

# All My Sons by Arthur Miller

Historical background: America in WWII

A Presentation by Relli Zakheim

# America after the Great Depression



- In 1940, after 10 years of Depression, 9 million workers were out of work.
- Vast reservoirs of physical productive capacity also lay unused, including factories, heavy construction equipment, machine-tool stocks, electrical generating plants, trucks, locomotives, and railcars.
- As much as 50% of capacity stood idle in automobile manufacturing plants alone.

*(Freedom From Fear, Chapter 18 "The War of Machines", p617)*



# December 6, 1941: Pearl Harbor

The Japanese attack the American fleet  
in Hawaii



In 1942 America declares war to the  
Axe powers and Joins the Grand  
Alliance

In January 1942 Roosevelt told Congress:

“The superiority of the United Nations in  
munitions and ships must be overwhelming...a  
crushing superiority of equipment in any theater  
of the world war”

(*Freedom From Fear*, Chapter 18 “The War of  
Machines”, p. 618)

# The Selective Service System

(Frank “was always one year ahead of the draft. When they were calling boys twenty-seven Frank was just twenty-eight, when they made it twenty-eight he was just twenty-nine”) AMS, Act II, p. 79

## The Draft System



In 1940 the Selective Service Act had registered some 16 million men between the ages of 21 to 36.

Between 1940-1942 the age was extended from 18 to 65. However, the military wanted no men over 45 and strongly preferred to take only those under the age of 26. Contrary to much later mythology, the nation's young men did not step forward in unison to answer the trumpet's call.

The blacks represented 10.6% of the population but constituted less than 6% of the armed forces at the beginning of 1943.

Fathers and married men were untouchable down to early/end 1944.

(*Freedom From Fear*, Chapter 18 “The War of Machines”, p632-33)



# America: A consumer's paradise

## 1944 and after: The American Dream



In 1944, most Americans have never had it so good:

- They started half a million businesses.
- They went to movies and restaurants.
- They bought books, recordings, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, jewelry and liquor in record volumes.
- House-wives shopped at well-stocked supermarkets, 11,000 of them newly built during the war.

*(Freedom From Fear, Chapter 21 "The Cauldron of the Home Front")*

# How did the societal values change further to WWII?

## An American family in 1942



## The importance of the FAMILY

- Americans emphasized more strongly the primacy of family and children in their lives than in previous eras. The marriage rate, which dipped in the Depression years, rose rapidly in the war decade. In 1942 it reached the highest level since 1920.
- By war's end, a higher proportion of American women were married than at any time in the century, and women's median age at marriage has dipped to an historic low.
- In the immediate postwar years, the average number of children per household climbed from 2 to 3, as "Rosie" and her sisters abandoned work to become the mothers of the baby-boom generation, whose statistical origin actually dates from 1940.

(*Freedom From Fear*, Chapter 21 "The Cauldron of the Home Front")



# WAR, CAMARADERIE and RESPONSIBILITY



Battle of Okinawa

- **Benjamin Bradlee**, later editor of the *Washington Post*, spoke for many veterans when he remembered the war as

“more exciting, more meaningful than anything I have ever done... loved the camaraderie... the responsibility. The first time a man goes into battle, is strangely like the first time a man makes love with a woman. The anticipation is overpowering; the ignorance is obstructive; the fear of disgrace is consuming; and survival is triumphant.”

- WWII took men away from home, formed friendships, and shaped the arc of their lives ever after.

(*Freedom From Fear*, Chapter 20 “The battle for Northwest Europe”, p. 712-13)

# The disappointment of the veterans sent back home at the attitude of the American population

Our own mail came up to us in canvas bags, usually with the ammo and rations. On several occasions I actually had to bend over my letters and read as rapidly as possible to shield them from the torrents of rain before the ink was smeared across the soggy paper and the writing became illegible. Most of us received letters from family and civilian friends. But occasionally we received letters from old Company K buddies who had returned to the States. Their early letters expressed relief over being back with family or with "wine, women, and song." But later the letters often became disturbingly bitter and filled with disillusionment. Some expressed a desire to return if they could get back into the old battalion. Considering the dangers and hardships those men had been through before they were sent home, and considering our situation in front of Shuri, the attitudes of our buddies who had returned Stateside puzzled us. They expressed themselves in various ways, but the gist of their disillusionment was a feeling of alienation from everyone but their old comrades. Although there was gasoline and meat rationing back in the States, life was safe and easy. Plenty of people were ready to buy a Marine combat veteran wearing campaign ribbons and battle stars a drink or a beer anytime. But all the good life and luxury didn't seem to take the place of old friendships forged in combat.



There was talk of war profiteers and able-bodied men who got easy duty at the expense of others. Some letters said simply that folks back in the States “just don’t understand what the hell it’s all about, because they have had it so easy.” I heard more than one buddy express the opinion, as we sat in the mud, that civilians would “understand” if the Japanese or the Germans bombed an American city. Some men thought that would have been a good idea if no American civilians got killed, just scared. But nobody wanted it to be his hometown. It was hard to believe that some of our old friends who had wanted so much to return home actually were writing us that they thought of volunteering again for overseas duty. (Some actually did.) They had had enough of war, but they had greater difficulty adjusting to civilians or to comfortable Stateside military posts.

We were unable to understand their attitudes until we ourselves returned home and tried to comprehend people who griped because America wasn’t perfect, or their coffee wasn’t hot enough, or they had to stand in line and wait for a train or bus. Our buddies who had gone back had been greeted enthusiastically—as those of us who survived were received later on. But the folks back home didn’t, and in retrospect couldn’t have been expected to, understand what we had experienced, what in our minds seemed to set us apart forever from anyone who hadn’t been in combat.

(Sledge, E.B.. **With the Old Breed** (p. 268). Random House Publishing Group, 2007, Kindle Edition)

# THE WAR OF MACHINES

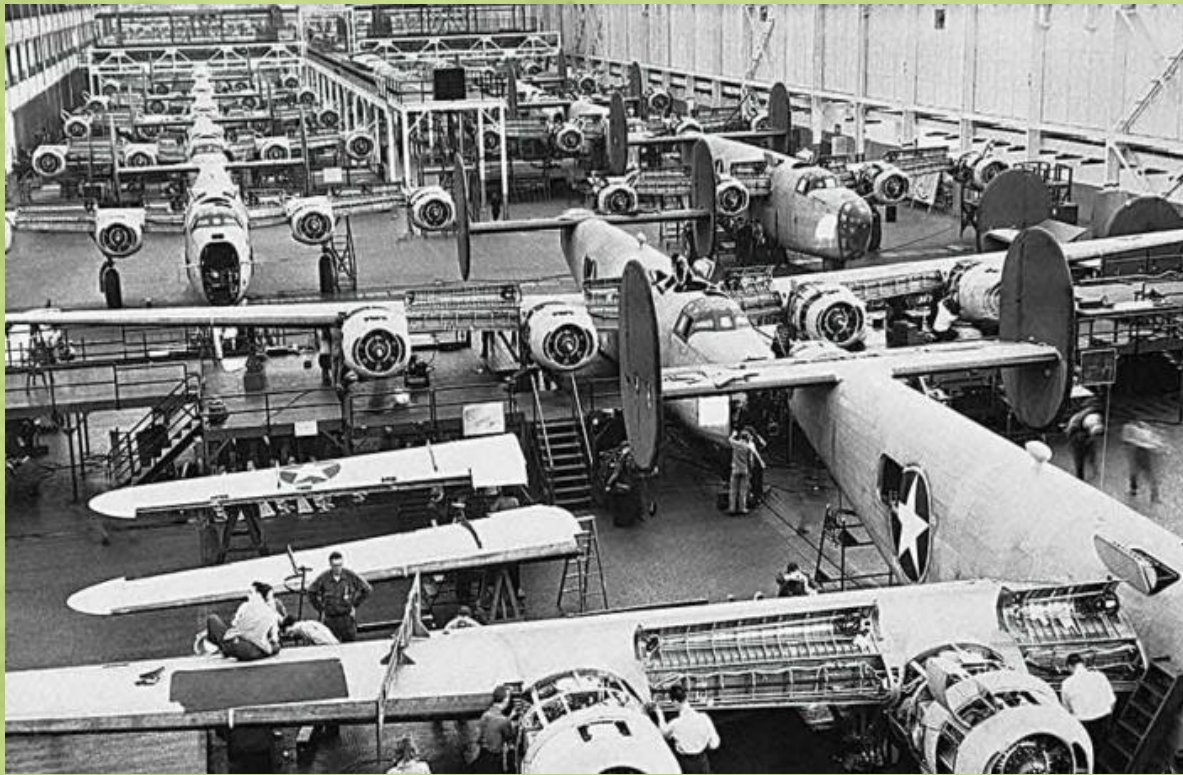
“Thanks to the dispensations of timing and geography, the United States could choose to fight a war of machines rather than men”. *David M. Kennedy*



# The Commercial-to-military war production

(George to Keller: "I saw your factory on the way from the station. It looks like General Motors".) AMS, Act II, p. 82

Ford's Willow Run Plant in Detroit, which at its peak in 1944 produced one B-24 an hour.



- In 1941 Ford's plant in Detroit starts producing B-24 bombers, followed by B-17 and B-29 "Superfortresses" that eventually delivered the two atomic bombs.
- General Motors led the largest war production effort in American history. In 1942, the company converted all factories to produce \$12 billion worth of airplanes, trucks, tanks, guns and shells for the military.

(*Freedom From Fear*, Chapter 18 "The War of Machines", p. 652-53)



# America becomes the world's super-power

## America in 1950



- The engines of the military economy roared on, pounding on by the war's end a fantastic statistical litany:
- 5,777 merchant ships; 1,556 naval vessels; 299,293 aircraft; 634,569 jeeps; 88,410 tanks; 11,000 chain saws; 2,383,311 trucks; 6.5 million rifles; 40 billion bullets
- 2 atomic bombs

*(Freedom From Fear, Chapter 18 "The War of Machines")*



# AMERICA: THE WAR OF MEN

**Ann:** "I said he's dead. I know! He crashed off the coast of China November twenty-fifth! His engine didn't fail him. But he died. I know..." AMS, Act III, p. 105

## The Burma Campaign, 1941-1945

(Mother: "...there was half a page about a man missing even longer than Larry and he turned up from Burma.")

Chris: "You can have a helluva time in Burma.") AMS, Act I, p 34



- In 1941 a retired US Army Air Corps colonel Claire Chennault had begun recruiting American pilots to help the Chinese in their fight against the Japanese occupation.
- He organized a group of volunteer pilots named AVG (American Volunteer Group), later called by the press the "Flying Tigers" because of the sharks' teeth painted on the noses of the P-40 aircraft they used to fly.
- The Americans fought along British and Indian forces.



# Curtiss P-40 Warhawk One of WWIIs most famous fighters

(Keller: "Larry never flew a P-40."

Chris: "So who flew those P-40s, pigs?") AMS, Act I, p. 40



- The **Curtiss P-40 Warhawk** is an American single-engined, single-seat, all-metal fighter and ground-attack aircraft that first flew in 1938.
- A total of 11,998 P-40s were built before production was finally terminated in 1944. Warhawks constituted the principal armament of the U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) fighter squadrons throughout 1942 and 1943. Even after the appearance of newer types of fighter aircraft in the USAAF rendered the P-40 obsolete, it continued to contribute to victory in a variety of Allied air forces.

<https://www.historynet.com/curtiss-p-40-warhawk-one-of-ww-iis-most-famous-fighters.htm>

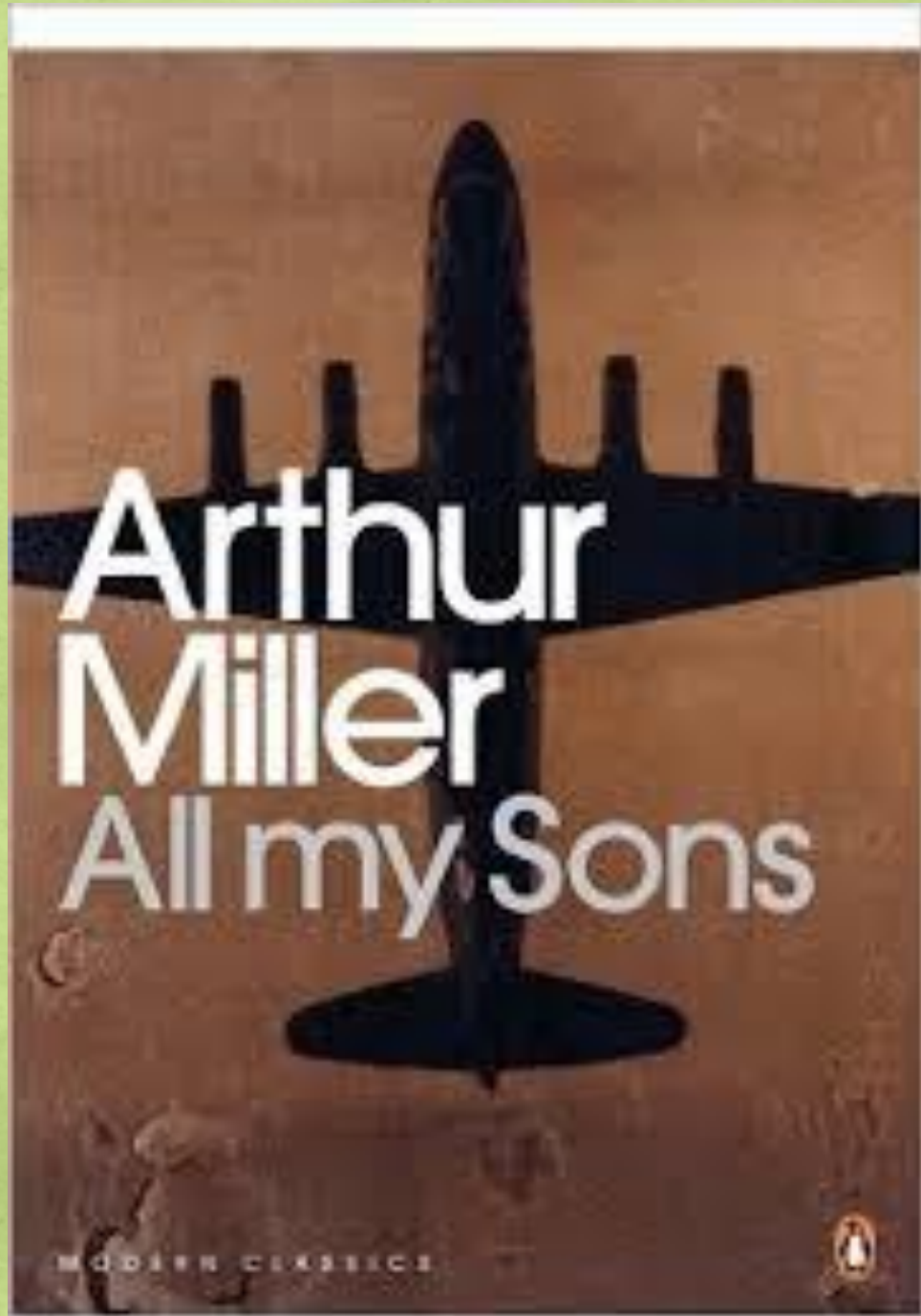
# Curtiss P-40 in Australia

(**Keller:** "The beast! I was the beast; the guy who sold cracked cylinders to the Army Air Force; the guy who made twenty-one P-40s' crash in Australia.") AMS, Act I, p. 38



- By May 1941 Tomahawks were also operating in the Middle East, eventually serving in that theater with Australian and South African fighter squadrons as well as the RAF.
- In addition, the British sent 195 Tomahawks to the Soviet Union after the Germans invaded that country on June 22, 1941.





Arthur  
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All my Sons

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