Life, Rockwell, and Radio: exploring religious iconography in America, 1944-1950

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Life, Rockwell, and Radio: exploring religious iconography in America, 1944-1950

by

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INTRODUCTION

American culture has long been both Christian and plural, both secular and religious, and much of the dynamism of U.S. religious history derives from that paradox. Any story that fails to take seriously both Christians and non-Christians is bound to obscure as much as it illuminates.¹

Stephen Prothero

Religion has always played a key role in American history. Ironically, perhaps, Stephen Prothero’s most recent work, Religious Literacy, demonstrates the current population holds the unenviable position of being the least religiously literate in the Western world. Prothero argues that religion is the most explosive aspect of culture, whether as a force for good or evil, and sees America’s religious illiteracy as more hazardous than its cultural illiteracy. Expressing his concern for the ignorance concerning the role of religion in American history, Prothero traces the deterioration of the nation’s religious literacy to the Second Great Awakening at the beginning of the 19th century. Citing the emphasis on a personal relationship with God over clergy-driven theology as an expression of faith, Prothero explains how intellectual and spiritual theology gradually failed to hold authority over most Americans. Nevertheless, Prothero’s study explores the way many religious principles survived by embedding themselves into the Puritan-rooted schools of the 19th century. One critic of Prothero’s concludes his call for schools to incorporate the cultural role of religion in history as naïve, especially given the difficulty most schools experience in attempting to teach the mere basics of American history. She writes, “But religion is no longer the air we breathe, and it is doubtful that schools can accomplish what parents and

congregations cannot or will not in a society where people read fewer and fewer books of any kind -- including the book they consider the word of God.”

While religious literacy may have faded to include only a minority of Americans in the 19th century, the powerful and volatile nature of religion, whether relegated to the minority of the population or not, continues to permeate our contemporary world. In fact, the current “culture wars” demonstrate the extent to which religion still mirrors social, political, economic, and cultural anxieties, and suggest it maintains a powerful hold on American society. The Religious Right, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, or the finer points of toleration and cultural acceptance continue to ignite some of the strongest forces – be they political, economic, social, or cultural – into extremist declaration and actions. Only by considering the way religion interacts with and reflects the broader culture and society can historians fully grasp these significant changes in our world.

The Second World War and the postwar years emerged as a watershed in American history. Coming on the heels of the largest and deepest economic depression the nation had ever experienced, Americans understood the stakes of joining the fight of a Second World War. Yet they understood the risks only tacitly because it soon became clear that most had underestimated the degree of change that arrived with World War II. To some extent, migration and dislocation had already influenced the changing landscape as people sought out employment during the Great Depression. But the disruption of families, as well as gender and economic arrangements, continued during the war, as servicemen enlisted and many women replaced men in the workforce. Families relocated to military bases, many of

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which had been hastily constructed, and created new social and economic relations almost overnight in formerly small communities. Others moved to secure work in major industries of war production. Racial tensions simmered as Mexican Americans faced minimal discrimination in the armed forces while black Americans who enlisted found themselves relegated to servant-like jobs such as cooks and messmen.\(^3\)

Not only did World War II and its aftermath significantly alter the nation’s domestic life, it amended American foreign policy and diplomacy. As the United States emerged virtually unscathed from the destruction of World War II on the victorious side, it took a decisive leadership role in settling the terms for worldwide peace. Moreover, sole possession of the atomic bomb both assured and reinforced America’s new position as global leader. Though the atomic monopoly had ended by September of 1949, America has yet to surrender this role.\(^4\)

Ordinary Americans expressed concern with the great internal and external changes inaugurated by their country’s involvement in World War II. They worried about change, its lack of certainty and its potential to make things better or worse. With the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the conflict’s dramatic conclusion in the Pacific theater unleashed a sense that things would never be the same. As the idea of a return to normalcy crept into the national consciousness, Americans exhibited much turmoil with regard to what it might look like.\(^5\)

Business and economic sectors struggled to transform the wartime economy to a peacetime economy. Americans had faced drastic unemployment rates during the Great

\(^3\) James A. Henretta, et.al, *America’s History*, 4\(^{th}\) ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000), 842.
Depression but moved into a wartime economy with a labor shortage due to the fact that a significant portion of the workforce joined the armed forces. Women and black Americans were, for the first time, able to assume a more substantive role in the work force. But the changes the end of the conflict guaranteed for the wartime production economy boded more disruption. If loyalty to the cause dampened labor strife from 1941 to 1945, labor strikes in 1946 made headlines on a regular basis. The cessation of the war meant many major unions united to win better hours and a larger piece of corporate profits enjoyed by a rejuvenated industrial sector. Meanwhile, many other Americans, fearing the economy might sink into recession and thereby erase all wartime gains, expressed concern about labor militancy in the war’s aftermath.⁶

Racial turmoil fanned the flames of broader economic anxieties. African Americans found themselves unable to ignore the similarities between the Nazis’ anti-Semitism and the persistence of Jim Crow in the states. Having just made the world safe for democracy, black veterans returned home with high expectations of better treatment and continued the fight for social, economic, and political justice. In his endeavors to address the nation’s hypocrisy, President Harry S. Truman attempted to soften racial injustices. He succeeded only partially in desegregating the military because he could not overrule filibustering southern congressmen. In the workforce, African Americans continued to confront ingrained discrimination despite A. Philip Randolph’s 1941 victory in securing Executive Order 8802 from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, which held that defense industry firms with federal government contracts could not discriminate. As hopes of gaining some sort of economic foothold evaporated and a postwar wave of racial violence surged in the South,

many black Americans grew increasingly unsatisfied and were willing to begin a measure of agitation in order to achieve full and equal citizenship.⁷

Changing gender roles also continued to complicate the nation’s desire for a return to normalcy. Women in the workforce were pressured to relinquish their positions to returning veterans and to return to the home. For example, wartime benefits that had facilitated their working outside of the home, such as the small number of child care centers established by the federal government, closed. As the solution to postwar economic anxieties emerged in the celebration of a white, middle class consumer lifestyle, the ideal roles for women became motherhood and domestic management. Thus, with a return to the focus on the American family as a nucleus of the country came a return to stricter gender roles, the likes of which had not been truly seen since the turn of the century.⁸

Even the concept of femininity underwent significant alterations to reflect the country’s changing mood. White women who worked outside the home came to be viewed as dangerous and destructive to the precious family unit. Popular culture reinforced the message. In fashion, for example, restricting girdles and longer skirts returned. Both on the runway and off, a link between the destructive power of atomic weapons and uninhibited women surfaced. A new word was needed to describe the scandalous two-piece swimwear that displayed the female body. Designers picked “bikini” because it also referred to the shocking display of atomic power the United States displayed in its testing of nuclear

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weapons on the Pacific island of Bikini Atoll. More broadly, “bombshell” entered national slang to describe the destructive power of an unleashed woman.\(^9\) The message became quite clear after the war: American women must be contained in the home.

Nor was the definition of masculinity immune from the changing nature of the times. Art, government propaganda, and popular advertisements demonstrated a definite trend toward portraying the ideal man as brawny, strong, and hardworking. This contrasted with the rodent-like portrayal of the Japanese and the skinny, snakelike, and sinister portrayal of the Nazis that had dominated American propaganda during the Second World War. Fatherhood was deemed as important as motherhood. Indeed, another reason for reaffirming the nuclear family as the basic unit of American society resulted from the troubling rise in juvenile delinquency rates. Much of the blame landed on parents who failed to supervise their children because many fathers were in the service and many mothers worked outside the home.\(^10\) Proper masculinity and proper femininity shored up social and cultural norms that dictated that women go back to their strictly domestic roles.

Prior to World War II, the United States had typically retained a position of isolation in all of its foreign relations. But in another example of the watershed of this war, the nation assumed a new position in the world of foreign policy with new global implications. Given its unquestioned military dominance, especially with regard to nuclear weapons, the United States commanded the world’s attention. America scrambled to assert its will in the postwar world, reflected in foreign policy concepts such as containment, the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan and the NSC-68 report. The Truman Doctrine held that all ‘free peoples’

\(^9\)Ibid., 96-99.
\(^10\)“U.S. Normalcy,” *Life*, (December 3, 1945), 34.
resisting subjugation would receive large scale economic and military assistance from the United States; the Marshall plan was designed to complement the Truman Doctrine and promised massive aid to recovering European nations; and the NSC-68 report expanded containment and recommended the development of the hydrogen bomb, increases in the nation’s conventional forces, and tax hikes to finance a larger sustained defense budget. As American qualms toward the motives of communist Russia dissolved into deep suspicions, the Cold War ushered in a novel global American leadership: defender of democracy and the free world. Significantly, many former colonial empires disintegrated and found themselves characterized by political instability in the postwar years. The United States recognized such instability as a dangerous liability in the battle between democracy and communism, and viewed these Third World countries as a prime location for implementation of a democratic ideology, at the expense of communist ideals. Not only did the United States begin to shape global governance, it also claimed a mantel of moral superiority that it endeavored to spread around the world.

In the midst of such swirling uncertainty, religion emerged as a vehicle to help people negotiate the changes during and after the war. Religion offered moral certitude and reassurance as much as it complimented domestic and foreign policy goals. The ways in which religion adapted to social and cultural changes mirrored the social and cultural changes Americans struggled to address. More specifically, when combined with art, radio, and print culture, religion facilitated Americans’ response to the plethora of foreign and domestic transformations after the Second World War.

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11 Henretta, America’s History, 870-977.
12 Boyer, By the Bomb’s Early Light, 181-195.
The cultural mediums of art, radio, and print culture helped people to understand their new world. Art revolves around the interplay of both internal and external expression. Historians can study artistic mediums to gain insight into certain individuals and their personal responses to culture, yet they can also evaluate art to sketch a larger picture of how a certain time and place defines itself. Jules David Prown, editor of *Art Journal*, has weighed the value of incorporating art as a text in the era of ‘new history’ and describes it as reflecting an “increasingly permeable border between the humanities and the social sciences.” Prown discusses the appearance of “a world of burgeoning interest in new mediums (film) and neglected categories (folk art), cultures (African, and by extension Afro-American), genders, and classes.”13 Additionally, works of art may speak through silence. The ways in which art remains “unvoiced” sometimes articulates meaning beyond the message it loudly proclaims. Similarly, the cultural medium of radio, at its apex during the 1940s, became a definitive medium of cultural authority prior to the rise of television. With its legacy of FDR’s Fireside Chats and one of the few reliable sources of war news, radio maintained its reassuring powers and respectability after the war. Finally, much the same way that some popular paintings made ‘high’ ideas more palatable for the average citizen, magazines relied on photographs and photographic essays. As a prolific and accessible postwar cultural medium, print media both shaped and reflected the American disposition.

Perhaps no other American artist achieved as much popular recognition as Norman Rockwell, who managed to capture the mood of the United States during World War II and long after. Because of his longevity and because so many viewed his art, Rockwell’s work

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continues to characterize the era for many Americans. Even today people need only to look at his work and find themselves transported back in time. The reason for Rockwell’s immense popularity primarily rests with his ability to capture what so many experienced, or thought they experienced, during the turbulent war years. The artist’s self-proclaimed goal was to tell a story through his work. His narratives of the quintessential American and normative “American-ness” implicitly defined for all his viewers how the national ideal either did or should look.

Rockwell’s most enduring work, “The Four Freedoms,” echoed the elevated concepts evident in President Roosevelt’s famous Four Freedoms Speech, in which he outlined the democratic strategy for fighting the evils of fascism. FDR espoused Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear as the bedrock principles for which America fought. Rockwell spent a great deal of time mulling over these concepts until he finally found a way to express them for the American everyman. Rockwell’s “Four Freedoms” series became arguably his most recognizable, cementing the high abstract ideals of freedom into a painting that struck a chord with all those who viewed it. His deliberate identification with the common man and particularly with middle class whites, demonstrated the extent to which both Rockwell and the nation’s citizens embraced homogeneity in order to project a feeling of national unity and pride in the midst of a disturbing reality of racial and class divides. Rockwell assumed a Protestant foundation as part of his normative white, middle class and gendered all-American identity.

Rockwell’s art also emerged as a preeminent example of how Americans desired to remember the era of World War II. As the late 1950s and 1960s brought more, not less, turmoil, many began to re-imagine the war years as a simpler time, and its people as
members of the “greatest generation.” Still, the limits of Rockwell’s vision privileged a
distinct identity and then enshrined it as the preeminent symbol for the nation and its
principles. His deliberately narrow focus, more evident during World War II and its
immediate aftermath, highlighted the conscious effort Americans made to reconstruct and
remember their experience in a specifically white, middle class, and gendered way.

Rockwell most memorable ‘everyman’ character during the war was Willie Gillis, the
average All-American boy, proudly serving his country but having fun too. The image of
Gillis provided a strong, yet dogfaced and lovable image that young American men strove to emulate. But Rockwell’s favorite American soldier eventually came home and grew up. In fact, the October 5, 1946 cover of the Saturday Evening Post depicted Gillis in a college setting, smoking a pipe, playing golf, and reading his textbooks. He seems to barely fit in the small window seat. A clear designation of the switch from being a sergeant in the Army to a veteran going to college with the aid of the G.I. bill, the Gillis character allowed Rockwell to symbolize the dramatic transition from war to peace in America.

14 The trend continues today with the publication of Tom Brokaw’s “The Greatest Generation” and “Flags of Our Fathers” as well as the latter being made into a movie directed by Clint Eastwood.

Just like thousands of other American troops after the war, Willie Gillis had come home. Yet if an immense victory had taken place, the real work of building America’s postwar ideology had just begun. As many citizens experienced bewilderment and struggled to come to grips with the transition to peace and their nation’s new role in the world, Charles Fuller’s voice brought comfort and reassurance over the radio waves. The dominance of Charles Fuller and his famous program, *The Old Fashioned Revival Hour*, which aired from 1934 to 1968, also illustrated the need for Americans to remember the past in order to survive in the future.
Fuller’s career displayed the tension between fundamentalism and American culture. Growing out of a response to modern Enlightenment ideals, fundamentalists held more strongly to their religious theology, besmirching any use of modern ideas. Essentially, fundamentalists equated modernity as a dilution of their theology. To them, religion and technology smacked of oil and water. By contrast, Fuller and his long running radio show demonstrated how a fundamentalist could use modern technology to spread the fundamentalist gospel. While not without opposition, Fuller managed to make his message and program a resounding success. But his struggle revealed the extent of the conflict between the increasingly modern culture in America and the harkening back to older ideals of Christian morals and principles.

Despite the inherent paradox in utilizing modern technology for fundamentalist and anti-modern theology, Fuller provided a significant new model. *The Old Fashioned Revival Hour* successfully struck the right balance of incorporating modern technology and fundamentalist principles. Fuller’s genius lay in his ability to modernize the church in order to reach the nation’s ‘sinners’ with the fundamentalists’ message of hope. In addition, Fuller’s program, with its hymn singing and appeal to individuals, resonated with the independent nature of many Americans. Fuller’s on-air sermons invited, rather than condemned. His listeners, in the privacy of their own homes, did not feel the peer pressure of public revival meetings; their conversion occurred on their own terms.

Moreover, Fuller’s success enabled him to lay the groundwork for future fundamentalist and evangelical churches, as they too began to tap the resources of technology in order to build their belief base and to expand their cultural empire. In the World War II and postwar years, Fuller established the essential link between religion and technology,
which has facilitated the current fundamentalist efforts to exert not only religious influence but political influence as well. The impact of religious radio upon popular culture during the golden age of radio cannot be denied. It significantly bolstered the conservatism of the time and played an important role in shaping the medium itself. Radio evangelicals even managed to attain a sort of “cultural authority” over the medium and used it to strengthen their claims as guardians of national values.16

Finally, *Life* magazine, a popular, respected, and widespread form of print media, played a key role in the return to normalcy in the United States. Not only did *Life* include news headlines and special reports, it also provided in-depth glimpses into individual lives and wrestled with the changes besetting the nation after the Second World War. Its editorials evinced both the publication’s and the population’s struggle to digest these new realities. Moreover, with its striking photographic essays, *Life* helped Americans to conceptualize their changing culture more easily.

As a reflection of anxiety and optimism at the close of World War II, *Life* incorporated a wide array of articles on religion that pointed to the ways religion both changed culture and found itself changed by culture. For example, the threat of encroaching communism encouraged America’s churches to unite against a common enemy of Christian faith. A Cold War mentality dictated that America’s religious leaders downplay their denominational and doctrinal differences in order to amalgamate their defenses against communism’s godless faith. *Life* relied on powerful images to promote unity. For example, it showed Protestants from all over the world forming a world council to fight the spread of

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communism; it illustrated an important meeting of American cardinals with the Pope; and it proclaimed the bravery of the Greek Orthodox priest who defied the Soviet Union’s attempt to quietly separate him from the rest of the church.\textsuperscript{17} The text which accompanied these articles played second fiddle to the reassuring and persuasive images of the church leaders talking, shaking hands, and praying together.

Especially in its editorials, \textit{Life} thoroughly examined America’s new global responsibilities. The magazine implored its readership to recognize America’s moral imperative to spread democracy and Christian values around the world. At times, the editors provided a faith-based rationalization for this viewpoint. Most often, however, \textit{Life} failed to veil the political nature of this urgent necessity. Alongside the photographs of communism’s evil march across Eastern Europe and its infringement on countries emerging from colonialism, \textit{Life} argued for America’s unity in fighting communism on all fronts, and not just in spiritual battles. In fact, \textit{Life} connected the religious, moral, social, political, and economic imperatives for defying communism in such a way that Americans would have been hard pressed to see an alternative to pondering the ways and methods of the enemy.

By examining the three mediums of art, radio, and print media, historians can illuminate the interplay of religion, culture, and society during and immediately after the Second World War. The resulting perspective modifies the way Americans conceive of the role of religion in American during World War II and into the Cold War. Religion did not die a gradual death with the emergence of the Age of Enlightenment. Instead, religion continued to play a significant role in the nation’s society, culture, and politics, especially as America

experienced turbulent periods. This was certainly the case as America struggled to deal with the momentous changes ushered in by World War II. Far from blinding Americans or providing the sole motivation for all forms of action, religion both mirrored and helped to guide the progress of social and cultural change in 1940s America.
CHAPTER ONE:
The People’s Artist: Norman Rockwell’s Influence During World War II

Norman Rockwell occupies a position in our national memory, not merely as an artist but as a symbol of a particular period of history and culture in the United States. Regardless of the critics who may or may not consider him an artist in the most traditional sense, Rockwell managed to create a massive amount of popular art viewed and prized by a vast number of Americans. Furthermore, his career spanned more than fifty years. Such popular success and longevity set Rockwell apart. As a result, his influence provides a valuable window into American culture, social norms, and aspirations, particularly in the World War II era.

Norman Rockwell must have tapped into something significant to attract such a wide audience for so many years. Karal Ann Marling, a prominent art historian, has described the artist’s centrality in American culture: “Norman Rockwell is the most popular American artist of this century. The themes of his work define a turbulent period that opened with barefoot boys lazing away summer afternoons in the countryside and ended with their sons stepping cautiously onto the surface of the moon.” Marling categorized Rockwell as a chronicler of American history who relied on his artistic ability to portray “ordinary, everyday places beautified by light and by the artist’s scrupulous attention to their angles and corners and timeworn surfaces.” Aside from the consideration of these more formal thematic elements, the public’s widespread reception of Rockwell imbues his legacy with broader insights into American culture.

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Born in New York City in 1894, Rockwell always aspired to be an artist. At the age of fourteen, he attended the New York School of Art for two years before moving to the National Academy of Design, in lieu of finishing high school. Rockwell then transferred to the Art Students League and studied under Thomas Fogarty and George Bridgman. While still in his teens, Rockwell published various greeting cards, became the art director of *Boys Life*, a publication of the Boy Scouts of America, and created numerous freelance illustrations. By his early twenties, Rockwell worked in a studio with famous illustrators J.C. and Frank Leyendecker and Howard Chandler Christy, and contributed illustrations to *Life, Literary Digest*, and *Country Gentleman*. In 1916, Rockwell created his first cover for the *Saturday Evening Post*. Over the span of the next forty-seven years, Rockwell produced an additional 321 covers for the magazine, which made him a household name. By the 1960s, Rockwell was creating work for *Look* magazine, much of it revealing his disquiet concerning civil rights, poverty in America, and space exploration. The next decade saw Rockwell’s establishment of a trust to preserve his art in what is now the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. In 1977, the widely revered artist received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor bestowed on civilians, for his imaginative artistic contribution to the nation. Rockwell died in 1978, at the age of eighty-four. His influence has endured.²

Norman Rockwell also relied on a conscious self-fashioning to enhance his legacy. For example, describing the pleasure he derived from his desire to tell stories by way of pictures he wrote, “other artists and illustrators may strive for beauty or color or just to please themselves. I do not. I try to use each line, tone, color and arrangement; each person, facial

expression, gesture and object in my picture for one supreme purpose – to tell a story, and to
tell it as directly, understandably and interestingly as I possibly can.”\(^3\) Indeed, Rockwell’s
striking ability to tell stories became recognized as the focal point of his talents and abilities.

Moreover, Rockwell strove to tell a story through popular culture mediums of
magazine covers and illustrations, calendars, and advertisements. These particular forms
dictated a different approach to crafting visual images as they had to be accessible to the
widest possible audience. Given this limitation, some might critique Rockwell’s work as less
than “high art.” Yet he still expressed the importance of conveying a solid idea that told a
story without sacrificing artistic quality.\(^4\) Ironically, perhaps, Rockwell’s unwavering focus
upon creating a story remained the source of both his harshest criticism and his most
heralded praise.

The United States experienced great economic, political, and social upheaval
throughout Rockwell’s career. Yet his work from the World War II era proves especially
insightful for addressing the tensions inherent in his artistic choices. What can Rockwell’s
art tell historians about the culture of World War II in America? How did Rockwell and his
work influence the nation, particularly from the years 1939-1945? An examination of his
work from this period, “The Four Freedoms” provides a glimpse into acceptable cultural,
societal, and gender norms in America. For example, the assessment of Rockwell’s most
famous work from the period demonstrates how he visualized the undercurrent of changing
American views and values during the war. The series, which raised over 130 million dollars
for the war effort in 1943, reveals the extent of his influence on the wartime economy. At the

\(^4\) Ibid, 22-23.
same time, the “Four Freedoms” reflects the intersection of Rockwell’s attempt to tap into the hearts and minds of the American people and the way they wished to see themselves as patriots and citizens.

Rockwell’s work from 1939 to 1945 appeared in diverse mediums but hewed to familiar themes. In cover, story, and book illustrations, advertisements, portraits ephemeras, and other miscellaneous works, Rockwell dealt primarily with the middle class. White men served as his most common characters. Children comprised the second most featured group, followed by women and groups or family depictions. Rockwell portrayed men performing particular activities, often conspicuously professional and as heads of families. He illustrated men as doctors, veterinarians, fishermen, fathers, pharmacists, government workers, salesmen, business owners, chefs, and reporters. When depicting leisure activities, they travel and play baseball. Rockwell rarely incorporated other ethnic and racial groups in this period, and arguably all of his work centered on middle class subjects, as opposed to working class or lower class representations. His commercial art, commissioned for a specific purpose and audience, ranged from advertisements hailing Listerine to illustrating the virtues of the Boy Scouts of America to demonstrating the enjoyment of Cream of Kentucky whiskey. Interestingly, the Cream of Kentucky ads showed white men from all walks of life with the exception of one black male who appeared in the series of advertisements in the servile position of a waiter.

In an era of great social upheaval, Rockwell’s art consistently reinforced the accepted gender norms of the time. When he turned his attention to women, he represented them in a decidedly domestic role, with husbands and families and especially as caregivers of their children. At times, women’s activities tend toward the light and frivolous. They are putting
on makeup, giving manicures, being pursued by men, and fighting with each other over men. In their roles as wives and mothers, they appear pious and dedicated, praying, taking care of young children, and preparing food. By reinforcing typically middle class and gendered roles for white men and women, Rockwell reassured a nation in upheaval. One less challenge to the status quo restored a measure of confidence that some things could stay the same in the midst of a rapidly changing world.

The most prevalent subject of Rockwell’s art during the World War II era, however, dealt with the military, a particularly masculine preserve. Most of Rockwell’s military images consisted of white males and ignored the reality that America claimed to be fighting for democracy abroad while preserving segregation within its own Armed Forces. Many concentrated on the character of Willie Gillis, Rockwell’s model of a typical young American serviceman. Gillis came from a family with a legacy of military service in America, prayed in church, was missed by his family, received food packages from home, read his hometown news while abroad, and was pictured sleeping soundly at home while on leave. Rockwell’s emphasis on the home provided insight into his mission of reassurance. Gillis’s story, especially his relationship with his home, put many motherly minds at ease when thinking of their sons fighting in war far away. Willie Gillis became a symbol of the ideal soldier, fighting for freedom because he remembered the value of freedom back home.

Willie Gillis also had an existence independent of home. In one portrait, two lovely young women fight over him. In another, he demonstrates what to do in a blackout, which involved keeping a coquettish female in close proximity, much to his delight. By underscoring Gillis’ youthful sexuality in both a playful and practical situation, Rockwell
reinforced the masculine vitality of American troops as well as their ability to prevail in the struggle.

In addition to the Willie Gillis character, Rockwell depicted poignant scenes of various servicemen. One illustrated a marine’s joyful homecoming, an optimistic outcome that most families hoped to embrace. Another represented lovers on a train at Union Station during Christmastime. Still another showed a veteran putting on his civilian clothes that had somehow become too small for him. Rockwell thus used playfulness and a lighthearted touch to boost homefront morale. In other instances, he highlighted the dignity, admiration, and hero-like qualities of his serviceman. Illustrations of veterans especially demonstrated the veneration and respect for men in the military reinforced by mainstream culture during the World War II era.5

Rockwell’s distinctly middle class white American focus dismayed many critics. His failure to pay attention to the complex divisions within American society led to the complaint that Rockwell’s America was “an America of the extended family and the involved community, where the butcher was a friend, the postman a helpmate, and the worst thing in life was the embarrassment of a bad haircut.”6 Others argued the very reason Rockwell concentrated on mainstream culture resulted from his understanding of how people wanted to remember America nostalgically. Rockwell biographer Laura Claridge wrote, “as far as many Americans were concerned, however, Norman Rockwell exemplified the country’s heartland; he was its ‘everyman.’”7

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Popular art made for well-known artists. Few Americans of the Second World War generation, regardless of their socioeconomic status or race, could deny they had heard of Norman Rockwell or seen his art. According to one observer, Rockwell “shared with Walt Disney the astonishing distinction of being one of the two American visual artists familiar to nearly everyone in the United States, rich or poor, black or white, illiterate or Ph.D. To most of them, Rockwell was a master: sane (unlike van Gogh), comprehensible (unlike Picasso), and perfectly attuned to what they wanted in a picture.”8 Despite the fact that Rockwell’s work largely portrayed the white middle class, his embrace by many different classes and ethnicities raised both the artist and the work to the level of cultural icon. This, in turn, gave Rockwell a platform that reinforced his power to comment on America, either as it was or as citizens wanted it to be. Mass reproduction fed Rockwell’s renown as well. Most Americans never saw an original Rockwell painting in a museum. Robert Hughes, author of *American Visions: An Epic History of Art in America*, even tied Rockwell’s popularity to the advent of television. “Its minute verisimilitude—as well as the exaggeration of every wink, scowl, grin, and pout on its characters’ faces—had the depthless narrative clarity of TV.”9

Few critics denied Rockwell’s ability as an illustrator, but the difference between an artist and an illustrator could be construed as sizeable. One worked for a boss to tell a story through pictures while the other created art as a form of self expression under purely individual pressure. A writer for *Time* magazine thought highly of Rockwell’s work, but believed “it is questionable whether any of his work could be seriously described as art.

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9 Ibid, 509.
Even the Four Freedoms fall short of artistic maturity through their very virtue as posters: they hit hardest at first sight.”¹⁰ Rockwell referred to himself as an illustrator, but many thought this too modest a label.¹¹ More supportive critics argued that the difference between illustrator and artist was less important than the quality of the work. As late as 1993, admirers claimed Rockwell’s art “had always been timely. More than ever these days, his work had that exacting detail and realism most people now wanted to see, while still depicting broadly recognizable characters.”¹²

Rockwell himself demarcated his understanding of the difference between an artist and an illustrator by describing a conversation he had with a bohemian art student in Provincetown, Massachusetts. The art student created an abstract picture of Johnny Appleseed and Rockwell queried him about it because no observer could clearly discern that the picture actually portrayed Johnny Appleseed. The student replied it did not matter since he, the artist, knew and that was all that mattered. This provided a stark contrast with Rockwell’s sworn goal to tell a story through his paintings. Concerning his conversation with the Johnny Appleseed artist, Rockwell wrote “all of which demonstrates, I think, that an illustrator and a fine arts painter don’t go at a picture in the same way.”¹³

Rockwell’s art must also be situated within the changing role of mass culture in the mid twentieth century. According to Robert Hughes, Rockwell’s popularity was linked to the growth of a “huge administrated monoculture” and the undermining of American regionalism. Hughes related the growing American mass culture as akin to the disappearance

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¹⁰ “I Like to Please People.” *Time.* (June 21, 1943): 42.
of the fictional West. “Just as the vanishing of the mythic West only made its fictive images vastly more popular, so the massing and incorporation of American culture produced intense nostalgia for ‘old’ and ‘real’ America, its folkways and idiosyncrasies, its threatened values.” Painters or artists who voiced the yearning to rediscover an evaporated American past occupied a conspicuously revered place in the national culture.14

The question remains: should Norman Rockwell be considered an artist in the truest sense of the word or a pop culture illustrator? Or, as Karal Marling asked, “if we all like it, is it art?”15 Though Rockwell normally referred to himself as an illustrator, at times he also considered himself a genre artist. Nevertheless, he frequently accepted projects not considered worthy of an artist, such as designing Christmas cards or participating in a correspondence course for transforming amateurs to professional artists. Notably, Rockwell’s formal art exhibitions consisted of his many magazine covers from the Saturday Evening Post. Despite all the criticism from the high brow art community, Rockwell and his art dominated far more conversations than any other single artist before and during his time. As Karal Marling wrote, “the discourse that currently validated ‘art’ seemed irrelevant to whatever Norman Rockwell was doing.” She also cited the “Four Freedoms” as the beginning of Rockwell’s departure from commercialism toward the creation of more independent art compositions.16

The importance of understanding Rockwell’s position as an artist or illustrator matters because it reveals whether Rockwell found his motivation from within or from some sort of boss or supervisor. Evidence supports both Rockwell the illustrator and Rockwell the

14 Hughes, American Visions, 507.
15 Marling, Norman Rockwell, 9.
16 Ibid., 111-119.
artist. However, given his pervasive influence, today’s critics seem much more willing to bestow Rockwell with the title of artist. Much of that has to do with his longevity and the way he evolved over the course of his career.

Though Rockwell’s early pieces, notably those that appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*, are considered more illustrations than art, his later work won critical acclaim as thoughtful, stylistic, and artistic. In the 1940s and 1950s, Rockwell began to experiment with a growing number of fine art stylistic devices. Moreover, in this later work he started to display a growing discontent with the label of illustrator, an uneasiness not evident in his work from earlier decades. Rockwell’s later portfolio also reflected a departure from his traditionally ‘safe’ subject matters and exhibited a heightened awareness for class, racial differences, and tensions existent in society.

Perhaps the best way to evaluate the scope of Rockwell’s influence is to return to an examination of his work against the backdrop of World War II and the role of propaganda in its promotion. The Second World War emerged as a battleground for contending ideologies. The public’s awareness of propaganda as a potentially malevolent presence contributed to the toned down nature of all the World War II posters, especially when contrasted with more rabid posters by other American artists from World War I. Accordingly, those from World War II emerged as “cultivated by commercial interests and increasingly by political parties…but with a more sophisticated regard for public taste and tolerance and for the creditability level of various poster appeals.” For example, in deference to the United States allies, the latter propaganda posters dodged such contentious topics such as communism and

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17 Ibid., 125.
socioeconomic ideas, but also encouraged such time-honored values as piety through Christianity, good works, and humanitarian objectives.\textsuperscript{19}

Helping in the war effort was hardly limited to enlisting in the Armed Services. With the Defense Emergency Act of 1941, the U.S. government aimed to mobilize the American economy into full-scale war production and it relied on art to assist the effort. Wartime posters endeavored to make every citizen aware of the variety of ways he or she could serve the war effort from the homefront. As two observers have argued, “wartime posters united the power of art with the power of advertising to sell the idea that the factory and the home were also arenas of war. Poster campaigns aimed not only to increase productivity in factories, but to enlarge people’s view of their wartime responsibilities.”\textsuperscript{20} Thus the poster, readily available and easy to plant in public spaces and workplaces, emerged as a popular mouthpiece for motivating citizens to support the war. Buying war bonds, working in factories, rationing, keeping the nation’s secrets safe, and encouraging frugality and material support of the troops all materialized as common themes in World War II posters. In short, popular art became a tool for the promotion of these wartime American democratic values and goals.

Enter Norman Rockwell. As an artist who embodied the concept of “old time” America and American values, Rockwell’s art, whether commissioned by the United States government or not, played an instrumental role in corralling popular opinion in support of the Second World War. Rockwell officially created only two posters for the U.S. government, one for the U.S. Army Ordnance Department and one for the U.S. Employment service and

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 10-11.
War Manpower Commission.21 Neither achieved the widespread recognition of the “Four Freedoms,” the most iconographic of his work from the period. Yet it was the marketing of this series of posters by the Office of War Information, though not commissioned by them, that made Rockwell’s art appear much more aligned with U.S. government strategies.

The “Four Freedoms” series, painted in 1941 and published in 1943, promoted the overseas war effort on the homefront by linking it to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s memorable speech delivered on January 6, 1941. In this address, Roosevelt espoused the essential human freedoms as a method for battling fascist ideology. They consisted of the freedom of speech and expression; the freedom of worship; the freedom from want, which meant “economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants;” and freedom from fear, which Roosevelt described as a reduction in armaments “to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor—anywhere in the world.”22

Not only did Roosevelt’s message inspire, it defined what the nation stood for and what it vehemently opposed during World War II.

Though not the only American inspired by Roosevelt’s speech, Norman Rockwell meditated on its key concepts until he came up with fitting illustrations. Rockwell later recalled the incident clearly, “I juggled the Four Freedoms about in my mind, reading a sentence here, a sentence there, trying to find a picture. But it was so darned high-blown. Somehow I just couldn’t get my mind around it.” He then described how difficult it was for him to discover how to “take them out of the noble language of the proclamation and put

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them in terms everybody can understand.” After one sleepless night, inspiration struck. While attending a town meeting, Rockwell remembered a certain gentleman had stood up and said something to which everyone else at the meeting expressed disagreement. But the artist also remembered the way the people allowed the gentleman speak without shushing him or talking over him. They let the man air and express his opinion, however poor.²³

Rockwell’s recollection demonstrated a common technique he used as an approach for his artwork. He took a high or abstract idea and translated it in order to make it more accessible and comprehensible to the greatest number of people. Not surprisingly, Rockwell’s “Freedom of Speech” poster illustrated a common looking man speaking at town meeting. The people around him, mostly white men of different ages, look at the speaker and appear to be listening to him. Rockwell also incorporated a more nuanced appreciation of class in this image. The man speaking appears as a humble blue collar worker in contrast to the men in ties and jackets around him. Because Rockwell depicted a more diverse community, his “Freedom of Speech” poster struck his audience as a realistic interpretation of what that freedom actually meant for many Americans. It spoke to their ideal images of themselves by bridging the differences in class that, in reality, proved difficult to surmount.

Rockwell’s “Freedom of Worship” illustrated profiles of a variety of people, both young and old, in the posture of prayer. The colors appeared muted and the top of the painting read “Each according to the dictates of his own conscience.” Significantly, because Rockwell aimed to reach beyond the Judeo-Christian majority, his “Freedom of Worship” incorporated a variety of ethnic backgrounds, more than any of his other works from the period. Like Roosevelt’s speech, Rockwell’s poster also referenced the ideals of the Founding Fathers who sought to establish a nation that valued freedom of religion. In this
way, Rockwell reaffirmed one of democracy’s core values, which strengthened American resolve in the battle against fascism.

Rockwell’s “Freedom from Want” returned to a more mainstream portrayal of how Americans wanted to imagine themselves. It showed a white family sitting down to an abundant meal. The nuclear heads of a family, a mother and a father place the golden turkey in the center of the table. The father can take pride in his ability to provide for his family while the mother can take comfort in her culinary talent. They are surrounded by other family members, in profile, of all ages, smiling and talking. The table is not laden with food,
but instead shows fruit, a covered dish, and some vegetables. The glasses are all filled with water, not wine, to demonstrate freedom from want should not equal overabundance or extravagance.

Freedom From Want (March 6, 1943). Source: [www.nrm.org/exhibits/current/four-freedoms.html](http://www.nrm.org/exhibits/current/four-freedoms.html)

Continuing with the theme of a white nuclear family, Rockwell’s “Freedom from Fear” exhibited a mother and father tucking their two children into bed for the night. Both look rather grave, though the mother exudes comfort to the children while the father looks loving, but also concerned. He holds a newspaper with headlines screaming of the horrors
taking place during the war. As a representative everyman, the father is weighed with additional responsibility. His duty includes defending the nation literally, by enlisting in the Armed Services, but also defending his home and family. Given the government’s propaganda efforts to rouse support for the war, viewers would have automatically understood the inseparable connection between these manly duties.

Freedom From Fear (March 13, 1943). Source: www.nrm.org/exhibits/current/four-freedoms.html

Indeed, despite the fact that all of the “Four Freedoms” paintings focused on predominately middle class white Americans, they resonated with a wider audience. With
few exceptions, all Americans came to understand the rather abstract concepts of the four freedoms of President Roosevelt’s speech in a very personal way. The familiarity of Rockwell’s work, due to its previous circulation in mass popular culture combined with his role in translating the abstract into the concrete to give his wartime images particular power. As a result, his audience understood the people in his paintings could be, and often were, people they knew. Viewing these images, it became easier to comprehend how ordinary people represented what was best in America and why they should both sacrifice and lend all their strength to winning the Second World War.

Rockwell attempted to interest the government in the propaganda potential of his “Four Freedoms,” but it initially remained slow to respond. Unlike other artists of his day, Rockwell sought no remuneration for his series. The Undersecretary of War, Robert Patterson, informed Rockwell that while a few officials had noticed his work, the government itself lacked the time to find more specific use for it. Furthermore, the government sought to hire “fine arts men, real artists.”24 The exchanges between Rockwell and government officials reflected the fact that though Rockwell might have been widely regarded as an illustrator, he had not yet gained wide recognition as an artist.

Instead, it fell to popular culture to make the “Four Freedoms” represent what America stood for during the war. The Saturday Evening Post ran Rockwell’s images during four successive weeks starting on February 20, 1943. Each was accompanied by essays specifically describing what Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear meant. The articles written by Booth Tarkington, Will Durant, Carlos Bulosan, and Vincent Benet, respectively, all demonstrated how the national crisis of

24 Rockwell, My Adventures as an Illustrator, 314.
war rendered these four values all the more dear. Only after the series appeared in the *Saturday Evening* Post did the Office of War Information take notice. Later that year, it printed Rockwell’s interpretations of the Four Freedoms in order to raise war bonds. Its decision to champion Rockwell’s “Four Freedoms” as a traveling exhibition eventually garnered over 130 million dollars in war bonds. Though Rockwell claimed the sensitivity of the subjects contributed to his struggle with the actual painting of the Four Freedoms, he obviously hit the mark on some level for many Americans. Ben Hibbs, who served as editor for *Saturday Evening Post*, described the public’s reaction. “Those four pictures quickly became the best known and most appreciated paintings of that era. They appeared right at a time when the war was going against us on the battle fronts, and the American people needed the inspirational message which they conveyed so forcefully and so beautifully.” Whether or not the “Four Freedoms” came to be regarded as examples of art in its highest form remains debatable, but clearly they achieved iconic status. Widely viewed and appreciated, thousands of Americans venerated and remembered Rockwell’s posters.

To further explore Rockwell’s artistic influence during the Second World War, historians cannot ignore the painting entitled “Rosie the Riveter.” Indeed, the far reaching influence of “Rosie the Riveter” remains a symbol of a revolution in wartime economics and gender relations. More specifically, “Rosie the Riveter” deserves a closer look because it portrayed World War II era women as supporting the war outside the home. This represented a significant departure from the World War I era, when propaganda promoted images of women fighting strictly on the domestic front.

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Some ascribed the origins of “Rosie the Riveter” to the song written by Redd Evans and John Jacob Loeb in 1942, which contained the lyrics

> While other girls attend a favorite cocktail bar,  
> Sipping dry martinis, munching caviar;  
> There’s a girl who’s really putting them to shame—  
> Rosie is her name.  
> All the day long, whether rain or shine,  
> She’s part of the assembly line,  
> She’s making history working for victory,  
> Rosie, Rosie, Rosie, Rosie, Rosie, Rosie the riveter.  

The popularity of this song can be attributed to the reality that more than six million women became part of America’s workforce during World War II. The huge increase of women in the workforce, especially in the industrial sector of the economy, represented a sharp break from the World War I. More specifically, during World War II women joined the male-dominated areas of the workforce to aid America’s push for victory.

Rockwell’s painting of “Rosie the Riveter” appeared on the May 29, 1943 cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*. The picture shows Rosie as a redheaded, brawny, muscular woman, eating a sandwich against an American flag background. Her riveting gun lies across her lap, while her goggles and shield perch on the top of her head. She seems masculine in her dirty overalls and with her muscles and toughness. Yet a handkerchief and a compact peek out from her pocket and she wears rouge and lipstick. Nor did tough work damage her manicure as her perfect nails appear painted bright red. Because most shoe manufacturers did not make work boots in women’s sizes, loafers adorn Rosie’s feet, which rest comfortably on Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. She clasps her metal lunch box, emblazoned

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28 Ibid., 16.
with her name, between her arm and body. Even her chest, loaded with pins, supports the
war effort. Notable is the absence of a wedding ring for Rosie and the fact that Rockwell
painted her eating, not working. Rosie symbolizes women and the workforce during World
War II, with all its contradictions and nuances.²⁹

Rosie the Riveter (Saturday Evening Post Cover May 29, 1943)
Source: www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/images/at0071.2s.jpg

²⁹ Sheridan Harvey, “Rosie the Riveter: Real Women Workers in World War II.”
On one hand, Rosie bucked the female stereotypes usually characterized on magazine covers by appearing “independent, self-sufficient, and strong.”30 On the other, Rockwell intended the cover as a bit of a joke, especially when contrasted with the serious and solemn “Four Freedoms.” Rockwell incorporated his sense of humor into the painting of Rosie by expressly patterning her body position to imitate Michelangelo’s prophet Isaiah on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Whether he intended the juxtaposition of a working woman with a significant male prophet, or he just patterned Rosie after Michelangelo’s Isaiah for fun, Rosie became an icon for women everywhere. Karal Marling writes, “thanks to the women’s movement, this has become one of Rockwell’s most famous images. So it is pertinent to ask why he bases his aircraft worker on one of Michelangelo’s male prophets. It is just a joke on the Rosies of the world, who are (literally) filling a man’s shoes for the duration? Or does the tension of the pose mirror Rockwell’s own anxiety about his first independent oil paintings – The Four Freedoms series—and about being a great artist, like Michelangelo?”31 It seems Rockwell, whether intentionally or not, highlighted the tension between the traditional role of women staying out of public life with the new push for working women to be accepted in traditionally male zones of work.

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31 Marling, 107.
Maureen Honey has studied woman and recruitment propaganda during the Second World War to demonstrate how “war work” confronted the limited role women could play in public life. In addition, she has examined why the considerable amount of women employed in male fields failed to significantly alter discriminatory labor practices and conformist views.
of a woman’s position in a post war era. She concludes the publications aimed at the middle class exhorted egalitarian ideals, such as attaining approval by male coworkers. Publications targeting working class women neglected feminist themes but concentrated on war worker’s pride to be incorporated into the working class, which was “leading the country to victory.”

Examining how visual representation conveys meaning to a broad spectrum of viewers, Melissa Dabakis concludes, “although normally considered propaganda for the war effort, this popular image registered the contradictions embodied in official wartime ideology and exposed the diversity of women’s experiences in the paid work force.”

The Office of War Information promoted two major drives aimed at endorsing women’s increased participation in the workforce as a way to support their men fighting abroad. It launched the “Women in Necessary Services” campaign in the fall of 1943. At the same moment, the Saturday Evening Post solicited Rockwell, its most popular illustrator and artist, to fashion a suitable cover for its Labor Day issue. Rockwell’s image of a woman decked in red, white, and blue while loaded with industrial tools and equipment echoed the sentiment evident in his more famous Rosie.

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33 Ibid., 678.
35 Maureen Honey, Creating Rosie the Riveter. Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 63.
Yet how liberating was Rockwell’s image? As historian Maureen Honey has commented, “propagandists infused new life into the very image that the glorification of Rosie the Riveter attached: the vulnerable homemaker who depended on a man for her livelihood.”36 Conversely, Honey posits that women engaged in jobs with typically masculine qualities and higher wages prompted a broader reconsideration of women’s roles in society. Rosie the Riveter thus became a representative icon of how women challenged

36 Ibid., 136-137.
the traditional gender roles of the 1940s.\textsuperscript{37} Whether he intended it or not, Rockwell’s image of Rosie continues to be at the center of debates over the nature of women’s changing roles in the workplace and at home during World War II and today.

Beginning in the Second World War and increasingly in the decades afterward, Norman Rockwell rose to the upper echelon of popular American artists. His career lasted for decades and his work addressed many important events in American history. Rockwell created his art to delight and inform his audience, yet possessed a great deal of personal inspiration. His stature resulted in part because Rockwell found himself so in tune with the tenor of American society. It also has to do with his emphasis on telling a story. The Four Freedoms exemplified the common values held by Americans during World War II, which contributed to their influence and popularity. More importantly, Rockwell’s art captured the mood of the culture. Especially during World War II, it provided a lucid window into American values, hopes, and fears. A reconsideration of Rockwell’s work affords the opportunity to take the pulse of a nation at a tumultuous time. More broadly, it offers a way to better understand how American both saw and liked to remember their role in the nation’s history.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 1.
CHAPTER TWO:
The Old Fashioned Revival Hour: Charles Fuller and the Impact of Radio on Religion and Culture in America

*A Christian’s view of broadcasting should be more realistic than a daydream, less fantastic than a nightmare, and clearer than an illusion.*

*John W. Bachman*

If “Jesus is a fixture on the American landscape –on highway billboards, bumper stickers, and even tattooed bodies,” then how did He rise to the level of icon in America? While it may seem logical that the role of religion faded with the emergence of the modern age, evidence suggests otherwise. The growth of separation between church and state served to enhance the power of religion by forcing religion to seek its niche in the broader secular culture. Mass media provided a useful vehicle for transmitting religion. The central question concerning religion and its role in twentieth century American culture revolves around how religious groups utilized the media to propagate their message. The particular decisions members made about which forms of media to use tells us much about the way religion has functioned in the American culture.

One way Jesus became a national icon is through His disciples’ influence on the airwaves. Radio made Christianity a fixture of popular culture, particularly in the 1940s. Not only did religious radio broadcasting significantly bolster the conservatism of the time, it played a key role in shaping the medium itself. In an analysis of culture and radio in America, Tona J. Hangen writes, “evangelists attained a ‘cultural authority’ over the medium

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of radio and used it to regain the desired role of national values guardian.” Yet what sort of ideas, objects, and religious messages have continued to attract listeners? An examination of religious radio demonstrates the mass media’s role in constructing cultural boundaries and establishing cultural identities.5

Charles E. Fuller’s popular, long-running Old Fashioned Revival Hour, the most important Christian radio show of the 1940s, provides a particularly telling example of the cultural implications of religious broadcasting. After the Second World War, religion in the United States changed, as did the ways people experienced it. Protestants and Catholics diluted their denominational differences and united to present a stronger front against the menace of godless Communism as Cold War realities crept into national consciousness.6 If the story of religious broadcasting in America reveals itself principally as an account of evangelicals dominating the airwaves, then Fuller’s demonstrates the moment this takeover began.7 Fuller’s account reveals the tensions between fundamentalism and American culture. His radio program also allows us to know what audiences heard and illuminates why they desired to listen. Finally, it is useful for understanding how religious broadcasters overcame governmental obstacles to their programs and how Fuller himself paved the way for a future that included firmly entrenched Christian radio broadcasters.

In one of his earliest memories, Charles Fuller recalled his childhood fascination with fire. At the sound of the fire alarm at nearby fire station, young Charles dashed off to join the fireman and perched on the truck, right behind the big horses. Perhaps this attraction to

6 Prothero, American Jesus, 118.
fire and firemen kindled the intense enthusiasm Fuller would later demonstrate for saving people from the fires of hell. Born in Los Angeles on April 25, 1887, Charles Fuller moved with his family to the Redlands of the San Bernardino Valley while still young. Fuller spent much of his childhood outdoors, working hard, helping cultivate the family orange grove, and enjoying the constant companionship of a dog.8

Fuller’s family, deeply religious and dedicated Christians, instilled the same values in their children. In fact, Fuller’s father, Henry, became so interested in foreign missions that he took a trip around the world in 1902. Though Henry Fuller’s vision for his son entailed running the orange ranch and turning a profit, Charles had other ideas. By saving the dimes he earned capturing gophers around the grove, he ordered a telegraph set from a mail order catalog. He learned Morse code and began stringing wire through the ranch house to transmit messages. Fuller even convinced the old Southern Pacific railway station manager to allow him to practice receiving and sending messages on the old railroad circuits. As his hobby blossomed, Fuller created the first amateur wireless telegraph receiver in the Redlands area during his senior year of high school. This early fascination with the nuances of signal transmission foreshadowed the illustrious career he eventually pursued.9

After marrying his high school sweetheart, Grace Payton, during his years at Pomona College, Fuller’s life underwent a significant change. Fuller had read in the newspaper about a preacher named Paul Radar, who also happened to be a man he had known during his college days as an amateur wrestler and boxer. Since his old friend had appeared far from spiritual when Fuller knew him and seemed an unlikely person to be preaching in public,

8 J. Elwin Wright, *The Old Fashioned Revival Hour and the Broadcasters*, (Boston, The Fellowship Press, 1940), 30-33.
Fuller found himself intrigued. He listened with rapt attention as Radar preached from the book of Ephesians.\(^\text{10}\) Fuller then dedicated his life to God as he had not done before and “felt freed from all desire to get ahead in the business world and to make money.” He devoted himself to be used by God to win souls.\(^\text{11}\)

As the desire to preach the gospel became a driving passion in Fuller’s life, he enrolled in The Bible Institute of Los Angeles. Upon graduation, he ministered at the Placentia Presbyterian Church, teaching a Sunday school class.\(^\text{12}\) Then, in 1915, while at the Defender of the Christian Faith Convention in Indianapolis, Fuller became the last minute substitute for his mentor, Paul Radar. Fuller’s broadcast was very well-received. As a result of this serendipitous substitution, Fuller funneled his new-found popularity into creating Calvary Baptist Church. It did not take long for Fuller to combine his passion for ministry with his childhood passion for radio.\(^\text{13}\) His leadership skills and strong preaching abilities soon enabled him to launch a radio ministry.

Fuller’s time in Placentia demonstrated some of the tensions between fundamentalism and modernism. Many church leaders viewed the use of radio to transmit the gospel message as relying on methods too secular and too modern. More than a few Calvary congregants saw radio and evangelism as “oil and water.”\(^\text{14}\) Some religious leaders, in keeping with the Christian fundamentalism platform of combating modernist theology and the cultural

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\(^\text{10}\) Wright, *The Old Fashioned Revival Hour and the Broadcasters*, 60.

\(^\text{11}\) Fuller, *Give the Winds a Mighty Voice*, 34.

\(^\text{12}\) Ibid., 79-86.


\(^\text{14}\) Ibid.
changes connected with it, even targeted radio. Still others saw radio as a medium to spread fundamentalism, not a modicum of modernist heathenism. Fuller broadcasted from Calvary Church beginning in 1930 until 1933, when he resigned as a pastor to pursue his radio ministry full-time.

Despite financial hardships, Fuller formed the Gospel Broadcasting Association (GBA), a nonprofit corporation commissioned to develop radio programs for fifteen million potential listeners in the United States and Canada. In 1934, Fuller’s broadcasts aired through Los Angeles’ more powerful KNX, the network from which he launched his cornerstone program, The Radio Revival Hour which turned into the Old Fashioned Revival Hour. KNK was part of the Mutual Broadcasting System, which stretched much farther and allowed Fuller to reach a wider audience.

The Mutual Broadcasting System and its affiliates made Fuller into a national religious leader by 1939. By the 1940s, however, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) became increasingly uncomfortable with the amount of time the Mutual network allotted to Fuller. The government, uneasy about ‘promoting’ certain religious agendas, especially ones that contained denominationally specific content, desired to keep religious broadcasting as neutral as possible. Additionally, other advertisers coveted the airtime used by Fuller. Fuller responded by forming the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). The NAE formed a crucial base for the creation of the National

16 Erickson, Religious Radio and Television in the United States, 83.
17 See Fuller, Give the Winds a Mighty Voice. 79-86, 99; and Erickson, Religious Radio and Television in the United States, 83.
18 Fuller, Give the Winds a Mighty Voice, 115.
Religious Broadcasters (NRB), which was “set up to provide a united evangelical front against those who wanted to curtail the broadcasting of conservative viewpoints.” After syndication of the *Old Fashioned Revival Hour* in 1943, influential groups pressured Mutual to cut its religious programming. Fuller recognized this trend and successfully secured contracts with a myriad of independent radio stations to broadcast his and other religious programs. Nevertheless, due to its overwhelming popularity, the *Old Fashioned Revival Hour* resumed its syndication in 1949, picked up by the American Broadcasting Company (ABC). It stayed on the air until 1968.

The *Old Fashioned Revival Hour* remains the most respected and longest running religious radio program. The broadcast opened with the choir’s rendition of “Jesus Saves.” Usually, either the choir or a barber shop quartet led the hymns that followed. Other hymns followed, all of them uplifting and rousing, none of them dirge-like. Fuller’s wife, Grace, rounded out the first half of the show by reading a selection of listener letters while the second half of the *Old Fashioned Revival Hour* allowed Fuller to display his preaching talents. Without intoning in sentimental or overly florid speech, Fuller addressed his audience directly, giving credence to the one-on-one feeling of the broadcast. His message also remained basically the same throughout his career. Fuller’s sermon themes revolved around the necessity of salvation and the individual sinner’s responsibility to accept Christ. He spoke little of the horrors of hell. Rather, he accentuated the mercy, blessings, and promises of God. The end of each sermon resulted in an altar call. A typical call went as follows:

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“Let us bow our heads in prayer while the choir sings an invitation number...Pray as they sing. And friends of radioland, as we are bringing the *Old Fashioned Revival Hour* to a close, will you take God at His word and come? He says, “Come let us reason together.” Will you take God at his word? God bless you. Kneel right down in your room, or by your bed, wherever you may be, look up into the Father’s face through Jesus Christ, and say “God be merciful to me a sinner, and save me.” While heads are bowed in this fine audience at Long Beach, put your hand up just before we leave the air, and say “Pray for me.” God bless you. God bless you. There is no middle ground.”

Fuller calmly and resolutely urged his invisible listeners, as well as the listeners of his studio audience, to save their souls.

Fuller’s simple, straightforward message, without the oratorical tricks employed by others, struck a chord with his listeners, time and time again. This type of oratory proved particularly effective on the radio because listeners failed to feel the pressure they might feel in a public revival meeting or congregation. Yet the intimacy of Fuller’s approach let people feel as if he spoke directly to them. In addition, Fuller’s lack of condemnation found a receptive ear, since many of his radio preaching predecessors stuck with the fire and brimstone style. One could speculate that Fuller intentionally fashioned his delivery after the comforting tone Franklin Delano Roosevelt displayed during his historic ‘Fireside Chats.’

The American public had grown accustomed to the voice on the radio as a source of leadership and reassurance during times of isolation and war. Fuller managed to emulate this personal message of comfort to reach Americans in the privacy of their own homes.

Why the title *Old Fashioned Revival Hour*? For one, it evoked feelings of an earlier time of religious awakenings in America. The title reflected the historical concept of a revival, where itinerant preachers would spend a few days preaching the gospel and creating converts. It also acted as a metaphor for rural life in its language, tone, and desire for better

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Fuller’s emphasis on community helped to counteract the more personal and individualized experience of a listener listening in his or her own home. Conversely, Fuller’s ministry in practice did not so much work in an old fashioned way, since his techniques and use of radio were decidedly modern. But his use of the term ‘old fashioned’ enabled his listeners to overlook what they may have perceived as an anti-fundamentalist and modern religious vehicle and just see religion.

The postwar 1940s and early 1950s became crucial decades for both religion and the mass media. People enjoyed the feeling of being selected for personal attention through the medium of radio because the close experience of listening created the sense that a personal advisor spoke to them in the same room. As Hangen has observed, “until television, radio was the only means for the immediate experience of a remote event, and that experience—partly because of its sheer novelty in the early years—could be jarring, epiphanic, even life-changing.”

Recognizing the profitability of religious radio, the mainstream secular media took a great deal of interest in the new modes of organization which, in turn, shaped the landscape of commercial broadcasting. Some likened the use of media by evangelists to the use of the printing press in the Protestant Reformation. Even the radio broadcasters of the time recognized this window of opportunity, since “radio, if employed skillfully, has a mass appeal which cannot be matched by any other medium of communication.” In addition, few could deny radio’s “continuing value as a medium due to its ability to acclimate to change.”

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22 Ibid.
If the 1950s saw the rise of the television surpassing this widespread appeal of radio, during the 1940s, the radio remained the king of communication.

Such popularity has led others to claim that the early American evangelicals “largely established the tone and style of mass communication in the United States…American media are distinctly evangelistic enterprises hoping to attract new ‘converts.’” While Fuller did not expressly admit to using the rise of postwar American consumer culture to his advantage, many in the arena of religious broadcasting desired to see their product on the market with the rest of the goods for consumption. “The radio advertiser, broadcast producer, magazine editor, and newspaper reporter are contemporary evangelists,” Quentin J. Schultz has written, “They are hoping to ‘win people to their medium.’” A goal-oriented strategy of communication, this commercialized version resulted from a more historical evangelical aspiration to “conquer geographic space and win souls with the Christian gospel.” As a result, the modern media actually borrowed this ‘evangelical spirit.’ In an ironic twist, evangelicals relied on invisible airwaves in order to reach vast geographic areas.

Fuller’s vision explains religion’s rise in radio broadcasting status. He became the first American minister to understand the vast potential of radio to voice the conservative Christian message in the 1930s and 1940s. Most contemporary evangelicals take for granted this understanding of radio’s potential for the spreading of religious and political ideas. Fuller’s vision pioneered the most successful program of religious broadcasting and created the infrastructure critical for the success of evangelical broadcast ministries. In doing so, he laid the foundation for future evangelicals to do likewise. The unique qualities and

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25 Hangen, Redeeming the Dial, 105.
format of *The Old Fashioned Revival Hour* also “moved us toward today where almost every conceivable religious program is being broadcasted; including music, children’s shows, dramas, situation comedies, bible study, news, and preaching.”

Another key legacy that Fuller left to both the mass media and religious broadcasting is his foresight in eschewing the Mutual national network. As the FCC debated giving airtime to religious organizations, Fuller wisely decided to tap into independent stations rather than fighting for sustained network time. As a result, independent networks became the bedrock of religious broadcasting. The implications of Fuller’s radio ministry included his potent argument against those who maintained the only broadcasts that would be widely received by the public were the sustaining time broadcasts given by networks, not the independent broadcasts. Mark Ward claims that “by uniting their voice, gospel broadcasters had secured their position. No longer would anyone suggest that questions about religious radio could be decided without the evangelical viewpoint.” The formation of the NRB united the religious broadcasters quite effectively. In fact, ABC reversed its position and decided to accept paid religious programs such as the *Old Fashioned Revival Hour* in 1949.

Manuals and instruction books concerning religious broadcasting indicate the degree to which religious broadcasters realized radio’s potential to reach millions of listeners. John W. Bachman, for example, writing in 1960, argued that radio and television “are pervasive…they are time-consuming…they exert many demonstrable, superficial influences: they create celebrities, popularize songs, and instigate passing crazes such as hoola

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hooping.”28 Attaching religion to this powerful means of cultural influence proved a dynamic combination. There were three major aspects of radio with significant importance for religious organizations: “radio’s immediacy and speed; the personalized nature of radio communication; and the powerful drive exerted by radio as a potential agent of democracy.” Manuals also pronounced the Church’s obligation to employ all weapons in its arsenal to “create a community consensus, a climate of public mind and conscience,” linking religious broadcasting and the broadcaster’s civic duty to communicate ideas to the public.29

These broadcasting guides presented religion on the radio as an agent of cultural and political transformation. For example, E. Jerry Walker, in his 1945 manual Religious Broadcasting: A Manual of Techniques encouraged a more universal and united approach to religious broadcasting by evangelicals. Others, writing in 1948, proclaimed “radio highlights sharply the fact that the Church is not an exclusive institution conducted for the benefit of its registered members, but is the Christian Gospel and Christian people penetrating into the surrounding life of the community. The Church, through radio, is compelled to conduct a ministry to public opinion.”30

Christian radio manuals suggest a degree of organization that provides evidence that religious radio broadcasters recognized the power they wielded in American culture. Walker cited the NAB code concerning Religious Broadcasts: “radio, which reaches men of all creeds and races simultaneously, may not be used to convey attacks upon another’s race or religion. Rather it should be the purpose of the religious broadcast to promote the spiritual harmony and understanding of mankind and to administer broadly to the varied religious

29 Parker, Inman, and Snyder, Religious Radio: What to Do and How, ix-x.
30 Ibid., ix.
needs of the community.” Walker advised broadcasters to paint a positive picture of religion, in contrast to the often divisive and backstabbing reality of denominational conflict and competition. He reminded ministers that they represented all the churches of the community, and not to use the radio as a bully pulpit to blast other denominations. “Always be positive in your presentations when referring to the work of religion and the church.” Otherwise, Walker warned, the use of division will only give credence to the prevalent skepticism regarding the Christian church and its work.31

This plea for a universal and united front by religious broadcasters sheds considerable light upon the aforementioned push to overlook denomination differences in the emerging Cold War. The budding ideological battle between ‘atheistic communism’ and a democracy where Christianity was construed as being as ‘American as apple pie’ illustrates the extent to which the Cold War cast its shadow over American society and culture. Religious broadcasting failed to escape this historical and cultural reality. As Walker’s manual shows, the media, with its tendency to homogenize, played an active role in the process of reducing denominational differences.

In addition, the manuals made legible the desire to craft the religious programming as efficient, and thus as effective, as possible. Walker described how a successful religious broadcasting committee considered both radio and religion carefully. It “discovers where religion and radio meet on common ground and utilizes radio technique to its greatest advantage in putting across worth-while religious content.”32 Another manual supplied instructions on programming to reach all the groups in the community and discussed the

32 Ibid., 5-19.
service goals of religious broadcasting, which included the religious interpretation and communication of faith, the emotional identification and communication of faith, and the worship method. It provided step-by-step instructions for writing the program and producing it, which includes a section entitled, “How’s Your Voice?” and the educational functions in religious radio. The need for a unified diversity in religious radio represented one method to reach a broader audience. Compilers of a different manual constructed the goals of Protestant broadcasts, which included winning listeners to the Christian faith, Christian living instruction, building strong Christian families, making known the Christian gospel to all people in all places, and helping various religious groups to understand each other. Not incidentally, some authors also included more basic knowledge such a radio hand signals and examples of fifteen minute religious radio newscasts.

All of these manuals served to depict the ways in which religious radio strove to use the medium as a means of gaining cultural and social influence. Fuller’s example led evangelical broadcasters to develop “more politically conscious strategies.” These strategies included the NRB’s employment of good legal counsel and “the momentum of a fresh coalition” in order to stay in tune with Washington D.C. and the decisions being made that would affect them. Evangelical broadcasters especially wanted to educate radio listeners in evaluating current events. As one manual writer observed, “the Christian will join with others in encouraging broadcasts which take into account the many dimensions of the human personality, which awaken an individual and broaden his horizons, which stimulate his

34 Bachman, The Church in the World of Radio-Television, 133-45.
36 Hangen, Redeeming the Dial, 149.
growth through recreation, inspiration, and enlightenment. He will favor broadcasts which contribute to interpersonal growth and which promote thoughtful discussion of social issues."

Fuller’s ministry significantly affected future religious broadcast leadership. Much as Fuller had after hearing Paul Radar’s broadcast, the future leader of the politically influential Moral Majority, Jerry Falwell, converted to Christianity after listening to an episode of the *Old Fashioned Revival Hour*. But Fuller’s influence upon current Christian broadcasting fails to end with Falwell. The popularity of current radio programs such as “Focus on the Family” with Dr. James Dobson, “Insight for Living” with Charles Swindoll, and others confirms the degree to which Fuller was a full-fledged pioneer in the world of religious broadcasting. Fuller’s influence has lasted well beyond radio’s heyday in the 1940s.

Charles Fuller also needs to be placed within the broader understanding of the Christian fundamentalist movement. Fundamentalism finds it roots in the post-Civil War era, when intellectual life and American society began to become more modern. Increasingly urban and industrialized, American society saw the ascent of modern science that appeared to disparage the conventional view of God and the world. Mainline groups such as Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and many Presbyterians willingly and readily accepted modern society. More conservative Protestants embraced isolation and promoted their fundamentalist ideas against all variations of modernism.

Fuller returned Christian fundamentalism to mainstream American culture through his *Old Fashioned Revival Hour*, undoing the damage that resulted from the Scopes Trial of 1925. According to Stewart M. Hoover, who has studied mass media and religion, “anti-

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intellectualism and rural culture lost favor in a rapidly industrializing society. Its problems were partly, then, problems of communication. It had lost its ability to command public attention.” Yet fundamentalism failed to fade away. Through consolidation that yielded reorganization, the fundamentalism movement reemerged in the 1930s. Not surprisingly, fundamentalism gained strength and national attention through its command of modern technology such as the radio. Charles Fuller certainly recognized this. In the same way that America’s earlier evangelists employed the technology of years past—such as rallies, newsletters, or tracts—the fundamentalist leaders of the 1940s embraced radio broadcasting as a “natural forum for their witness.”38 Thus, the failure of the fundamentalist movement to ‘command public attention’ diminished and reversed its downward trend with Fuller at the helm of the powerful pulpit of radio broadcasting.

As the movement continued to gather momentum through the 1940s and into the 1950s, the torch passed from Fuller to Billy Graham, who became the emblem of evangelicalism’s new status.39 Fuller’s success in his employment of the modern technology of radio demonstrated to fundamentalists that some elements of modernism could be harnessed to serve the goals of spreading their message. Finally, Fuller and his legacy helped to bring the fundamentalists, previously considered isolated and separatists from the mainline denominations, back into the mainstream of society and culture.

At the same time, fundamentalism retained its tension with American culture. Joel A. Carpenter argues, “Fundamentalism bears all the marks of a popular religious movement which drew only part of its identity from opposition to liberal trends in the denominations.

The movement had its own ideology and program to pursue.” After the Second World War, fundamentalism lost some of its isolation because it began to tentatively adopt some forms of modernism. In this case, it used the radio. Movements arise in order to make changes as a result of dissatisfaction with the poor achievement of goals of the established order and “because movements are decentralized and based on popular support, they are virtually irrepressible.” Indeed, the main reason the fundamentalist movement survived and earned a lasting place in Protestant American is because it established organizational structures connected to old-line denominations. Additionally, fundamentalism “responded creatively to the trends in contemporary popular culture.” It tapped into the popularity of radio and the rising consumer culture to supply listeners’ religious needs.

The success of fundamentalist radio has broader implications for the intertwining of religion and culture in American history. As Stewart M. Hoover notes, “Religious broadcasting is, first of all, a religious activity, produced and viewed by people who share common symbols, values, and a ‘moral culture’ they celebrate.” He goes on to explain that the broadcasting church finds itself entrenched in the recent fundamentalist revivals. As a result, the church that broadcasts “is tied to both the conservative and the more mainstream wings of American religion.” In addition, Hoover outlines the institutional and political structure unique to religious broadcasting. He concludes, “the organizations that produce these programs have their own histories and policies, and we must try to understand them.”

Frequently scholars construe religion and popular culture as on opposite sides in a ‘culture war.’ But a more accurate way to describe the relationship of religion and culture

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41 Hoover, Mass Media Religion, 21.
lies in the comprehension of their dualistic nature. Such dualism encompasses three areas. First, the religious groups sustain and participate in popular culture, while at the same time attempting to influence it. Second, studies of religion and popular culture often omit the indispensable social and cultural contexts for comprehending religion and popular culture. Third, scholars too often fail to account for the ways religion and pop culture factor into media literacy. After all, the advance of religious institutions mirrors their socioeconomic context. Hoover believes “class ideology and conflict, economic and demographic changes, and political upheavals all contribute to changes in religious institutions, both formal and informal.” His study of American Protestantism reveals the extent to which change was not the exception, but the rule, “reflecting the massive shifts in the character of society that have accompanied national development over the past two centuries.”

In the end, the advent of religious broadcasting and its zenith in the 1940s under Charles Fuller’s *Old Fashioned Revival Hour* demonstrates complicated interchange between culture and religion. Religious radio significantly impacted American culture as well as the way the mass media understood its role. Yet, the impact of religious radio cannot be fully grasped without a clear awareness of the transformations within the institutions of religion, culture, and society in postwar 1940s America. Holding Fuller up as a mirror of American culture serves as a litmus test of ever-changing national sensibilities.

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CHAPTER THREE:

*Life Traces Religion, Religion Traces Cultural Change*

Today, with its focus as a weekend information publication, *Life* magazine exists as a mere shadow of its former glory. Founded in 1936, *Life* soared in popularity in the 1940s and continued to enjoy considerable readership well into the 1950s. Examining *Life* from the fall of 1945, when victory was assured in Europe and approaching resolution in the Pacific, to the summer of 1950, when the war in Korea began, demonstrates significant shifts in American thought and culture. Editors in this era adopted a broad perspective and an expansive model. *Life* contained national and world news, as well as articles on politics, fashion, science, art, celebrity gossip, movies, theater, and sports. Its photographs and photographic essays conveyed an immediate message that engaged a wide range of readers while promoting a powerful new type of cultural literacy. Incorporating this wide array of subjects and interests, *Life* provided a comprehensive perspective of what piqued and interested the national mind. As a result, the magazine emerges as a primer in the visual representation of American postwar life and culture.

At the close of the Second World War, *Life* reflected the excitement and anxiety of Americans. Beyond the exhilaration of victory, much of the stress ordinary people felt related to their concern about returning to an economic depression. Nearly all had lived through the Great Depression and it remained a pressing memory in their minds. Moreover, most understood the vital role of American participation in the Second World War in economic questions. It was not Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, but industry’s revitalization through war production that breathed life back into the suffering American economy. Many
citizens wondered how the country would translate wartime economic gains to a peacetime economy.\(^1\)

Yet these significant concerns merely served as a starting point for more unsettling questions at the close of the war. Americans expressed anxiety about the disturbances of social, racial, and gender norms as the troops began to return home. Women, who served in a greater capacity in the work force during World War II, now needed to return to their homes and return their jobs to veterans. Many black American veterans arriving home after defending democracy across the world nurtured higher expectations of equality. Meanwhile, Americans of Japanese, German, and Italian descent struggled to reaffirm their identities as United States citizens first, and to downplay the importance of their ethnic identity.\(^2\)

Additionally, many Americans found themselves unable to comprehend what this new era of the atomic weapon and the United States’ role as global leader meant. Not only did Americans need to adjust to important changes at home, they needed to amend their traditionally isolationist views toward the world. Many of the world’s former great powers lay in ruins and needed assistance in their rebuilding efforts. As a new world leader, emerging virtually unscathed from the recent conflict, the United States was positioned to become an example to the rest of the world. Along with the power of the bomb, this meant fashioning a new foreign policy. What should this new superpower look like? As the iron curtain fell, what did it mean for America to become the main defender against communism, the ultimate assault on democracy? America began to see that as a world power its responsibility was to lead, guide, and encourage the rebuilding of a strong worldwide

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democracy. Such a role provided the only hope against the evils of a defeated fascism and the emerging threat of communism.³

As the people searched for a “return to normalcy” in the war’s aftermath, they looked to religion. It was, after all, one of the stable, unchanging pillars of society. But religion itself did not remain unaffected by the recent tumult. Rather, to retain its influence, the Church and its leaders had to find a way to offer solace and reassurance in the midst of the social, racial, and gendered anxieties that Americans confronted when they picked up their newspaper or took a walk downtown. In many cases, for example, religious leaders emerged at the forefront of America’s push for unity against communism.⁴ As a major cultural interpreter, Life included organized religion’s grappling with the same questions as the larger society. Examining how the magazine portrayed the changing nature of religion in post World War II American culture illuminates the extent of America’s understanding of its many transitions at home and on the world stage.

Current events served as one of the many issue covered in Life magazine. While the news ranged from the exotic to the momentous to the mundane, it provides an interesting glimpse into what the editors and the readership considered worthy of note. As such, it offers an opportunity to more fully understand the postwar mentalité as well as its influence within the broader scope of history.

Life relied on religious coverage to chronicle a myriad of emotions American felt at the close of the Second World War. Specifically, given the sizable portion of the population who claimed German descent, many Americans struggled to deal with bringing Germany

back into the western European community. One early article recounted how “a few anti-
Nazis face the appalling job of redeeming a country that feels no guilt or shame.”5 Perhaps
unsurprisingly, German church leaders emerged at the forefront of the reconciliation effort.
Many of them had spent time in jail for protesting the Nazi “encroachment on religious
freedom” and viewed the Americans as liberators. As Percy Knauth wrote, “these
churchmen realize fully what a fearful task lies ahead of them in the resurrection of
Germany.” According to one Confessional Church leader, Germany knew “how completely
poisoned the youth of our nation is. It goes deep, very deep. German youth has lost all
moral and religious hold on life.” Using religious imagery with terms like ‘resurrection’ of
Germany, Knauth’s article demonstrated the degree to which America felt both a moral
responsibility and a political imperative toward the Germans. The United States saw itself as
the one to spearhead the ethical overhaul of much of the formerly Nazi-dominated Europe.
In addition, one interviewed German responded, “Americans must feed the German people
because otherwise the whole country will go Bolshevist.”6

The establishment of the United Nations (UN) also provided food for thought for
those considering America’s role in the world. One editorial discussed America’s entry into
the war when “our national purpose seemed to be no more than to resist aggression and
perhaps to establish the notion in the world that aggression does not pay. Later this aim was
embellished...with more ambitious doctrines like the Four Freedoms and still later with the
hope of ending all world wars and knitting the nations into a kind of political unity, the hope

6 Ibid.,76.
of the San Francisco Charter.”\(^7\) Demonstrating an evolution in perspective, this editorial pinpointed America’s new attitude toward foreign affairs. “In the next few months Europe and Asia will be reformed,” it claimed, “Our decision will not only affect American lives but help determine the future of half the human race. It is an immense responsibility.”\(^8\) For an average *Life* magazine reader, this article provided a completely new framework for viewing the United States and its relationship with the rest of the world.

Legitimate concerns about the postwar production economy took center stage in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War in 1945. That July, an editorial expressed apprehension about inflation or the possibility of deflation. “Americans know what kind of economy they want,” it intoned, “a free, expanding, capitalistic, competitive economy, which shall, however, provide more security for the individual and be proof against mass unemployment.”\(^9\) But a massive wave of labor strikes belied this optimistic outlook and dominated the news. “With the end of war production came the end of full employment,” another article reported. It continued in dramatic fashion, “In Detroit, San Francisco, Kansas City—across all the land in the big and little shipyards and factories where victory had been forged and the war boom born—the machines stood idle.”\(^10\) Many unions took advantage of

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\(^7\) “The Meaning of Victory: What We Have Won is Clearer Goals and a New Chance to Work for Them,” *Life*, (August 27, 1945), 34.

\(^8\) “The State Department: Instead of Another Face Lifting, Now is the Time for a Change of Habits,” *LIFE*, (September 3, 1945), 28.


the end of the war and the end of the no-strike policy to agitate for better working conditions.11

*Life* also reflected America’s concern about its uneasy alliance with Russia at the war’s close. An editorial articulated the prevailing feeling when it commented, “Russia is the No. 1 problem for America because it is the only country in the world with the dynamic power to challenge our own conceptions of truth, justice and the good life.” This editorial reflected the puzzlement of most Americans in how to deal with a former ally quickly becoming a new threat. Fresh on the heels of the lessons of appeasement, some Americans desired to combat their fear of Russia with force. But the editor concluded, “we have an opportunity to remove that fear by a counter-policy of good deeds, using our position to act as ‘honest broker’ to persuade traditionally imperialist countries to relax their grip—in India, in the Near East, in the East Indies, in China.” 12 Yet if such an outlook represents the genesis of America’s concept of a Cold War, the military mindset remained hard to shake. After dropping the first atomic bomb in the history of the world, another editorial noted, “If it isn’t Japan that will hit us, it will be someone else. The future cannot be ducked or dodged by any attempt to make the world eternally safe for a soft and powerless and negligent U.S. And the American people must be persuaded to maintain their power, not treated as children who can’t be trusted to think straight in 1950.”13 Striking a balance between America’s role as a peacemaker and its role as militant defender would continue to be difficult.

12 “America and Russia: To Equal the Communist Talent for Persuasion We Must Develop Persuasiveness of Our Own,” *Life*, (July 30, 1945), 20.
An article in the December 1945 issue of *Life* specifically addressed ‘U.S. Normalcy.’ Its author conveyed the yearning to recover a lost status quo as well as the impossibility of that task, writing “in their hearts the people knew that this time they could not escape the great world. Beneath their urge to normalcy was a foreboding, an uneasy resignation to what seemed inevitable fate.” What disturbed people most was that end of the war brought chaos instead of the peace and “ordered world” they had anticipated and desired. Veterans experienced difficulty in merging back into their pre-war lives, and juvenile delinquency shot up as much as one hundred percent, apparently due to parental neglect. Americans sought to deal with their unease by attending church more regularly, the article noted.14

Heightened racial awareness, carried by black and white veterans returning home, also contributed to America’s unease about a return to “normalcy.” If white southerners wanted a return to Jim Crow, African Americans wanted to seize the moment to expand on the wartime push for civil rights. The results were schizophrenic. The Ku Klux Klan staged a comeback in Georgia and recruited many new members across the nation to its racially white purist vendetta.15 The white editors at *Life* attempted to address the ‘negro problem.’ Finding that the main problem was rooted in economics, editors argued the way to resolve it would be to provide equal economic opportunity for black Americans. Worried over the possibility of dissatisfied African American aligning themselves with a more radical agenda, as they had in the 1930s and 1940s, *Life* solicited a piece from Jackie Robinson. The sports

star argued that the majority of Black Americans would not support the communist agenda and invoked their pride as Americans to explain why.\textsuperscript{16}

By 1949, \textit{Life} also assisted the articulation of the nation’s perspective on atomic weapons, their use, and the role of America as initiator and early monopoly–holder of this powerful technology. As the government painted its sole possession of nuclear arms in a very benevolent color, \textit{Life} editors quoted Chairman David E. Lilienthal of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) as saying “the essential ingredient of democracy is not doctrine but intelligence, not authority but reason, not cynicism but faith in man, faith in God.” Religion is what set America apart from the Communists. By extension, Lilienthal implied that only a Christian nation could exercise restraint and responsibility in order to avoid atomic catastrophe. He continued, “our strength lies in the fearless and untiring pursuit of truth by the minds of men who are free.”\textsuperscript{17} Keeping in mind that Americans had just learned of the Soviet Union’s explosion of their first atomic bomb, thereby ending their atomic monopoly, \textit{Life} provided reassurance by portraying the nation’s leaders with an optimistic perspective and claiming the moral high ground with regard to their obligation to the free world.

A year later, \textit{Life} magazine continued to evaluate America’s position in the world. Interestingly, its editors often invoked religious terminology to buttress their perspective. For example, they referred to American business and economic expansion into the global market as ‘The Great Reformation’ and continued to espouse America’s job as the guardian


\textsuperscript{17} “Bomb to Bomb’: So Stand the Great Antagonists, But Man is Still Master of All,” \textit{Life} (October 3, 1949), 22.
of the free world. Furthermore, the treatment and understanding of the momentous postwar events laid the framework for comprehending how the magazine would rely on religion in the 1950s to continue to explain America’s changing culture.

To begin, the religious groups that *Life* covered and how they portrayed them, mattered in terms of building consensus. *Life* often featured headlines and short stories exhibiting the unusual aspects of religion. For example, a story detailing the jailing of fifteen ‘fundamentalists’ in Utah because of polygamy, appeared in the July 1945 issue, accompanied by a short story about faith healers, particularly those using snakes, on the additional pages. Similarly, a story centering on the Shakers and the dying out of this particular sect revealed *Life*’s less than congratulatory treatment of the religious fringes. The magazine treated these anomalies as more of a freak show than a form of religion to take seriously. The purpose was to both reflect the growing desire for unity and the lessening of differences within the American Christians churches and to influence the formation of a more unified front against the common enemy of communism.

*Life* adopted various levels of empathy when covering religious individuals. Certainly, the magazine featured specific individuals because of their uniqueness or their reliance on unusual methods, but the magazine also picked both the fanatics and those with more admirable traits to which arouse readers’ interest. For example, a portrait of Robert G. LeTourneau, the world’s largest manufacturer of earth-moving equipment, treated him as an off-the-wall lay preacher industrialist, or as a bit of a character. Adopting a tongue-in-cheek attitude, another story contrasted ‘Prophet Jones,’ a popular black minister in Detroit and his

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gospel message with his extravagant lifestyle. But *Life* also reserved at least tacit admiration for many of its featured religious individuals. In “Walkin’ Preacher of the Ozarks,” *Life* detailed the preacher’s life of service as he walked all over the hills to reach and teach the people who lived there. The popular magazine displayed many features pertaining to religious art and various artists with religious themes as well. Notably, these features usually coincided with the major Christian holidays of Easter in the spring and Christmas in late December. In this manner, *Life* continued to build Cold War consensus through the solidifying of America’s brand of Christianity.

Indeed, certain religious events in the timeline of American history warranted *Life*’s—and by extension its readers’—attention. Occasionally, the unconventional and strange appeared in this category of articles, but on the whole, *Life* tended to report the momentous gatherings of Christians or other widespread religious groups. For example, *Life* reported on five different Protestant church groups that put aside their differences and formed a unified Christian church in India. Often, these gatherings made for an impressive display of unity. Likewise, they might represent a founding moment that set a new course for an old group. Sometimes the magazine’s religious references remained secondary, as in the myriad of articles concerning the death of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. But regardless of the actual headlines of the various religious happenings in the United States *Life* weighed in on the nature, outcome, and perspective of these events.

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22 “Church Union in South India,” *Life*, (December 1, 1947), 63-68.

A frequent mention of religious news in *Life* magazine revolved around key appointments in the Catholic Church. Four Americans became Cardinals in May 1946, giving Americans five places in the Catholic College of Cardinals. Perhaps reflective of the nation’s new role on the world stage, this was also the first time any non-Italians had held the majority in the College in over six decades and *Life* heralded the deliberate show of unity by the Pope and the Cardinals.24 These reports indicated both the magazine and the broader public’s interest in seeing the leadership of the major denominations work together to lead the Christian world’s fight against communism.

Just as the United States struggled for unity, so too did the Church, and *Life* covered this as well. A May 1948 issue highlighted the gathering of 136 different churches’ delegates for the initial meeting of the World Council of Churches. Realizing a “weakness of disunity,” the delegates formed the World Council to focus on cooperative projects, such as reconstructing many of Europe’s ruined churches.25 But the Church also resisted being drawn into the bi-polar world of Cold War politics. In a follow-up story after the convention, *Life* reported criticism of both communism and capitalism. The United States delegate to the UN, John Foster Dulles, led the debate against the materialistic and atheistic nature of communism. Similarly, an October 1949 issue highlighted the march of the Episcopalians in San Francisco to clarify points of church doctrine and solidify the church’s stand to fight communism by rooting out its social contaminants. Even so, the World Council concluded, “the Christian Church should reject the ideologies of both Communism and laissez-faire capitalism and should seek to draw men away from the false assumption that these extremes

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are the only alternatives. Each has made promises which it could not redeem.”\(^{26}\) It seemed the *Life* editors were not necessarily being purely objective, but instead sought the use of ‘debate’ in order to build consensus. After all, the promotion of democracy involved the free exchange of ideas. Nevertheless, the articles articulating the coverage of the World Council gave more coverage to the Church’s denunciation of communism than to its criticism of capitalism.

*Life* also detailed key events such as the agitation by Jews for land in the Palestine region. A November 26, 1945 article featured a march by orthodox rabbis on the nation’s capital in order to petition for the admission of 10,000 Jews into Palestine. Another article exhibited a “light-skinned Dr. Bunche – grandson of an African slave” with the title “A U.S. Negro Makes Peace in Holy Land.”\(^{27}\) It demonstrated America’s favorable support of the Zionist movement as American ambassadors to the United Nations took up the cause for a Jewish homeland. *Life* put an intriguing spin on the story as it subtly tied together the connection of desiring freedom between the survivors of slavery in America and the survivors of the Holocaust in Europe. Another motivation might have been at work in this *Life* article about Dr. Bunche. America was experiencing racial turmoil at home, so it is likely this incorporation of a ‘token’ African American in the high circles of foreign policy attempted to assuage a degree of racial tension.\(^{28}\)

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\(^{28}\) For examples of how the federal government attempted to side-step the issue of racial turmoil at home by sending African Americans abroad in the Cold War world, see Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 27-57.
Yet *Life* retained a significantly secular approach to much of its coverage of religious events. While the publication obviously approved of the church’s various attempts at forming a united front against communism, it continued to reserve a degree of derision for many of the eccentric religious events that transpired in the United States. This stance stood in direct contrast with its more flattering coverage of ‘acceptable’ and more mainstream forms of religion, as exhibited in an article praising the virtues of a quiet, Christian Missouri town.  

In another article entitled, “Church Dancers: Girls Interpret hymns and psalms for a New England Congregation,” a reporter discusses a town’s initial frowning upon dancing. Eventually, residents resolved that dancing was permissible because Biblical study indicated “their original Christian purpose: to dance while singing.” Editors also casually inserted a comment below a photograph: “‘I shall be lifted up above mine enemies’ is shown as Noradel rises. The costumes are bought with money from square dances in church basement.” While this ending could be attributed to journalistic flair, *Life* articles addressing specific church events not related to church unity consistently underscored religious hypocrisy. In addition, this particular article may have been an effort to appease the youth of this church in order to waylay more evidence of juvenile delinquency. By sanctioning youth centered activities in the Church, *Life* praised the teens’ outlet of energy and encouraged America’s youth to stay out of trouble. In a similar example, an article appeared in the April1948 edition that detailed the story of the clergy in a small town in Iowa fighting the placement of a movie theatre in town. The author described the leader of the

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fight against the renewal of the theater’s license: “Reverend B.J. Haan, a hellfire and brimstone preacher, does not claim to have seen any movies but says he knows all about them. He approves light drinking, smokes, plays golf himself.” In this moment, the magazine’s secular stance trumps all else. More broadly, the editors of *Life* walked a fine line when dealing with religion. On the one hand, they praised and encouraged the Church’s unity in order to form Christian consensus against Communism. On the other, they demonstrated a broader sentiment of frustration with the evident hypocrisy of the Church. In reality, *Life* reserved its criticism for the backward and anti-modern portions of the Church that, in essence, defied the very nature of a unified American Christian ethos that Americans employed as a powerful Cold War weapon.

Providing commentary on the changing nature of society in a postwar culture, *Life* often highlighted the growth in church populations. Mixing religion and art, it also featured a story about a Trappist Monastery in Kentucky that became the setting for Thomas Merton’s surprising best-seller, *The Seven Story Mountain*. Merton’s “strange and sometimes tortuous book” outlined his life as a young Catholic convert who lived in enforced-silence at a monastery. If the article registered astonishment at the popularity of this obscure personal narrative, it also tacitly recognized that the story would resonate with many Americans and attempted to render legible the undercurrent of this Trappist lifestyle that many readers found fascinating. This article differed from the earlier ‘freak show’ exhibitions in that it acknowledged the popularity of this book and ventured to understand the larger cultural implications. The stories of the fringe Church sects held entertainment value, but failed to

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33 “Trappist Monastery,” *Life*, (May 23, 1949), 85, 88
capture the American imagination to the extent Merton’s autobiography had. Nevertheless, the way the author endeavored to put these two seemingly dissimilar pieces together demonstrated the desire to explain why a portion of postwar culture sought solace in deeper forms of religion.

Overall, *Life* treated the push for increased Christian unity within the Church in a favorable manner. It demonstrated the nation’s desire to be a world leader in more than just military, ideological, and economical ways. America also preferred to rise as the world’s moral compass through its consolidation and propagation of the Christian faith. At the same time, *Life*’s more dismal treatment of some of the religious events inside the United States in the postwar years illustrated the degree to which much of American society grudgingly tolerated fringe groups or backward leaders without affording them much respect.

*Life* also addressed the complexities of Christian faith in America on a regular basis, particularly during celebratory Christian holidays of Easter and Christmas. A 1945 editorial pinpointed secularism, not differences in creeds, as the main enemy of Christianity. Not surprisingly, it called for a merging of Protestants and Catholics in order to defend against encroaching secularism, a precursor to the threat of communism. A particularly compelling article, written by the eminent theologian Harry Fosdick, investigated the “sentimentalizing of Jesus,” both its origin and its impact in more recent years. According to Fosdick, this figure of Jesus and His mission paralleled that of the United States. He posited the Son of God not as “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild” with a loving but delicate presence, but as a strong leader and Reformer of early Christian perceptions.34 Fosdick sees the perception of Jesus,

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throughout the history of the Church, as socially conditioned. The Church created this mild and meek picture of Christ in order to establish the Church, not Jesus as the voice of authority. But the theologian traced the more modern image of Christ as a strong leader and reformer as reflecting the larger society’s desire for a powerful and decisive secular leader in a Cold War world.

In an Easter editorial, the writer considered the reasons for prayer, observing that “spurred by reason, fear, or today’s headlines, large numbers of Americans are rediscovering an old truth: mankind cannot live by bread alone. Scientists, philosophers, and ordinary men are arguing themselves into a position which might be called the Limbo of Faith in Faith. But it is not the same thing as Faith in God.” He concluded by asserting that a Christian’s faith in prayer gave them more certainty about right and wrong, writing, “no world-made trouble, not even today’s, can resist the moral analysis of Christian prayer. It is a thought for all who are troubled, including statesmen.” This particular article acknowledges that despite its confirmed global leader status, America remained uneasy about a ‘return to normalcy’ and what that entailed.

Another Easter reflection, this one in 1947, revealed that church attendance reached an all-time high in the United States. The editor was of the opinion that “materialism and science worship are in full retreat” but cautioned against what religion is not, writing, “there are indeed as many dangers as there are comforts in true religion…our age, if it is to be a religious age, must be also an age of rediscovery.” In an interesting comparison, Life linked the birth and growth of the Methodist church in America to the foundations of the

nation itself and commented on the role of the Methodists in the development of America’s character. An editorial in the same issue reiterated the reason for this investigation “as a natural consequence of America’s new power in the world, there is a new interest (both abroad and at home) in the study of American history, the American character, and the nature of American civilization.” The editor considered the Methodist Church America’s “most characteristic church” because it is “short on theology, “long on good works, brilliantly organized, primarily middle-class, frequently bigoted, incurably optimistic, zealously missionary, and touchingly confident of the essential goodness of the man next door.” As much as it contrasted American religions, this statement tacitly acknowledged disunity between denominations, but managed to communicate a feeling of pride as characteristically America. A powerful statement that blurred the lines between America and its bedrock of faith, this writer provided a summation for the changes in religion in America as a way to explain fundamental changes in American culture.

Outside of the United States, Life seemed to take a genuine interest in various cultures and religions. Yet it also treated stories about these different forms of religion, much of them non-Christian, in a decidedly diminutive fashion. Life’s most popular reference to the religious practices in India, the Pacific Islands including Japan, and other parts of the globe, invoked timeworn colonist language, relying on adjectives like “barbarous,” “savage,” “primitive,” or simply “strange.” The only non-Christian person of faith who found himself treated with veneration was Mahatmas Ghandi. The Life editors hailed Ghandi’s

38 “The Methodists: Their History, Virtues, Weaknesses and Even Theology are a Key to Understanding America,” Life, (November 10, 1947), 38.
death with a sincere tribute to his marriage of faith and non-violent political action into a potent push for peace.\textsuperscript{40} Ghandi’s Hindu faith could be overlooked by Christian Americans because of his dedication to human rights. In addition, the publication’s approving treatment of Ghandi contained elements of admiration for his use of democratic progress as the means for accomplishing his political exhortations for peace. \textit{Life} avoided discussing the more controversial points of Ghandi’s life, which included his desire to push the British out of India. This select praise of the democratic overtones of Ghandi’s life and muting of the more controversial aspects illuminated America’s determination to tout the values of democracy, regardless of staying true to the context of the situation.

Meanwhile, the magazine invested much authority in the leadership of the Pope and his lieutenants in the Catholic Church as they strove to rebuild a war-torn and divided Europe. \textit{Life} highlighted the humanitarian work of the Catholic Church in a number of articles, such as one about “Modern Magdalenes” living in a convent near Paris that “turns prostitutes and thieves into nuns.”\textsuperscript{41} Just as it encouraged the American Church’s unified stance against communism, \textit{Life} supported it counterparts outside of the United States in their effort to withstand communism’s assault. In particular, a \textit{Life} writer hailed the Archbishop Josef Beran of Prague in his stalwart refusal to bend to communist plans to separate the Catholic Church from its hub in Rome. The author framed Beran as “the central figure in the basic struggle of modern times: that of Christianity against communism.”\textsuperscript{42} Such a deliberate and reductionist portrayal of communism vs. Christianity illustrated the degree to which Americans saw Christianity and democracy as twin saviors of the world.

\textsuperscript{40} “Ghandi: He Changed World History, yet his Power was not of this World,” \textit{Life}, (February 9, 1948), 32.
\textsuperscript{41} “Modern Magdalenes,” \textit{Life}, (April 8, 1946), 45-46.
Other humanitarian work hailed by the magazine included Christian missionary journeys to “primitive natives” in countries such as the then Belgian Congo in order to both Christianize and civilize the nations.\(^{43}\) The connection between the Christian faith, American values, and the provision of medicine and education within the context of ‘civilizing’ the nations deemed archaic by American standards should not be overlooked. Nor was it necessarily new. Much of the justification for the United States’ earlier imperialist moments had relied on the marriage of Christianity and civilization.\(^{44}\) The escalating Cold War reframed this dualism of bringing Christianity and civilization to the world as a battle for the hearts and minds of other nations in order to place them in the democratic sphere and outside of the grips of communism. This clear connection between America and its standard of civilization would provide a framework for America’s decisions in foreign and domestic policies for decades to come.

One of the most telling examples of this mantle of benevolence that the United States scrambled to adopt presented itself in *Life’s* series on the history of Western Civilization. Not incidentally, the series posited America as the central benefactor and the repository of all useful Western history. *Life* heralded the nation with the subtitle: “America is heir and hope of the West’s civilization.” The article reiterated the importance of a focus on studying America as the beneficiary of all Western tradition and specifically discussed the eras which “had a direct and dynamic effect on America.” The author passionately explained, “the reason for this is now more clear and urgent than ever. The culture which for centuries flowered so fairly in Europe is now, of necessity, being taken over and fostered by America,

the new land which Western civilization made and which today is that civilization’s great heir and hope.”⁴⁵ Tracing the history of Western culture and progress from the Age of Exploration, through the Middle Ages and Medieval times, to the Glory of Venice and the Protestant Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment, and Eighteenth century England, Life used the course of history to give resonance to the ideals and principles American now needed to fight to preserve. This gutsy claim corresponded to America’s new might and strength as a world superpower, but was only made possible because of Europe’s demotion in world power status due to the war.

On the heels of detonating the world’s first atomic bombs on Japan, America celebrated its military genius and might while trumpeting its newfound powers. As one editor remarked,

“the arrogance of sovereignty against which American revolted in 1776 seems stronger than ever in many parts of the world. Let us keep it still from American thoughts and American shores! Our nation is a great instrument for good, and power is safer in our hands than in most. But that will be so only while we remember that our nation and our sovereignty are not ends but instruments. The purpose of American strength is to promote liberty and self-government throughout the human race.”⁴⁶

Combining history and American principles, rooted in Christian beliefs and morals, as an appropriate rationale for assuming the leading role on the world stage, the editors promulgated a Cold War vision of Manifest Destiny. Yet reflecting a democracy’s ability to critique itself, Life never really ceased to question the character of America. It presented a round table discussion on the ‘pursuit of happiness’ which concluded that happiness resides within each individual person. By emphasizing individuality, the magazine underscored its

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contrast with totalitarian and communist systems. It also examined the various views on the
coloracter of America, and found a definite “break of continuity” between first generation
immigrants and their children.\textsuperscript{47} The nation’s ability to successfully integrate foreigners
stood as a further testament to democracy’s supremacy, despite the fact that its struggle to
integrate its black sons and daughters would only grow more difficult in the ensuing decades.

With regard to the social structure, \textit{Life} examined the difference between high-brow,
low-brow, and middle-brow categories. For example, it took a sociological view of a typical
American community, categorizing inhabitants of Rockford, Illinois as lower, middle, and
upper social classes.\textsuperscript{48} Author Russell Lynes wrote, “the whole U.S. social structure can
now be divided into these three types. Gone are the days…when class distinction was
determined by wealth, birth, or political eminence.” Lynes continued in a mildly derisive
tone, “true prestige belongs only to scientists, writers, critics, commentators, and thinkers of
global thoughts. We have a society of the intellectual elite, run by the high-brows.”\textsuperscript{49} All of
these attempts to reevaluate America’s character, structure, and values served to demonstrate
the need of the nation to affirm its prominent role in this new world order. If intellectuals
formed the vanguard, the middle and lower classes had equally important and loyal roles to
play in a Cold War world. In addition, much of the analysis invoked an upbeat and
optimistic attitude towards America’s leadership of the Western world. America found its
optimism though its bedrock principles of democratic morality.

Whether subtly or in an outspoken manner, the widely-read \textit{Life} magazine served to
gauge the changes in post war culture, especially through the lens of religion. It accentuated

\textsuperscript{47} See “A \textit{Life} Roundtable on The Pursuit of Happiness,” \textit{Life}, (July 12, 1948), 94-113; and Geoffrey Gorer,
the democratic elements of religion in order to bolster America’s new image as the legitimate
defender of Western civilization, history, and tradition. Religion and its influence on
American culture provided a useful method for the United States to rationalize its attitudes
and policies, both at home abroad. The medium of *Life* magazine, with its effective use of
simple, straightforward text and photography, enabled these abstract ideas to gain a concrete
position in the minds of postwar Americans.
CONCLUSION

What sort of role do visual and audio images play in history and culture? When recalling defining moments of the nation’s shared past, most people turn to images. The iconography of popular art, radio, and print media draws its power from the ability to evoke a collective memory. That power, in turn, reinforces the lasting appeal of the images themselves.

Clearly, the three mediums of popular art, radio, and print media have worked together as agents of cultural change. The Second World War provided the watershed and impetus for the changes Americans attempted to understand in the postwar years, including their country’s vastly different status in the world and their altered social and economic status within their own country. The war and its aftermath provided an ideal battleground for the tension between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ in society and religion, as evidenced in the forms of religious iconography that permeated American postwar culture. Intimately linked to changes in society, religion acted as a stabilizer that mediated the apprehension related to tides of transformation. The ‘old’ concepts of isolationism, economic depression, avoiding modernity, doctrinal divides, and secularity retained a degree of authority in postwar America. At the same time, they lost substantial ground to the ‘new’ ideas of global leadership, economic prosperity, embracing modernity and technology via the atomic age, and the Cold War. Christianity became a builder of Cold War consensus.

Employing cultural history enables historians to recognize new aspects within both religion and the era itself. As an artist, Norman Rockwell deliberately told a story of America’s everyman. As a radio host, Charles Fuller adopted an assuring tone in his voice to bring comfort during a time of tumultuous change. As a widely read publication, Life
magazine used its popularity to promote American democracy over communism. All three relied on a type of cultural imagery to decipher, influence, and, at times, manipulate popular culture. All three also used formal elements to foster unity as a way to respond to the multiple levels of change rippling across the nation.

Norman Rockwell intentionally depicted American unity though his expression of the American ideal. In a variety of ways, he portrayed what this America and its people looked like. His talent for telling this American story is evident because of the ways so many interpreted and strove to emulate his white, middle class, and gendered ideal. While the influence of religion remains muted in Rockwell’s overall themes, his subtle treatment of religion—the way he usually assumed a Protestant foundation—contributes to both the fashioning of a definition of the American archetype and its enduring influence in the national consciousness.

Charles Fuller bolstered American unity by linking a fundamentalist Christian message with modern technology. In so doing, Fuller managed to integrate the ‘old’ concepts Americans clung to with the ‘new’ concepts of modernity in such a way as to make his listeners comfortable with both. Broader responses to The Old Fashioned Revival Hour’s also demonstrate the push for American unity. In its attempts to regulate religious broadcasting, the FCC discouraged denominational programming while endorsing the more universal and nondenominational message of the mainline Christian Church.

Life also promoted American unity, especially in its articles and photographic essays and images concerning religion. The magazine spelled out the importance of presenting a unified front to deal with the significant changes around its readers’ neighborhood as well as around the world. However, Life treated the stories of religious events and individuals
outside of the accepted mainstream in much more unflattering light. The magazine explicitly pointed out the inherent hypocrisy evident in the particular person or group, thereby dismissing the fringe religious groups that avoided the push toward national unity as eccentric and unpalatable.

Relying on different mediums, Rockwell, Fuller, and *Life* functioned to enshrine unanimity as a primary response to tensions that grew out of a larger and more vague desire for a return to normalcy. All three privileged harmony within the nation’s borders in order to enable Americans to understand the new dialogues of the Cold War. In varying degrees, the three mediums also chose to shape their new dialogues through the language of religion.

Indeed, the longevity and breadth of Christianity in the United States acted as a powerful agent itself that generated unity in the postwar years. At home, religion became a tool of cultural translation, frequently used to define those events or individuals who defied unity as hypocritical or unorthodox in a decidedly negative way. In the battle for the hearts and minds of the world, religion facilitated agreement of America’s moral responsibility to spread democracy. When aligned with foreign policy positions, it also helped to define what constituted admirable progress.

Cultural iconography plays a significant role in interpreting and understanding the past. The inherent power of images, whether visual or audio, has increasingly influenced the way American society and culture interprets events in the country and the world. Historians must recognize the valuable tool that cultural iconography provides in the quest to more fully understand our history. Whether or not this influences their own interpretations of the past, historians cannot deny that artistic mediums and popular culture have helped the nation’s citizen negotiate change.
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