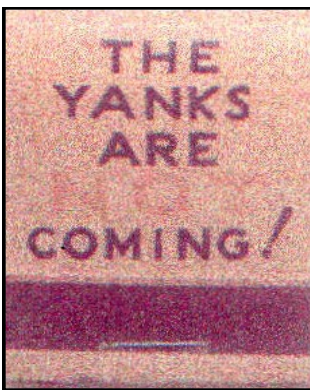


World War II: The

[World War II has always been a fascinating topic to me because of my inherent interest in history, but also because I was born five days after the war ended...I've always had the nagging feeling that I missed the greatest event of the twentieth century. And, it was such a vast event, with so many big and small facets, both here at home and abroad. That's always brought home to me when I page through my World War II Patriotic covers, for example. Recently, in doing so, I came across the cover pictured on the opposite page, and that got me to thinking about the subject once again]

THE SECOND WORLD WAR broke out as Adolf Hitler's Panzers rolled into Poland on September 1st, 1939. In the United States, there arose a mass movement of women outraged not by Hitler's atrocities, but by the inclination of the American government to aid those in peril. "What this country needs is an American revolution," declared Agnes Waters, one of their leaders. "A good old-fashioned revolution of mothers".

A confederation of groups coalesced, known as the Mothers' Movement. Most of the organizations had the word 'mother' in their title: the National Legion of Mothers of America, the National Blue Star Mothers, We the Mothers Mobilize for America. Like contemporary far-right militants, the Mothers were true believers, neither dupes nor hypocrites. The Mothers combined maternal rhetoric and anti-militarism, love of Jesus, and hatred of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. They had substantial clout by virtue of their numbers and fanaticism: they claimed 10 million members at their peak and in reality had five or six million. Moreover, they were part of an even larger non-interventionist movement. They made common cause with men of the extreme right such as Father Charles Coughlin, the Roman Catholic Detroit 'Radio Priest', notorious for his anti-Semitic, anti-Roosevelt ranting in a weekly radio program that was syndicated across America. Other notable leaders in this area included Gerald L. K. Smith; Col. Robert McCormick, the Anglophobe owner of the Chicago Tribune newspaper; isolationist senators Burton K. Wheeler, Gerald P. Nye, and Arthur H. Vandenberg, and Representatives Clare E. Hoffman and Hamilton Fish.



Upper-middle-class, college-educated, the Mothers were neither socially deprived nor impoverished. Rather, they were alienated and frightened, manipulated by demagogic leaders such as Agnes Waters, Elizabeth Dilling, and Lyril Clark Van Hyning, who were more fanatical than the rank and file. The leaders were ambitious, angry, energized, and charismatic. They were motivated by super-patriotism, love for sons and husbands who might be called to war, and virulent hatred of Communists and Roosevelt, as well as the Jews. Nor were they neutral about Hitler; they applauded the Nazi leader as a barrier to Communism.



The motivations of the leaders overlapped but were not identical, and the leaders had distinctive personalities, although commonalities existed in their world view. It was a world filled with plots and conspiracies.

The viciously anti-Semitic Waters, for example, became convinced that FDR wanted to rule the world as a communist dictator in league with Jews. Possibly a Jew himself, Waters alleged, Roosevelt was duping America into fighting Germany, the only nation capable of defeating Communism. Waters testified

Anti-War Movement

before Congressional committees to oppose repeal of the arms embargo, conscription, extension of the period of service of conscripts, Lend-Lease, the use of the Navy to convoy British vessels, and the admission of Jewish refugees to the United States.

Waters' invention of bizarre conspiracies confounds the aphorism that truth is stranger than fiction. Lacking a first-rate mind, she did possess a first-rate temper. Her speeches were volcanic eruptions overflowing with bigotry. Waters claimed that the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had invited Hitler to attack Britain so Chamberlain could raise taxes on the British. Anti-Semitism had always been present in America but the Great Depression, competition for jobs, and resentment of the wealthy aggravated it.

The godfather of American anti-Semitism was Henry Ford. He never emulated the gutter-level hate-spewing of Smith or Coughlin, but he encouraged those who did. Smith and Dilling were on his payroll. Ford's newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*, ran a series collected as “*The International Jew*”, which became a bible of anti-Semitism. A highly successful industrialist and one of the richest men in America, Ford evoked admiration because of his down-to-earth manners and financial and technical acumen. He was urged to speak out on other issues, such as the ‘Jewish question’, and his pronouncements were taken seriously.

In 1941, Curtis became chair of a group directing the largest, and originally the most moderate, of the women's anti-war groups, the National Legion of Mothers of America (NLMA). Founded in 1939 by three Los Angeles Mothers, financed and publicized by the press magnate, William Randolph Hearst, who hated Roosevelt, the NLMA had evolved by Pearl Harbor into an extremist organization. The Legion's movement reached millions of women. Its leader, novelist Kathleen Norris, was a conservative Republican who nonetheless crusaded for suffrage and Prohibition and against war and capital punishment. [Taken from *History Today*, Dec. 1999, by Glen Jeansonne]

Of course, all of the speeches, rabble-rousing, and anti-war efforts eventually came to naught in the face of the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, on the morning of December 7, 1941. With that event, much of the support that these groups had enjoyed vanished, literally in a single day.

That was six decades ago, and much has changed—enemies are now friends; friends are now enemies...and yet, one doesn't have to look very hard to see some disturbing similarities between the arguments of those earlier groups and the arguments of today's anti-war groups.—the same rabid personal attacks on the current President, the same “It's a Jewish conspiracy” announcements, the same predominance of a two-party split over a unified government. War is never a pretty sight, but it's unfortunately become a modern tradition that the really ugly aspects of war are now no longer on the battlefield ...but rather here at home.

[Full-book pictured on opposite page courtesy of Jim Spector, FL]

