kind and caring. However, he was then shipped to Frankfurt for interrogation and then to Stalag 3, a camp that housed other prisoners of war. Miller was in seven camps and escaped each time but was recaptured. He tells of one of his escape attempts as he met many who helped him. Miller notes the SS troops beat them and nearly killed them, but that the regular German military were decent men. Jacques Raboud joined the French resistance at a young age and helped hide soldiers behind enemy lines. A friend is discovered, and Raboud is taken by officers, beaten, and shipped to a labor camp. When they are finally rescued, the American captain held the SS men prisoner, tied them up, and left them in the hands of the now freed laborers. He is grateful to have survived. Walter Nowak was taken by the SS from Poland to a camp in Germany, as was Olga, who is now his wife. Both never saw their families again. They were forced to work in a factory until the war ended. The couple courts in camp, and Walter asks Olga's father for her hand in marriage. Olga is taken from camp on suspicion of inciting animosity, but Walter convinces them to release her, and the two are married. After the war, they come to live in the United States. Olga goes back to visit Auschwitz, and realizes she should not have, as she is unable to remember without pain. Erich Luth admits he did not protest enough under Hitler for fear of his own life. He was sent to work in factories and did so, but he feared his true opinions would be discovered. He was happy to become a POW in Italy. Vitaly Korotich tells of the tragedy of Babi Yar, a gaping canyon where it is believed several hundred thousand Jews were killed and burned. He has filmed there, and the lush grasses show where dead bodies



have been buried. Joseph Levine was in charge of helping newly-freed death camp survivors to survive. He helped them obtain housing, food, and transportation back to their home country. The freed are soon forced into relocation camps, and Levine assists the children with gaining education. He tells many stories of reuniting survivors with their families. He attended the Nuremberg trials and remains furious that the SS men on trial appeared bored.

In "Turning Point," Joseph Polowsky tells of his meeting of the Russian military at the Elbe river. Both armies (US and Russian) are told to stop advancing since the government was unsure of what the reaction would be, but they continue on to meet one another. They meet, among the dead bodies of many killed at the river, and the celebration of humanity is awe inspiring. The two armies agree to celebrate that day forever as a tribute to the civilian dead, and Polowsky does each year. Mikhail Nikolaevich Alexeyev speaks of war in the Ukraine and of his troops' defense of Stalingrad. The battle was fierce and many died on both sides, but soon, the Russian army came to assist. The German troops were offered surrender options but refused. He remembers seeing thousands of prisoners of war and many more dead. He also recalls giving up his own food so the prisoners would not starve. Galina Alexeyev, Mikhail's wife, worked in Stalingrad as a nurse and then as a communications specialist. She talks of dealing with wounded children and innocent people. Viktor Kondratenko discusses his witnessing of thousands of German troops surrendering, and the kindness they were shown by US and British soldiers. Grigori Baklanov reminds readers that of the Russian troops who went to war, only three percent returned home.

In "Chilly Winds," Telford Taylor discusses his role as one of the chief prosecutors at the Nuremberg trials. He notes the trials were somewhat racist, in that Germans were less punished than the Japanese. As the trials moved forward, cooperation ceased, and convictions became meaningless. Arno Mayer, a Jewish man, discusses his position as a morale officer for German POWs. He took care of the scientists in charge of Operation Paperclip, which was later known to be related to the bomb. Erhard Dabringhaus was an intelligence officer in WWII, and later, was a part of the CIC. He was in charge of locating and extracting specific wanted individuals. He often took SS men and treated them well for information. He is ashamed that the US used war criminals and allowed them freedom simply for information. Milton Wolff was a fighter for Spain in the Spanish Civil war. He began working for intelligence, recruiting members for the International Brigade. He then worked for the OSS and then in chemical warfare. He is then transferred all over the world for various infantry positions. Eileen Barth talks of her time as a social worker during the war and of her anger at the mail censorship of soldiers and civilians. Anthony Scariano works for Wild Bill Donovan of the OSS, like Milton Wolff. He participated in black ops, blowing up tunnels and bridges, and creating havoc behind enemy lines. Irving Goff worked behind enemy lines in guerrilla warfare. He was OSS, working for Donovan, and worked to save Gibraltar, North Africa, France, Spain, and other areas. He discusses many operations in which he was involved. Hans Massaquoi grew up in Germany as a black young man. He was originally attracted to the Nazi party, but soon learned he was unwanted. He quickly became part of a rebellion group of young individuals who were anti-Nazi. He and his mother flee to the mountains when the bombings begin and find emaciated prisoners in camps. When

they return to Hamburg, the British arrive, and Massaquoi becomes their translator. He finds his father in Liberia and because of his British and American connections is allowed to leave as a member of Allied forces.



# **Is You Is Or Is You Ain't My Baby, Remembrance of Things Past, and Epilogue: Boom Babies and Other New People**

## **Is You Is Or Is You Ain't My Baby, Remembrance of Things Past, and Epilogue: Boom Babies and Other New People Summary and Analysis**

In "Is You Is...," Philip Morrison and other scientists approached Washington to help make the bomb. He explains their process from creating the chain reaction to the final stages of the bomb. They learn the Germans were far behind in bomb creation. Morrison is moved to Los Alamos and assists in creating a method of assembly for the bomb. Morrison was there when they did the testing in the desert and loaded the core of the bomb onto the plane that dropped it on Nagasaki. Marnie Seymour speaks of her husband being sent to Oak Ridge, where they were working on the bomb. They were proud of their work. They were offered a chance to see the testing at Bikini but refused. Many friends are now dead from the radiation they received from the test. Many they worked with were unable to conceive, and two of Seymour's own children have birth defects. Later in life, Seymour saw people burned and maimed from the bomb and now feels horribly ashamed. John H. Grove helped to train those at Los Alamos and to help build the bomb. He was both relieved and horrified when the bomb functioned. Bill Barney, a pilot, was trained in secrecy, using dummy bombs. He was one of the pilots who dropped the bomb on Nagasaki. He admits he was in awe of the bomb, and that he has no guilt about his role. He believes it was worth it to save the lives of American soldiers. Father George Zabelka blessed the pilots of the planes prior to the dropping of the atomic bombs. He believes he should have been horrified when they heard of the casualties but claims that he and other parish members were not because those higher in the church did not show remorse. In Japan, he sees victims and realizes the horror the bomb caused. Hajimi Kito and Hideko Tamura Friedman are hibakisha, or survivors of Hiroshima. Kito recalls hearing victims scream after their skin began to burn, and Friedman recalls being inside a well-built shelter but seeing those outside dead and dying. She searches for her mother but never finds her. Kito notes maggots began to eat the flesh of the severely wounded and that salt water was used to sterilize the wounds. Both feel guilty that they survived when hundreds of thousands did not. Victor Tolley was part of the force sent to occupy Nagasaki following the dropping of the bomb. They helped tear down buildings, drank the water, and breathed the air. Many died later from cancer. Another man, Warren Zink, was at Bikini Island during the bomb tests. He became sterile, had severe headaches, vomiting, and a breathing problem following the testing. Suspiciously, his records have all been destroyed in a fire. When a tumor was removed and sent to a lab for radiation testing, it was lost in the mail. Victor Tolley



continues, noting that a huge number of vets present during atomic activity have developed cancer. John Smitherman was part of a group present at the Mount McKinley atomic bomb testing. Only six miles from the blast site, the men on deck of the ship were in shorts and tee shirts when they were hit by the sound and heat from the blast. They fought a fire on the target ship the same day. During the second test, the men were covered in water from the detonation of a bomb underwater. Smitherman soon notices sores on his arms and feet. A week later, more appear and he begins to swell. He is diagnosed with kidney problems. His left leg is removed, due to burst blood vessels, and a year later, they remove his right leg. Now, his arms are swelling, and they are planning to amputate. He also has cancer of the colon and the liver, but the government refuses to pay him for medical expenses, claiming his illnesses are not radiation related. He has, instead, gone to Japan where doctors have treated him for free. He is fighting for the rights of all men involved in testing to receive medical benefits. Joseph Stanskiak was a guard in Hiroshima for several months after the bomb. A Japanese man whose body is extremely swollen befriends him and shows him survivors of the bombing. He is horrified and saddened when the man dies. Stanskiak now has an enlarged liver, hemopneumothorax, swollen heart and lungs, and swollen limbs.

In "Remembrance of Things Past," Nancy Arnot Harjan recalls the war from her teenage years. A Japanese employee is taken to a relocation camp, and Harjan reads the diary of her family's Jewish gardener to learn the horrors of concentration camps. Paul Edwards joins the Red Cross and travels the U.S., noting the discrimination in the military. He organized adoptions for children of soldiers and civilians of occupied countries. He then worked for the United States Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, helping war torn countries and is sent all over the world to help those affected by WWII. He resigns after losing a passport and being accused of abusing his powers. He continued to work underground after the USRRA funding is pulled. He talks of being proud of his work and of pride in his country's efforts to extend their assistance to others.

In "Epilogue...", Nora Watson tells of learning about the war and realizing how horrible humans can be to one another. She does not believe the Germans did not know of the camps. She notes that her sister is materialistic, unlike herself, showing a difference in generations. Joachim Adler and Marlene Schmidt admit they ask their parents about their roles in Germany in WWII, and that the parents do not like to discuss things. They know that all generations question their parents, but they believe they have more reason to question than others. Steve McConnell notes that his generation, the baby boomers, believed they were on top of the world. They experimented with drugs and fought in an unpopular war, unlike their parents. He admits his generation was arrogant, and that now they are returning to racism. George Seymour believes he and his friends will not die natural deaths and that their opinions do not count in the world. Debbie Cooney, seventeen, notes she didn't become aware of the bomb until she was ten, and that it didn't affect her until her niece was born. Now, she feels a need to protect her. In the final pages of the book, Studs interviews children on a street corner who discuss racism, death, the bomb, violence, and war. It is eerie, in that these children discuss

these topics as adults do, with the same fears as many expressed in the book, showing clearly that the world has really not changed.



# Characters

## John Garcia

John Garcia is a large, native Hawaiian man who happens to be working at Pearl Harbor when it is attacked. He is asked by the military to assist in removing the bodies of dead and alive soldiers from the waters and helps to pull men from the ships. He joins the military and has difficulty determining his race, since Hawaiians generally care little about such matters. Once there, he finds he is treated differently than other soldiers who are white. His is the first story in the book, and as such, his words introduce the bombing of Pearl Harbor. He tells of the attack from the standpoint of a Hawaiian and one who is not Caucasian. Rather than a military view of the bombing, Garcia gives a civilian view. He is proud to be American but is often looked down on in the military as a non-Caucasian. His story introduces the concept of racism from a view other than the German/Jew point of WWII, and opens the idea of racism within the military. In addition, Garcia is able to give a unique perspective on the bombing as one whose home was destroyed, and whose family was directly affected.

## Peter Ota

Peter Ota is a Nisei, which is an individual born in America whose parents are from Japan. As a Japanese American, Ota is forced into internment camps during WWII by the U.S. government. His father is moved to a labor camp and his mother contracts an illness which affects her mind. She dies in a sanitarium without her family. The institutionalization of Ota's parents, as well as his own and that of his sister, shows the deep racism associated with the Japanese during the war, even if those individuals were born American. He and his sister are moved several times, often forced to stay in less-than-adequate shelters and given shoddy education. Ota and others in the camps grow up believing that to be Japanese is a shameful thing as a result of their internment. Ota reveals the depth of this experience, as he admits he taught his children little of the Japanese culture, as he believed that to be Japanese is shameful. He and many others, once the war is over, assimilate into American culture, and Ota is just now beginning to talk to his children of their Japanese heritage. His children ask why he and others did not fight against such treatment, but Ota notes the extreme racism against the Japanese was so strong, it was difficult to overcome.

## Richard Predergast

Richard Predergast is a large, heavysset man who represents those who were captured by the enemy and placed into labor camps that were primarily for military POWs. He is captured by the Japanese after the Battle of the Bulge and tells of cold, hunger, and violence against the prisoners. However, it is clear from his tale that this camp is not the same as the Jewish death camps but is simply a holding place for military prisoners.





They were hungry but not overworked or abused severely. Predergast's story leads readers into the idea of labor camps without introducing the horrors of death camps so early in the novel.

## **Anton Bilek**

Anton Bilek is a small, wiry man who is slightly overweight. He was captured by the enemy while protecting an airfield. His story introduces readers to the vast number of diseases suffered by POWs during WWII. Bilek suffers from malnutrition, dysentery, beriberi, and a host of other diseases during his imprisonment. He talks of sanitation problems, hard labor, and dangerous conditions. This story transitions readers from the elitist camps of Predergast to the more severe camps some soldiers suffered.

## **Dellie Hahne**

Dellie Hahne is a woman of average wealth and is still trim and quick. Her story is one of suffering and hardship and represents the women who lived their lives in a way dictated by the government, rather than by their own wishes. Hahne married a soldier after only six weeks of meeting because her government pressured her to do so. She learned he was a violent, angry man who was eventually kicked out of the military. She was ostracized as a military wife but found her freedom while working outside of the home. She divorces her husband and struggles to make it after the war. Her story introduces readers to the struggle for women's rights, and the consequences of government propaganda.

## **Dempsey Travis**

Dempsey Travis is a black man whose story tells just how deep racism ran during WWII. He and several others are shot by white soldiers at their own base camp in the United States, and several are killed. The Red Cross, nurses, doctors, and army personnel all show little care for the dead black men, clearly conveying a true sense of racism and discrimination. Travis recovers and overcomes racism by becoming one of the only black PX operators. His story shows how deep racism was in the United States and also the courage of some as they overcame such adversity.

## **John Abbott**

John Abbott, with a long gray beard and sparkling eyes, introduces readers to the concept of a conscientious objector. Abbott refuses to fight in WWII, because to do so would violate his own beliefs. He is put into work camp but refuses to work there as well. He is eventually imprisoned. His story tells of the consequences of going against the war and the government but also shows readers that there were some who fought against the war, even though they still gave a part of their lives as a consequence.





## **Ted Allenby**

Ted Allenby is the first example of a homosexual in the military in WWII. Readers learn Allenby was forced to overcompensate for his beliefs, since they were unaccepted, by fighting even those within his own camp. He was rebellious and felt he had to prove his manliness. He had lovers but could not share his feelings outside of secrecy. He became a Chaplain and helped many get out of the army as he discovered they were homosexual. When he is caught, however, he is dishonorably discharged despite a spectacular war record, showing again the severe prejudice that existed in WWII. His benefits are eventually restored, symbolizing the shift in Washington to a more liberal viewpoint.

## **John Kenneth Galbraith**

John Kenneth Galbraith is an example in the book of a person in Washington who spoke out against the use of the Air Force in WWII. His job, at the time, was to evaluate the effectiveness of the air strikes being called on Germany. His team discovered the German war machine was not being harmed by the bombings, despite the believed number of individuals killed. The bombings of Tokyo, however, were far more effective, in that the Japanese were less able to continue production. However, it was decided that the fire bombings were not a decisive factor in winning the war. Galbraith's story shows there were many at the time that were questioning the actions of the US military, not only in terms of their effectiveness, but also in terms of their continued reliance on faulty methods to contain the enemy.

## **Jean Bartlett**

Jean Bartlett represents the opposite of Dellie Hahne. Whereas Hahne fought sexism, Bartlett embraced it. She played host to a number of young men as they shipped off to war, and often wrote to them, playing their lover. She was, to many, a reason to live. On return home, however, these young men found her to simply be playing an unintentional game. She was engaged fourteen times, was involved in sex at an early age, and finds herself unable to commit to relationships later in life. Her story shows the real damage of the government's belief that women should give themselves to soldiers in order to maintain their morale.

## **Charles A. Gates**

Charles A. Gates represents the few of the black armed forces in WWII to prove to the world that black divisions were strong, capable, and just as qualified as white soldiers. Gates was in the first black tank group used in combat. His team was even doubted by Patton, who told them they were not qualified because of being blacks. However, through their determination, they overcame even the government's doubt as they



achieved greatness. Although it took many years, they were eventually recognized for their honor and bravery, and even Patton recognizes their achievements.

## **Maxine Andrews**

Maxine Andrews is a member of the Andrews Sisters and represents the entertainers during WWII. Maxine and her sisters traveled all over the world to entertain the soldiers while they were at bases. They saw the wounded and suffering of the troops and used their talents to help lift their morale. They provided something for the troops to look forward to, and although they did not fight in the war, they helped to lift the spirits of the wounded.

## **Thomas Corcoran**

Thomas Corcoran represents the members of Washington during WWII. His role was originally to help with China Defense Supplies, eight months prior to the war. He makes it clear the war was on the minds of Washington long before the bombing of Japan and that there was a struggle as to whether or not to be involved. Corcoran eventually helps the US take over pharmaceuticals in South America and Latin America, thereby taking money from the German military, as they had previously held a monopoly over the industry in that area. Corcoran shows that although the US was not directly involved in the war until Pearl Harbor, there were many operations already underway that indirectly affected the war.

## **Lowell Steward**

Lowell Steward represents the black men of Tuskegee Air Force base. The Tuskegee airmen were a trial operation during WWII, where black men were quietly allowed to be pilots. Because of discrimination during the training process, where the black men would be thrown out for any infraction, the graduates of Tuskegee were elite in their intelligence and abilities. The men fought to prove themselves and became one of the most legendary fighting forces in history. It is such achievements, many believe, that allowed blacks to continue to rise following the ending of the war and that led to the civil rights movement.

## **John Houseman**

John Houseman worked for the OWI as a voice for the Voice of America, a radio program. Houseman represents the men and women who served in the military as part of the media during WWII. These individuals were often censored and sought to bring the truth to the people of America as well as to the troops. As Houseman's story notes, however, they were often used as instruments of the military.



## Joseph Polowsky

Joseph Polowsky represents the soldiers during WWII who were fortunate enough to meet allied forces and fortunate enough to see those allies as equals. Polowsky and his men end up meeting the Russian military on the Elbe River when they are not supposed to, by order of their superiors. They meet among a sea of dead soldiers and civilians and spend time together celebrating life and companionship. Over time, the US and Russia became enemies, but these individuals know that both sides are simply soldiers of warring governments. Polowsky's story shows that although the officials often sought to keep animosity alive between nations, the soldiers themselves sought only peace.

## Telford Taylor

Telford Taylor was the primary prosecutor of twelve of the Nuremberg trials. His story is one of bravery and of justice, in that Taylor sought to bring charges against the men who, either directly or indirectly, caused the death and torture of several hundred thousand individuals. His story, however, also shows that as time wore on, the trials became less of a focus as the cold war loomed, and some of those horrible individuals escaped without severe punishment. He notes that many of those tried at Nuremberg were simple not like other individuals, in that they were perverse in their cruelty. Others, however, were common individuals made uncommon by the situation. His story shows that although not directly responsible, those following orders that are inhumane are just as responsible for the end result as those planning the act.

## Philip Morrison

Philip Morrison was one of the scientists working on the Manhattan Project, or the atomic bomb. His story explains that the scientific community sought to create the bomb to help end the war. Morrison also notes they did not understand the full power of the bomb or the consequences of their actions, although they knew the bomb was extremely dangerous. Morrison and the others firmly believe in their actions and show no guilt in dropping the bomb, as they believe their actions helped to end the war. However, Morrison's story also shows that the US government knew the Japanese were not far along in building a bomb, and that two bombs were dropped only as a matter of strategic course, and not a further threat against Japan.

## John Smitherman

John Smitherman represents all the men and women associated with the atomic bomb who have suffered endlessly as a result of their association. Smitherman is on the boat in the ocean only six miles from the testing at Mount McKinley and on the boat in the drop zone within minutes of the bomb test. He is covered in radioactive water, he drinks radioactive water, swims in it, touches radioactive surfaces, and is not warned by the government or the scientists who stay below deck and tell the soldiers they are safe.



Smitherman is severely ill as a result, is diagnosed with several cancers, and has several limbs amputated. However, his government refuses to treat him. He is, instead, treated for free by the Japanese. This ironic tale shows clearly the damage the US government did to the soldiers who helped test the atomic bomb and the government's shameful cover up of the event.



## Objects/Places

### Nisei

The Nisei are second generation Japanese Americans born within the United States.

### OCS

OCS is the abbreviation for Officer Candidate School, in which many college bound men learned to be officers in WWII.

### Beriberi

Beriberi is a lack of vitamin B-1, which causes kidney failure. As a result the body swells drastically as fluids build up in the body. Without treatment, death is certain.

### WAC

WAC stands for the Woman's Army Corp, a division of the army in which women served in WWII.

### Zoot Suit Riots

The Zoot Suit refers to a style of dress worn by Mexican-Americans, and the term zoot suit riot was also used to refer to the riots between those Mexican American youths and their American G.I. counterparts.

### C.O.

A C.O., or conscientious objector, was a person in WWII who refused to fight because doing so violated their personal beliefs.

### Dies Committee

The Dies Committee is another name for the House Committee on Un-American Activities, whose responsibility was to locate and eradicate activities that went against the state.



## **Anderson Shelter**

An Anderson shelter was a bomb shelter built in the garden. A hole was dug and then shored with boards. Corrugated tin was placed over the top.

## **Morrison Shelter**

A Morrison shelter was a shelter built inside the home in the middle of the living room from beams and struts.

## **Crystal Night**

Crystal Night was the night Nazi antisemitism broke out in Germany, as thousands of Jews were arrested, some killed, and their property destroyed.

## **OWI**

OWI is the Office of War Information, an organization responsible for the dissemination of information during WWII.

## **White Radio**

White Radio was used to convey only true information during WWII.

## **Black Radio**

Black Radio was used to convey untrue propaganda during WWII.

## **OSS**

The OSS, or Office of Strategic Services, was the precursor to the CIA, or Central Intelligence Agency.

## **Hibakisha**

The hibakisha individuals are survivors of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

# Themes

## Discrimination

Discrimination is one of the most prominent themes throughout the novel and ties in with some of the ideas of WWII. In WWII, as is described in several places in the book, the German government and many of the German people believed themselves to be of a superior race, that of the Aryan nation. They believed blacks and Jews and others to be inferior to themselves and sought to eradicate them from the earth. As a result, hundreds of thousands were killed.

Many in the novel who served in the U.S. military note a similar discrimination, although not as obvious. Many blacks throughout the novel discuss their experiences with an extremely racist world. The military had segregated barracks, where the black camps were often at the back of the area, with little light or access. They did not have the same entertainments as the whites, and had no PXs, no theaters, and no officers clubs. They were separated at meals, as well. Many reported not only harsh words, but such atrocities as mass shootings and beatings by white soldiers and officers. Whites would tell others, even in battle, that the blacks had tails and were rapists. In one case, black soldiers are actually gunned down, and the white Red Cross workers even show themselves to be racist.

It is not just the blacks who suffer discrimination. Mexican-Americans suffered greatly during the zoot suit riots, where local G.I.s and other individuals sought to attack them simply for their race. The Japanese within the United States were segregated into camps, as well, and many Jews were persecuted. Those with ties to the Spanish Civil War were also discriminated against.

Even further, there were many who believed the entire war was an example of discrimination. The media often portrayed the German soldiers as handsome, young, bright men, while the Japanese were portrayed as monsters. Many believe bombs were not used on Germany because they were a "white" race, whereas the Japanese were seen as less important and less "human." In battle, they were seen as barbaric and almost animalistic, whereas the German's are described as good soldiers.

It is clear discrimination played a role in WWII, not just as a reason for the war, but throughout the war as well. Jews, blacks, Mexican-Americans, Japanese-Americans, Spanish, and others continuously have to fight not only the enemy, but those who are supposed to be allies as well. While these struggles helped to further the rights of such individuals, the price paid for such advancements was often the lives of innocent people.



## Women's Rights

Women's rights and the role of women in WWII is another important theme shown throughout the novel. In the beginning, the novel discusses the rights of women in the United States at the time the war broke out. Women, prior to WWII, were housewives, and very few held positions outside the home and certainly not within the military. During the war, however, government officials began urging women to leave their homes and go to work in factories and in the armed forces in an effort to help the war effort. "Rosie the Riveter" became an important propaganda character, and many women went to work. For the first time, they were responsible for production and for their own employment. They were not only proud to be assisting with the war effort but were finding a freedom they were not offered previously.

In addition, women were often told it was their responsibility to keep the men happy. They were encouraged to date and even marry soldiers heading to war, and in many cases, women were marrying men they barely knew. After the war, many of these marriages ended in divorce as the women discovered their husbands were not the men they believed them to be. Women were, in these cases, treated as toys and objects to be used for the delight of the men. This was true also of the woman of the entertainment sector, who performed for the soldiers.

There was another class of women who were used for the military, as well. These women, whether WAC women or Red Cross or nurses, all gained employment using new skills and helped the military directly as they cared for the wounded. In other countries, these women also helped organize war communications and underground communications.

When the war ended, women were asked to return to their previous lives, but such a request was difficult to heed. Women had discovered a new freedom. They had learned valuable skills and felt independent and strong. They no longer needed to depend on men for their well being but were strong in their abilities to provide for themselves. This, many agree, gave rise to the women's movement and helped much of the world to see women as strong, capable, intelligent, useful members of society.

## Government Propaganda

The propaganda used by governments is another topic throughout the novel. In the United States, there are many who believe the government falsely presented information in an attempt to gather support for WWII. For example, many women strongly believe they were led to marry soldiers and go to work. They were led to think that they were vital to the war effort, but following the war, these ideas were shattered when they were sent back to their homes.

In other cases, people blamed the media, under government control, of pushing concepts of racism and discrimination through movies and television. Many note that movies portrayed the war as positive and led the country to believe they were fighting





for the good of mankind. However, Germans were often portrayed as handsome, young, intelligent individuals, whereas the Japanese were often thought of as a lesser race and far removed from the whites of the United States. These images were strong in the minds of many Americans until they met the Japanese and realized they were no different than themselves.

When the bombs were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the government led the country to believe they were necessary to stop the war. It was not until after that speculation began that the Japanese were already prepared to surrender and that the bomb may have been dropped for more sinister, political reasons than the saving of US lives. Further, when the government lied to soldiers about the dangers of the bomb and used them primarily as guinea pigs for radiation experiments, the questions began to surface about the truthfulness of the government. It was clear from the cover-ups and the treatment of radiation patients that the government lied to the soldiers and to the American people and refused to pay for their mistakes. The people began to doubt governmental policies, which then led to a completely different atmosphere during later wars, such as Vietnam.

While it is clear from the novel that the US government used propaganda to trick the American people, it is equally clear that the success of that propaganda was severely restricted. The moment discrepancies between the truth and such propaganda were revealed, the United States population began to question the government and to rebel against such ideas. It is this rebellion that led to a refusal to continue to fight in the later years and has led to a general distrust of government for many.

# Style

## Perspective

The book is told as a collection of personal narratives and therefore uses the first person viewpoint. This view is absolutely vital for the story, in that the entire point of the novel is to show World War II from a variety of angles in an effort to portray the war as it was seen through the eyes of different people in different countries. This view allows the speaker to draw the reader into the story. Biases are conveyed, which help to show the reader the true character of the individual telling the story, which makes the narrative more believable. Allowing the speaker to show emotion as a result of their story allows the reader to be shown each situation independently of another. The first person viewpoint also helps convey these emotions convincingly. The author introduces each speaker, which adds another element to the character portrayal in the story, since the author presents only his view of the character speaking. However, this view is often objective, without reference to opinions or conjecture but only factual information that allows the reader to visualize the speaker. In this way the author allows the reader to make an objective opinion of the speaker based only on the first person narrative he or she gives.

## Tone

The tone of the novel ranges drastically from person to person and story to story. In some cases, such as in narratives from higher Washington officials, the tone of the story can often be combative and defensive, as these individuals attempt to justify their actions during the war. In some stories, such as in tales of the men within a specific neighborhood, there is a tone of pride and arrogance. In some, such as in stories of concentration camp survivors, there is a tone of sheer despair and devastation. The tone of the women's stories is often one of anger and frustration at the government and their propaganda. In stories of blacks during WWII, there is often a tone of anger at the racist way in which they were treated. In some tales, there is a light-heartedness as soldiers tell stories of amusing adventures. This changing of tone story by story not only helps to keep the reader interested in the novel but also helps the reader to sense the underlying emotion of the person telling the story. This, in turn, allows the reader to better identify with the speaker. When combined with the first person viewpoint, the tone of the story greatly helps to move the book along and to convey the depth of the topic of WWII without seeming overbearing.

## Structure

The novel consists of four books, as well as an introduction. Book One contains seven separate sections, each of which indicates a change in topic. Book Two contains five sections; Book Three contains four sections, and Book Four contains six sections. The



books travel from the entry of the U.S. into WWII following the attack on Pearl Harbor all the way through the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the return of soldiers to the United States. The last book also covers the feelings of other generations on WWII, and the future of the world after the atomic bomb. These sections are, roughly, in chronological order and cover nearly all aspects of the war in some way or another. The sections are of unequal length, as are the books. The entire book is 589 pages in length.

The language of the novel is very accessible for most readers. In some cases, conversations are translated which can lead to confusions of words or phrases, but even these conversations are easy to follow and to decipher. The author's questions help guide conversations without directing them, which keeps the conversations flowing. In some areas, conversations of weaponry and battle can be technical and at times a bit dull, but still remain informative and necessary to understanding the war as a whole.



## Quotes

"Aaaah, I feel that if countries are gonna fight a war, find yourself an island with nobody and then just put all your men in there and let them kill each other. Or better, send the politicians, let them fight it out." - "A Sunday Morning," pg. 24.

"When you first come in, you're a hero, but enough sailors come through these ports, and social disease, alcoholism, rape, mayhem, and they're not popular anymore. I learned a lot on that merchant ship" - "A Sunday Morning," pg. 37.

"About five hundred people died that night. Allied bombers killed allied prisoners. Just one of those goof-ups that happened so often in war." - "A Chance Encounter," pg. 52.

"How could American boys do this? If you're reduced to savagery by a situation, anything's possible." - "Tales of the Pacific," pg. 62.

"We had all become hardened. We were out there, human beings, the most highly developed form of life on earth, fighting each other like wild animals." - "Tales of the Pacific," pg. 64.

"I think we should be in any place that communism is threatening to take over. If we go in there, for God's sakes, let's go in. Play the game like it should be or get the hell out. You can't go in halfway and the other guys all the way, that's not a good ball game." - "Tales of the Pacific," pg. 97.

"If you can go half your life and not recognize how you're being manipulated, that is sad and kinda scary." - "Rosie," pg. 111.

"I was lied to. I was cheated. I was made a fool of. If they had said to me, Look this has to be done and we'll go out and do the job...we'll all get our arms and legs blown off by it has to be done, I'd understand. If they didn't hand me all this shit with the uniforms and the girls if their pompadours, dancing at the USO..." - "Rosie," pg. 121.

"If you're interested in reforming me or rehabilitating or changing me, you must explain to me why you got these guys in here who have been convicted on murder and why you've got me in there, too, because I refused to murder people." - "Reflections on Machismo," pg 172.

"I hate it when they say, 'He gave his life for his country.' Nobody gives their life for anything. We steal the lives of these kids. We take it away from them. They don't die for the honor and glory of their country. We kill them." - "High Rank," pg. 193.

"This is why World War Two doesn't read popular things in my mind. They were fighting fascism and letting racism run rampant." - "Flying High," pg. 344.



"World War Two has had a tremendous impact on black people as a whole. There have always been strides for black people after every way, especially that one. But after the war is over, they revert back to bigotry." - "Flying High," pg. 349.

"There are worse things than war: losing one without fighting. It's the old business of I'd rather die on my feet than live on my knees." - "Up Front with Pen, Camera, and Mike," pg. 363.

"I went into one building and I didn't see anything else. I had walked into the gas chamber. It's a museum today with clean, white painted walls. When I was there, the walls were still covered with blood. People had banged their heads against it as they were dying"." - "Crime and Punishment," pg. 441.

"The expression in their eyes was not childish anymore. They looked like the eyes of old people." - "A Turning Point," pg. 456.

"Then I began to notice a change in attitude. Teachers would make snide remarks about my race. One teacher would point me out as an example of a non-Aryan race. One time, I must have been about ten, a teach took me aside and said, "When we're finished with the Jews, you're next"." - "Chilly Winds," pg. 497.

"If Uncle Sam don't pick up and give my wife and all the other wives some benefits before I leave this ol' earth, I think that the whole majority will have sinned so much that they will answer some of these days to somebody a little higher." - "Is You or Is You Ain't My Baby?", pg. 554.



## Topics for Discussion

On page 14, Terkel poses the question of whether or not a society has to experience horror in order to understand horror. What do you think? Do you believe that to understand a certain event, one has to experience the event personally? Or do you think one can understand a horrific experience without having gone through the experience personally? Why do you think this? Can you give examples supporting your idea? What are those examples?

On page 52, Red discusses the death of five-hundred allied soldiers at the hands of other allied soldiers. How often, according to various parts of the book, did this happen? Can you find other examples of such a problem? Describe them in detail. Do you think such events still happen in war? Why? Do you believe such events are acceptable parts of war? Why or why not?

In "Tales of the Pacific," Sledge discusses the downward spiral he and other soldiers fell into while fighting the Japanese, in terms of the cruelty and lack of respect for human life they showed the soldiers of Japan. Why did the soldiers have this spiral? What was the cause? Do you think this attitude helped them or hurt them during battle? Why? Do you think you would be likely to feel similar emotions or to act similarly? Why or why not?

On page 113, as well as in other areas of the book, there is a discussion about religion and war. Peggy Terry notes that the Bible says not to kill, and does not seem to make any allowances for war. She therefore finds it difficult to believe in religion when chaplains send men to war with blessings and rewards soldiers for killing more people. What do you think? Do you believe religion and war can somehow work together without conflicting one another? How can a chaplain bless a soldier as he goes off to kill other human beings? Do you believe a higher power would support such an action? Why or why not?

There are several discussions of how WWII was partially responsible for the woman's movement. Based on the book, do you believe this is true? Why or why not? Be sure to use information from the book to support your belief. What were the conditions women lived under during this time? How did they feel? What did they do? Be sure to be specific in your answers.

On page 215, Eddie discusses the fact that he didn't question his actions during the war because he was being told to do something by his government. Many in the Nazi regime did the same. Do you believe this is a valid statement? Why or why not? Do you believe those simply following orders are just as responsible for their behaviors as those in command? Why or why not? Do you think individuals who follow orders of another should be punished for their actions? Why or why not?

Throughout the novel, racism is a theme that divides nations, armies, and political powers. Describe at least one section of the novel where racism plays an important role.



What is the consequence of racism? Are reasons given for racist attitudes? What are those reasons? Are they similar to reasons used in other areas of the novel?

The media plays a vital role in WWII, as seen in the book. How is media used within the war to transmit information? Is all information portrayed truthfully? Why or why not? If not, in what ways does the media portray things incorrectly? Why is this done? If so, why do some seem to believe the media during the war was biased? Do you agree or disagree?

Stud Terkel asks several individuals their feelings on the use of the atomic bomb by the American government. Based on what you've read in the novel, do you agree with America's use of the atomic bomb? If so, why? If not, why not? What other options were available? Why were those options better or worse? Do you think you could have been the pilot dropping the bomb?: Why or why not?