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During the Second World War, the United States government collaborated with American publishers to provide servicemen with unprecedented access to reading material. Between 1943 and 1947, the Armed Services Editions project supplied 1,322 titles and nearly 123 million books in all genres, from classics to westerns. Using both primary and secondary sources, the following essay probes the interplay between culture and society, home front and theaters of war, as viewed through the lens of the Armed Services Editions. The project provides a case study, in short, through which to analyze what historians Carl Kaestle and Janice Radway call "print culture" between 1943 and 1947. The Armed Service Editions initiative reveals not only changes in modern book publishing and in modern book reading, but also documents larger trends in modern American culture, notably the ascendance of "middlebrow" culture during the second quarter of the twentieth century. Ultimately, the Armed Services Editions represent a valuable—yet often overlooked—chapter in American cultural history.

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Books and reading—United States—History—20th century.

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“AS POPULAR AS PIN-UP GIRLS”: THE ARMED SERVICES EDITIONS
AND AMERICAN PRINT CULTURE, 1943-1947

by
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Bundles of these books have been flown into the Anzio beachhead by plane. Others were passed out to the marines on Tarawa within a few days after the last remnant of Japanese opposition had been extinguished on that atoll. They have been dropped by parachute to outpost forces on lonely Pacific islands; issued in huge lots to the hospitals behind the combat areas in all points of the world; passed out to soldiers as they embarked on transports for overseas duty.

-*New York Times* (30 April 1944)

No man should have to walk more than a mile for a book.

-Lt. Col. Ray L. Trautman, Chief of the Library
Section of the Special Services Division (1944)

It has certainly put good literature on a democratic
(small 'd') level that it has never enjoyed before.

-Letter from an Army Air Corps
lieutenant stationed in India (1945)

I can't explain the emotional reaction that took place in this
dead heart of mine and dulled mind.

-Undated letter from a serviceman with malaria at Camp
Pendleton, California, referring to *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*

A tepid ooze of Midcult is spreading everywhere.

-Dwight Macdonald (1960)

Though historian David Kennedy characterizes the Second World War as a “War of Machines,” the war also hinged on ideas and on words—in short, on culture.¹ In May of 1943, as Allied forces inched closer to defeating Rommel’s Afrika Korps and his Italian allies in North Africa and as American forces swept the Japanese army from the Aleutian Islands, the United States expanded its offensive on just such a cultural front. A joint project of the Army, the Navy, the Office of War Information, and a committee appointed by the Council on Books in Wartime, the Armed Services Editions initiative called for publication of a monthly selection of books in a special pocket-sized format. In

his encyclopedic if ponderous history of the Army Library Service between 1940 and 1946, John A. Jamieson called the Armed Services Editions the Service's "outstanding" achievement, evincing organization and efficiency and affecting the most servicemen of any library initiative.² In four years, for that matter, Editions for the Armed Services, Inc. (the project's corporate name), disseminated 1,322 titles and a total of 122,951,031 books. More important, it constitutes an important—and often neglected—chapter in the history of the book, in the history of publishing, and in the history of middlebrow culture.

Scholarship on the Armed Services Editions since their final contract petered out in the fall of 1947 has been desultory, not to say overly triumphal and insufficiently nuanced. The effusive Jamieson, for instance, called the Armed Services Editions, "one of the most efficiently planned and best-coordinated production programs of the entire war" in his 1950 study.³ Such books, in fact, appealed to "nearly everyone who cared to read at all."⁴ Despite this catholicity of choice, Jamieson noted the lingering influence of the genteel tradition, as final selections "doubtless went a little against [the Advisory Committee's] idea of what book publishing was for."⁵ But on the whole Jamieson framed the project narrowly: library service to American soldiers between 1940 and 1946, with some consideration of its antecedents. In other words, Jamieson failed to consider the ASE project in a larger social, political, and cultural context—perhaps inevitable given the early date at which he was writing.

Nearly a decade later, Frank L. Schick focused on the seeming apotheosis of the paperback book in the United States, noting: "Never before in the history of the printed book have so many readers simultaneously been offered such a variety of books at such a low price."⁶ Moreover, Schick assumed a nearly sycophantic approach, describing ASE

as “an example of creative coexistence between private ownership and public interest at a time of national emergency which found the book industry prepared to fill unselfishly a sudden need.”⁷ Schick thus ignored the publishing community’s quite tangible self-interest in the ASE project. Like Jamieson, finally, Schick confined his scope merely to the history of the book.

In two pieces in 1963 and 1964, meanwhile, Paul H. North, Jr. framed the Armed Services Editions as an “interesting problem” for bibliographers and bibliophiles alike, largely because by the early 1960s such books were “almost as extinct as the passenger pigeon.”⁸ Notwithstanding the books’ putatively “unrivaled sentimental association” with wartime authors, the Armed Services Editions was the only series to reprint the books’ original dust-jackets.⁹ Similarly, only the Armed Services Editions offered both condensations and special compilations of major authors (e.g. modernists like Thomas Wolfe, Sherwood Anderson, and William Faulkner); in fact, such volumes were the only purely original work done in the series. Also in terms of rarity, by the 1960s the volumes issued between late 1945 and late 1947 were effectively impossible to obtain at any price and authors in these series included F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Wolfe.¹⁰ As such, North deemed the Armed Services Editions “incunabula of the America ‘paperback revolution.’”¹¹

In the later 1960s, William M. Leary, Jr. shifted focus, using the Armed Services Editions to explore the politically sensitive issue of censorship during the Second World War.¹² For his part, Leary found not the presence of censorship but its *lack* to be most compelling; as he put it, the armed services used its censorship powers “with great discretion.”¹³ Belying his claim, however, the Council (and thus the Armed Services

Editions) hewed to certain guidelines, among them to eschew any derogatory statements about American allies, any religious or racial groups, any trade or profession, or any sentiment not in accord with the “spirit of American democracy.” Most logically proscribed were any statements giving aid or comfort to the enemy or that were harmful to the U.S. war effort. As a whole, Leary’s argument is of questionable veracity; more problematically, he fails to link censorship to larger themes in the history of the book, the history of publishing, or the history of middlebrow culture.

Ten years after Leary’s piece, Charlotte Laughlin returned to the Armed Services Editions in a bibliophilic context à la North.¹⁴ Citing current nostalgia as well as the public’s increasing interest in collecting artifacts of popular culture, Laughlin focused on the books’ being “fairly rare.”¹⁵ Armed Services Editions became increasingly difficult to come by not only because of their original format premised on dispensability but also because of their original distribution pattern: with Series I in August of 1944, ASE management earmarked a larger percentage of books for general and station hospitals within the United States. Correspondingly, early editions remained much harder to track down. Therefore, whereas North emphasized the rarity of the *later* editions, Laughlin emphasized the rarity of the *earlier* editions; one might conclude, then, that *all* Armed Services Editions were rare by the late 1970s. Moreover, Laughlin speculates that the Editions “both shap[ed] and reflect[ed] the reading tastes of a large section fo [sic] the American public, but neglects to suggest how exactly this dialectic operated.”¹⁶ Similarly, a 1981 piece by George Bixby again focused almost wholly on the bibliographic, arguing that Armed Services Editions were “true” first editions because although their content

was mostly (if not all) reprinted, each book was in fact a new selection of the author's work, even if abridged.¹⁷

Piet Schreuders's 1981 monograph, meanwhile, "sketch[ed]...the *graphic* development of American paperbacks through the years"; thus his work pivoted around designers and artists of covers rather than authors, editors, printers, binders, distributors, and salesmen.¹⁸ Rounding out 1981, Max Wilk sought to "celebrate" the Armed Services Editions and to put them in their proper place in the larger sweep of publishing history.¹⁹ But Wilk consistently fell prey to overstatement, calling the Armed Services Editions initiative "one of the great altruistic movements in American publishing" and "a literary smorgasbord never before contemplated."²⁰ With similar verve, he overreached in arguing that ASE "looked like no books before or since" and that such books yielded a "mammoth" appetite for good literature among the American public.²¹

Ringed in the Armed Services Editions's fortieth anniversary, the Center of the Book sponsored a Library of Congress symposium 17 February 1983. The subsequent book (1984), edited by John Y. Cole, emphasized the importance of the Editions to the growth of the mass market paperback and the interest such books spawned in collectors. More intriguing, it touched (albeit briefly) on the government/publishing industry partnership and on how the books might have affected their myriad readers.²² Also in 1984, Kenneth C. Davis characterized ASE as "one of the most ambitious—and ultimately successful—combined military-civilian operations undertaken during the war."²³ Despite this tantalizing claim, Davis by and large focused on the ASE as an object lesson vis-à-vis the publishing industry: Americans would read millions of paperbacks if provided with the opportunity.

In the 1990s and beyond, the Armed Services Editions received scattered treatment. In 1996, for instance, University of Virginia student Daniel J. Miller mounted an exhibit entitled *Books Go To War: The Armed Services Editions in World War Two*, exploiting the university's robust collection of the Editions (1,310) and once again emphasizing the books' rarity as physical artifacts.²⁴ Finally, Christopher P. Loss's 2003 article focused for better and for worse on ideology and asserted—rather tenuously—that the Editions provided a “vital source of liberal democratic rejuvenation” for American soldiers, especially when juxtaposed both with fascism abroad and with memories of World War I propaganda at home.²⁵

Overall, scholars over the past sixty years have neglected to anticipate, much less to follow, the approach suggested by Robert Darnton in his watershed 1982 article, “What is the History of Books?”²⁶ Darnton framed the history of the book as the “social and cultural history of communication by print”; through an interdisciplinary (and if necessary, international approach), such an approach plumbs both how ideas are disseminated through print over time and how the printed word affects the thought and behavior of mankind over time.²⁷ Indeed, previous scholars of the Armed Services Editions seem to presuppose that the history of the book and of book publishing transpires in a vacuum. Therefore, the following analysis uses the Armed Services Editions as a lens through which to view not only the history of the book and the history of book publishing, but also a larger issue: the coalescence of American middlebrow culture. Fortunately, the Armed Services Editions initiative yielded a wealth of sources. On one hand, quantitative evidence provides a top-down perspective and shows where and when books were distributed; it also limns the objectives and predispositions of the

critics who made these selections. On the other hand, qualitative evidence from the bottom-up (admittedly self-selecting) comes from myriad servicemen's letters recounting their experiences with and reactions to the Editions.

Notwithstanding the Armed Services Editions's place in the history of the book and the history of book publishing, the project also played an important—and overlooked—role in what historian Joan Shelley Rubin characterizes as the ascension of middlebrow culture. Between 1917 and 1950, she highlights an “unprecedented” range of efforts to make literary and other high culture accessible to the general public. Rubin examines the artifacts such efforts produced, but not the reader responses to them. Furthermore, she focuses on cases with a critical presence and omits solely commercial ventures such as *Readers Digest*. In contrast, the Armed Services Editions offer the possibility of gauging (to some degree) reader response to such middlebrow fodder. Similarly, like Rubin's case studies the ASE project was equipped with a tripartite critical presence (Advisory Committee, Army representative, Navy representative); at the same time, it was neither a purely commercial undertaking nor a purely altruistic undertaking—rather, it represented an unprecedented commercial partnership between the publishing industry and the federal government.

In each of her cases, Rubin probes the definition of “cultured” person propagated by the endeavor as well as the vision of self inhering in reviews and commentaries of the case. Second, she analyzes the sense of role, purpose, and authority middlebrow writers showed. Similarly, she determines the meaning of the forms and of the content of such middlebrow projects. Finally, she observes the reactions of the avant-garde and academic critics and the nature of the advertisements for such products.²⁸ For instance, the Book of

the Month Club (established in 1926) allowed subscribers to receive books picked by a panel of judges. Second, John Erskine's "Great Books" program both fostered discussion groups and encouraged the reading of the texts themselves. Third, numerous colleges and universities offered extension courses in the humanities and in other disciplines, some of whose contact was provided via radio; radio broadcasting, for its part, allowed literary critics to reach a mass audience—literally infiltrating the American living room. Meanwhile, the conventional print world nurtured innovations such as the New York *Herald Tribune's* Books section, the *Saturday Review of Literature*, and "outlines" and other simplifications of sources promising specialized learning. Older institutions joined the groundswell: correspondence course, night schools, women's study clubs, and lecture circuit speeches proliferated, while public libraries revamped their catalogs, opened their shelves, and offered improved information services. By 1950, in fact, most if not all voluntary education earned the sobriquet of middlebrow.²⁹

The First World War seemed intellectually to augur a sharp break with the past, signaling an end to Victorian optimism, morality, and progress. Similarly, the rise of affordable mass amusements also seemed to stifle the genteel impulse. But as Rubin points out, the genteel tradition "survived and prospered, albeit in chastened and redirected form."³⁰ Surveying a society in transition and the tensions and conflicts that resulted, Rubin redraws the boundary between "high" and "low" culture. Second, she assesses the fate of what Santayana called the genteel tradition.

Rubin evinces ambivalence with respect to the genteel tradition. At best, genteel critics favored engagement with and thus the wholeness putatively derived from the "best" cultural products. Such a "wholeness"—undergirded by a vision of aesthetic

sensitivity—Rubin argues, seems preferable to what she characterizes as the current culture of fragmentation and “personality.” Similarly, Rubin evinces mixed feelings about the middlebrow critics themselves. On one hand, they presumably put forth more books to more readers, thus validating the cultural imperative of democracy. In this sense, their efforts to court intelligent readers like patrons of the Book of the Month Club or of “Great Books” fulfilled legitimate needs. On the other hand, middlebrow critics bear responsibility for abdicating their role to sustain aesthetic standards and thereby (at least ideally) to promote an experience of deeper humanity to their audience.³¹ In much the same way, Janice Radway strikes an ambivalent note about the Book of the Month Club, noting that “Middlebrow culture may have prepared its subjects to take up a particular social position and to enact a specific social role, yet it may also have attempted to endow them with capacities to withstand the emotional costs of doing just that.”³² As a quintessential middlebrow product, the Armed Services Editions offer a testing ground on which to examine Rubin’s and Radway’s claims.

Taking a broad survey approach, historians Carl Kaestle and Janice Radway characterize the period between 1880 and 1940 as one of “Print in Motion.” In other words, “between 1880 and 1940 the production, distribution, and consumption of print was so pervasive a part of daily life in the United States that it became the habitual arena for the achievement of all sorts of purposes, from business to religion, from leisure to organizational life.”³³ In effect, the printed word became “the sine qua non of influence and organization”; middlebrow, meanwhile, helped it to thrive.³⁴ As one index, illiteracy among those over ten years of age improved from 7.7% in 1910 to 4.3% in 1930 to 2.9%

in 1940. Similarly, the number of books increased twice as fast as the population and the number of higher education institutions jumped from 811 (and a total enrollment of 115,817) in 1880 to 1,706 in 1940 (with a total enrollment of 1,494,203). In short, “By 1940...the United States had become a nation of readers” both at work and at home.³⁵

Larger forces underpinned this metamorphosis. Between 1880 and 1940, print forms and institutions grew both more tightly integrated and more nationally-oriented, not least because of the apotheosis of consumer culture. As such, they reached larger audiences through economies of scale and speed. Still, smaller and more narrowly-focused local print cultures continued to thrive.³⁶ In this vein, competing parties tried to broaden and to diversify literary training and education, exploiting mass production technology to shatter the traditional genteel linkage between books and elites.³⁷ Broadly speaking, the publishing industry was “profoundly affected by the economic, social, and cultural forces that transformed every aspect of American life between 1880 and 1940.”³⁸

More specifically, declining prices and increasing access spurred *both* a more shared and a more diverse culture.³⁹ In this vein, as Radway notes, “The middlebrow was formed...as a category, by processes of literary and cultural mixing whereby forms and values associated with one form of cultural production were wed to forms and values usually connected with another”; as such, middlebrow’s “scandal” sprang from its refusal to maintain traditional boundaries.⁴⁰ By 1940, for example, copyright law, modern ad-driven magazines and newspapers, and the widespread adoption of advertising and public relations techniques yielded considerable change in literary commodities and the ways in which they marketed. All the same, “diversity persisted,” as various persons used the book trade for non-commercial purposes and readers themselves used books for their own

reasons.⁴¹ Indeed, “Many individuals read across brow levels, and many publishers sought ways to cross literary and class divides.”⁴² More broadly, the industry itself by 1940 was a “highly articulated system,” more varied than popular wisdom then recognized.⁴³ Still, the changes in print were neither as abrupt nor as structural as those affecting other media such as magazines and newspapers.⁴⁴

Despite the suspicion—if not outright antipathy—with which they were viewed by many American publishers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, paperbound books had a long and not undistinguished pedigree. As Kenneth Davis observes, “The history of American publishing was littered with the failures of paperback experiments of the past”; as early as 1829, in fact, the so-called American Library of Useful Knowledge made a brief and unsuccessful foray into soft covers.⁴⁵ Nearly a half century later, however, paperbacks made a more noticeable imprint on American publishing and in turn on American culture, as cheap ground-wood paper, popular interest in English and French novels, and the absence of an international copyright law made cheap reprints beguiling.⁴⁶ But with the advent of international copyright law 1891, the boom crashed.

During the next four decades, publishers made occasional attempts to resuscitate the paperback market. For example, Emanuel Haldeman-Julius established the Little Blue Books in 1919—effectively pamphlets, they sold for five or ten cents and enjoyed remarkable popularity. Charles Boni’s 1929 experiment with Boni Paper Books (featuring serious content and priced at fifty cents) met a less felicitous fate, as did Modern Age Books in 1937. Finally, teaming up with Richard Simon, Max Schuster, and their firm’s treasurer, Leon Shimkin, in 1939, Robert de Graff settled upon an adroit

strategy. Recognizing that the sine qua non to profitability was to reduce costs and to increase volume, de Graff trimmed the royalty provided to author and to original hardcover house, reduced the usual discount to dealers from forty to fifty percent to thirty-six percent for wholesalers and to twenty percent to booksellers, reduced production costs by borrowing the original publishers' plates, and cut each book's size to 4.25 inches by 6.5 inches. He used the new "perfect" binding (glue instead of stitching) and ramped up print runs to ten times that of the usual hardcover print run while settling for profits as lean as a half-cent per copy.⁴⁷ He also prioritized getting rights to *New York Times*'s bestsellers.

Unabridged and sold for twenty-five cents at venues ranging from drugstores to bus stations, Pocket Books met with "overnight and overwhelming success."⁴⁸ Featuring classics, currently popular novels, mysteries, and a "smattering" of nonfiction, humor, anthologies, and plays, Pocket Books "practically sold themselves."⁴⁹ Perhaps more important, they legitimated the paperback's status to publisher and public alike and finally rescued the paperback from the widespread opprobrium it elicited in the publishing world between 1880 and 1940. Finally, they provided a suitable model—as well as personnel like Philip Van Doren Stern—for the Armed Services Editions.

More specifically, scholar Patricia Travis focuses on the ways in which trade publishers accommodated themselves to modernity, thus paving the way for middlebrow culture's ascent. During the Gilded Age, for instance, the book was framed not merely as a commodity, largely because of the industry's heritage of artisanal republicanism. Common industry practices such as "trade courtesy" pivoted around "gentlemen's agreements" with respect to thorny issues such as piracy and luring authors away from

fellow firms. Though practiced inchoately, trade courtesy endured and helped to preserve the industry's relative decentralization and its lack of integration. Trial and error and custom remained other underpinning norms and publishers even took an obstinate pride in their profession's backwardness in the age of what historian Alan Trachtenberg calls the "Incorporation of America" and the process historian Robert Wiebe calls the "Search for Order."⁵⁰ Only gradually did publishers' suspicions about advertising and retail generally leach away.⁵¹

But by 1920, factors such as the collapse of the American Publishers Association, the founding of new houses willing to meld traditional respect for the book with new promotional techniques, the obdurate persistence of cheap books, and the growth in publishers' numbers of titles, advertising budgets, and overall revenue smoothed the transition to a "New Breed" of publisher instrumental in the promotion and dissemination of middlebrow culture. Of East Coast middle class origin, well-educated and often Jewish, these men committed both to material quality and to content quality and included among others, Alfred Knopf, Donald Brace, Alfred Harcourt, Horace Liveright, Albert and Charles Boni, Richard Simon, Max Schuster, John Farrar, Stanley Rinehart, Bennett Cerf, and Donald Klopfer—many of whom later assumed pivotal roles in the concretization of middlebrow culture as well as in the initiatives of the CBW and the ASE. They shepherded into being innovations like the Little Leather Library, the Modern Library, and "Outline" series and further undercut the stigma associated with publishing cheap reprints. Always cognizant of image, however, they also sought to spruce up the industry's public image by hiring adman non-pareil Edward Bernays to "educate" the public with respect to the book trade.⁵² As Janice Radway notes, given

new productive forces and new audiences, the 1920s proved a time of “extreme disarray” for the literary world.⁵³

Retained by the National Association of Book Publishers to perform a systematic analysis of the book publishing industry, the Irving Trust Company’s O.H. Cheney offered a mostly negative portrayal of industry business practices in 1931, albeit with a smattering of backhanded praise, e.g., “The book industry as a whole is not backward compared with any other industry as a whole.”⁵⁴ Cheney’s findings were unequivocal: 1) management and control methods in the industry were “generally inadequate”; 2) hazards and wastes were “unnecessarily high” in industry; 3) economic burdens were inequitably distributed through the industry’s various branches; 4) relations between these branches were in any case “unsound”; 5) the industry’s existing structure was “incapable” of handling reasonable volume profitably, but a new system was not currently possible; 6) the nation’s educational process creating new readers was weak at key points; and 7) the industry’s methods of promotion were “inadequately organized and planned.”⁵⁵ Record-keeping on the whole was inadequate and lack of valid statistics hindered efforts at amelioration. More pernicious, as Cheney adumbrated, the industry “asks for curiosity and it has none, except in gossip; it asks for systematic self-improvement, and has done so little for itself. It tries to sell self-knowledge and the spirit of research—but, generally, it knows little and has tried to find out less.”⁵⁶

But Cheney also stressed the potential for betterment, especially as the publishing world remained “little” business and thus intrinsically had more potential for change.⁵⁷ On a related note, most of Cheney’s prescriptions “involve no expenditure of money at all—simply the wise reallocation of past expenditures; a willingness to think and to work;

courage to face facts and to experiment.”⁵⁸ Unsurprisingly, he suggested that 1) management principles and methods be applied; 2) anti-waste efforts be implemented; 3) hazards be reduced; 4) the flow of money through the industry be accelerated; 5) programs for bettering inter-branch relations and trade practices be developed; 6) a method for redistributing profit burdens and opportunities be nurtured; 7) the distribution system be streamlined; 8) the forces “making” readers be stimulated; 9) a practical organization for developing markets be devised; and 10) a practical organization and similarly practical programs for promoting book-buying be developed.⁵⁹ He concluded with a warning: “But there is no escaping the truth that the industry will get progressively worse, progressively more wasteful, more difficult to make profitable and more filled with headaches and heartaches for most of those in it.”⁶⁰ Ironically, the Second World War and path-breaking projects like the Armed Services Editions the provided the stimulus for which the industry thirsted.

Whereas Cheney trained a lapidary eye on the machinations of the publishing industry, sociologist Robert Lynd and his sometime scholarly partner, Helen Lynd, trained an equally keen gaze on the reading habits of “average” Americans in their seminal surveys *Middletown* (1929) and *Middletown in Transition* (1937). By 1925, for instance, Middletown (Muncie, Indiana) residents had access to “a range and variety of reading matter unknown to [their] parents.”⁶¹ Even so, the purchasing of current books remained “almost entirely confined to a limited number of the business class.”⁶² But the Middletown Library told a more encouraging story about the democratization of reading—and the potential market for the New Breed of publishers. Juxtaposing statistics from 1893 with statistics from 1924, the Lynds found that the number of books

in the public library focusing on the “useful arts” had increased from ninety-one to 1,617, on fine arts from forty-five to 1,166, and on history from 348 to 2,867. Similarly, the number of biographies increased from 132 to 1,396, the number of books on sociology from 106 to 1,937, the number of science from 89 to 585. Literature titles, finally, increased from 164 to 2,777.

Furthermore, between 1903 and 1923 Middletown’s population less than doubled but adult library book reading quadrupled. More striking still, the number of books circulating during that twenty year period increased exponentially: in the “useful arts” (sixty-two times), in the fine arts (twenty-eight times), in philosophy/psychology (twenty-six times), in religion (eleven times), in sociology, economics, and related subjects (nine times), in history (eight times), in science (six times), and in fiction (less than four times).⁶³ Unsurprisingly, the Lynds concluded that “The significance of such a ceaseless torrent of printed matter in the process of diffusing new tools and habits of thought can scarcely be overstated,” for “As Middletown reads it is participating in other worlds, being subjected to other ways of living.”⁶⁴

Upon his return to Middletown in the mid-1930s, moreover, Lynd found that reading played a “relatively larger” part in leisure activities during the peak of Depression; he hypothesized that persons tended to read more books in bad times than in good ones (a suggestive conclusion vis-à-vis soldiers’ wartime reading).⁶⁵ In this vein, he noticed the “anodyne” function of fiction, as between 1929 and 1933 its circulation increased 163% (whereas nonfiction increased 72%).⁶⁶ By 1935 the Middletown Library had doubled its circulation from pre-Depression years. In Lynd’s judgment it was an “agency serving the people’s leisure, providing morale-building interests, vital

information, and...providing an indispensable check to local radical tendencies.”⁶⁷

Clearly myriad average American readers waited to be courted by the “New Breed” of American publisher and the newly available proliferation of print material, much of which emanated from thoroughly middlebrow endeavors. Through the offices of middlebrow culture and through the midwife of World War II, publishers and reader converged.

Notwithstanding the changes in publishing and in reading between 1880 and 1940, notions of culture themselves evolved—especially with respect to cultural hierarchy. Rooted in the specious “science” of phrenology, the notion of “highbrow” by the 1880s connoted gentility. By the turn of the century, “lowbrow” connoted its opposite. One of the first sustained intellectual treatments of the “highbrow”/“lowbrow” phenomenon, Van Wyck Brooks’s 1914 essay, “‘Highbrow’ and ‘Lowbrow,’” characterized the dichotomy between “highbrow” and “lowbrow” both as “quite American” and as “authentically our very own.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, Brooks lamented, “Desiccated culture at one end and stark utility at the other have created a deadlock in the American mind, and all our life drifts chaotically between the two extremes.”⁶⁹ Ironically, unlike many later critics who castigated the middle ground, Brooks called for a middle plane in which personality could release itself and find a niche “between vaporous idealism and self-interested practicality.”⁷⁰ Thus he exhorted Americans to find an *object* in living—not merely a reflexive penchant for vacuous self-assertion.

Nearly two decades later, Margaret Widdemer probed the very sort of “middle” for which Brooks had ostensibly called. For Widdemer, the reading public consisted of “[t]he club audience and its husbands.”⁷¹ More seriously, she characterized the reading

public as “the public that reads; the men and women, fairly civilized, fairly literate, who support the critics and lecturers and publishers by purchasing their wares.”⁷²

Unsurprisingly, despite its tendency to escape notice by the broader cultural sphere, the middlebrow novel “where minor and sometimes major if unacknowledged popular mores are kept...is always with us.”⁷³ Indeed, middlebrow readers remained ever vulnerable to being “cowed by the perfectionist critic.”⁷⁴ Widdemer picked up on a fundamental issue vis-à-vis culture and the popularity of middlebrow, as she noted that “The rules which in stable times carry the majority comfortably are off.”⁷⁵ As a result, middlebrow materials provided an important vehicle for prosaic reassurance in the face of rapid and often bewildering social and cultural change.

In 1942, Virginia Woolf underscored the potentially pejorative aspects accruing to the middlebrow. In an unsent letter, Woolf—at times rather tongue-in-cheek—delineated the relationship among highbrow, lowbrow, and middlebrow. Surveying the “Battle of the Brows,” Woolf defined the highbrow as one of “thoroughbred intelligence who rides his mind at a gallop across country in pursuit of an idea”; conversely, a lowbrow was one of “thoroughbred vitality who rides his body in pursuit of a living at a gallop across life.”⁷⁶ As highbrows remained “wholly incapable of dealing successfully with what is called real life” they depended upon their lowbrow brethren.⁷⁷ But popular wisdom, propagated by middlebrows, emphasized the antipathy between highbrow and lowbrow while as “go-betweens” and “busybodies” the middlebrow curried favor with both. But while the highbrow stayed aloof from the middlebrow’s allure, the lowbrow took the middlebrow—“this mixture of geniality sentimentally stuck together with a sticky slime of calf’s-foot jelly”—seriously.⁷⁸ Ultimately, the “true battle,” Woolf suggested, loomed

between highbrow and lowbrow, on one side, and the “bloodless and pernicious pest who comes between,” on the other.⁷⁹ Later cultural critics such as Clement Greenberg and Dwight Macdonald carried Wolf’s acerbic commentary to a new high of asperity with respect to the middlebrow. But no critic could have predicted just how crucial a role middlebrow culture played in wartime culture, especially in its cynosure, the Armed Services Editions.

When Random House bookman and sometime Council on Books in Wartime Director Bennett Cerf reflected on wartime publishing, he characterized the war years as “business as usual—in fact, more business than usual.”⁸⁰ Cerf recalled that gasoline rationing and military transportation requisitions made movement, even to the local movie theater, difficult. The U.S. Bureau of the Budget later concluded, “In World War II the United States faced the greatest administrative test since its founding.”⁸¹ As a result of the war, Cerf remembered, “people stayed home and read books, and the market expanded tremendously.”⁸² As he wrote to his partner, Donald Klopfer, in August of 1943 as the ASE plan was coalescing: “I find that business is sailing along at a terrific clip.”⁸³ Even more confident by the early spring of 1944, Cerf wrote to Klopfer that “Despite the taxes and high costs and all kinds of other worries, this business has gotten into such shape that it is virtually impregnable.”⁸⁴ In the armed forces, moreover, as the Commission on the Implications of Armed Services Education Programs noted, “Never before in history had such a vast program of education and information been made available to a comparable group of American citizens,” all of which focused on linking the soldier to familiar cultural facilities, buttressing his morale, and encouraging him to

develop the “sound philosophy of the citizen-soldier.”⁸⁵ Even so, as of 1944 only four of ten white G.I.s and fewer than two in ten African American G.I.s had completed high school. In fact, nearly a third of white soldiers and one-half of black soldiers had received no education beyond grade school.⁸⁶ Thus they proved ripe for adult education programs.

Historian John Tebbel characterizes the book trade in September of 1939, as German panzers overran Poland, as “surprisingly healthy.”⁸⁷ Surviving the Depression “far better” than most other industries, the publishing world benefited from its relative smallness (in some sense confirming Cheney’s verdict).⁸⁸ But as Cheney had discerned at the beginning of the decade, book buying and book reading remained “a long way from realizing their potentials.”⁸⁹ International turmoil in 1940 benefited American publishers: for instance, Penguin shifted the site of printing for many of their books from Great Britain to the United States and refugee publishers like Kurt Enoch of Germany injected new vigor into the American publishing industry. In keeping with such developments, 1940 total production levels increased nearly 6.5% from 1939 and stood at an unprecedented 11,328 titles. In particular, technical books shot up thirty-five percent and fiction twelve percent.⁹⁰

Despite these sales figures, a gap yawned between sales and costs in 1941. In addition to the cost of labor’s five-year increase (twenty percent), 1940 ushered in increased manufacturing costs (ten to twenty percent) and paper costs (fifteen percent). Thus, in 1941 publishers faced increasing financial exigency.⁹¹ Meanwhile, the United States mobilized her armed forces. In this vein, a pre-Pearl Harbor survey of thirty-one Army posts from Maine to California sought to probe soldiers’ reading tastes. Soldiers

overwhelmingly preferred short stories, detective novels, and light fiction; conversely, they jettisoned long books, old books, plays, and books on current political and sociological problems. About fifteen of every one hundred men finished a book every two weeks, seventy to eighty percent of which were fiction, namely detective novels, Westerns, or novels on contemporary American life.⁹²

In the spring of 1941, Grosset & Dunlap broke new ground as the first firm explicitly to promote books for soldiers. In a joint campaign with selected booksellers, the firm targeted servicemen's friends and relatives and encouraged them to send low-priced, popular books to the troops.⁹³ Other publishers found that war books, especially fiction, offered a potential "gold mine" and paperback sales throughout the year showed "tremendous growth."⁹⁴ In the wake of Pearl Harbor, moreover, the American public demonstrated an insatiable demand for maps, globes, and atlases.⁹⁵ As Tebbel concludes, pursuant to Pearl Harbor "There was going to be a great demand for books, as there had always been in wartime, and it was soon going to be impossible to meet it."⁹⁶ But in at least one way the industry was prepared to mobilize: merely 263 firms issued nearly seventy-two percent of all books.⁹⁷ The fortuity of war brought them together.

Just after the first shipment of Armed Services Editions sailed forth in the fall of 1943, critic Malcolm Cowley took stock of the contemporary book trade, asserting: "In 1943 the public is buying books—not all books, and not always the books that critics think it ought to be reading, but at least those that answer its questions or manage to get themselves talked about."⁹⁸ But the market remained segmented: whereas best-selling fiction and non-fiction achieved sales that dwarfed figures from ten and twenty years

past, scholarly or experimental works saw their sales plummet. As Cowley noted, “Most publishers think that this is a time to give the public what it wants, and it doesn’t want difficult poetry or scholarly essays.”⁹⁹ With notable exception, the Armed Services Edition followed suit.

Even so, the broad reading public embraced pragmatic material, for instance handbooks on all aspects of military science. It also wanted children’s books, humorous books, first-hand accounts of the war, dictionaries and Bibles, novels with religious themes, and even ancient and modern classics. Conversely, Cowley found general fiction in less demand than before the war but ascribed the phenomenon either to changing public taste or to the paucity of what he considered “interesting” novels.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, both publishers issuing cheap reprints and book clubs thrived as never before.

Underscoring the widespread ethic of consumption in wartime, Cowley attributed increased book sales to a more general increase in goods consumption: “people have more money to spend and fewer items on which to spend it.”¹⁰¹ Despite rationed paper, for instance, books remained more available than many other consumer items ranging from automobiles to radios and silk stockings. Ultimately, this zest for consumption dovetailed both with an increasingly educated population and with books’ publication in cheaper editions for a wider market through a greater number of outlets.

Building on Cowley’s opinions, historian David Kennedy notes that the United States waged the Second World War on top of a robust consumer economy made possible by full resource utilization, diversion of resources from lower to higher production, and overall gains in production stemming from increased efficiency, electricity, and technology. In fact, between 1940 and 1944, war spending increased from \$3.6 billion to

\$93.4 billion; even so, civilian goods purchasing increased twelve percent over the same time frame. The United States's World War II economy was one of "matchless plenty": emphasizing quantity over quality, the economy capitalized on more efficient plant layout, better product organization, increased economies of scale, and better process engineering.¹⁰² Retail sales reached a record high 1943 and again in 1944, while consumers gobbled up record amounts of books, recordings, liquor, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals.¹⁰³

As historian John Morton Blum emphasizes, other spending hot-spots included clothes, cars, entertainments and recreations, wagering, jewelry and department stores, and appliances, e.g. refrigerators, radios, and dishwashers. Advertisers shrewdly linked their products to the American "cause" and to visions of postwar abundance. Similarly, "adaptive firms" such as Coke and Wrigley linked their products emphatically with G.I. wants, characterizing such products as "war material." Ironically, most Americans failed to understand that the war's demand for "guns" spurred production and thus made possible the mass consumption of "butter." The cycle of mass employment, mass production, mass advertising, mass distribution, and mass ownership of industry products and goods began, in short, with government spending.¹⁰⁴ Overall, goods consumption skyrocketed between 1939-1948: clothing sales tripled; furniture sales quadrupled, as did jewelry sales; and both liquor and household appliance sales quintupled.¹⁰⁵

Meanwhile, American production kept up. As head of the War Production Board Donald Nelson noted, American industry produced 300,000 planes, 124 ships, 41 billion rounds of ammunition, 100,000 tanks and armored cars, 2.4 million trucks, and 434 million tons of steel for the war effort.¹⁰⁶ It was not surprising that book publishing, too,

achieved unprecedented feats both in production and in efficiency. As the U.S. Bureau of the Budget summarized in 1946, “Our superiority in resources would have been of little significance without a parallel superiority in the ability to organize our efforts for the exploitation of these resources.”¹⁰⁷ Still, these stupendous feats required equally unprecedented consolidation. Though American industry included approximately 184,000 manufacturers, military orders went exclusively to a relative handful, between 100 and 150.¹⁰⁸ As Nelson reflected, “Probably at no former time in our history had there been such wholesale consultation between government and private industry.”¹⁰⁹ Indeed, “with rare exception” persons working for the government, often on behalf of the industries from whence they came, continued to receive their quotidian corporate salaries.¹¹⁰ The Bureau of the Budget conceded that the lineaments of democracy “occasionally enabled the advocates of private group advantage to threaten the general good”; even so, the selfsame processes of democracy allowing creation of such tensions also facilitated their solution.¹¹¹ Like many other industries, publishing was a metonym for such tension between government and business, such give and take between private interest and public good.

In a follow-up article, meanwhile, Cowley traced the evolution of the publishing business since World War I, emphasizing publishers’ “mixture of visionary enthusiasm and rather cynical business sense.”¹¹² He characterized American publishing in that interregnum as a “luxury trade,” largely because the First World War doubled books’ prices and thereby gutted their potential market.¹¹³ Dollar novels and paperbacks costing between twenty-five and fifty cents debuted in 1930, but overall these ventures failed commercially. Despite their low prices, these books reflected the publishing world’s

emphasis on giving the public “what was good for it,” as opposed to what it wanted.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, some bookstores were ill-equipped to sell such cheap books in quantity; others refused even to *handle* such books, showing their roots in the genteel tradition. These inchoate efforts, however, inspired more durable subsequent forays into the low-priced book market.

Finally capitalizing on the momentum of its abortive predecessors, Pocket Books debuted in 1939. Pocket Books procured an attractive format for full-length books with an attractive price tag of twenty-five cents. Not only did Pocket offer the reading public what it wanted, as Cowley phrased it, but it also entered the merchandising arena on a grand scale, harnessing the saturation method; its retail outlets ran the gamut from cigar stores to army camps. In its final incarnation after the war, in fact, ASE adopted the Pocket format.

Books previously gracing the best-seller lists proved strong reprints, as did detective stories and books turned into movies. Anthologies such as “The Pocket Book of Short Stories” also stirred up considerable interest—not to say revenue. Book clubs, too, employed advertising and direct solicitation to achieve unprecedented sales. Sears, Roebuck and Company planned a new book club, The People’s Book Club, whose selections would be made not by a panel of judges but rather by Gallup and his American Institute of Public Opinion. Just as an unintended consequence of the World War Two was a recovery from the Great Depression, so too did those men fighting in the war create “a greater appetite for reading matter than could be supplied by any method of distribution that existed before the war.”¹¹⁵

Finally, Cowley looked sanguinely to the fortunes of the postwar publishing industry. Though he forecasted a brief spending boom, he suggested that familiar shortages of disposable income would once again assert themselves. On the other hand, many citizens would be used to reading and to owning books. Despite the resulting tension, Cowley prognosticated that books sales would reach the millions instead of the hundred thousands. Writing for the “great public,” meanwhile, authors with a “broadly human touch” would not only earn great sums of money but also raise the general level of culture and ideally, the general capacity for logical thought.¹¹⁶ Even for Cowley, the genteel tradition died hard.

But Cowley also pinpointed a less felicitous aspect of postwar publishing. The system he saw emerging might increase conformity and concomitantly invite censorship by government, church, and public taste. Expanding their audience by reducing their prices, publishers would logically be less amenable to risk with respect to their books’ subject matter. Cowley predicted increasing numbers of books written collectively and heavier pre-publishing editing. Gallup and his ilk might supplant literary critics, as “they will abandon any pretense of guiding that [public] mind; they will simply give the public what it wants.”¹¹⁷ Though Cowley characterized the public taste as “good” (at least in the long run) and the development of mass market publishing as “one of the most exciting developments in American life,” he refrained from expressing unalloyed enthusiasm.¹¹⁸ Castigating the prevalence of literary frauds, he also patronized the mass market audience, asserting, “It prefers anecdotes to formal expositions, personalities to ideals; and it hasn’t much patience with experiments.”¹¹⁹ Thus Cowley’s assessment

provided useful context for the early period of the Armed Services Editions endeavor and for the ongoing debate over middlebrow culture.

The Armed Service Editions' progenitor, the Council on Books in Wartime, coalesced six months after Pearl Harbor. On 16 April 1942, the *New York Times* announced the formation of a group to "Further [the] Concept of 'Weapons in War of Ideas.'"¹²⁰ Representing educational, library, publishing, and authors' organizations, the nascent Council formed an executive committee that include C.B. Boutell of Putnam's as chair, W.W. Norton of W.W. Norton and Company, Donald Klopfer of Random House, Frederic Melcher of *Publishers Weekly*, Robert M. Coles of the American Booksellers Association, Ivan Veit of the *New York Times*, and S.P. Hunnewell, executive secretary of the Book Publisher's Bureau, Inc. The organizing committee, meanwhile, involved Malcolm Johnson of Doubleday, Doran and Company, Melcher, novelist Robert Nathan, Norton, and Boutell. The American Association for Adult Education, the American Booksellers Association, the American Library Association, the Book Publishers Bureau, Inc. (who ultimately donated its board room for Council meetings), the National Education Association, and the American Center of the P.E.N rallied to sponsor the Council. In cooperation with the *New York Times*, the Council planned to jumpstart its wartime participation by holding three evening sessions in May (at the *Times*'s Hall) to feature "prominent men and women" discussing the role of books in the war.¹²¹

Having refined its slogan to "book as weapons in the war of ideas," the Council announced the schedule for its programs—now trimmed from three nights to two. Assistant Secretary of State A.A. Berle, Jr., would start proceedings with James Bryant

Conant of Harvard and Anne O'Hare McCormick of the *New York Times* to follow; Arthur Sulzberger of the *Times* would chair the session. The second night would feature a panel discussion over which Clifton Fadiman (later a Book of the Month Club judge and host of "Information, Please!") of the *New Yorker* would preside; participants would include poet William Rose Benét, British novelist Eric Knight, editor of the *Infantry Journal* Lt. Col. Joseph I. Greene, naval commentator Paul Schubert, chairman of the War Writers Board Rex Stout, authority on aviation Major Alexander de Seversky, and John Kiernan, sports editor of the *New York Times*.¹²²

For his part, Berle exhorted: "Books in wartime! They must be something more than objects of trade."¹²³ Conant, meanwhile, took a less hortatory stance with his address, "American Youth in the War." Inveighing against programs concentrating on officer training for current collegians, Conant noted that economic as well as educational selection played a crucial role in determining who could attend college. The armed services needed the best young men but were "obviously" not getting all the best, largely because of the "hardening [of] the social strata" as the army and navy expanded. As a remedy, Conant favored a quota basis with federal grants earmarked for the neediest students; only thus could colleges truly offer the best men for the nation's services.¹²⁴ Third, McCormick discoursed upon the "terrible burden of responsibility" on those who report and interpret events. As "The war is beyond human scale, and yet...has to be dealt with by the human mind," the news media served as the "first line" of information and thereby of national offense and defense. Asserting the "power of propaganda to vanquish whole nations," McCormick linked American books' role in the war effort explicitly to German cultural practices: "The Nazis really meant to burn civilization at the stake." As

such, readers and writers had an “almost religious obligation” to notice and fight against anything or anyone trammeling freedom of expression. Notwithstanding the clashes of vast mechanized armies, McCormick noted that “Ideas are really the explosive force.” Concluding, she called for “the book written to express and inspire big thoughts, big dreams, mature and steady purposes in America, a book written to the scale of America, [that] will fire a million guns and launch a thousand ships.”¹²⁵

As the *New York Times* reported, at the second night’s program the audience “overflowed the hall on to the stage” and the program pivoted around “the excitement of opinion that the war has produced in the world of ideas and in those who live by putting them in books.” For instance, Rex Stout advocated for a pooling of campaign funds by both parties in the 1942 election and using the revenue to craft a “biography” of the United States through the individual perspectives of the Congress to give voters a sense of who they were voting for—and against. British novelist Eric Knight, later an Armed Services Editions participant and the author of *Lassie Come Home*, argued that America, like Britain, should produce cheap books, “books that are exceedingly good and books that just kill time.” Indeed, Knight argued that every British writer was “doing his bit by writing.” Overall, a common theme of the two nights of discussion was simple: books should reach more people.¹²⁶

Capitalizing on the momentum engendered by the Times Hall meetings, the council convened on 18 June at a luncheon where sixty-eight of seventy publishing representatives vote to establish the Council on Books in Wartime as a continuing wartime activity. In procedural matters, the Council added five members to the original organizing committee: Nicholas Wreden of Scribner’s Book Store, Richard Simon of

Simon and Schuster, F.S. Crofts of F.S. Crofts and Company, John Farrar of Farrar and Rinehart, and Robert Coles. They allocated six thousand dollars for the next six months of Council operations; fees from participating publishers (graded by each publisher's total revenue) supported the Council's efforts.

On 25 August, the Council propagated its basic agenda under the overarching assessment that books were "necessary, useful, and indispensable."¹²⁷ The Council would cooperate with the Office of War Information but would remain voluntary, unpaid, and extra-governmental; indeed, the council stipulated that governmental regulations regarding materials shortages, output limits, or trade practices would not apply to its activities. Furthermore, the Directors would determine the Council's basic program while the Executive Committee oversaw its execution and supervised various committees. As for emphasis, first the council hoped to influence public thought with respect to both war and peace, as well as to clarify United States weaknesses and to improve public understanding of its enemies. Second, the Council intended its range of programs to bolster morale. Third, it would supply information for each individual's use regardless of his or her part in the war effort. Overall, the Council's paramount objective remained to encourage the widest possible reading of an "occasional" book in accord with its first objective. Similarly, the Council would publish information on books that would help morale or that would provide other useful information through reading lists, radio programs, and circulation of practical suggestions; more functional efforts would include fairs, luncheons, and club programs.¹²⁸

Although at its founding the Council specified a board of fifteen Directors and two ex-officio members, it later amended this policy to seventeen Directors and two ex-

officio members. In July of 1942, the Council voted; the Executive Committee included Norton (Chair), Farrar (Vice-Chair), Crofts (Treasurer), Johnson, and Wreden. Other Directors included Pat Beaird (Abingdon-Cokesbury Press), David S. Beasley (The University Society), Boutell, Martin M. Foss (McGraw-Hill Book Company), Donald Geddes (Columbia University Press), Franklin Hopper (New York Public Library), Howard C. Lewis (Dodd, Mead and Company), Alfred McIntyre (Little, Brown and Company), F.L. Reed (Grosset and Dunlap), Scott, Simon, and Meredith Wood (Book of the Month Club). Hunnewell and Coles rounded out the group as ex-officio members.

In the fall of 1942, the Council established an Information Committee that in the following six months produced more than one hundred columns printed in numerous periodicals and newspapers. Meanwhile, a Pearl Harbor anniversary commemoration drew interest from the general public as well as from the book industry—1,100 attended. As the *New York Times* concluded, the Council was moving from “behind-the-scenes planning into an operational phase.” Chairman Norton read a message from President Roosevelt, who likened books to naval ships armed with “the toughest armor, the longest cruising range, and...the most powerful guns.” In keeping with his notion of the war of ideas as a “great human war,” William Sloane next stressed the industry’s responsibility to create and distribute books that are “actual tools of war.” As he put it, “There is no way to escape this responsibility, no method of hiding from it.” At the same time, public thought must be oriented ahead to peacetime; Sloan favored encouraging “as many people as we possibly can to read as widely and deeply against the future as they possibly can.” In a final exhortation, Sloan trumpeted, “all of us must see that the dynamic books, the fertilizing books, the seminal books, are more seriously published and widely read

than they ever have been before.” Nicholas Wreden, finally, returned to more concrete matters, focusing on the bookseller’s individual responsibility to “suspend personal enthusiasms to see that above all the books that are weapons get all the breaks.”¹²⁹ To this end, a Reorganizing Committee in late 1942 performed a Council self-assessment and issued recommendations 28 January 1943. Given the Council’s success to that point, they favored continuing the Council’s original course. Still, mindful of the council’s ever-increasing scale and scope, the committee recommended the addition of a paid full-time director as well as the addition of two or three assistants/secretaries.

The council held its first annual meeting 2 February 1943—little more than a week before it began deliberations on the ASE project. The Council again expanded its cadre of Directors, this time to twenty-five. Thus the 1943 group included Norton as Chair, Farrar as Vice-Chair, and Scott as Treasurer. Other Directors included familiar names as well as a handful of new additions: Cerf, Beaird, Beasley, A.J. Blanton (The Macmillan Company), Crofts, Benedict Freud (Gimbel Brothers Bookstore), Geddes (now with Pocket Books), Donald Grosset (Grosset and Dunlap), George Hecht (Doubleday-Doran Book Shops), Curtice Hitchcock (Reynal and Hitchcock), Hopper, Henry Hoyns (Harper and Brothers), Johnson, Arthur Kennedy (P.J. Kennedy and Sons), Joseph Lippincott (J.B. Lippincott and Company), James Thompson (McGraw-Hill Book Company), Wood, and Wreden. Similarly, ex-officio members remained Hunnewell and Coles. At the end of the meeting James Van Toor, on leave from Farrar and Rinehart, was named the Council’s Executive Director.¹³⁰ Cementing the sense of common purpose between government and Council, Office of War Information head Elmer Davis spoke to the Council of his “healthy respect for the part books can play in a full war-

information program.” Davis also differentiated publishers from their mass media brethren, noting that “books have a service to perform which cannot be taken from them by newspapers or the radio, or even the motion pictures.” For its part, the Council pledged service to OWI “wherever books can aid in the war effort.”¹³¹ Still, both groups remained chary of dispensing anything that smacked of “propaganda”; as historian Allan Winkler notes, Americans demonstrated “serious reservations” about wartime propaganda, in no small part because of memories of the First World War and organizations such as George Creel’s Committee on Public Information. Hence a strategy of truth perforce prevailed during the Second World War, albeit a strategy of truth promoting an indefatigable appreciation for the “American way.”¹³² With a committee that included Norton as chair, as well as Marshall Best (Viking Press), Robert de Graff (Pocket), Walter Frese (Hastings House), Frederic Melcher (*Publishers Weekly*), and James Thompson (McGraw-Hill Book Company), the Council did much to help.

A week after the annual meeting, at a routine Council meeting Malcolm Johnson floated the notion of supplying cheap pocket-sized paperbound books to the government at cost for issue to troops abroad. Germinating as part of the Council on Books in Wartime’s agenda to subordinate publishers’ individual goals and to set “a future pattern for common effort,” the Armed Services Editions, like its parent organization, suggested that “Words were weapons for the winning of the war; not the only weapons, not the most important ones, but they helped.”¹³³ Thus the Armed Services Editions played an important role not only in the war, but also in making 1943 a “spectacular” year for

publishers overall—what Frank Mott calls the *annus mirabilis* of modern publishing, though rationing and materials shortages continued to vex the industry.¹³⁴

A planning committee comprised of Johnson, William Sloane of Henry Holt & Company, and John Farrar spent the month researching the issue and offered a preliminary report to the Council on 9 March. On 30 March, finally, Council chair W.W. Norton sent out a proposal to the Council's entire membership, noting that "the net result [of the ASE] to the industry and to the future of book reading can only be helpful."¹³⁵ More pointedly, Norton elaborated, the Council established Armed Service Editions to provide soldiers with "the one best thing we have to offer: the entertainment, the information, the morale, and even the inspiration, which is made in books."¹³⁶ Such books could also play a valuable prosaic role in keeping "soldiers and sailors in touch with the thought and the currents of life of their country and their people."¹³⁷ Norton was careful to specify the selfish and non-selfish aspects of the initiative. On the one hand, such a program would likely exert a "tremendous influence on the postwar course of the industry" and thus the program's rewards would redound to the publishing industry.¹³⁸ On the other, as Norton emphasized, such a program "is the most valuable thing that bookmen can undertake in the conduct of the war."¹³⁹ In this vein, as Bennett Cerf wrote to Donald Klopfer in September of 1942, "I know how you are missing the publishing business here but, on the other hand, don't forget that I am stamping around wishing to God I could get into uniform."¹⁴⁰

With this ambivalent course set forth, during the same meeting the Council adumbrated a plan for the Armed Services Editions. First, a small editorial committee would include a representative from the Council, the Army, the Navy, and the Office of

War Information. Once the committee selected a book, the Council would contract both with the original publisher and with the federal government to secure appropriate rights and to facilitate printing and distribution. Competitive bids would determine the firms to manufacture the books. Books would be sold directly to the government whereupon it would arrange shipment of the books to a central point or to a limited number of points. The government would shoulder the cost for composition, for printing plates, and for paper, printing, and binding. A ten percent overhead fee (not unlike the government's policy of cost-plus for war industries) would also be included, as well as a royalty (one cent per book) and shipping costs. Quotas for paper and metal plate would be worked out with the War Production Bureau.

The plan also addressed the books themselves both physically and thematically. As discussed previously, the books' format would emphasize portability. Content would encompass seven broad categories: 1) a "moderate" number dealing with the war; 2) representations of current popular fiction; 3) "occasional" books of humor; 4) "occasional" American classics; 5) nonfiction "as may be dictated by the Army and Navy"; 6) "occasional" anthologies; and 7) "original books in the nature of anthologies, put together specifically for our troops."¹⁴¹ Finally, in addition to the extant Planning Committee, the Council named both a Management Committee that consisted of Johnson, Scott, and Simon and an Editorial Advisory Committee that included Farrar, Sloane, Wreden, Harry Hansen (*New York World-Telegram*), Jennie M. Flexner (*New York Public Library*), Mark Van Doren, and Amy Loveman (*Book of the Month Club* and the *Saturday Review of Literature*).¹⁴²

But inevitably some publishers protested, claiming the Armed Services Editions would vitiate profits or the industry's entire price structure, or would instill "socialization," or would contravene anti-trust laws.¹⁴³ In a later interview, Malcolm Johnson recalled "kicks" from several publishers and even lawsuit threats.¹⁴⁴ As a stop-gap measure, he felt it "absolutely essential" to keep the proposed books from civilians.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, Philip Van Doren Stern recalled that most publishers were "okay" but some were "fussy" at first; by contrast, authors were generally "enthusiastically cooperative" as were agents.¹⁴⁶ Another Council meeting 8 April 1943, allayed these concerns. Fostering "widespread discussion" and representing an effective parley between promoters and dissenters, the meeting reiterated that the books' "very physical nature will make it impossible to include them in libraries or to keep them on any permanent basis."¹⁴⁷ At the end of the month, meanwhile, the Council set 10 May as the date and the New York Public Library as the place for the official observance of the Nazi book burnings. The flag would be lowered to half-mast and several authors whose works had been banned in the Reich would speak.¹⁴⁸

Pursuant to placating the dissenters, the intrepid Planning Committee of Johnson, Farrar, and Sloane drafted a final proposal for the Council meeting on 5 May. The final pitch noted that all publishers retained "complete freedom of decision all along the line" with respect to their participation in the project.¹⁴⁹ Also stressing publishers' autonomy, the committee termed even this proposal as "purely tentative"; they ruminated whether the best strategy would be to ask each publisher to select from his own list, then consolidate these aggregate selections.¹⁵⁰ On a similarly pragmatic note, the committee proposal put forth for discussion whether the Editions should adopt a policy of producing

a large number of books of a limited number of titles or whether they should offer a list of titles large enough to give soldiers a cross-section of the books available domestically. Deciding on the latter option, they considered three factors: first, a very small list might prove more vulnerable to political criticism than a larger one; second, the committee wanted to keep troops in as close a contact as possible with the home front; and third, they expected books to be “widely exchanged” and thus variety was essential.¹⁵¹ More specifically, ASE’s focus would remain on the “best new trade books”; even so, “since to men on active service great books are as welcome in many cases as timely ones,” selections would include classics as well.¹⁵²

Returning to immediate industry concerns, the proposal deemed royalties as “essential protection” for both publishers and authors and that a cent per copy was an “optimum” amount.¹⁵³ In this vein, the armed services themselves would be the books’ sole consumer and the books would be governmental property. Tackling the lingering suspicions of publishers about business being hurt by the project, despite its separation from the civilian economy, the proposal insisted that “abnormal war conditions must be met by steps which would not ordinarily be undertaken in peacetime, and which when peace returns will be discontinued.”¹⁵⁴ Reinforcing this point, the proposal concluded by noting, “the plan is a sampling operation of enormous scope, possible only in wartime, and possible only...within the framework of such a machinery as is contemplated.”¹⁵⁵

In this vein, the contract would terminate upon the war’s completion, notwithstanding an interval “to cover the supply of books for a limited period to the armies of occupation.”¹⁵⁶ Still, the savings in cost stemmed from innovative distribution practices and “represent[ed] no surrender of the profit-motive.”¹⁵⁷ Indeed, the places for

which ASE were designed made conventional hard-bound books “impractical” if not downright impossible, e.g. overseas stations, hospitals, field combat, and practice duty stateside.¹⁵⁸ Even so, the nature of the operation as well as the wartime conditions under which it operated made it impossible for a private publisher to accomplish the ASE agenda; as such, a minimal central body was necessary for coordination. In other words, the proposal adroitly noted both that the private profit motive was unimpaired and that private publishers could not undertake such a project, thus rendering their objections moot.

Procedurally, the ASE would draw paper from Armed Services supplies and in line with government quotas (thus the publishers’ pool would not be affected). Contracts with original publishers would produce requisite orders to set-up, to print, and to bind books. Meanwhile, the federal government would designate shipping points and would ship the books in bulk; Uncle Sam would also pay for shipping. After it agreed to each month’s contract, the Army would advance one-half of the month’s estimated cost (to be used as working capital); it would pay the balance after delivery and would subsequently sell ten thousand copies of each title to the Navy. The Council paid both salaries and incidental expenses. In this vein, ASE used two bank accounts: one for paying production bills (the U.S. Army contracting officer would countersign) and one for operating expenses such as payroll and overhead. Finally, the proposal conceded that the long-term effects of ASE were “difficult to assess.”¹⁵⁹ All the same, all parties agreed; hence the ASE bureaucratic and procedural endoskeleton was in place. Ironically, the Council on Books in Wartime refused yet to make its plan public. In a 14 May *New York Times* piece, Norton described a recent Associated Press report on the Council

spearheading an effort to get cheap books to soldiers overseas “wholly inaccurate.”¹⁶⁰ Three days later he retrenched.

On 17 May, the day Philip Van Doren Stern joined the ASE project as fulltime manager after two years as editor of the Overseas Publication Section of the Office of War Information, the Council on Books in Wartime publicly announced its plan to ship thirty-five million American books to troops abroad. Though announced with much fanfare in May, the first books did not go to the printers until July. On 13 July, in fact, as Allied forces swept through the Mediterranean to Sicily and up the Italian boot, the nascent ASE decided that only thirty titles per month would be produced initially. Once again they reassured publishers that the armed forces’ quotidian purchases of hard-bound books would remain constant and that the government would not dump the remainders on the market after the war. In further bureaucratic developments, Farrar resigned in early September; as a result, Stern took on the position of chairman and Edward C. Aswell of *Harper’s* came aboard as an Editorial Advisory Committee member. Even as chair, however, Stern continued his responsibilities at Pocket, spending mornings with the Editions and afternoons with Pocket.¹⁶¹

Even as the ASE project took flight, the Council remained active on other fronts. On 10 May, 1943, for example, the Council commemorated the Nazi book burnings, dispensing fifteen hundred newspaper releases, six hundred cartoons, a hundred copies of Stephen Vincent Benét’s “They Burned the Books,” letters from six hundred members of the clergy, and an Associated Press release to a thousand newspapers. Similarly, “They Burned...” was read aloud at the New York Public Library and NBC broadcasted a radio version. *Publishers Weekly* dedicated its back cover to promoting the event and the

Council sent window streamers to five hundred bookstores and libraries and sent postcards to a thousand writers asking them to raise consciousness in any way they could. In June, the Council rallied around the United Nations Books Week, providing speakers for UN meetings and broadcasts, sending a press release to five hundred editors, disseminating nine color posters to 250 libraries and bookstores, and sending pamphlets (*United Nations* and *Together We Stand*) to 550 libraries and bookstores. Again, *Publishers Weekly* devoted its back cover to the event; the Book of the Month Club contributed by sending a Council cartoon to more than five hundred newspapers. For the Independence Day celebration the Council sent a speech emphasizing the relationship between books and the American tradition of liberty to 350 libraries. Howard Fast pitched in with a twelve-minute script based on Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* to four hundred radio stations. The summer also saw the radio debut of the Council's "Words at War" and its first newsreel production, "Books in the War." On the fourth anniversary of the war, finally, Archibald Ogden of Bobbs-Merrill replaced Van Toor as the latter joined the Office of Economic Warfare.¹⁶²

On 17 September 1943, after seemingly interminable delays the first shipments of books arrived for embarkation. ASE succeeded in their innovations with respect to format, economy, and content. Notwithstanding their small size and weight (one-fifth of a conventional book), Armed Services Editions (with rare exception) contained the complete work. Of 1,322 titles over four years, in fact, only about seventy endured abridgement. In the interests of spatial economy, each title eliminated appendices, bibliographies, indexes, lists of illustrations, and at times, tables of contents. Bastard

titles, half titles, and illustrations (except maps) were excised, all chapters ran in (instead of beginning on a fresh page), and prefatory matter (e.g. dedications, acknowledgments) was set in italic type and ran in at the beginning or at the end of the text.

The Editions featured a paper cover bound along the short edge, two columns on each page, and type that facilitated easy reading. Printed two-up on Webb presses traditionally used for magazines (from rolls using curved nickel-faced stereotypes or electrotypes), the books were next cut apart. When possible, each cover reproduced half-tone photographs of the jackets of the original editions in four flat colors: red, yellow, blue, and black. Commanday-Roth handled all covers; designed by Sol Immerman, they featured a smaller reproduction of hard-cover cover, as well as a circular A.S.E. colophon and a colored band.¹⁶³ Each book's back cover featured a list of that month's available titles. Germane to the conditions under which they would be read, each book was bound with staples coated to prevent rust; similarly, waterproof glue helped make the books at least nominally resistant to adverse weather. Still, they were "strictly expendable."¹⁶⁴

In assuring economies of scale (each book cost just 6.09 cents to make), plans called for each print run to supersede 50,000 copies of a given selection, though the projects' planners expected runs to average nearly 100,000. Over the duration of the ASE project, these measures made for the lowest per-book cost in publishing history.¹⁶⁵ ASE were distributed in packages that contained one copy of every title in each month's group with the expectation that men would exchange books once they finished a given title. Fiction and non-fiction, both classic and contemporary, were included, as were mysteries and westerns. The first list of twenty-five books, for instance, included Franz Werfel's *The Song of Bernadette*, Hervey Allen's *The Forest and the Fort*, William

Saroyan's *The Human Comedy*, Captain Ted Lawson's *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, Margaret Carpenter's *Experiment Perilous*, Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, and W.L. Hudson's *Green Mansions*.¹⁶⁶ In the Editions, each individual could find an outlet for utilitarian improvement in service of a commodifiable goal and an opportunity to seize upon the traditional linkage between learning and social prestige that such endeavors like the Book of the Month Club promoted. And like the Club, the ASE bypassed the middleman and derived its authority from its panel of "expert" selectors; in short, the ASE were "profoundly hybrid."¹⁶⁷

Reporting on the newly launched ASE, *Publishers' Weekly* characterized the support given to the project by authors, trade books publishers, librarians, and booksellers as both "immediate" and "unanimous."¹⁶⁸ Indeed, the project promised an ideal symbiosis as both a "patriotic gesture" and a "keen realization" of the Armed Services Editions's potential ability to spur the reading of books more broadly. Conspicuously, *PW* failed to mention the heavy measure of self-interest involved in publishers' participation in ASE. In the *Saturday Review*, meanwhile, CBW Director Bennett Cerf enthused over this "Noble Experiment" that promised to provide American servicemen not only with the best current fiction but also contemporary accounts of the war on all fronts, material he thought sure to spur serious thought about the post-war world.¹⁶⁹

Fresh from Army service himself, Paul McPharlin chronicled the reading habits of the American serviceman for *Publishers' Weekly*. Citing those young men who might have gone to college in peacetime, or those servicemen stationed at quiet posts, McPharlin asserted that "Never before has there been a war which afforded men in uniform so much opportunity to read."¹⁷⁰ After basic training stateside, the GI settled

into routine and noticed how much time remained for him to kill on a quotidian basis. Out of curiosity, or exigency, when “a date and dinner outside the gates are too much before pay-day,” he tackled a book.¹⁷¹ Pursuant to embarking for foreign service, moreover, the soldier found still another sequence of waiting and training; under these conditions, McPharlin called men’s appetite for reading material nothing short of “voracious.”¹⁷²

Consulting the circulation records of service club libraries, which often resembled public libraries in towns whose population size corresponded to that of the camp, McPharlin noted that libraries’ supply often exceeded its demand. Still, such libraries served a “preponderantly serious group,” those men focused on self-education and culling information useful for armed forces promotion.¹⁷³ Mysteries, humorous verse, and short stories comprised a crucial facet of such libraries’ material; even so, numerous “mature” soldiers exploited the opportunity to catch up on their reading and thereby selected titles of “established reputation.”¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, McPharlin found no discernable difference vis-à-vis reading tastes between enlisted men and officers. Noting only that officers enjoyed more privacy (or at least the possibility thereof) than their enlisted counterparts, McPharlin nonetheless observed that officers and enlisted men likely read similar amounts of serious and frivolous materials. Additionally, McPharlin presciently observed the advantages of books reasonable in price and compact in size. Each man had only limited space in his foot-locker or his barracks bag and most uniforms could not accommodate most books. Thus each serviceman received further incentive to pass a book along to his fellows once finished with it.

In December of 1943, *Publishers' Weekly* reported on the evolution of the ASE's parent, the Council on Books in Wartime. Armed with a two-fold purpose of providing servicemen overseas with what it deemed "worthwhile" books and exerting a salutary influence on public opinion domestically in winning the war and the peace to follow, the Council engaged in a wide variety of initiatives, from choosing outstanding titles for special promotion as "Imperative" to sponsoring radio programs, from providing speakers at organizational meetings to producing movie newsreels, from promoting children's books to cooperating with the Office of War Information.¹⁷⁵ The Council saw the Armed Services Editions as "paramount" in their program.¹⁷⁶ While conceding the wide range of titles in the ASE, the Council insisted that its overriding aim remained to provide servicemen with the "best" of current fiction and nonfiction, including short story anthologies, biography, geography and travel, current affairs, history, science, inspirational, career-oriented works, poetry, nature, drama, and sports. In a rather ambivalent nod to the war's progress, in late 1943 the Council began to provide books for soldiers in German or Japanese prison camps, distributed through the auspices of the International YMCA's War Prisoners' Aid. Thus an overrun of two thousand copies accompanied the usual run of each ASE title.

Pursuant to the Council's fall 1943 legal travails stemming from a film short made from John Roy Carlson's controversial *Under Cover*, the Armed Services Editions incorporated itself on 10 January 1944. Its management committee included Malcolm Johnson, president of the Book Publishers Bureau as well as executive vice-president at Doubleday, Doran; Richard Simon; and S. Spencer Scott, who served as treasurer of the Council. More specifically, Stern served as general manager and Wendell A. Roos as

production manager. The editorial Advisory Committee helped to select titles and included Stern as acting chairman; Nicholas Wreden, manager of Scribner Book Store and president of the American Booksellers Association; Jennie M. Flexner of the New York Public Library; Mark Van Doren; Hansen; Loveman; Aswell; and Russell Doubleday of Doubleday's. The committee considered titles and ultimately drew up lists of books to present to the Army and Navy. Inclusion hinged on agreement among all involved. By late December of 1943, 120 titles had been published or were in the process of being published, each in a printing of 57,000. Perhaps most gratifying, ASE merited an "extremely favorable" response; indeed, even at this early point ASE books proved of "considerable therapeutic value" for men wounded in action.¹⁷⁷ In line with its services, the ASE earned runner-up honors for the Carey-Thomas Award that month, awarded every year for the best example of creative publishing.

The Council held its second annual meeting in February of 1944. Among the guests were the Navy's chief of public relations, Captain Leland Lovette. Lauding the "great service" provided by the "generous act" of providing books at cost, Lovette characterized the Navy as "a great believer in reading for recreation."¹⁷⁸ Lovette praised the ASE "important part in the conduct of the war."; more specifically, he noted that books on Guadalcanal in late September, 1942, proved "a vital morale force amid the strains and tensions, the blackouts and long hours of heavy work."¹⁷⁹ No doubt helping the matter, men proved too tired for athletics; furthermore, safety considerations often precluded showing films. Still, Navy men read "literally everything," according to Lovette, and the Navy selected books based only on readability and interest. Foreshadowing later controversies over censorship of the Armed Services Editions,

Lovette detailed the Navy's "policy of freedom" that presupposed soldiers would recognize any "obvious" propaganda—a logical policy in fighting an enemy that delighted in burning books.¹⁸⁰ As scholar Christopher Loss observes, even by 1938 the Nazis had banned eighteen categories of books totaling 4,175 titles, in addition to the complete works of 565 authors. The German war machine also made it official practice to ransack cultural repositories in occupied countries through the *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (ERR). Books were harvested for the planned Nazi University to be built in Bavaria after the war.¹⁸¹

In its coverage of the Council's meeting, *Publishers' Weekly* hailed the Armed Services Editions as "one of the outstanding publishing projects of 1943."¹⁸² After covering thirty thousand miles in the Pacific theater, Colonel C.L. Frederick of the Headquarters of the Army Air Forces visited the second annual meeting of the Council. Like Lovette, he spoke enthusiastically—perhaps histrionically—of the reception given to the Armed Services Editions, characterizing them as nothing short of a "godsend."¹⁸³ Indeed, Frederick provided a wealth of anecdotal evidence as to this observation. Watching crates of books arrive in the Gilbert Islands (again perhaps rhetorically gilding the lily), Frederick spoke of troops "enthusiastically going over their new, attractively-bound, bright new books, praising them, fitting them into their pockets, already bargaining with their comrades—if you had been there, I am sure you, too, would have had a little lump in your throat."¹⁸⁴ Even in a combat theater men had "plenty" of time to read. Frederick cited the long distances, the time spent traveling, and the time spent waiting for task forces to muster as reasons why reading was "one of [servicemen's] most pleasant recreations."¹⁸⁵

Notwithstanding this “very warm human side” of the Armed Services Editions, the books fulfilled a four-fold purpose: improving the servicemen’s literary tastes, adding to their reading enjoyment, broadening their intellectual and cultural interests, and meeting an “urgently-felt need.”¹⁸⁶ Perhaps most important for his audience, Frederick emphasized that ASE were “definitely selling Private Joe Doakes out there in the Pacific on the better book business.”¹⁸⁷ Though Frederick characterized responses to ASE as “all 100 percent favorable,” he also noted that at times a soldier accustomed to murder mysteries or “sexy pulps” finds the ASE selections “*a little highbrow*.”¹⁸⁸ Still, he reassured the Council that such sentiments were aberrant.¹⁸⁹ Like the Book of the Month Club judges loyal to the notion of a book as circulating and thus amenable to use in numerous contexts by numerous persons, selectors for the Editions sought to match each selected book with its reader. In so doing they empathized and identified with their readers, even if such consideration at times seemed patronizing. Similarly, neither the Club judges nor the ASE selectors thought sentiment necessarily a bad thing; they targeted the entire range of human emotion. Unlike the Book of the Month Club judges, moreover, the Editions’ selectors proved much more open to literary modernism. Above all, both groups of “experts” saw reading, as Janice Radway puts it, as “intensely individual yet oddly social.”¹⁹⁰

Next, Frederick returned to the themes of edifying men’s literary tastes and their intellectual and cultural standards. Though he framed the Council’s books as slightly above most servicemen’s prewar literary tastes, Frederick concomitantly noted that war and military life tended to lower men’s spiritual and intellectual standards. Thus, books countered such wartime depredations; showing a genteel streak, Frederick encouraged

further elevation of literary tastes: “By catering to a less discriminating reader you would lose the challenging opportunity to raise the reading tastes of all men out there.”¹⁹¹ In this vein, Frederick deemed the range of subject matter “adequate” and offering “something for everyone.”¹⁹² Finally, Frederick praised the construction and format of the books, citing their resistance to insects, vermin, mildew, and general wear and tear. Similarly, given the dearth of light in the Pacific forward areas, servicemen embraced the books’ shorter lines and their crisp and clear type face.

Closing out the meeting, general director Philip Van Doren Stern offered ASE publication statistics for the last three months of 1943: October, 1,501,202; November, 1,874,643; and December, 1,570,280. The total number of books shipped during 1943 stood at 6,428,552. By the end of 1943, then, the Armed Services Edition’s publication list numbered 450 approved books, 120 of which had been printed and delivered. Another 150 were in active production. In keeping with their original agenda, moreover, the Council abridged only three (who performed the abridging remains unclear), and these solely because their length exceeded 512 pages or approximately 220,000 words. Also on a prosaic note, the Council selected its Directors for 1944. Holdovers from 1943 included Norton (who resigned due to ill health in November of 1944, with Simon serving out his term), Scott, Beard, Blanton, Cerf, Freud, Hecht, Hitchcock, Hopper, Hoyns, Johnson, Lippincott, Thompson, and Wood. Farrar, Beasley, Crofts, Geddes, Grosset, Kennedy, and Wreden departed. Fresh faces, finally, included Simon, Marshall Best (Viking Press), de Graff, C. Halliwell Duell (Duell, Sloane and Pearce), Mrs. Josephine Kimball (Young Books), Elliott Macrae (E.P. Dutton and Company), Alfred McIntyre (Little, Brown and Company), Stanley Rinehart (Farrar and Rinehart), William

Sloane (Henry Holt and Company), Datus Smith, Jr. (Princeton University Press), Richard J. Walsh (The John Day Company), Mrs. Robert Coles (American Booksellers Association), and Carl Milam (American Library Association).

Insofar as early shipments met with “great favor” from senior armed forces personnel, the Navy increased its standing order from ten to fifteen thousand of each title. Similarly, the Army increased its request from fifty-two thousand to seventy-seven copies of each title beginning in February, 1944; they also requested an increase of three thousand copies of each title each month thereafter. Faced with mushrooming demand, the corporation’s main office changed locations to accommodate the increased size of the project; concomitantly, it increased its permanent staff.¹⁹³

Like Frederick, Major Leon Poullada focused on the challenges of library services in specific Pacific theater contexts. In Hawaii in May, 1942, for instance, the organization and the expansion of library program presented “complex problems,” e.g. shipping, mustering available personnel, and ensuring transportation.¹⁹⁴ Even so, expansion was “urgently needed” as “The clamor of these solitary men for reading material could soon be heard all the way to the top of Kaleakala.”¹⁹⁵ Subsequent Pacific island-hopping necessitated the securing of reading material for large troop concentrations and for supporting tactical operations. Indeed, tactical operations rendered imperative a new and unprecedented strategy, with library service as a “direct adjunct” to troops in battle.¹⁹⁶ Poullada echoed numerous other observers, noting that troops retained “plenty of time to read even when engaged in actual combat...in many cases reading was the only form of diversion possible.”¹⁹⁷ Even during invasions,

soldiers endured “long periods of inactivity”; therefore, librarians needed to supply soldiers as soon as they boarded their transports.¹⁹⁸

Poullada named Armed Services Editions “one of the most unmixed blessings ever to occur in library service anywhere.”¹⁹⁹ General Bradley, Commander of the 96th Division, called portable libraries more generally “the finest thing ever done for the soldier in the way of recreation.”²⁰⁰ Known as “CBW kits,” the ASE proved a “perfect example” of the principle of “stimulation of reader interest.”²⁰¹ Indeed, such books shattered what Poullada called the “factor of resistance,” itself a “compound of inertia, ignorance, self-consciousness, and the conviction that books are only for the high-brow, the cultured, the elite.”²⁰² In sum, ASE helped to erode long-standing and still powerful cultural barriers.

Writing in February, 1944, Chief of the Library Section of the Special Services Division Lieutenant Colonel Ray L. Trautman provided an overview of current Army Library Service initiatives. Trautman characterized the average G.I. as a “cross-section” of all able-bodied young men in the United States. His previous use of books had been limited to an educational setting—though via newspapers and other such materials, he read printed matter equivalent to a three-hundred-page book each week. In wartime, however, the serviceman “reads what you and I have always thought we’d read if we ever had time.”²⁰³ Notwithstanding letters from family and friends, books and familiar magazines helped him to remain familiar with life stateside. Citing a contemporary study of men stationed in New Guinea, Trautman noted that twenty-one percent of men claimed to have read a book the previous day. In fact, reading even trumped athletics in

popularity. Earlier research in the United States, conversely, found that only ten percent of men claimed to have read a book on a typical leisure day.

Nothing short of “revolutionary” in design and in method of production, Trautman emphasized, the Editions enabled adequate book distribution to troops overseas for the first time, meeting the challenge of fewer fixed libraries and thus the need for more widespread distribution and eliciting “a most enthusiastic reception” from servicemen.²⁰⁴ As Trautman noted, “millions of men with limited recreational resources are discovering the enjoyment of reading and are having an abundance of good reading material placed in their hands.”²⁰⁵ Armed Services Editions proved attractive to publishers as well, despite their initial qualms, for any book selected automatically became a “best-reader” if not an outright “best-seller,” potentially boosting conventional civilian hardcover and softcover (if available) purchases. Unsurprisingly, then, the “wholehearted co-operation of the trade-book industry” underwrote the endeavor.²⁰⁶ Such expendable paper-bound books proved “increasingly important” in ensuring “stable morale” by underpinning individuals’ quests for information, education, and recreation.²⁰⁷

Given the “utmost diversity” inherent in any personal judgment of reading material, the Armed Services Editions hewed to a rigorous selection process by committee and thus by consensus.²⁰⁸ In particular, the selectors sought: 1) to emphasize both “readability” and a “masculine viewpoint”; 2) to eschew the “mediocre, subversive, and trashy”; 3) to furnish “representative important books” in all subject fields and if possible, the best book available on each subject; 4) to provide “authentic” military books of interest to soldiers and military books relevant to special branches of the armed

services; 5) to offer nonmilitary “informative” books that embody “accuracy, clear presentation, and modernity”; 6) to supply “recreational” reading that men of “various backgrounds” would read as civilians, e.g. humor, biography, fiction, poetry, and travel; 7) to supply recent fiction but to avoid the “mediocre, trashy, and mawkish” as well as books with “a decided feminine interest”; 8) to provide fiction of “enduring value” in a format of “good print”; 9) to offer books with “simple vocabulary” and inherent “adult interest” for the near-illiterates; 10) to supply supplementary reading for classes or correspondence courses; and 11) to elide “political argument” or “political propaganda” of “any kind designed or calculated to affect the result of any election for President, Vice-President, presidential elector, member of the Senate, or member of the House of Representatives.”²⁰⁹ Thus, like the book of the month Club judges, the Advisory Committee walked a fine line.

Given these criteria, Trautman offered a sampling of Armed Services Editions in eight categories. For instance, in contemporary fiction ASE published by February, 1944, included Marcus Goodrich’s *Delilah*; William Wister Haines’s *Slim*; Eric Knight’s *Lassie, Come Home*; Richard Llewellyn’s *How Green Was My Valley*; John P. Marquand’s *So Little Time*; Mary O’Hara’s *My Friends Flicka and Thunderhead*; Theodore Pratt’s *Mr. Winkle Goes to War*; Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings’s *The Yearling*; William Saroyan’s *The Human Comedy*; Betty Smith’s *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*; John Steinbeck’s *Tortilla Flat*; George R. Stewart’s *Storm*; Philip D. Stong’s *State Fair*; and Ethel Vance’s *Reprisal*. A related category, historical novels, encompassed Hervey Allen’s *The Forest and the Fort*; Mary Ellen Chase’s *Windswept*; Lloyd Douglas’s *The Robe*; Joseph Hergesheimer’s *Java Head*; and Conrad Richter’s *The*

Trees. Third, representative humor selections included Robert Benchley (*Benchley Beside Himself*), Kathryn Forbes (*Mama's Bank Account*), Emily Kimbrough and Cornelia Otis Skinner (*Our Hearts Were Young and Gay*), and Rosemary Taylor (*Chicken Every Sunday*).

Westerns, another popular category, included staples like *Saddle and Ride* by Ernest Haycox, *Gentle Annie* by MacKinley Kantor, and *The Bar 20 Rides Again* and *Hopalong Cassidy's Protégé* by Clarence E. Mulford. Also popular, short stories included Max Beerbohm, *Seven Men*; Stephen Vincent Benét, *Selected Short Stories*; *The Fireside Books of Dog Stories*; Max J. Herzberg (ed.), *Happy Landings*; and Ring Lardner, *Round Up*. On the other hand, classics included Conrad's *Lord Jim*, Emerson's *Seven Essays*, *The Republic of Plato*, and Twain's *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*; the poetry category provided Stephen Vincent Benét's *Western Star*, Robert Frost's *Come In*, and Ogden Nash's *Good Intentions*. Finally, general books ranged from Esther Forbes's *Paul Revere*, Joseph C. Grew's *Report from Tokyo*, Ward Morehouse's *George M. Cohan*, and Bellamy Partridge's *The Country Lawyer* to Gontran de Poncins's *Kabloona*, Ernie Pyle's *Here is Your War*, Carl Sandburg's *Storm Over the Land*, and Gordon Seagrave's *Burma Surgeon*. Despite the men's voracious appetite for light fare, in fact, Trautman suggested that there existed "as great a market for good books as for light stuff and trash."²¹⁰

Nearly one hundred Editions were reprinted. Authors boasting multiple reprints included humorist Thurber with five (including the co-authored *Is Sex Necessary?*), Ernest Haycox with four of his Westerns, Frank Graham with two sports-focused books, C.S. Forester with two (one crime novel and one sea-faring adventure featuring Horatio

Hornblower), Alan LeMay with two Westerns, Thorne Smith (creator of *Topper*) with two, Max Brand (Frederick Schiller Faust) with two Westerns, humorist and journalist H. Allen Smith with two, gothic romance novelist Joseph Shearing (Marjorie Bowen) with two, David Ewen with two books on popular music, and humorist Cornelia Otis Skinner with two (including one co-authored). In short, the ASE reprints proved a veritable feast of the middlebrow.

Nor did Trautman restrict his gaze merely to wartime. As he postulated, “It is safe to say that many thousands of them will retain after the war the reading habits and interests which they are now acquiring.”²¹¹ Not only did Trautman assert that veterans would have become accustomed to books of quality at a reasonable price, he also advocated for a program much like the Armed Services Editions to continue after the war, harnessing the same mass production and wide distribution opportunities. Astutely Trautman mandated that books should cost no more than a movie admission, insofar as most books were produced at the cost of a package of cigarettes and thus “should be as easy to buy.”²¹² Given these standards, books would be available at any kind of retail outlet: grocery stores, gas stations, dime stores, barber and beauty shops, and movies. Commercially, such a measure would buttress extant retailers such as drug stores, newsstands, cigar stores, and of course, bookstores. Still, Trautman returned to the library as potentially a “vital part of the life of all literate people of the community—a cultural center in the broadest sense.”²¹³ Indeed, as he concluded: “It is hoped that these [librarians returning from the service] will carry into their new positions the best of what they have learned in the Army and that their successful but perhaps unorthodox methods will there be adopted in an effort to achieve a better standard of library service”²¹⁴ Thus,

lessons from the Armed Services Editions might profitably be applied in peacetime. Moe broadly, as WPB chief Donald Nelson posited, “It would be wonderful if the same sort of willing cooperation between the government and business could extend beyond war into peacetime.”²¹⁵ Alas, such potential ultimately went unexploited in publishing as in other industries, even though such cooperation had been “probably the greatest collective achievement of all time, as Nelson posited”²¹⁶

Inveterate sponsor of the Council on Books in Wartime, the Book Publishers Bureau, specifically its War Committee, weighed in on the necessity of books both in wartime and in the postwar world in a 1944 pamphlet. The Committee, Melville Minton (G.P. Putnam and Sons), Norman V. Donaldson (Yale University Press), Lawrence Sanders (W.B. Sanders Company), and Edward M. Crane (D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc.), like many of their brethren first argued for the exceptionalism of publishing and the necessity of maintaining its august tradition “unimpaired.”²¹⁷ Socially, culturally, and educationally unlike any other industry, the Committee claimed, the publishing industry catered to approximately 112.5 million American readers in United States and sold them approximately 225 million books in 1942.

Looking ahead, the War Committee of the BPB noted that the nation was entering an “era of book exporting”; concomitantly, publishers’ goals must center on extending markets and the “American theory and way of life.”²¹⁸ As such, it remained a “matter of national responsibility” to maintain high production and to resist any cuts in materials.²¹⁹ Pledging to cooperate with the federal government, its agencies, and the American citizenry “in every way,” the Committee nonetheless insisted on the publishing industry’s self-policing ability.²²⁰ Concluding with another panegyric to the industry, the

Committee asserted, “If the complex future world is to be faced intelligently, its problems cannot be solved without the agency of books”; indeed, books would prove “vital” to present and to future civilization.²²¹

Quoting a serviceman in New Guinea, meanwhile, the *New York Times* hailed the Armed Services Editions as “As Popular as Pin-Up Girls.” Applauding the ASE’s “novel” publishing arrangement between publishers and armed forces, the *Times* noted that efficiencies in the Armed Services Editions’ production were “believed to be unprecedented in the history of American publishing.”²²² In this vein, fifteen million books had already been shipped abroad and each month thirty new titles of nearly 100,000 copies each were being added. Observers found a “remarkable similarity” in reading tastes between soldiers overseas and the stateside best-seller lists; to bolster interest, moreover, *Yank* published lists of new titles.²²³ Servicemen’s letters both praised the books and offered suggestions for new titles. For instance, a V-mail letter from a soldier in Italy mused: “I often wonder if the Army realizes just how many people would stay out of trouble so long as they had anything like a good book to occupy their time.”²²⁴ Another servicemen stationed in the southwest Pacific called the Armed Services Editions’ format nothing short of a “stroke of genius”; overall, the *Times* called it “highly successful” in maximizing convenience.²²⁵ Despite its effusive praise, the *Times* emphasized that the ASE selections “seek to provide recreation and entertainment for their readers; not to orient or to educate them.”²²⁶

The publicity value of selection by the Council for inclusion in the Armed Services Editions was also emphasized and showed the overlap between reading tastes at home and among soldiers abroad. For example, the Council chose Zofia Kossak’s

Blessed are the Meek for inclusion in the ASE, even as it also represented the April selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club.²²⁷ A contemporary advertisement for Roy Publishers both hailed *Blessed are the Meek* for its status as bestseller and as an ASE selection and used it to leverage new titles offered by Roy, including Xavier Pruszyński's *Russian Year*, Zalman Shneour's *Downfall*, and Lt. J.M. Herbert's *G for Genevieve*.²²⁸

Despite its avowed recreational intentions, not to mention its extensive vetting processes, the Armed Services Editions fell prey to controversy in the early summer of 1944 as a result of legislation from 1943. As John Morton Blum suggests, a coalition of Republicans and Southern Democrats, while fragmenting to an extent on the conduct of the war and on international matters more generally, preserved consensus on other domestic issues (especially when looking ahead to war's end), namely preserving white supremacy, cutting non-war spending, rolling back the New Deal, and challenging executive authority. More ominous for New Deal liberals, the 1942 elections rewarded the GOP, as the party gained forty-four seats in the House and seven in the Senate. For that matter, the average congressman in January of 1943 was a white middle-aged professional, often a lawyer, who was college-educated, an army veteran, Methodist or Presbyterian, and a member of a fraternal order such as the Masons, Elks, or Odd Fellows. The new Congress dismantled the Works Progress Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the National Youth Administration in early 1943; similarly, it cut the National Resources Planning Board and effectively marginalized the Farm Security Administration and the Rural Electrification Administration. Overriding Roosevelt's veto on the revenue act, the new Congress also jumpstarted the House Un-

American Activities Committee in 1943. Even so, Roosevelt managed to maneuver the G.I. Bill in the fall of 1943 that provided for unemployment, social security, educational benefits for returning soldiers.²²⁹

On January 12, 1944, instructions approved by the Council, the Army, and the Navy were sent to each reader on the ASE Advisory Committee: 1) look for statements or attitudes which are opposed to the spirit of American democracy; 2) look for any statements which may be offensive to our allies in this war, or which may give aid and comfort to the enemy, or which may be detrimental to our own war effort; 3) watch for any materials or statements which the passage of time may have made obsolete, incorrect, or ridiculous; 4) watch for any statements which may be offensive to any religious or racial groups, trades, or professions; 5) look for any controversial material relating to forthcoming political elections, particularly that which either praises or denigrates any political candidate; 6) bear in mind that these books are published almost exclusively for a male, military audience, and that Armed Services Editions should appeal to the audience for which they are intended; and 7) check statements which may be at variance with military training or doctrines, or unduly critical of any military or naval commanders or branches of the service.²³⁰ The fifth proviso was of special import, given subsequent developments. Months before the Soldiers' Vote Bill, in other words, the Council, Army, and Navy had of their own accord emphasized the necessity of jettisoning any books that could possibly influence the 1944 elections.

Title V itself gestated in the Soldier Voting Law of 1944 (Public Law 277, 78th Congress). In June of 1943, Theodore Green (Rhode Island) and Scott Lucas (Illinois) introduced a bill to facilitate absentee voting among soldiers stationed overseas.

Subsequently, the Committee on Elections and Privileges reported favorably on the measure and passed it on to the Senate in November, 1943. Theretofore little uniformity had prevailed among individual states' policies for both federal and state elections. As such, only twenty-eight thousand soldiers voted in 1942. The Green-Lucas bill, by contrast, advocated a short-form ballot to be distributed to *all* servicemen that *all* state commissions would accept. But opposition among conservative Democrats and Republicans coalesced behind Senator Taft and Representative Rankin, who claimed that the bill infringed upon states' rights.

On a more practical level, this bloc thought the bill would facilitate the distribution of ballots, thereby allowing more soldiers to vote. Completing this inference, they believed that servicemen would be more likely to support the incumbent, FDR, their commander-in-chief. As Taft asserted, "it is peculiarly important...that the Government and Government officials understand that their control of the means of communication shall not be used to conduct a campaign on one side against those who do not have equal facility to reach the men in the armed forces of the United States."²³¹ Indeed, Taft argued that the Secretary of War and the Secretary of Navy were already scheming to reelect FDR to ensure their own retention. Taft's original proposal thus made it unlawful for Army or Navy officials to disseminate any literature "designed or calculated to affect the result of any election." Also, the U.S. War Ballot Committee would review all materials to ensure no violations and a penalty would be assessed for any violation: a fine of \$1,000, a one year prison sentence, or both.²³²

Though Taft claimed that he intended to censor only literature printed at government expense, the extant wording ("paid for") included *all* commercially produced

materials bought for Army libraries. For his part, Roosevelt refused to sign the bill, but equivocated and chose not to veto it; it thus went into law 1 April 1944. The Adjutant General in War Department emphasized that commanders should err on the side of prohibition, but left much to their discretion. Though the final version exempted books published and purchased before April 1, this codicil was often ignored and thus retroactive weeding occurred, for instance in economics and political biographies. Even so, post librarians “for the most part” continued to buy what they wanted; others effectively ignored the Attorney General’s decision.²³³ John Jamieson estimated that no more than half U.S. military posts made “any real effort” to comply.²³⁴

Meanwhile, Ray Trautman’s policy fixed on pointing out inanities and inconsistencies, requesting liberal interpretations wherever possible, and maintaining a positive outlook, insofar as “Nobody outside the Army grasped what was going on.”²³⁵ The Council on Books in Wartime spearheaded a counterattack and on 18 June announced a resolution to be sent to the President, the Secretary of War, the Secretary of Navy, and other government officials. Similarly, the Council sent ten thousand copies to various press agencies, sparking myriad editorial denunciations of such censorship. Taft subsequently retrenched, ascribing the furor to a misinterpretation and sponsoring an amendment to prohibit only books “considered in their entirety” to be “obvious propaganda.”²³⁶ It also exempted all materials purchased with non-appropriated funds or sold through Army exchanges as well as all books, magazines, and newspapers of general circulation.

Characteristically, compromise finally prevailed. The Army and Navy would first distribute postcard application forms for soldiers to state election commissions and would

also help distribute regular state forms. Comprised of representatives from the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Navy, and the War Shipping Administration, the U.S. War Ballot Commission would supervise ballot distribution. That said, the use of the ballot was restricted to servicemen overseas whose state election commissions authorized use of form (twenty states agreed). Last, Title V restricted dissemination of propaganda, in effect bolstering the Hatch Act of 1939 that limited federal employee participation in electoral campaigns and was permanent (in contrast to rest of Soldier Voting Law). Under this amended version, about thirty percent of servicemen voted in 1944 (2,691,160). As Jamieson concludes—and oversimplifies: “Nobody could have foreseen that a single press release would produce so great an effect.”²³⁷

Citing Title V of the Soldier Vote Act, the Adjutant General of the Army proscribed numerous “distinguished books of general circulation” in an initiative the Council on Books in Wartime called an “alarming encroachment on freedom.”²³⁸ According to the Adjutant General, the Act banned “books containing political argument or political propaganda of any kind designed or calculated to affect the result of a Federal election.”²³⁹ Therefore, such books could not be made available “at Army hospitals, libraries, service clubs, guest houses, day rooms, messes and United Service Organizations, Red Cross and other volunteer agencies and welfare and recreational facilities operating at Army installations.”²⁴⁰ What was more, “the gift of any substantial number of copies of a book containing political argument or political propaganda will not be accepted by or for the Army.”²⁴¹ Notably, Title V’s provisions barred Catherine Drinker Bowen’s *Yankee From Olympus*, a biography of Oliver Wendell Holmes; Charles A. Beard’s *Republic*, an assessment of America’s founding; Mari Sandoz’s

Slogum House, a novel of the America West; and E.B. White's *One Man's Meat*, a collection of essays. Ironically, Title V provided a different set of regulations for material printed in magazines; thus *Life*, which had printed much of Beard's book, and both *The New Yorker* and *Harper's*, which had run White's essays, continued to circulate.

The Council reemphasized its commitment to the "special importance of a free literature in wartime" and excoriated the government's "encroach[ment]," even labeling the government's action outright "discrimination."²⁴² Concluding its resolution protesting the censorship, the Council opined "That censorship of matters other than those affecting security in wartime cannot be left to the arbitrary will of individuals, even if legally authorized, without grave jeopardy to democratic freedom of the press."²⁴³ In a broadside at Title V, the *Times* praised United States publishers, booksellers, and librarians for their role in "the vital task of clarifying and unifying American thought in this war of ideas."²⁴⁴ As the Armed Services Editions demonstrated, meanwhile, books served as "great builders of morale"; indeed, the *Times* editorialized, "Never before have soldiers and sailors been so well supplied with companionable 'weapons' against fatigue, boredom, and fear."²⁴⁵ In microcosm, the Council's efforts underscored the fundamental differences between Allies and Axis: whereas "People of the Axis lands are prevented by force from knowing the facts of the time and are told what to think," "People of this free nation are supplied with the truth as free men see it and are confidently left to think for themselves." Ultimately, the Council's work stood as a "shining example of democracy in action."²⁴⁶

Buttressing the *Times's* stance, *The Saturday Review of Literature* chimed in on Title V as well, calling the War and Navy Department's decisions "astounding" and a

clear case of what, tongue in cheek, it called “censoritis.”²⁴⁷ For its part, “N.C.” (presumably editor Norman Cousins) argued, the Council had “logically and industriously gone about fighting *Mein Kampf* with books of our own,” not least through the “unprecedented” initiatives of the Armed Services Editions.²⁴⁸ Moreover, *The Review* noted, moreover, that proving intentionality in a literary work, as Title V mandated, was at best a dicey proposition. From this perspective, Bowen’s *Yankee From Olympus* was “as much a piece of political propaganda *designed* or *calculated* to influence the coming elections as a monograph on the Archaeopteryx.”²⁴⁹ Similarly, the Army and Navy had interpreted Beard’s work in a “frenzy of literalness”; by their logic, in fact, *any* materials containing the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution was amenable to censure.²⁵⁰ Unsurprisingly, *The Saturday Review* deemed the law both “incredibly bad” and a “fantastic catch-all” that would eliminate writing of any sort of the political or social history of the United States.²⁵¹

In a blistering crescendo, “N.C.” argued that “We are doing more than keeping ‘politics’ out of the Army; we are keeping out the rudimentary facts of life as they pertain to the operation of this nation.”²⁵² Hinting at the political underpinnings of the issue, he characterized the furor over Title V not only as a “bad case of Congressional jitters” but also as little more than a “handful of vociferous Congressmen...bullying officials into pathetic passivity.”²⁵³ The unrepentant Cousins, in fact, asserted that any discussion of the post-1931 United States, viz. the New Deal, had been consigned to “a sort of contamination ward.”²⁵⁴ He concluded by underscoring a vexing paradox: on the one hand, the government seemed determined to create a “hermetically sealed vacuum free of

all information and intelligence” and yet, on the other, “we complain because our fighting men do not seem to know what they are fighting for.”²⁵⁵

General Manager of Editions for the Armed Services, Inc., Philip Van Doren Stern inveighed against censorship issue in late July of 1944. Speaking putatively as a private citizen, Stern reviewed the process of selection vis-à-vis the Armed Services Editions and emphasized that the Advisory Committee (appointed by the Council on Books in Wartime) comprised of publishers, booksellers, reviewers, authors, and librarians remained “very careful” to eschew titles that might offend any person(s) politically, religiously, or racially.²⁵⁶ Moreover, Army and Navy officials had final say, approving each title in writing before it was put into production and thereby making “doubly sure” that selected books were of entertainment and morale value only—as “non-controversial as possible.”²⁵⁷ Given the extensive vetting process, Stern characterized the process as working “very satisfactorily.”²⁵⁸ Indeed, having received letters of approbation from “every theater of war” and having endured only one protest on religious, racial, or political grounds, Stern seemingly stood on solid evidentiary ground.

Given the loopholes for magazines, Stern argued, “It seems to me that books have been discriminated against”; ironically, one of the banned books, Beard’s *Republic*, remained available, albeit only in *periodical* form. Echoing *The Saturday Review*’s editorial Stern asserted that such legislation “strikes at the very heart of the democratic principles on which our Government is supposedly run”—especially given the self-censorship provisions already in place.²⁵⁹ Stern, too, underscored the difference between totalitarian and democratic societies, noting: “The law...is more suited to a Prussianized army than to a democratic one”; similarly, such a law “represents what we are trying to

destroy, and is destructive of what we are trying to preserve.”²⁶⁰ Stern perorated: “Is the citizen-soldier to be merely a soldier—an unthinking cog in a vast military machine—and lose the rights he had as a citizen?”²⁶¹ At any event, 1944 proved Roosevelt’s narrowest victory and the GOP preserved its coalitional supremacy with Southern Democrats while picking up a Senate seat. On the other hand, the Democrats gained twenty-two House seats.

Finally, in 1947 John Jamieson framed the key provision for censorship (Title V of the Soldier Voting Law) as having produced “violent, chaotic, even ludicrous results.”²⁶² As a case in point, Jamieson reemphasized the absurdity of books such as Zane Grey’s *Riders of the Purple Sage* being proscribed because it contained passages ostensibly defamatory to Mormons. Title V notwithstanding, though, the Army’s record remained “notably clean”²⁶³ As one Service Command Librarian quipped: “We had just enough trouble to know that there had been no real trouble.”²⁶⁴ Similarly, in his 1968 article William Leary emphasized that the ban on books was “particularly harsh.”²⁶⁵ But like Jamieson, he stressed the Army’s relative lenience with respect to censorship. Still, the censorship imbroglio suggested the relative vulnerability of print culture in wartime.

Fortunately, the travails of censorship failed to divert focus from the most important endeavor: getting books to servicemen. In the midst of the censorship controversy, a less sanguine assessment of the broader armed services library condition, albeit in the Aleutian Islands, came from Murray Morgan through the *New York Times*’s John Chamberlain. The vast majority of fiction (approximately 6,500 of 9,000 books) came from United Service Organization donations. For Morgan, “About the best that can be said of the books is that they are varied as only an assortment of gift books could

be.”²⁶⁶ Unimpressed with what he (enigmatically) termed the “Mexican shelf,” Morgan called the fiction selection “spottier yet” and lacking especially in novels of social protest.²⁶⁷ By contrast, mysteries could be found in abundance and amounted to half of all circulation. Still, on the whole, the library remained “little used”²⁶⁸

Also contravening rosier estimates, Morgan estimated that a mere hundred men (half of them officers) checked out fully eighty percent of all books that circulated. As Morgan concluded, “a majority of GI’s did not read as civilians and have not acquired the habit in the Army.”²⁶⁹ As vehicles for pin-ups, magazines remained in higher demand. Finally, Morgan saw Armed Services Editions mainly used by the same men who already patronized the library. That said, Morgan related an anecdote in which one of his hut-mates had been “weaned” from comic books by having *Moby Dick* “thrust” into his hands; more encouraging, the man subsequently “graduated” to Barnes’s *Intellectual and Cultural History of the Western World*.²⁷⁰ In short, the reception of Armed Services Editions remained uneven. Even so, as a letter from Stanley Rinehart Jr. to General George Marshall 5/11/1944 stated, “We were all pleased to read that you carry a set of [ASE] with you when traveling.” Rinehart also praised the “finest kind of understanding and cooperation [received] from all members of the War Department associated with this work.”²⁷¹ Similarly, the *New Yorker*’s A.J. Liebling found readers when he shadowed servicemen mustering for D-Day in early June of 1944. As one soldier put it, having read *Knight Without Armor* in a single day and currently in the midst of *Candide*, “These little books are a great thing...they take you away.”²⁷² Still, as John Jamieson later conceded, reading under fire was “exceptional.”²⁷³

An official Army statement in August, 1944, called overdue attention to the Armed Services Editions project, “one of the largest book publishing ventures in the world.”²⁷⁴ Focusing largely on logistics, the statement stressed the continued cooperation among the Council on Books in Wartime, the Army’s Special Services Division, and Navy Department representatives. Published monthly, each series was designated by a letter of the alphabet. Series A through I included thirty titles each; with series J, the number was increased to thirty-two. Delivered in bulk to the Overseas Supply Division at the New York Port of Embarkation and subsequently assembled into sets weighing 7.5 pounds, Armed Services Editions reached troops around the world via the Army Postal Service. Commencing with the I series (August, 1944), moreover, sets were slated to be mailed to general hospitals in the United States and with the J series, to stateside station hospitals. In terms of overseas distribution, one set per month was allocated for each 150 men or major fraction thereof, one set for each fifty hospital beds, and one set for each small detached unit of less than 150 men. Meanwhile, the YMCA’s War Prisoners’ Aid sent four thousand sets per month to prisoners of war. In September production was ratcheted up to forty titles per month. On the whole, fourteen million books reached servicemen between October of 1943 and June of 1944—not including books for the Navy.²⁷⁵ Still, distribution could be problematic, both in terms of geographic location (getting books to the men) and in terms of apportioning books among the men (ASE relied on the first come, first served rule).

A second official statement in December of 1944 emphasized the transient nature of the Armed Services Editions: “They belong in men’s pockets, on their bunks, on dayroom tables, rather than on carefully guarded library shelves.”²⁷⁶ Offering a “wide

range” of title “for every taste,” books passed through a detailed screening process, from the Council’s Advisory Committee to the Army’s Special Services Division and the United States Navy to final scrutiny by the book reviewing section of Editions for Armed Services, Inc., who checked the titles against specific criteria enumerated by the Special Services Division and the Navy.²⁷⁷ Priority remained for those stationed overseas in fighting zones, remote areas, or hospitals. Even the hospitals devised a sub-hierarchy of service, as books were earmarked first for ward patients, then for ambulatory patients, convalescents, and finally, medical detachment personnel.

Finally, the statement illustrated the range of materials with specific examples, describing typical books theretofore disseminated in Armed Services Editions (and not listed above). Classics included *Tristram Shandy* while popular classics included *Call of the Wild*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Moby Dick*; conversely, best-sellers included *Bedford Village*. So-called serious fiction, meanwhile, included *Of Human Bondage*, *The Apostle*, *My Antonia*, *Short Stories of Thomas Mann*, and *Grapes of Wrath* and humor included *Inside Benchley*, *A Subtreasury of American Humor*, *Laugh with Leacock*, *Low Man on a Totem Pole*, and *The Education of Hyman Kaplan*. The “perennial serviceman’s favorite” Thorne Smith contributed *The Bishop’s Jaegers*, *Skin and Bones*, and *The Glorious Pool*; on a similarly light note, the western genre contributed more than twenty titles in the first twelve series.²⁷⁸ Poetry both serious and humorous (Nash’s *Good Intentions*, Housman’s *Selected Poems*) rounded out of the fiction selections.

Nonfiction selections displayed much the same pattern of variegation as their fictional counterparts. *The Making of Modern Britain*, *A Time for Greatness*, *Storm Over the Land*, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, *Good Neighbors*, and *The Arabs* were representative titles

in history and politics; books focusing more narrowly on the war included *Miracle in Hellas* and *The Story of Dr. Wassell*. Third, biography and autobiography provided titles such as *The Horse and Buggy Doctor*, *Queen Victoria*, and *Happy Days*; on a lighter note, inspirational titles included *The Book Nobody Knows* and *On Being a Real Person*. Finally, selections included a trove of miscellany on agriculture, medicine, reporting, and so forth with title like *Deserts on the March*, *Lice and History*, *McSorley's Wonderful Saloon*, *Selected Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, *Wind, Sand and Stars*, and *Science Yearbook*.²⁷⁹

In February of 1945, citing a “tremendous increase” in requests from servicemen, the Council planned to issue eighty-five million books in the calendar year.²⁸⁰ At the Council’s third annual meeting on 1 February, speakers included Trautman, Chester Kerr of the OWI, who had taken charge of Overseas Editions, Inc., and Commander Walter Karrig, chief of the books and magazine section of the Navy’s Public Relations Division and co-author of *Battle Report*. With characteristic ebullience, Trautman characterized the serviceman’s interest in books as one in which “he is willing to pay another soldier just for the privilege of being next in line to read his book.”²⁸¹ Despite increasing output from twenty million to fifty million books, meanwhile, scarcity often prevailed. Allaying Trautman’s concern, Stern promised to ratchet up production such that eight million books would be produced per month beginning in July of 1945. He also noted that through January of 1945, 534 titles had been printed. Finally, the Council, run on a year-to-year basis and funded entirely by the “voluntary subscription” of its members, voted to continue its activity for another year and elected a new board of directors.²⁸² The

Council appointed the indisposed Norton Honorary Chair. Returning Directors included Simon, Scott, Best, Beaird, Blanton, de Graff, Duell, Hecht, Hopper, Johnson, Lippincott, Macrae, McIntyre, Rinehart, Sloane, Walsh, Wood, Mrs. Coles, and Milam.

Notwithstanding Hoyns, who had passed away, departing Directors included Cerf, Freud, Hitchcock, Kimball, Smith, and Thompson. New members included Marion Bacon (Vassar Book Shop), Hugh Kelly (Whittlesey House), Alfred Knopf (Alfred A. Knopf), Henry Laughlin (Houghton Mifflin Company), Frank MacGregor (Harper and Brothers), Joseph Margolies (Brentano's), and Charles Proffitt (Columbia University Press).

In a contemporary editorial, Frederic C. Melcher of *Publishers' Weekly* praised the “impressive” response of the publishing world in developing large-scale cooperative ventures with the federal government.²⁸³ Melcher also emphasized that “quantities cannot begin to meet the demands for reading”; even so, he allowed the Council “justifiable pride” in its work and with a tinge of bathos lauded the “self-sacrificing effort” by industry leaders who “enabled books to play their part in the war.”²⁸⁴ In particular, Melcher praised Council stalwarts such as Johnson, Norton, Kerr, Simon, Stern, Scott, the late Hoyns, Farrar, the late Jennie Flexner, and Ogden.

Deeming the American army as having “the highest standard of education...that has ever been known” and the “best-read army in history,” *The New Republic's* Bruce Bliven editorialized that Armed Services Editions were “literally teaching millions of Americans to read books, many of them good books, who never read anything before except newspapers, and in them chiefly the comic strips.”²⁸⁵ More pragmatically, such books “relieve the boredom of the endless waiting which constitutes the greater part of all life in the armed services.”²⁸⁶ On the other hand, “a good many men want to reread these

books with which they are already somewhat familiar or which they feel should be part of the background of *every cultured individual*.”²⁸⁷ Bliven proved overoptimistic in claiming that books were available in “practically unlimited quantity,” but he did note that the Armed Services Editions initiative was on pace for seventy million per year and had increased initial printings to one hundred and forty thousand.²⁸⁸ Similarly, Bliven emphasized the intellectual bond among soldiers that such books could foster, for “Almost never is a volume read by fewer than two or three people, and some popular titles have passed through more than twenty hands.”²⁸⁹

More specifically, Bliven portrayed the Army as a “cross-section” of the civilian population that read the same types of books in the same proportions as “any other body of predominately young, predominantly male, citizens.”²⁹⁰ As a result, the Advisory Committee remained “careful to give the soldiers what they want, and not what somebody thinks might be good for them.”²⁹¹ For the most part, then, the “emphasis is on entertainment rather than improvement, though the Council stands ready to add informative works at any indication that they are really desired.”²⁹² Bliven found contemporary fiction and humor, as well as murder mysteries and westerns to be the most popular selections; even so, he discerned a “small but steady demand” for poetry.²⁹³ Overall, in the first year and a half of the Armed Services Editions programs, more than a quarter of selections were novels, while humor comprised approximately fifteen percent, and biography and autobiography about ten percent.

Up to the beginning of 1945, moreover, other classifications and number of titles included drama (three), self-help and inspiration (four), current affairs (eleven), aviation (six), sports (ten), history (thirteen), science (fifteen), nature and animals (five), music

and the arts (two), foreign countries and travel (twenty-seven), sea stories and the navy (nineteen), fantasy (eleven), adventure (fifteen), and classics (nineteen). Meanwhile, also suggesting the allure of compilations and lighter fare, Pocket Books's top ten sellers over the same time period (none of which were available in ASE) included *The Pocket Dictionary*; Zola's *Nana*; *The Pocket Book of Cartoons*; *See Here, Private Hargrove*; *The Pocket Book of Verse*; *The Pocket Book of Boners*; *The Case of the Curious Bride* by Erle Stanley Gardner; *Damon Runyon Favorites*; an Ellery Queen murder mystery; and *Lost Horizon* by James Hilton.

Paying "personal tribute" to the Armed Services Editions, Pfc. John Van Der Voort, a former English teacher, emphasized the salutary effect such books exerted on servicemen's morale.²⁹⁴ Onboard ship, in fact, "one saw soldiers eagerly devouring these books, oblivious of overcrowded decks, a blazing sun, and a heaving ocean."²⁹⁵ Indeed, "Whenever a spare moment or an empty space permitted, the books emerged from hip pockets"; characteristically pedagogic, Van Der Voort posited that "leisure plus a readily available book equals a reader."²⁹⁶ That said, though Van Der Voort thought the titles "wisely chosen," few servicemen touched Plato or Emerson.²⁹⁷ He "deplored" the lack of controversial material as well as the dearth of travel books, but he found the greatest demand for "long novels whose sweep of narrative provides escape from the problems of the present" and cited as examples *As the Earth Turns*, *Windswept*, *Little Caesar*, and *Roughly Speaking*.²⁹⁸

Like Trautman looking ahead to the postwar world, Van Der Voort encouraged commercial publishers to adopt the ASE format. Showing his genteel side, Van Der Voort argued that although the soldier had become "an avid reader through force of

circumstances,” publishers should continue to cultivate him postwar, perhaps through the simultaneous publication of a twenty-five-cent paperback edition and a regular edition. As Van Der Voort put it, “Let [publishers] not drive him back to the intellectual stagnation of the pulps and the slick magazines.”²⁹⁹ Switching metaphors, he pleaded “May the individual publishers continue to satisfy that hunger [for books] instead of withdrawing nourishment by returning to outworn publishing practices.”³⁰⁰ Concluding on a personal note, Van Der Voort characterized “every” soldier as indebted to the ASE; further, he evinced gratitude for the ASE’s help “in maintaining [his] sanity and emotional balance during a trying time.”³⁰¹

Even the mainstream media took note of the Armed Services Editions. In the *Saturday Evening Post*, for example, David G. Wittels noted that “In this most murderous and precedent-shattering struggle in history, millions of men have been going into battle equipped with books as well as guns.”³⁰² Framing the Armed Services Editions program as not only the “greatest book-publishing project in history” but also a “typically American mass-production miracle,” Wittels lauded the project’s “beautifully simple” strategy: reversing the conventional publishing process, publishers *first* lined up facilities and *then* tailored books to fit them.³⁰³ Though the English, Russians, and Germans discerned early on that books would prove “vital” to morale, they failed to solve the vexing problem of bulk.³⁰⁴ American business—with the federal government as midwife—did.

Mired in “non-ivory-tower conditions,” soldiers nonetheless read “far more books than such a cross-section of American men ever read before”; indeed, “Some are reading books for the first time since childhood.”³⁰⁵ Books were even parachuted into remote

areas and soldiers regarded books' arrival as a "major event."³⁰⁶ Like A.J. Liebling, Wittels noted that books accompanied men as they prepared for D-Day in June of 1944; in fact, in the marshaling area men "abandoned souvenirs, spare shoes and blankets, but not a single one of these books was left behind."³⁰⁷ A corporal in New Guinea observed: "They make us feel still part of civilization."³⁰⁸ Meanwhile, Pfc. John L. Stewart linked the freedom to read with the freedom for which the United States was fighting the Axis, writing "It would be a bad bargain to win territories but lose that magic kingdom which you defend."³⁰⁹

Wittels framed servicemen's literary tastes as roughly akin to those of stateside civilians, but differences arose. For instance, soldiers showed greater interest in books that explained the human mind, e.g. James Harvey Robinson's *The Mind in the Making* and Robert Thouless's *How To Think Straight*, than did their civilian counterparts. On the whole, Wittels saw a "goodly" number of serious, thoughtful, "literary" books; even so, Westerns were "read avidly," as the first 534 books issued as ASE included eight by Ernest Haycox, seven by Max Brand, five by Eugene Manlove Rhodes, and two dozen others.³¹⁰ Adventure "semiclassics" included four Conrad titles and from Jack London, while C.S. Forester's sea stories merited six inclusions and both *Moby Dick* and *Typee*, as well as *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist* found numerous readers.³¹¹ On a similar note, humor found a ready audience: the first 534 books issues included five by James Thurber, five by Mark Twain, and three by Robert Benchley. Ironically, though men predictably "clamor[ed] for books with sex situations," "even the search for ribald passages tend[ed] to cause a taste for reading books to sneak up on men not previously interested."³¹² Finally, as Pocket Books had discovered, short story compilations

remained “in such demand that collections not previously published had to be created.”³¹³ Though not all men were converted, to most books seemed little less than “manna.”³¹⁴

On the other hand, books rejected from “service” in the ASE included Franz Boas’s *Mind of Primitive Man* (ostensibly too specialized); Will Durant’s *Story of Philosophy* (too dated); Tacitus (too scholarly); *Letters of Alexander Woollcott* (not “manly” enough); and *Some of My Best Friends are Soldiers* (title too ambiguous). As noted above, overt censorship also reared its head; risibly, one censored title was the Army Air Force’s own *Official Guide to the Army Air Force* because it contained a portrait of Franklin Roosevelt as Commander in Chief. But “Loud, raucous laughter”—not to mention “indignant public clamor” spurred a subsequent relaxation of censorship policies.³¹⁵ Despite such hiccups, publishers looked sanguinely to the postwar world.

Russia declared war on Japan on August 8, 1945, two days after Hiroshima and one day before Nagasaki. That day, meanwhile, the *Saturday Review of Literature* bestowed its award for distinguished service to American literature upon the Council on Books in Wartime for the Armed Services Editions. Editor Norman Cousins presented plaques to Richard Simon in his capacity as chairperson and Philip Van Doren Stern in his capacity as manager. Having thus far supplied sixty-five million books to Army and Navy personnel, the ASE’s current production stood at one hundred and fifty-five thousand copies of forty titles each month.³¹⁶ *The Saturday Review* speculated that each title was passed around to four other men; if this was true, then each member of the armed services received access to twenty-five books. More striking than mere numbers, however, the books themselves satisfied an “important need,” as “men are reading where men have never read before.”³¹⁷ Perhaps most important, books had become part of

soldiers' "regular equipment all over the world."³¹⁸ As one Air Force lieutenant stationed in India opined, the ASE represented "something very big and very lasting."³¹⁹ The postwar world would test this assertion.

In the fall of 1945, the war two months over, Frederick Melcher reflected upon the lessons the Armed Services Editions experience provided for the book industry. Its list of titles, Melcher asserted, merited the "careful study of all the book trade and librarians."³²⁰ Melcher divined an even greater preponderance of fiction titles than had earlier observers (sixty percent of all selections). Of eighty-eight popular fiction titles, moreover, one in nine was a Western, a notable contrast with stateside audiences, with whom Westerns had not been big sellers "for some time."³²¹ In this vein, Max Brand and Ernest Haycox placed more titles on the ASE list than any other author. Other fiction categories heavily represented included historical novels (eighty-eight); mysteries (fifty); and short stories (forty-eight). Contemporary fiction put up substantial numbers, too, with 127 titles that included C.S. Forester (eight), as well as mainstays such as Jack London, Walter Edmonds, Mark Twain, and John Steinbeck. Similarly, humor racked up ninety-one titles, with Thorne Smith and James Thurber spearheading that category.³²²

A professional librarian in civilian life, John Jamieson served as Assistant Executive Officer of the Library Branch of the Army's Special Services Division from 1943 onward and became, in effect, the Army Library Service's court historian. In a fall 1945 article, he assessed the first two years of the Armed Services Editions and the men who read them. Rejecting as a "complete misconception" that soldiers were nothing but "naïve lowbrows," Jamieson asserted that highbrows and lowbrows coexisted in the service, but that the "great majority" of personnel fell somewhere in between the two.³²³

Reading—of some sort—was part of soldiers’ daily lives as civilians and remained “very important” for them overseas.³²⁴ In that way, “Because of physical isolation, conditions of weather and terrain, the foreign language of the native population, or the nature of their work, they are often cut off from other forms of recreation” and thus reading proved attractive.³²⁵ Still, library officers stationed overseas agreed: the popularity of recreational reading stemmed from the “expansion of the reading public overseas rather than from any marked change in the reading interests of individual soldiers.”³²⁶ Those made readers by circumstance “almost exclusively” preferred fiction or recreational nonfiction.³²⁷ Such idle soldiers became “omnivorous readers, with a extraordinary capacity for reading almost any type of novel with great enjoyment,” especially if such men did not read much as civilians because of their lack of ready access to newspapers, magazines, movies, and radio.³²⁸ Armed Services Editions in particular fostered a taste for reading in those who had never before read or had read only magazines and newspapers. As a whole, books proved of “vital importance” for recreation and the services found it necessary to issue books “just as food and clothing were issued.”³²⁹

Overall, novels dealing with sex, action stories (especially westerns), collections of short stories and humorous pieces, and recent popular novels received the most favorable response. As Jamieson soft-pedaled, “Naturally books that are obviously for the feminine trade are not popular, although hospital patients occasionally do show an unexpected interest in writers like Fannie Hurst and Faith Baldwin.”³³⁰ Even so, he thought overseas soldiers’ tastes did “not differ in any important way from those of

civilians.”³³¹ As such, libraries overseas were heavily weighted (seventy percent) toward fiction.

Though the Library Branch of the Special Services Division retained overall responsibility, in practice overseas library service hinged on theater commanders’ individual decisions, as they were putatively the best judges of supply needs and of available cargo room. During the early stages of the war, regular editions of books were plentiful “only in the rear areas of most theaters” and were “spotty” even there.³³² The Armed Services Editions filled that gap, as the services distributed them automatically each month *without* reliance upon the relevant local commander.

Disseminating sixty-five million books between September, 1943, and September, 1945, the ASE included first, a “generous proportion” of current best sellers, then popular books of the past and works of general interest in numerous subject fields.³³³ Catering to “every taste,” ASE selectors deemed variety “not only desirable but necessary.”³³⁴ That said, “inevitably” ASE selection reflected the presence of professional bookmen on the advisory committee but to Jamieson the lists contained “such an abundance of good stuff” that one must feel a “thrill of pleasure” from seeing them.³³⁵ Men preferring good writing as opposed to light or “racy” writing had a “somewhat wider choice,” but the array of magazines compensated for this imbalance.³³⁶ As Jamieson specified, the 774 books published at the time of his writing included adventure (seventeen), aviation (six), biography (fifty-seven), classics (twenty-one), contemporary fiction (127), current affairs (twelve), drama (four), fantasy (nineteen), historical novels (eighty-nine), history (seventeen), humor (ninety-one), miscellaneous (ten), music and arts (six), mysteries (fifty), nature (eight), poetry (seventeen), science (sixteen), sea stories (twenty-three),

self-help (six), short story collections (forty-eight), sports (eleven), travel (thirty-one), and westerns (eighty-eight).

For troops training stateside, Jamieson divined a pronounced demand for utilitarian literature pivoting around military service and Army careers. Even more soldiers clamored for materials on mathematics and on all aspects of mechanics and aeronautics. Other subjects that attracted “almost universal interest” included psychology, marriage and sex relations, etiquette and “personality,” photography and hobbies, and war and world events.³³⁷ Unsurprisingly, anecdotal humor books proved “immensely popular” as were sensationalist “lowdown” books featuring plots involving political intrigue or gangsters.³³⁸ In short, the fictional preferences of stateside soldiers were “almost identical” to the preferences of soldiers abroad.³³⁹ Similarly, books shipped abroad preserved the same ratio of fiction to nonfiction as did books earmarked for domestic use: between forty and forty-five percent fiction and fifty-five and sixty percent nonfiction. After 1943, moreover, research suggested that the demand for recreational reading among overseas personnel far exceeded the demand domestically; the former also evinced less interest in subject-interest materials.

Jamieson cited an unspecified 1944 study that sought to determine the broad popularity of the first one hundred and twenty ASE titles. Twenty-nine were categorized as “outstandingly popular,” twenty-four of which were fiction.³⁴⁰ These fictional favorites included seven westerns, one title that linked humorous stories (*Education of Hyman Kaplan*), one short-story collection (*The Best Short Stories of 1943*), one humorous novel (*Suds in Your Eyes*), and six recent bestsellers: Steinbeck’s *Tortilla Flat* and *Grapes of Wrath*, Smith’s *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Marshall’s *Great Smith*, and

Mason's *Rivers of Glory*. The remaining eight novels were a variegated lot: *Typee*, *Candide*, one satire (*Star-Spangled Virgin*), and four action stories (*Hostages*, *Slim*, *Swamp Water*, and *Without Orders*). Meanwhile, nonfiction favorites included *Life in a Putty Knife Factory* (anecdotal humor), *Love at First Flight* (humor about flight training), *McSorley's Wonderful Saloon* (humorous reporting), *Report from Tokyo*, and *Fathoms Below* (diving and undersea salvage drama).

Compiled semi-annually, library reports from overseas indicated the titles most often requested (whether available or not). In the first half of 1944, Lilian Smith's *Strange Fruit*, James T. Farrell's *Studs Lonigan*, Erskine Caldwell's *God's Little Acre*, and James M. Cain's *Postman Always Rings Twice* earned top billing. Ben Ames Williams's *Strange Woman* and *Leave Her to Heaven*, John Hersey's *A Bell for Adano*, Charles Jackson's *Lost Weekend*, Nancy Hale's *Prodigal Women*, and Ilka Chase's *In Bed We Cry* also proved popular. Finally, authors whose works were most requested (no specific titles) included James T. Farrell, Zane Grey, Thorne Smith, Donald Henderson Clarke, Ernest Hemingway, Erle Stanley Gardner, Ellery Queen, Bromfield, Tiffany Thayer, Ben Ames Williams, A.J. Cronin, Damon Runyon, Kenneth Roberts, and John Steinbeck.

Service personnel manifested sizeable interest in current bestsellers, too. For example, of the *New York Times*'s seven fiction bestsellers circa mid-September 1944, three were prominent in overseas library reports (*Strange Fruit*, *Leave Her to Heaven*, and *A Bell for Adano*); two had been printed twice in ASE (*The Robe* and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*); and two others were often mentioned in library reports from the second half of the year (*History of Rome Hanks* and *The Razor's Edge*). By contrast, of the *Times*'s

nonfiction bestsellers, only three were “outstandingly popular” among overseas troops: Bob Hope’s *I Never Left Home*, Gene Fowler’s *Good Night, Sweet Prince*, and Ernie Pyle’s *Here is Your War*.³⁴¹ Even when war ended, demand for these books remained strong. In fact, the end of war “completely transformed” the armed services and thus the soldiers’ daily lives: increased leisure time necessitated a vast expansion of recreational options; similarly, recreational equipment earned a high shipping priority for the first time.³⁴² Like many of his fellow scribes, Jamieson looked to the future with guarded optimism, noting, “It is reasonable to assume that the majority of these new readers of books will remain habitual book readers in civil life only if books are made readily and cheaply accessible to them.”³⁴³ In this vein, Pocket Books sold more than forty million books in 1945, avoiding serious literature and fiction, subsisting on light nonfiction and paperback originals, and unlike the ASE, eschewing classics and Westerns altogether.³⁴⁴

Looking to the postwar world, Americans craved both safety from war and security from economic depression.³⁴⁵ In historian James T. Patterson’s words, it was an era of “Grand Expectations.” That said, at war’s end Americans experienced a “bewilderingly pluralist” society of 139.9 million persons.³⁴⁶ Surveying the larger publishing milieu, meanwhile, historian John Tebbel notes that “More happened to the industry during the period...1940 to 1980, than in all the previous periods combined.”³⁴⁷ Despite the domestic atmosphere of political reaction and metastasizing anxiety over the Cold War, the ASE continued its work. A six-month contract covering 1 January through 30 June of 1946 provided for publication of one hundred and five thousand copies of each title in January with a scaling down to fifty thousand by June. At its final annual

meeting 30 January 1946, the council decided to dissolve the following day; to donate its records to an appropriate repository; and to permit the Book Publishers Association to use any useful information the Council generated through its radio, film, or book list initiatives for the good of the publishing industry. Finally, the Council labeled peace no less urgent than war and cautioned that a new organization might be needed in the future to carry out the Council's sometime objectives.³⁴⁸

In spite of the Council's dissolution, in February, 1946, it was planned to continue ASE until the fall of 1946, and in April the deadline was extended through 1947. The new plan called for the production of twelve titles per month in lots of twenty-five thousand (twenty thousand for the Army, five thousand for the Navy) copies per title. Changing economies of scale, however, necessitated a change in format. Following Pocket Books's lead, ASE would use rubber plates, thereby securing a cost of eighteen cents per book; concomitantly, the plan upped royalties to six cents per copy. In spite of the continuation of ASE, as Tebbel observes, "With the end of the war, a publishing era also came to an end, one that had begun with the close of the First World War."³⁴⁹ But postwar possibilities also beckoned; in 1946, Tebbel judges, "optimism prevailed everywhere."³⁵⁰

Besides the ongoing ASE, the Council's achievements as of 1 February 1946 seemed both wide-ranging and substantial. It had provided 3.6 million books (thirty-five titles in from one to three languages each) for the Overseas Editions, supervised by a Management Committee that included Stanley Rinehart (Farrar and Rinehart), William Sloane (Henry Holt and Company), and Marshall Best (Viking Press). Similarly, it produced three regularly scheduled radio programs and numerous special ones, totaling

more than three hundred programs. LeBaron Barker (Doubleday, Doran and Company) had chaired the effort until February 1943, then Albert Leventhal (Simon and Schuster) took over. Original members included Farrar, Norman Hood (Henry Holt and Company), and Leventhal; later members included Raymond Bond (Dodd, Mead and Company), Frank Taylor (Reynal and Hitchcock), Benn Hall (Duell, Sloane and Pearce), Mrs. Francis Merriam (Random House), and Elinor Green (Simon and Schuster). Also exploiting the medium of film, the Council produced seven films; Arthur Wang (Thomas Y. Crowell Company) chaired the Committee and was joined by Robert M. Coles (ABA), Alan Collins (Curtis Brown, Ltd.), Jacob Wilk (Warner Brothers), and Clarence Boutell (G.P. Putnam's Sons).

The Council had completed fifty-eight book lists recommending books thought to be useful vis-à-vis the war. Three committees undergirded the effort. The Library Committee included Jennie Flexner (who chaired until November 1944) and Beatrice Libaire (who chaired subsequently). Other members included Marion Dodd (Hampshire Bookshop), Flora Ludington (Mt. Holyoke College Library), Alice Hackett (*Publishers Weekly*), and Meredith Wood (Book of the Month Club). The Recommended War Books Committee included Donald Gordon (American New Company), Francis Ludlow (Retail Bookseller), Virginia Kirkus (Virginia Kirkus Bookshop Service), Amy Loveman (Book of the Month Club and *Saturday Review of Literature*), John Beecroft (Literary Guild), and Hackett. Finally, the Children's Book Committee included Vernon Ives (Holiday House), Doris Patee (Macmillan Company), Lena Barksdale (Doubleday, Doran Book Shops), Irene Smith (Brooklyn Public Library), and Marguerite Kirk (Librarian of the Board of Education, Newark, NJ).

On a related note, the “Imperative” Book Plan operated under the aegis first of the War Book Panel (1942-1943) and subsequently under the Recommended Book Committee (1944-1945). The former included Irita Van Doren (*New York Herald Tribune*), Loveman, J. Donald Adams (*New York Times*), Colonel Joseph I. Greene (*Infantry Journal*), and Admiral H.E. Yarnell (U.S.N., retired). The Recommended Book Committee included Loveman, Hackett, Ludlow, Kirkus, Beecroft, and Donald Gordon (American News Company). The council proved well-stocked with respect to the Press and Promotion Committees. Edwin Seaver (Book of the Month Club) chaired the Press Committee and was joined by Leo Mishkin (Book of the Month Club), Boutell, Charles Denhard (Denhard, Pfeiffer and Wells), and Eugene Armfield (*Publishers Weekly*). Meanwhile, the Promotion Committee was led by Franklin Spier (Spier and Sussman), and included Thomas Maher (Macmillan Company), Paul North Rice (New York Public Library), Paul Hampton (*Atlantic Monthly*), and T.J. Doran (Retail Bookseller); later members included Helen Taylor (Henry Holt and Company) and Leslie Grinnell (Macmillan Company).

The Council supported innumerable speakers under the Forums and Fairs Committee. Chairs in succession included Farrar (August-October 1942), Sloane (October 1942-February 1943), and Ogden (February 1943-September 1943). Original members, meanwhile, numbered Philip Hodge (Farrar and Rinehart), Kenneth McCormick (Doubleday, Doran and Company), Coles, Lois Cole (Macmillan Company), E.S. Mills, Jr. (Longmans, Green and Company), and Ogden; later members included George Shiveley (D. Appleton-Century Company), John Woodburn (Harcourt, Brace and Company), Hardwick Moseley (Houghton Mifflin Company), and John McCaffery

(Doubleday, Doran and Company). Finally, the council as a whole provided crucial support in modifying legislation such as the Soldiers Vote Bill.³⁵¹

In June, 1946, both the Army and the Navy requested continuing service to overseas personnel. As ASE manager H. Stahley Thompson announced, subsequent shipments would include twelve titles per month for the coming year; meanwhile, each title would be printed in twenty-five thousand-copy lots. Thompson reemphasized the project's commitment to including the most recent and the most popular titles. In fact, he hoped to distribute the new selections overseas simultaneous with their trade edition issue domestically.³⁵² Meanwhile, the War Department turned over between one hundred and seventy-five thousand and two hundred thousand Armed Services Editions to the Veterans Administration for distribution among 110 hospitals. In a marked shift, the Veterans Association also received 942 packets of forty titles each. Every hospital or home received between one and forty-four sets; the VA special services in conjunction with the Army's special services handled distribution.³⁵³

In August of 1946, forty titles of fifty thousand copies were issued. Beginning in October, however, ASE issued only twelve titles per month of twenty-five thousand copies per title, a plan finalized for one year. More important, the loss of wartime economies of scale necessitated a change in format: the new Armed Services Editions resembled Pocket Books paperbacks. Moreover, they no longer opened flat; even so, printed on rotary presses from rubber plates, the new ASE still ran from 128 to 512 pages; again, very few were condensed. October titles included C.S. Forester's *Lord Hornblower*; Ernie Pyle's *Last Chapter*; John McNulty's *Third Avenue, New York*; Peter Field's *Ravaged Range*; Gore Vidal's *Williwaw*; Will Ermine's *Outlaw on Horseback*;

Luke Short's *Coroner Creek*; Dorothy Macardle's *The Unforeseen*; Lucy Cores's *Let's Kill George*; Alice Campbell's *With Bated Breath*; Gene Fowler's *A Solo in Tom-Toms*; and *The Saturday Evening Post Stories*, edited by Ben Hibbs.

The Advisory Committee for the new endeavor included familiar faces in Loveman, Margolies, Hansen, Gannett, and Stern. Insofar as Mark Van Doren had resigned, Virginia Kirkus of Harper and Brothers joined the committee. Head of the Army Library Service Paul E. Postell retained final say (assisted by Mildred Young), sharing duties with the head of the Navy Libraries, Isabel DuBois. Despite its decreased size, ASE now retained its own art director in William Ronin. Notwithstanding manager H. Stahley Thompson, other key members of the ASE production team included Bernice Mitchell, Edgar Macklin, and Ben Zimmerman.

Vice-Chairman S. Spencer Scott presided over the Council on Books in Wartime's annual meeting in May of 1947. Reelected officers included Simon as chair, Scott as vice-chair and treasurer, and Marshall A. Best as secretary. Also following precedent, the Management Committee included Johnson as chair and both Scott and Simon. Finally, Directors of the corporation included Simon, Scott, Marshall A. Best, Marion Bacon, Beard, Randall Williams, Robert de Graff, C. Halliwell Duell, Hecht, Hopper, Johnson, Hugh Kelly, Alfred Knopf, Henry Laughlin, Lippincott, Storer Lunt, Frank MacGregor, Elliott Macrae, Joseph Margolies, McIntyre, Charles Proffitt, Stanley Rinehart, Sloane, Richard Walsh, and Wood. In short, the Council continued to be remarkably incestuous with respect to the publishing world and to the production and the promotion of middlebrow culture.

After announcing the Council's intention to donate its current \$100,000 surplus to the U.S. Treasury, Scott read a letter from Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal: "It is the desire of the Navy Department not to let this occasion pass without expressing its sincere appreciation for the services rendered to naval personnel. The continuance of this wartime program for an additional year, made possible through the efforts of your organization and the cooperation of the publishers, has been of great benefit to Navy and Marine Corps personnel."³⁵⁴ More succinctly, "The Navy Department extends to your organization the greeting 'Well done.'"³⁵⁵ Similarly, General Omar Bradley wrote that he and many servicemen considered Armed Services Editions "valued companions"; he added "my own personal appreciation of your efforts and those of your associates to contribute to the well-being of our fighting men on all fronts."³⁵⁶

For his part, Joseph Margolies received a letter from Brigadier General Russel B. Reynolds, Chief of the Army Special Services, in June of 1947. Characterizing the ASE endeavor as of "invaluable aid" to American soldiers, Reynolds expressed "sincere appreciation for the important work which [Margolies] performed so conscientiously for the armed forces."³⁵⁷ Reynolds also noted the populist impact of the project, noting that "The many letters from both veterans and soldiers received by this office give evidence of the widespread praise on the part of the American soldier for the excellence of the selections included in these editions."³⁵⁸

Having recently joined H.W. Wilson as editor of miscellaneous publications and manager of foreign sales, John Jamieson probed Armed Services Editions authors as to feedback received from their G.I. readers. Insofar as by the end of the war Armed Services Editions were distributed at one hundred and thirty thousand sets per month,

Jamieson assumed that the “majority” (between half and two-thirds) of books reached their intended audience.³⁵⁹ Emphasizing the catholicity of such books’ appeal, Jamieson noted that “Just about everything was covered except text and technical books and the juvenile and purely feminine fields.”³⁶⁰ Furthermore, “The idea was to provide such varied fare that every man could find several books that appealed to him in every set, no matter how his taste ran—highbrow, lowbrow, contemporary, classic.”³⁶¹ Jamieson framed the ASE effort as the “first mass-production American publishing venture...that gave the highbrow, or shall we say the upper-middle-brow, *as good a break* as the lowbrow.”³⁶²

Jamieson solicited feedback from fifty authors; most wrote back and their answers suggested that no relationship existed between the volume of fan mail each received and their readership. Author of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Betty Smith received ten times her usual fan mail. Meanwhile, H. Allen Smith received between five thousand and ten thousand letters, Louis Bromfield and Kenneth Roberts received between one thousand five hundred and two thousand letters, Lloyd Douglas got one thousand and A.J. Cronin and Ben Ames Williams got five hundred. Writers like Hervey Allen, MacKinley Cantor, E.B. White, H.L. Mencken, Esther Forbes, Clyde Brion David, and Ernest Haycox received between two hundred and five hundred letters.

More specifically, Charles Beard received five hundred letters concerning his (ultimately proscribed) *Republic* and said that they showed “evidences of thoughtful and inquiring minds.”³⁶³ Similarly, James Thurber got between one hundred and fifty and two hundred, “almost all” of which were “highly favorable”—not to say “intelligent and well-written.”³⁶⁴ Indeed, Thurber’s books “helped [soldiers’] loneliness and...helped to

remind them of home.”³⁶⁵ H.L. Mencken also found a vast majority of his letters friendly (about ninety percent). Surprised that Katharine Anne Porter received 600 letters, Jamieson speculated that her popularity stemmed from the fact that “everyone who discovers her fancies she is his own special discovery.”³⁶⁶ Even more than Thurber or Mencken, Porter stressed that her letters “were all without exception friendly, sensible, sincere” and emphasized that such artifacts were “a very treasurable memory.”³⁶⁷

Naturally, authors expressed pleasure at potentially expanding their audience both among Americans and among foreign citizens. More cautious, Jamieson described the ASE as exerting a “modest” effect in extending the public for American books beyond traditional economic and geographic areas.³⁶⁸ On a related commercial note, author Glenway Wescott called selection for the ASE a “real prestige,” in no small measure because such selection inflated a work’s price when peddled to Hollywood.³⁶⁹

By contrast, despite their works’ popularity, authors of westerns received the least mail, “possibly because readers of westerns are usually inarticulate; perhaps, too, because westerns are nearly always pure escape fiction and don’t connect in any way with home or with ideas about life,” as Jamieson, showing a bit of elitism, explained.³⁷⁰ Another popular genre, mysteries, also spurred few letters to their authors.

Letters that authors received from G.I.s contained a variety of requests, ranging from life advice to writing advice to romantic overtures. That said, most persons wrote to express gratitude for books that moved them, reminded them of home, or limned their current experiences. In this vein, letters tended to be informal or conversational in tone; further suggesting their personal nature, most letters contained information not only about

from where (generally) they wrote, but also the specific place and situation in which they wrote.

Notwithstanding the widespread enthusiasm many authors recounted, it remained unclear how many soldiers would remain readers after the war. As Jamieson asserted, “One may doubt whether it changed the reading habits of a generation, but at least it enabled many hundreds of thousands of men to kill time pleasantly and sometimes profitably in dreary places where there was nothing to do but read.”³⁷¹ Indeed, in service life persons did not need to go to a physical library, nor did they need to obtain a library card or to make a reservation. Finally, unlike civilian life, wartime offered few other rival attractions. Author Ernest Haycox predicted that “Most of this correspondence will die out since the war-time feeling that we were all brethren will pass and the customary reserves and formalities will come again.”³⁷² In this vein, as Kenneth Davis notes, the ASE project simply “faded away” after the expiration of its final contract.³⁷³ Even so, the project seemed to have its effect on American culture. As André Schiffrin later reflected, 1947’s most popular authors were a “veritable honor roll” of middlebrow culture.³⁷⁴

As effective eulogies for the Council on Books in Wartime, reviews of its 1946 history emanating from the publishing industry and librarians in 1948 described the Armed Services Editions as the “most notable” of the Council’s numerous efforts.³⁷⁵ A “triumph not only in mechanical production but in bringing authors, publishers, and printers into agreements which ran counter to all normal ideas of royalties and trade practices,” the Armed Services Editions—not to mention the Council’s other activities—“helped mightily in sustaining morale” and proved a “unique” episode in publishing.³⁷⁶

More prosaically, the Council “establish[ed] the pattern for common effort in the book industry.” Looking ahead, finally, one reviewer emphasized, “Considering the slight hold book reading has in this country, the need for such common effort in peace as well as in war is clearly evident.”³⁷⁷

Perhaps more poignantly, given the nascent Cold War, another reviewer mused, “May there never be a need for it to serve as a pattern for the rebirth of a Council on Books in Wartime.”³⁷⁸ Again, the project’s peacetime possibilities were truncated. Conversely, as the history’s author, Robert Ballou, had noted, “The responsibility of the bookman is greater now than it could ever be in wartime.”³⁷⁹ For that matter, even years after the Council and the ASE’s demise, the Department of Defense was to be kept apprised of available reprint editions through consolidated list tiles and quantities issued monthly by American Book Publishers Council. For instance, in 1950, the Council convened on 10 August 1950, and planned to produce between seven hundred and seventeen hundred copies of each title of thirty selections per month. As *Publishers Weekly* noted, “Making readily available a wide selection of reading matter for the Armed Forces is considered to be one of the publishing industry’s primary responsibilities now.”³⁸⁰

As Frank Schick shows, in terms of sheer volume the paperback market as a whole mushroomed in the first decade postwar. Though the ASE project causally cannot be linked with the American public’s expanded appetite for paperbacks after the war, one might bear in mind the conclusions of the Commission on the Implications of Armed Services Education Programs, who in their 1947 report noted that “Books of all types

were used by men who had not used books before” and that libraries and other agencies and institutions should capitalize on this war-engendered momentum.³⁸¹ In fact, between 1 June 1943 and 1 October 1945, a full 10.8% of armed services inductees were either illiterate or Grade V (slow learners).³⁸² More sanguine, the Commission concluded: “All lines of evidence available indicate that the phenomenal growth of adult education will continue”; their findings, in other words, implied that those who were affected by military education would show an increased respect for print, whether in service of communication, instruction, or recreation.³⁸³ The large-scale availability of cheap books could only help.

Between 1945 and 1946, for instance, the number of titles produced spurted from 112 to 353, in no small measure due to new promotion techniques. After a brief dip in 1947 to 296 titles, 1948 saw the production of 320 titles and 135 million copies. Subsequently, publishers put forth 538 titles (184 million copies) in 1949, capitalizing on an increased demand for translations, as well as for genre publications such as science fiction and romance. Mysteries, an ASE mainstay, were on the wane: their share of the paperback market declined from approximately half (1945) to twenty-six percent in 1950 to thirteen percent in 1955. As the Book Publishers Bureau predicted, moreover, European markets provided an increasing outlet for U.S. publications. Meanwhile, paperback numbers continued to increase: from 642 titles (214 million copies) in 1950 to 866 titles (231 million copies) in 1951 to 882 titles (252 million copies) in 1952 to 1,061 titles (259 million copies) in 1953. Though production dipped to 986 titles and 240 million copies in 1954, the paperback could claim a full nine percent of the total publishing market. Nineteen fifty-five, moreover, featured a total of 1,374 titles and

1956 a total of 1,572 titles—paperbacks now counted for thirteen percent of total publishing. Finally, 1957 saw 1,469 titles printed, a slight drop from 1956 but still seemingly auspicious. Indeed, over eighteen years (1939-1957), the paperback industry grew from fewer than six publishers to more than six *dozen*.³⁸⁴

But the story of postwar paperback publishing was not one of unremitting triumph. As Kenneth C. Davis points out, even in 1946 retail outlets failed to expand sufficiently to accommodate the increased number of titles. The problem became worse over time and the number of returns from retailers to publishers became a “perennial plague.”³⁸⁵ In matters of literary taste, moreover, Davis characterizes the late 1940s as a race to the lowest common commercial denominator, as the industry became prey to fly-by-night operations and twenty-five cent books, lurid cover illustrations and cover copy as well as retitling, abridgment, and salacious editorial selection.³⁸⁶ As a result, by the early 1950s, though sales potential remained strong, the paperback industry’s reputation seemed “badly soiled.”³⁸⁷ What was more, the coexistence—not to say tension—that Kaestle and Radway discerned between consolidation and diversity between 1880 and 1940 had become “growing schizophrenia” by the mid-1950s, as lowbrow materials and serious literature and nonfiction increasingly diverged.³⁸⁸ Donald Grosset’s introduction in 1952 of the “quality” paperback by converting out of print and academic titles into cheap paperbacks only exacerbated matters. A silver lining existed, however, as by this time it was an “irrefutable fact” that paperbacks had assumed a “central position” in the publishing world.³⁸⁹ Indeed, between 1959 and 1960 revenues from paperback sales surpass those from adult trade hardcover for the first time.³⁹⁰

In 1960, the National Association of Book Publishers reissued the so-called “Cheney Report.” In a new introduction, Robert Frase of the American Book Publishers Council noted that while book publishing and distributing retained much of its essential character, massive economic changes had affect it substantially.³⁹¹ Book sales were seven times as high as in 1931, aided immeasurably by “greatly expanded” purchases of government agencies.³⁹² As so often proved the case, Frase tried to have his cake and eat it, too, as on one hand he observed that “Especially since 1950 has the growth in book sales been consistent and strong,” but on the other that the industry retained much of its historic quality of “relatively small and highly competitive business units.”³⁹³ In short, the industry seemed to teeter betwixt and between corporatization and its artisanal roots, unwilling to embrace the former or to eschew the latter.

In the fifteen years after the war, middlebrow culture came under critical fire. Indeed, the vehemence of some of the attacks suggested just how deeply middlebrow had permeated American culture. In a 1948 essay, for example, Clement Greenberg warned of the “stabilization” of the avant-garde and its concomitant professionalization embraced by official and commercial outlets.³⁹⁴ More to the point, Greenberg admonished, “It must be obvious to anyone that the volume and social weight of middlebrow culture, borne along as it is by the great recent increase of the middle class, have multiplied at least ten-fold in the past three decades.”³⁹⁵ Furthermore, middlebrow culture had become a more pernicious threat than ever, surpassing the pulp dime novel in Greenberg’s horrified lexicon. Resorting to the language of bacilli, Greenberg claimed that middlebrow culture “insinuates itself everywhere, devaluating the precious, infecting the healthy, corrupting the honest, and stultifying the wise.”³⁹⁶ Greenberg encouraged an

increased self-monitoring, for “Insidiousness is of [middlebrow’s] essence, and in recent years its avenues of penetration have become infinitely more difficult to penetrate and block.”³⁹⁷

In a follow-up article in *Harper’s* Russell Lynes took a more playful look at the highbrow, lowbrow, and middlebrow. Lynes characterized “high thinking” as the factor supplanting social class in America, with highbrow as the elites, middlebrow as the bourgeoisie, and lowbrow as the hoi polloi.³⁹⁸ Conversely, most highbrows were not well-paid, most middlebrows found themselves relatively well-off, and only the lowbrow existed at any level of income. All highbrows, in this taxonomy, view the world as “inhabited almost entirely by Philistines—those who through viciousness or smugness or the worship of materialism gnaw away at the foundations of culture.”³⁹⁹ Unsurprisingly, they framed the “real enemy” as the middlebrow person, “A pretentious or frivolous man or woman who uses culture to satisfy social or business ambitions.”⁴⁰⁰ On the other hand, highbrows prided themselves on “associat[ing]...culture with every aspect of daily life.”⁴⁰¹ Like Woolf, Lynes characterized the highbrow/lowbrow relationship as amiable. Unlike the middlebrow, the lowbrow remained uninterested in threatening the highbrow and in fact was “almost completely oblivious” of the latter, remaining content simply with knowing what he liked and fixating upon it.⁴⁰² Meanwhile, Lynes bifurcated middlebrows between “upper” and “lower.” Upper middlebrows purveyed highbrow ideas as “cultural do-gooders,” earning their living as educators, museum directors, movie producers, and the like.⁴⁰³ By contrast, the lower middlebrow consumed whatever the upper passed along; while thinking he knows what he likes, that is, he is actually uncertain about “almost everything.”⁴⁰⁴ The lower middlebrow represents the

highbrow's villain and the upper middlebrow's (read: advertisers') hero; found "everywhere," lower middlebrows belong to book clubs, take courses, attend lectures and generally serve as the "conscientious stabilizers of society."⁴⁰⁵ But like Greenberg and Woolf, Lynes evidently felt some discomfiture at the specter of the middlebrow dominating American society—that "dreadful mass of insensible back-slappers, given to sentimentality as a prime virtue, the willing victims of slogans and the whims of bosses, both political and economic."⁴⁰⁶ Indeed, the 1950s suggested a worrisome "Decline of attention," as Joan Rubin concludes.⁴⁰⁷

Finally, in 1960 Dwight Macdonald returned at length to the pernicious specter of Midcult, managing to trump even Greenberg's diatribe of twelve years prior. First defining Masscult as the sort of novelty cultural product made explicitly for the market, he lambasted it as lacking "even...the theoretical possibility of being good."⁴⁰⁸ Not content with such a verdict, Macdonald characterized Masscult as not only non-art but very possible anti-art in the bargain, asking nothing of its consumer and providing nothing in return.⁴⁰⁹ Paradoxically, Masscult was ineffably democratic: "All is grist to its mill and all comes out finely ground indeed."⁴¹⁰ Splenetic though he was toward Masscult, Macdonald saved his heavy artillery for what he labeled Midcult. Though Masscult threatened High Culture, especially because of the porousness of class boundaries in the United States, Midcult—a "peculiar hybrid" from the "unnatural intercourse" between high and Masscult—posed an even greater threat because it evinced the same infelicitous characteristics of Masscult but covered them with a "cultural fig-leaf."⁴¹¹ Echoing Greenberg, Macdonald noted that Midcult "pretends to respect the standards of High Culture while in fact it waters them down and vulgarizes them."⁴¹²

Thus the threat, Macdonald argued, of authors such as Stephen Vincent Benét. As Macdonald concluded, “We have...become skilled at consuming High Culture when it has been stamped PRIME QUALITY by the proper authorities, but we lack the kind of sophisticated audience that supported the achievements of the classic avant-garde, an audience that can appreciate and discriminate on its own.”⁴¹³ Subsequent developments in book-publishing would do nothing to allay Macdonald’s alarm.

Just as Macdonald feared, the 1960s ushered in a true era of corporatization in the publishing world. Though in the fall of 1944 department store magnate Marshall Field III had inaugurated the corporatization of the publishing industry, only in the early 1960s did momentum accrue. Comprehensive publishing, for instance, became increasingly common, e.g. a publisher published comics, all types of books, hard and soft covers, as did bureaucratic corporate management practices; similarly, corporate or public ownership became increasingly “widespread,” especially for paperback publishers.⁴¹⁴ As scholar Patricia Travis observes, two 1960s developments hastened the end of the “book man’s” era. First, as Travis notes, media conglomerates bought once-independent houses and effected unprecedented vertical integration, as when RCA bought Random House in 1965. As a result, book men could no longer maintain their integrity as putatively independent knowledge workers; now they were simply corporate employees. Dovetailing with this development, a new writers’ vanguard emerged and established its own institutions outside the mainstream publishing industry. As such, the book men’s longstanding agenda of subversion from within seemed not only ineffectual but also quite possibly risible.⁴¹⁵

Oddly enough, the paperback book weathered these developments; despite the recession and inflation picking up steam in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was a “boom time.”⁴¹⁶ for paperbacks. Women supplanted men as the biggest group of paperback consumers and by the end of the 1970s the romance was the single biggest-selling category of paperback.⁴¹⁷ But corporatization and competition caught up eventually and crisis loomed by the end of the 1970s.⁴¹⁸ Lamenting the “fairly homogenized output” from publishers generally, Davis also characterized the 1980s paperback business as experiencing “a failure of nerve and creativity.”⁴¹⁹ Perhaps more troubling, having been supplanted by television shows like *M.A.S.H.* and televised sporting events like the Super Bowl, “The mass-market paperback isn’t really mass anymore.”⁴²⁰ He returned, finally, to the decline of standards in the industry, reiterating the long-held shibboleth that, “historically at least, the most ‘successful’ publishers in paperback have been those who mingled quality with commerce.”⁴²¹

Furthering Davis’s pessimism and adding an elegiac tone of his own, publishing veteran André Schiffrin, seemingly with rose-colored glasses, reflected that “[publishers’] role was to publish the best books we could possibly find, although, of course, we also concerned ourselves with whether these books would sell.”⁴²² Schiffrin located the problem in the oligarchic organization prevailing in the industry, as five conglomerates controlled eighty percent of book sales.⁴²³ With similar disapproval, Schiffrin noted, “It is now increasingly the case that the owner’s *only* interest is in making money and as much of it as possible”⁴²⁴ In light of sentiments expressed by Davis and Schiffrin, the example of the ASE project assumes renewed gravitas.

Notwithstanding scattered exhibits such as 1984 and 1996 that focused on the fragile and rare physical artifacts of ASE, the larger import of the project remained largely forgotten, a wartime aberration, for well over a half-century. In the fall of 2002, however, books again led “the charge on illiteracy and boredom in every foxhole, air-conditioned tent and military chow hall.”⁴²⁵ Helmed by Andrew Carroll, director of the Legacy Project (the mission of which is to preserve letters and emails sent home by soldiers), the new ASE project commenced with four selections, none of which had been on the original ASE lists. Not coincidentally, the selections were determined by the availability of publication rights; they included Carroll’s *War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars* (Washington Square Press/Simon and Schuster), Allen Mikaelin’s *Medal of Honor: Profiles of America’s Military Heroes from the Civil War to the Present* (Hyperion), *Henry V* (Dover), and *The Art of War* (Dover). More than 100,000 of each of these four titles were shipped to servicemen in Afghanistan, Middle East, Europe, and Cuba in late 2002 and 2003.

Hailing the first Armed Services Editions as “one of the forgotten stories of World War II,” Carroll not only saluted the original project with his endeavor, but also hoped to promote love of reading among servicemen: “The goal is to encourage reading and to get great literature into the hands of U.S. troops.”⁴²⁶ Even so, like the original ASE the goal remained to “get our troops the books that they want”⁴²⁷ More important, as Carroll noted, “We want the troops to know these books are just for them, as a way to say, ‘We’re thinking of you.’”⁴²⁸ In much the same vein, as Carroll put it, “This [project] is not meant to be political or divisive...What I love about literature is its humanity.”⁴²⁹

And like World War Two servicemen, Carroll found the troops' response to be "phenomenal."

Again in keeping with the variegation of the original project, Carroll hoped to add authors as diverse as John Steinbeck, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Flannery O'Connor, James Baldwin, Stephen King, and John Grisham. Still, inclusion of titles once again pivoted around publishers' approval. Hyperion, Simon & Schuster, and Dover Publications led the way, while Random House, Oxford University Press, and Penguin joined later. Publishers also remained acutely aware of the business possibilities of the ASE; as the president of Dover, Clarence Strowbridge, stated, the original ASE "inspired a whole generation of servicemen and women to become lifelong readers, and I have no doubt these books will do the same."⁴³⁰ Once again self-interest and altruism conjoined.

But then new ASE project differed from its predecessor as well. Perhaps most important, the federal government abstained from involvement. Private donations and non-profit organizations funded the initiative. On the other hand, the lack of government involvement also forestalled the possibility of censorship. Once again, the servicemen's voices seemed to justify the project. As one computer technologist opined, "It's a great idea...You don't have much space to put things when you're under way, and you don't have a lot to do. This book will be easy to take along and read." Similarly, an information technologist weighed in: "We don't want anything that will depress us even more than we already are. We need books that will entertain us...Anything that will take us away from the world we're already entangled in."⁴³¹

Even so, the lack of government heft—much less the economies of scale it facilitated—circumscribed the scale of the project and thus its potential effect upon

service personnel. As of 2005, the new project had added Christopher Buckley's *Wry Martinis* (Random House), John Gable (ed)'s *The Man in the Arena: Selected Speeches, Letters and Essays by Theodore Roosevelt* (Theodore Roosevelt Association), and Geraldine McCaughrean's translation of *One Thousand One Arabian Nights* (Oxford University Press).⁴³² Whether the project would sustain itself, however, remained to be seen. In any case, World War II and ASE veteran Roy Meador's sentiment—"Thank you, Armed Services Editions, may you never be needed again"—proved, once again, not to hold up, this time in a new millennium.⁴³³ But for its part, middlebrow culture continues to thrive in various permutations, continues to negotiate the liminal space between utilitarian commodity and what Matthew Arnold called "The best that has been said and thought in the past."

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¹ (Kennedy 1999) As Raymond Williams argues in *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, by the late nineteenth century "culture" came to mean an entire way of life (a continuing process) that incorporated material, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. As Williams concludes, "The history of the idea of culture is a record of our reactions, in thought and feeling, to the changed conditions of our common life"(295). More specifically, Carl Kaestle and Janice Radway employ the phrase "culture of print" to encapsulate the "tensions between social integration and disintegration, between order and disorder, and between incorporation and diversity [that] were themselves played out with the indispensable assistance of

proliferating print practices and reading formations”(15). I thus approach the study of culture—particularly its middlebrow aspect—using both Williams’s and Kaestle and Radway’s theoretical framework.

² (Jamieson 1950), 142.

³ (Jamieson 1950), 149.

⁴ (Jamieson 1950), 143.

⁵ (Jamieson 1950), 153.

⁶ (Schick 1986; 1958), vii.

⁷ (Schick 1986; 1958), 69.

⁸ (North 1963, 35-36), 35.

⁹ (North 1963, 35-36), 35.

¹⁰ (North 1963, 35-36)

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¹² (Leary 1968, 237-245)

¹³ (Leary 1968, 237-245), 238.

¹⁴ (Laughlin 1978, 31-38)

¹⁵ (Laughlin 1978, 31-38), 31.

¹⁶ (Laughlin 1978, 31-38), 33.

¹⁷ (Bixby 1981, 13-14)

¹⁸ (Schreuders 1981), 1.

¹⁹ (Wilk 1981, 22-24), 24.

²⁰ (Wilk 1981, 22-24), 22, 23.

²¹ (Wilk 1981, 22-24), 23, 22.

²² (Cole 1984)

²³ (Davis 1984)

²⁴ <http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/exhibits/ase/>

²⁵ (Loss 2003, 811-834), 814.

²⁶ (Darnton 1982, 65-83)

²⁷ (Darnton 1982, 65-83), 65.

²⁸ (Rubin 1992), Introduction.

²⁹ (Rubin 1992), Introduction.

³⁰ (Rubin 1992), xvii.

³¹ (Rubin 1992), Introduction.

³² (Radway 1997), 285.

³³ (Kaestle and Radway 2009), 3.

³⁴ (Kaestle and Radway 2009), 8.

³⁵ (Kaestle and Radway 2009), 471.

³⁶ (Kaestle and Radway 2009), 2-3.

³⁷ (Kaestle and Radway 2009), 4.

³⁸ (Kaestle and Radway 2009), 49.

³⁹ (Kaestle and Radway 2009), 193.

⁴⁰ (Radway 1997), 152.

⁴¹ (Kaestle and Radway 2009), 55.

⁴² (Kaestle and Radway 2009), 530.

⁴³ (Kaestle and Radway 2009), 529.

⁴⁴ (Kaestle and Radway 2009), 12.

⁴⁵ (Davis 1984), 33.

⁴⁶ (Davis 1984), 34.

⁴⁷ (Davis 1984), 39-40.

⁴⁸ (Davis 1984), 13.

⁴⁹ (Davis 1984), 40-41.

⁵⁰ (Trachtenberg and Foner 1982); (Wiebe 1967)

⁵¹ (Travis 1998), chapter 1, *passim*.

⁵² (Travis 1998), chapter 1, *passim*.

⁵³ (Radway 1997), 253.

⁵⁴ (Cheney and National Association of Book Publishers 1931), 4.

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- 55 (Cheney and National Association of Book Publishers 1931), 9.
56 (Cheney and National Association of Book Publishers 1931), 12.
57 (Cheney and National Association of Book Publishers 1931), 5.
58 (Cheney and National Association of Book Publishers 1931), 16.
59 (Cheney and National Association of Book Publishers 1931), 9-10.
60 (Cheney and National Association of Book Publishers 1931), 14.
61 (Lynd and Lynd 1929), 229.
62 (Lynd and Lynd 1929), 230.
63 (Lynd and Lynd 1929), 237.
64 (Lynd and Lynd 1929), 232, 236.
65 (Lynd and Lynd 1937), 252.
66 (Lynd and Lynd 1937), 254.
67 (Lynd and Lynd 1937), 256-257.
68 (Brooks 1958), 6.
69 (Brooks 1958), 14.
70 (Brooks 1958), 34.
71 (Widdemer 1933, 433-434), 433.
72 (Widdemer 1933, 433-434), 433.
73 (Widdemer 1933, 433-434), 433.
74 (Widdemer 1933, 433-434), 434.
75 (Widdemer 1933, 433-434), 434.
76 (Woolf and Woolf 1942), 177-178.
77 (Woolf and Woolf 1942), 178.
78 (Woolf and Woolf 1942), 182.
79 (Woolf and Woolf 1942), 184.
80 (Cerf 1977), 170.
81 (United States.Bureau of the Budget 1946), 3.
82 (Cerf 1977), 170.
83 (Cerf and Klopfer 2002), 100.
84 (Cerf and Klopfer 2002), 149.
85 (Houle and American Council on Education 1947), 1, v.
86 (Kennett 1987), *passim*.
87 (Tebbel 1972), IV, 1.
88 (Tebbel 1972), IV, 1.
89 (Tebbel 1972), IV, 5.
90 (Tebbel 1972), IV, 7.
91 (Tebbel 1972), IV, 9.
92 (Tebbel 1972), IV, 9-10.
93 (Tebbel 1972), IV, 12.
94 (Tebbel 1972), IV, 13-14.
95 (Tebbel 1972), IV, 16.
96 (Tebbel 1972), IV, 18.
97 (Tebbel 1972), IV, 17.
98 (Cowley 1943, 417-418), 417.
99 (Cowley 1943, 417-418), 417.
100 (Cowley 1943, 417-418), 417.
101 (Cowley 1943, 417-418), 418.
102 (Kennedy 1999), 647.
103 (Kennedy 1999), chapter 18, *passim*.
104 (Blum 1976), chapter 3, *passim*.
105 (Patterson 1995), chapter 3, *passim*.
106 (Nelson 1946), Foreword.
107 (United States.Bureau of the Budget 1946), 518.
108 (Nelson 1946), 276.
109 (Nelson 1946), 342.

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- ¹¹⁰ (Nelson 1946), 331.
¹¹¹ (United States Bureau of the Budget 1946), 519.
¹¹² (Cowley 1943, 482-485), 483.
¹¹³ (Cowley 1943, 482-485), 482.
¹¹⁴ (Cowley 1943, 482-485), 482.
¹¹⁵ (Cowley 1943, 482-485), 483.
¹¹⁶ (Cowley 1943, 482-485), 484.
¹¹⁷ (Cowley 1943, 482-485), 484.
¹¹⁸ (Cowley 1943, 482-485), 484.
¹¹⁹ (Cowley 1943, 482-485), 484.
¹²⁰ (Anonymous1942b, 17)
¹²¹ (Anonymous1942b, 17)
¹²² (Anonymous1942c, 17)
¹²³ (Ballou 1946), 6.
¹²⁴ (Anonymous1942, 12)
¹²⁵ (McCormick 1942)
¹²⁶ (Anonymous1942a, 17)
¹²⁷ (Ballou 1946), 9.
¹²⁸ (Ballou 1946), 9-10.
¹²⁹ (STEVENS 1942, BR8)
¹³⁰ (Ballou 1946), 11-15.
¹³¹ (Anonymous1943, 17)
¹³² (Winkler 1978), 5, 13, 156, and passim. See also (Kennedy 2004), especially chapter 1.
¹³³ (Ballou 1946), 1.
¹³⁴ (Tebbel 1972), IV, 51; (Mott 1947), 277.
¹³⁵ (Ballou 1946), 66.
¹³⁶ John Jamieson Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University
¹³⁷ John Jamieson Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University
¹³⁸ John Jamieson Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University
¹³⁹ John Jamieson Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University
¹⁴⁰ (Cerf and Klopfer 2002), 37.
¹⁴¹ (Ballou 1946), 66-68.
¹⁴² Other Committee members at various times included Edward C. Aswell (Harper & Brothers), Mrs. Beatrice Libaire (New York Public Library), Lewis Gannett (New York *Herald Tribune*), and Joseph A. Margolies (Brentano's, Inc.).
¹⁴³ (Ballou 1946), 68-69.
¹⁴⁴ John Jamieson Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University
¹⁴⁵ John Jamieson Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University
¹⁴⁶ John Jamieson Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University
¹⁴⁷ (Ballou 1946), 70.
¹⁴⁸ (Anonymous1943, 16)
¹⁴⁹ (Ballou 1946), 70.
¹⁵⁰ (Ballou 1946), 70.
¹⁵¹ (Ballou 1946), 71.
¹⁵² (Ballou 1946), 71.
¹⁵³ (Ballou 1946), 71.
¹⁵⁴ (Ballou 1946), 71.
¹⁵⁵ (Ballou 1946), 73.
¹⁵⁶ (Ballou 1946), 71.
¹⁵⁷ (Ballou 1946), 72.
¹⁵⁸ (Ballou 1946), 72.
¹⁵⁹ (Ballou 1946), 73.
¹⁶⁰ (Anonymous1943, 26)
¹⁶¹ (Tebbel 1972), IV, 32.
¹⁶² (Ballou 1946), 16-19.

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- 163 (Schreuders 1981), 50.
164 (Anonymous1943, 1966-1967)
165 (Anonymous1943, 25); (Anonymous1943, 901-903)
166 (Anonymous1943, 25);(Anonymous1943, 1966-1967)
167 (Radway 1997), 172.
168 (Anonymous1943, 1966-1967)
169 (Cerf 1943, 14-15)
170 (McPharlin 1943, 904-906), 904.
171 (McPharlin 1943, 904-906), 905.
172 (McPharlin 1943, 904-906), 905.
173 (McPharlin 1943, 904-906), 905.
174 (McPharlin 1943, 904-906), 905.
175 (Anonymous1943, 2300-2313), 2300.
176 (Anonymous1943, 2300-2313), 2300.
177 (Anonymous1943, 2300-2313), 2302.
178 (Anonymous1944, 780-786), 786.
179 (Anonymous1944, 780-786), 786.
180 (Anonymous1944, 780-786), 786.
181 (Loss 2003, 811-834), 817-818.
182 (Anonymous1944, 777-779), 777.
183 (Anonymous1944, 777-779), 777.
184 (Anonymous1944, 777-779), 778.
185 (Anonymous1944, 777-779), 779.
186 (Anonymous1944, 777-779), 778.
187 (Anonymous1944, 777-779), 778.
188 (Anonymous1944, 777-779), 778. My emphasis.
189 (Anonymous1944, 777-779), 778.
190 (Radway 1997), 262-294.
191 (Anonymous1944, 777-779), 778.
192 (Anonymous1944, 777-779), 778.
193 (Anonymous1944, 777-779), 779.
194 (Poullada 1946, 439-440, 441, 470), 439.
195 (Poullada 1946, 439-440, 441, 470), 439.
196 (Poullada 1946, 439-440, 441, 470), 441.
197 (Poullada 1946, 439-440, 441, 470), 441.
198 (Poullada 1946, 439-440, 441, 470), 441.
199 (Poullada 1946, 562-566), 562.
200 (Poullada 1946, 562-566), 565.
201 (Poullada 1946, 562-566), 562.
202 (Poullada 1946, 562-566), 562-563.
203 (Trautman 1945, 53-66), 53.
204 (Trautman 1945, 53-66), 60.
205 (Trautman 1945, 53-66), 61.
206 (Trautman 1945, 53-66), 62.
207 (Trautman 1945, 53-66), 58.
208 (Trautman 1945, 53-66), 61.
209 (Trautman 1945, 53-66), 61-62.
210 (Trautman 1945, 53-66), 65.
211 (Trautman 1945, 53-66), 61.
212 (Trautman 1945, 53-66), 65.
213 (Trautman 1945, 53-66), 66.
214 (Trautman 1945, 53-66), 65.
215 (Nelson 1946), 347.
216 (Nelson 1946), 429.
217 (Book Publishers Bureau, War Committee 1944)

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- 218 (Book Publishers Bureau, War Committee 1944), 3.
219 (Book Publishers Bureau, War Committee 1944), 3.
220 (Book Publishers Bureau, War Committee 1944), 5.
221 (Book Publishers Bureau, War Committee 1944), 3, 5.
222 (Anonymous1944, BR1-BR18)
223 (Anonymous1944, BR1-BR18); for advertisements in Yank on the first three series (A, B, and C), see (Anonymous1943a, 21; Anonymous1943b, 21; Anonymous1944, 21).
224 (Anonymous1944, BR1-BR18)
225 (Anonymous1944, BR1-BR18)
226 (Anonymous1944, BR1-BR18)
227 (Anonymous1944, 17)
228 (Anonymous1944, BR14)
229 (Blum 1976), chapter 7.
230 (Stern 1944, 13-14), 13.
231 (Jamieson 1947, 367-384), 371.
232 (Jamieson 1947, 367-384), 371.
233 (Jamieson 1947, 367-384), 378.
234 (Jamieson 1947, 367-384), 378.
235 (Jamieson 1947, 367-384), 380.
236 (Jamieson 1947, 367-384), 382.
237 (Jamieson 1947, 367-384), 384.
238 (Anonymous1944, 29)
239 (Anonymous1944, 29)
240 (Anonymous1944, 29)
241 (Anonymous1944, 29)
242 (Anonymous1944, 29)
243 (Anonymous1944, 29)
244 (Anonymous1944, 18)
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