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AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION IN FIRST FIVE MONTHS OF WAR

May 5. 1942

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Summary Report of the Division of Polls,
Bureau of Intelligence,
OFFICE OF FACTS AND FIGURES

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SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Five months after the nation went to war the morale of the American people was good. Successive defeats in the Pacific and serious shipping losses off their Atlantic shores had made Americans increasingly aware of the hard job winning the war was going to be. But it had neither disturbed their majority belief that the ultimate victory would be theirs, nor had it decreased one whit their determination to attack the Axis in every way and with everything at their disposal.

They knew what they were fighting for and they believed in their own war motives. They believed, too, in assuming a full share in making the post-war world a better place to live in by spreading the President's Four Freedoms around the globe.

By and large, also, they were convinced of the worthwhileness of the things their Allies were fighting for. Most of them might grouse about their neighbors not taking the war seriously enough, but this very complaint from two-thirds of them was perhaps proof positive that they were not complacent. For they welcomed sacrifices, in fact urged more rationing, more registration for war work, more price and wage fixing. A chief concern of theirs was that their Government was not asking them to do enough. And there was a spirit of offense abroad among them which showed signs of swelling into a demand for dramatic action at an early date -- action directed both at the enemy and at enlisting their own full-time efforts in the conflict.

Yet there were certain danger signals, certain soft spots in the hard core of national morale. One of these might well prove to be the people's impatience for offensive action. This spirit of offense would bear watching to see whether it could roll with the punches it might still have to absorb before the carefully coordinated counter-offensive of total war could be launched. It might have to be spoon fed with further actions like the bombing of Tokyo —actions perhaps insignificant militarily, but vitally important as spring tonics.

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It might also require an information program aimed more squarely at the global aspects of the war, and the need for painstaking preparation in the ultimate task of crushing Hitlerism,

Another possible storm signal could be detected in the people's attitudes toward their principal Allies. The euphemism of lend-lease would sooner or later cause bad blood if the majority continue to believe we should be repaid for all the material aid we were furnishing Britain, Russia, and China. And the day would come when the enormous contributions of these Allies would have to be translated to Americans in terms of dollars and lives saved.

The spectre of world Communism still haunted many Americans who were not at all sure that Russia could be depended on to cooperate with us after the war. A better understanding of Russian needs and problems, plus continuance of Stalin's current line of stressing freedom and justice for all might help to allay their suspicions. Unchecked, they might provide a loose stone in the wall of Allied solidarity.

A third warning flag could be detected in the strong tendency of the public to brand labor leaders as slackers or worse in the war of production. If the gap between management and labor were widened by such press attacks as that aimed in March at the 40-hour week, mobilization for total war would inevitably be affected. To make a whipping boy of organized labor would be to produce disgruntled workmen doing less than their all for the war effort. Better public relations between labor and management, as well as a coordinated campaign by Government to play up labor's sacrifices in the emergency, seemed to be called for.

Definitely a "soft spot" in American public opinion as the war deepened was the uneducated poor section of the population. What over-confidence there was in the nation tended to repose in this group. These generally underprivileged people also inclined to take the shorter view of the war, to think less of the ultimate menace of Hitler and more of settling scores with the Japs in the Pacific.

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Perhaps because they looked on the war as of shorter duration, as well as because they had less to give up, they were somewhat less interested in making personal sacrifices than were the better educated. They were the uncertain elements in public opinion, the people who had no expressable convictions on so many of the vital war issues. More than other elements in the population, then, they needed to be told in simple straightforward terms the war's meaning.

As war brought employment opportunities to millions, made manpower a more saleable commodity than it had been in years, there was plentiful evidence that the country's eleven million Negroes would use the crisis to improve their status. While a great majority of them would continue to work and fight and die for an imperfect democracy, their leaders and their press were hammering away at racial discrimination, and brandishing the club of a "white man's war." Meanwhile, Negroes interviewed on such vital subjects of opinion as the length of the war, the selection of the number one enemy, the advisability of all-out war against Japan, and international cooperation versus isolationism gave a higher percentage of "Don't Know" answers than comparable white groups. One explanation of this is that Negro attitudes toward the war are less crystallized; another may be that Negroes have tended to deliberately withhold their honest opinions on certain of these issues. In any case, a wise war administration must work steadily to remove discrimination on at least the economic and military fronts. And such action should be accompanied by an information program designed to sell American democracy over totalitarian racial persecution.

Another large segment of the body politic which showed certain signs of weak morale during the first months of war was the second generation Germans and Italians. Less all-out in their attitudes toward the war against Germany, and more inclined to label Japan the greater menace, this group might provide fertile ground for the "negotiated victory" propaganda of a retorn America First Committee. It might also be more receptive to the specious appeal of the demagog who would convert the war into a racial struggle -- one in which the "whites" would all join against the yellow hordes of the Orient and the Tartar-descended sons of Russia.

The necessity for carefully controlling enemy aliens in this country may also color the thinking of these persons of Axis nativity. Friends and relatives of theirs will be interned but great care should be exercised to see that none of the honestly anti-Axis refugees are put behind bars. Such refugees should be given every opportunity to contribute to the war effort, both as a means of nailing down their own loyalties to democracy, and as a method of holding the full support of the second generation Germans and Italians.

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THE AMERICAN PUBLIC AND THE WAR

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The American People and the War

I. The Issue -- What We are Fighting For

Two months after Pearl Harbor the great majority of the American people received our entrance into the war sympathetically. They believed either that we had entered the war for idealistic reasons — to save Democracy, to stop the spread of Fascism — (63%), or they felt we had been ruthlessly attacked and had no recourse but to defend ourselves (21%). Nonetheless, it was significant that at this stage of our war effort almost 9 per cent cited unsympathetic reasons when asked what they thought the United States was "really fighting for in the war". Economic reasons, power and prestige were among the reasons given by this latter group.

Roughly two-thirds of the people looked sympathetically upon England's war motives, and these were about evenly divided between thinking that England fights for an ideal and that she fights to defend herself. Uncritical reasons why Soviet Russia is fighting were named by about two-thirds of the people, although three out of four of these felt that the real reason Russia was fighting was simply to defend her own territory.

The Four By an overwhelming margin the American people support the idea of having this country take a full and active part after the war in guaranteeing the President's four freedoms all over the world. More than 80 per cent of them in late February favored having the United States do each of these five things:

- 1. Maintain a world police force to guarantee against future wars.
- 2. Guarantee freedom of speech all over the world.
- 3. Guarantee freedom of religion all over the world.
- 4. Guarantee that all nations get a fair share of raw materials.
- 5. Help to secure better working and living conditions for people all over the world.

Seventy per cent of the people believed that this nation should cooperate with others in guaranteeing all five of these rights.

That the people are not overly vindictive toward the enemy may be evident in the fact that only a fourth of them were interested in destroying Germany, Japan, and Italy as nations, although another 40 per cent

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insist that after the Axis Governments have been overthrown and all conquered territories returned, an army shall be maintained in the Axis nations to police them.

When asked in February, more than half the population was willing to accept the Axis nations into an international organization after the war. At the same time, imperialism was renounced by three-quarters of the population which voted against our acquiring any additional territory as a result of this war.

II The Nature of the Enemy - Whom We Should Fight

The Number— Ever since America's entry into the war Germany has been labeled our "Number-One Enemy" more often than Japan, whenever people were able to make a choice between the two enemies. Japanese military successes have lessened the disposition to look upon Germany as the number-one enemy, but the reasons which people give for considering Japan the greater threat suggest first, that there is a hard core of antipathy toward the Japanese because of racial differences, and second, that people look upon Japan as the more immediate threat. There is good reason to believe that the vast majority of American people look upon Germany and the Nazi system as the real threat to our way of life, but the more immediate concern over Japanese gains makes the choice between Japan and Germany an extremely difficult one.

The Enemy To

Concentrate

concentrate most of our effort on fighting Japan as believed we should put most of our effort against Germany (62% to 21%). And this preoccupation with the Far East was further borne out by the disposition the public would make of American fighting planes if they were given the right to allocate them. Thirty per cent would base them in Australia. No other single fighting front is mentioned by more than ten per cent, and only 17 per cent chose the European front as against 45 per cent who would send the planes to some part of the Pacific front.

III The Fighting Forces - How We Should Fight

All-out The strong policy of all-out war against the Japanese wherewar ever we can attack them is favored by nine persons in every
ten, although there is some difference of opinion as to just
what constitutes "all-out war". In April (before the bombing of Tokyo),
67 per cent favored bombing Japanese cities, while 23 per cent advocated

insist that dies after the Acte Unverguente have been overligene and all conquered territories returned, an army soull be medatedued in the Axis nations to police them.

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restricting our attacks to the Japanese "navy and other military objectives". That the trend has been markedly in favor of offensive all-out
strategy, however, is evident from the fact that the percentage of people
who advocated bombing Japanese cities rose from 59 per cent in December
to 67 per cent in mid April.

Most people who have opinions on the conduct of the war to date are agreed that the Axis has sunk ships without warning, and about evenly divided as to whether the Allies have done the same thing. They are only slightly less in agreement that the Axis blockaded or cut off civilian food supplies, and just under half of them think that the Allies have used the blockade. Practically everyone is convinced that the Allies have not used gas or disease germs in the conduct of the war, but those with opinions are about evenly divided as to whether the Axis has resorted to this method of warfare. People are strenuously opposed to the use of poison gas or disease germs by the Allies, but if the Axis should use them first, most people favor using gas in reprisal. But the use of disease germs was apparently considered so drastic a measure that even if the Axis did it to us first, a majority were not in favor of the Allies ever resorting to this method of warfare.

IV The United Nations - Our Friends and Allies

Dependability Three-fourths of the American public believed in February that England can be depended on to cooperate with us after the war is over; 80 per cent feel that China can be depended upon. There was considerably less optimism, however, about Russia's rule in the post-war period. A fourth of the people either would not or could not answer the question of what Russia might do, and mure than a third of them felt that Russia could not be depended on to cooperate after the war.

Lend-Lease Late last winter the public was about evenly divided on the question of whether we should send more, send less, or send about the same amount of lend-lease supplies to Britain and Russia as we were before the United States went to war; but less than ten per cent believed we should stop sending supplies altogether. However, the trend was definitely in the direction of favoring more lend-lease aid for our Allies. For in December, this number who advocated greater aid for Britain and Russia amounted to 21 per cent of the population; while by late February this figure had climbed to 28 per cent.

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War Debts That the war-debt issue may be a rock on which post-war cooperation will founder is clear from the fact that threefourths of the American people believe at the close of the war that we
should be repaid for the lend-lease supplies sent to England and Russia.
The people are about evenly divided as to whether we will or will not be
repaid. Those who think Russia won't repay us argue that the Soviets
won't be able to. Many also feel that England won't be able to repay,
but more often people refer to the failure of England to repay her last
war debt. A few refer to Russia's failure to repay in the last war, and
about 9 per cent believe that Russia won't repay because she is not trustworthy and may turn against us.

V The Home Front

Complacency versus Defeatism

Length of War beople were asked shortly after America's entry into the war if they thought the war would be a long or a short war, more than two-thirds believed that it would be a long war. At that time about four out of ten persons thought the war would last two years or less. For about two months there was a slight rise in optimism and about the first of March almost one-half of the American people who had an opinion on this question thought the war would last two years or less. Two weeks later only one-third of the persons with opinions anticipated a war of two years or less. The most recent survey (about April 1st) indicates a revival of optimism and once more almost one-half the people who have an opinion think that the war will last two years or less.

How The Most people believe that the United States and her Allies will win the war, but the number who are sure we will win and also write the peace has declined from 69 per cent in December to 60 per cent in April. And there has been a corresponding increase in the number who think the conflict will force us to make certain concessions to the losers (22% in December; 28% in April). The number who believed the Axis has a "pretty good chance to win" has varied from one to four per cent, and those who thought the war would end in a draw went from four per cent in December to seven per cent in February, and back to three per cent in April.

Putting the question another way, with specific reference to the amount of effort and time needed to win over Japan alone, almost half the people interviewed in March felt that we can't possibly lose the war to Japan, but it may take a little time to win, and about the . 45

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same number thought that if we don't work a lot harder than we are now we won't win the war against Japan. Less than 3 per cent of the people felt that we have practically licked them already or that we have virtually lost the war already.

It might be argued that the 46 per cent who say we "can't possibly lose" have some of the characteristics of complacency, but the case built on this evidence alone would be tenuous. To discover whether the people themselves believed their contemporaries were complacent, the Division of Polls asked a nationwide cross-section in March how serious they thought the public was about the war.

Seriousness of the Public

About two-thirds of the persons interviewed did not feel that people are taking the war seriously enough, probably indicating that they themselves do take it seriously. About one-half of these do not have any suggestion to offer for making the public more aware of the seriousness of the war, but those who do make specific suggestions mention rationing and enforced economy more often than anything else as the one thing that might make people more aware of the seriousness of the war. More truth and publicity is the next most frequently mentioned proposal.

Prople are more prone to anticipate enemy air raids on Probability the Pacific Coast than on East Coast cities, but the disof Air Raids position to anticipate raids on both coasts has increased since early January. In early March about 70 per cent of the people felt that air raids on the Pacific Coast were very probable or fairly probable in the next few weeks. About 50 per cent anticipated air raids on East Coast cities. Most of the people who thought air raids probable believe that they will be few and far between and will not come regularly.

Production

People's Contribution

In early February 55 per cent of the American people felt their job to be connected with the war effort either directly or indirectly; 40 per cent thought their job had little or no connection with the war effort. But almost three in

every four persons believed they were doing something to help in the total war effort. Regular occupations and volunteer defense work accounted for 40 per cent of the things people said they were contributing by doing. A fourth said that they were buying defense bonds or stamps.

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A clear majority of the American people think that Farmers, tribution

Executives, and Workers are doing all they can do right now to help win the war; those who feel that there are other groups of people who are not doing as much as they could (25%) mention the Government, (Politicians, Government leaders, and Congress) most frequently. Labor leaders are the group most subject to criticism; two out of three persons with an opinion on the question felt that Labor leaders were not doing all they could to help win the war.

Almost two-thirds of the American people in March approved the idea of women registering for war work, and women themselves favored this suggestion more often than men.

U. S. Pro- Although a fourth of the people "don't know" whether we are duction producing more war material than either Japan or Germany, versus Axis four out of five persons with an opinion on the matter of war production think that we are producing more than Japan and her conquered territories. But only a small majority of those with opinions think we are producing more than Germany and her conquered territories. Thirteen per cent of the persons interviewed think we are producing more than Germany and Japan put together.

Sacrifice

Almost everyone has found that prices on most things have gone up since America entered the war and even in February most people felt that prices had gone up "quite a bit".

More than two-thirds of the people at that time believed that prices would go up more in the next year, and most of them thought they would go up quite a bit.

Eighty-four per cent of the persons interviewed favored Government regulation of prices, although less than half of them knew that Washington had already started doing so. Sixty-four per cent approved Government regulation of salaries and wages.

Most people feel that the Government has done the right thing in rationing rubber (86%). People are slightly less disposed to think that the Government is doing the right thing in rationing sugar, but 78 per cent of the persons interviewed favor sugar rationing also. Twenty-three per cent of the respondents think that there is some chiseling in tire rationing, and dealers, merchants, and manufacturers are the group most frequently mentioned as chiselers.

There is wide-spread approval (73%) for the idea of rationing all materials in which shortages may develop instead of waiting until there is a real shortage. | A clour wejerier of the American counts think that Ferences, took forther are doing the time of the new tribits now to belle win the west when the lead that there are other

eroups of paugle the rea not doing as much as they could (Egg) soution the Congruent, (Politicisms, Corarmont leaders, and Congrues) note from greatly. Lever leaders are the group cast easiest to existions; two out of three correspection with an equilion on the question falt that Labor leaders were not doing all they noted to into the cor.

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Information

Most people say that they get most of the news about the war from the radio, but there is some evidence that in recent months people have come to depend somewhat more upon the newspapers. Between one-quarter and one-third of the people say that they can get short-wave stations direct from foreign countries on their radio.

Of these, perhaps one-fourth to one-half have ever listened to a program broadcast from a foreign country. England, Germany, South America and Italy are most frequently mentioned as the countries from which broadcasts have been heard.

About 10 per cent of the persons interviewed say that they Programs have listened to "This is War" and identify it as a weekend program. Sixty-nine per cent said they heard the President's "Map Speech" and 50 per cent heard all of it. About 30 per cent of the respondents read the speech, but less than half of these read all of it. About 10 per cent of the people neither read nor heard anything at all about the speech. Those people who did hear the President's speech were generally more all-out in their attitudes toward the war and more aware of the seriousness of the job ahead.

Most people felt that the Government did the right thing in holding back the news about Pearl Harbor, even though two-thirds of them believed in early February that some important news was still being held back. In January almost two-thirds of the people felt that some important news about the attack on the Philippines was still being held back. And at the same time, three-fourths of them felt that the Government should release news about our losses "as soon as they are confirmed, so long as the news doesn't actually help the enemy". A slight majority of American people at the same time approved the idea of a Government spokesman to write the war news for the papers and broadcast it over the radio.

Accuracy of Two-thirds of a national cross-section interviewed in early Government March thought the Government was giving the public as much information as it could about the fighting in this war without helping the enemy. One-half the people considered the war news the Government does release to be accurate, about 30 per cent thought the news made things look better than they are, and 6 per cent felt the news erred on the side of pessimism.

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Aliens

The alien problem loomed numerically large to that half of the persons interviewed in January who guessed that one or more out of every ten persons in the country were aliens. When asked what the United States should do about the aliens who came here from Axis countries, about one-third thought they should be deported, and almost as many mentioned interning them.

People were about evenly divided on the question of whether there were aliens in their communities who were not loyal, with about one-fourth of the respondents having no opinion. Three-fourths of those who thought there were disloyal aliens near them didn't think there were very many. The Germans were mentioned three times as often as the Japanese as being disloyal. The Italians were mentioned somewhat more frequently than the Japanese.

A survey in early April indicates that people think the Germans are the most dangerous alien group in this country (46%), and the Japanese somewhat less dangerous (35%). But taking the Japanese alone, three-fourths of the people believe that those born here but educated in Japan are more dangerous than those born and educated here. Almost as many think that the Japanese who were born in this country are less dangerous than those born in Japan. Only on the Pacific coastal areas were the Japanese named as most dangerous.

There is virtually complete approval of the Government's policy of moving Japanese aliens away from the Pacific Coast, and 60 per cent favor as well the moving of American citizens of Japanese parentage. Two-thirds of the people think that the Japanese who are moved should be kept under strict guard, and that the Government should decide what work they will do. Twenty-eeight per cent favor allowing them to move about fairly freely in their new communities and 22 per cent believe the evacuees should have something to say about the sort of work they do. There is almost an equal division of opinion as to whether the evacuated Japanese should be paid the same wages that other people get, smaller wages, or room and board only.

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