In his fireside chat of 23 February 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt invoked the image of Washington’s “little army of ragged, rugged men” on the banks of the Delaware, before warning the American people that they were in the midst of an era that would try men’s souls. In the face of Axis onslaught, the President insisted that every American must put aside selfish divisions and build a community of purpose. Roosevelt declared,

This generation of Americans has come to realize, with a present and personal realization, that there is something larger and more important than the life of any individual or of any individual group – something for which a man will sacrifice, and gladly sacrifice, not only his pleasures, not only his goods, not only his associations with those he loves, but his life itself. In time of crisis when the future is in the balance, we come to understand, with full recognition and devotion, what this nation is and what we owe to it.¹

As with most such statements, FDR’s stirring words were part motivational therapy, part wish fulfillment: an evocation of a particular state of mind in the hope of bringing it about rather than proof of its prior presence. The recognition of the need for sacrifice he spoke of was far from universal, nor were its implications self-evident. For many critics, the conflict in Europe remained Roosevelt’s war, not America’s, a fight that – in Charles Lindbergh’s notorious assertion – served the interests of the British and the Jews more than of the American people. The First World War was widely remembered as a gargantuan mistake resulting from mischievous British propaganda and lies circulated by domestic munitions makers, and many Americans suspected that Roosevelt was pushing the nation along the same path with the ultimate goal of establishing presidential autocracy. Despite Pearl Harbor, the German declaration of war, and the subsequent collapse of organized anti-interventionism, support for the government remained sometimes truculent, sometimes grudging, and certainly did not provide conclusive justification for renewing the grand Wilsonian vision of collective security. The popular image of the war today – one in which the “greatest generation” transcended petty sectarianism in favour of a shared commitment to

defeat tyranny – fails to account for the complex mood of the time, in which patriotic sentiment jockeyed for primacy with other, conflicting emotions.

This space of debate provides the venue for Michaela Hoenicke Moore’s fascinating examination of popular and elite opinion about Germany during the Hitler era. Like Woodrow Wilson before him, Roosevelt found himself fighting a war on behalf of a divided public, and – nearly ten years on from the inauguration of the New Deal – an increasingly unified opposition. Nevertheless, the President disavowed any intention to engineer blind hatred of the enemy, even though it might have served his purposes to do so. He claimed that the function of the government’s wartime information activities was not to propagandize but to enlighten, to pass “from the realm of rumor and poison to the field of facts.” Roosevelt thus defended himself from accusations of authoritarianism by emphasizing his democratic determination to fulfil the “solemn pact of truth between government and the people,” filtering politically sensitive information not by distortion but only by discretion.²

While these statements are reflexively troubling for historians whose stomachs have been stuffed to bursting on rich diets of postmodernism, Moore has sidestepped the temptation of entering yet another discussion about the fallacies of empiricism. Instead, her book shows how government propagandists were sincere in their efforts to build their arguments for war from the words and actions of the enemy. The injunction to “Know Your Enemy” was received with high seriousness, as can be seen from the quality of many of the minds that were put to the task of propagandizing. This allowed for a degree of flexibility in policy discussions that, Moore gently implies, has been lacking in more recent conflicts. The Second World War was fought in a spirit of complexity, ambiguity and empathy, she argues; quite unlike the lessons of “moral righteousness, resolute certainty, and ideological commitment” (149) that were attributed to it after the fact. For this reason, the debates over how to understand (and therefore how to treat) Germany were so far from monochromatic propagandizing that they came to presage later scholarly discussions over the Sonderweg, intentionalism, and other historiographical questions about Nazism under the Third Reich. In this case, propaganda as well as journalism seems to have served as a first draft of history.

Essentially, then, Moore’s book is a plea for pragmatism even in the face of brutal conflict. Because of the conflicted popular mood towards Germany, Moore suggests that conventional assumptions about the historical function of national stereotypes during wartime – a monstrous and simplified caricature generated by the state in order to provoke useful hatreds among the citizenry – need not be a given. The intersecting forces that made up the popular image of the German enemy – the brutality of the conflict, news of German atrocities, sympathy for occupied territories on one side; hostility to American involvement, ethnic roots, and a suspicious memory of the last great war on the other – pushed people in different directions.

All too often, scholarly works which seek to examine “images of X” become entirely detached from any sense of an unfolding reality, but Moore’s interest in American efforts to understand the enemy shows us how perception and action interacted. Rather than persisting independently of the path of war, the images that were engendered by officials’ acts of imaginative reconstruction ended up shaping and influencing, as well as being influenced by, American policy. This encourages us to

² Ibid.
reconceptualize not only the process by which images of enemies are conjured in the heat of battle but also the idea of propaganda itself. While propaganda and analysis are often examined as separate categories of military action, Moore shows how these practices were deeply interrelated in Roosevelt’s America.

Not all of this produced positive results, though the problems that the administration faced were in a perverse sense very democratic ones. The need to align the government’s messages with the American people’s latent (and often highly positive) image of Germany directly contributed to the state’s unwillingness to engage with the atrocities in the East or with the Holocaust, and made it difficult to balance the imperatives of the home front with the needs of the military campaign. A harsh view of the enemy—one that rooted the evils of Nazism in the hearts of the German people rather than with a small, diabolic conspiracy—strengthened support for a war for unconditional surrender, but could be used by Goebbels to suggest to the German people that the price of defeat would be annihilation, as most notoriously happened with the misrepresentations of Henry Morgenthau’s plan for the postwar dismemberment and deindustrialization of Germany. A softer view, excusing the masses of the German people from collective guilt for their leaders’ actions and calling for a gentle peace in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of Versailles, offered greater possibilities for political warfare but risked fuelling domestic calls for a premature armistice.

While Moore is alive to the many questionable consequences of Rooseveltian pragmatism, which often turned out to be little more than appeasing the rife anti-Semitism and racial prejudice of the era, her enthusiasm for doubt in the midst of war encourages her to focus more on the openness of the President’s approach than on the prejudices which necessitated it. Race in particular plays a central part in accounting for the American response to Germany, yet its amorphous presence is not always addressed as fully in this book as one might have hoped (though perhaps because it has been covered so well elsewhere). Indeed, race is surely the central factor in explaining the discrepancy between wartime attitudes towards Germany and Japan. As Moore notes in her conclusion, the image of Germany cannot be separated from prevailing American ideas of whiteness, which had gained salience during the war as African Americans, Jews, other minority groups and their liberal allies sought to draw parallels between the United States’ prejudices and the vicious racial ideologies of the enemy. One of the reasons why so many people were reluctant fully to endorse Franklin Roosevelt and Henry Wallace’s image of the conflict as a war against “Axis enslavement” was that the language of slavery, however regularly repeated it had been since 1865, brought up troubling questions about America’s own history, which disturbed as many people as they animated. Propaganda posters that coopted Lincoln’s “half-slave and half-free” trope, combining it with images of Nazis threatening innocent white families with bullwhips, obliged citizens to begin thinking along civil rights lines, whereby human liberty was conceived as universal and inseparable. By contrast, images of racially caricatured Japanese abducting naked white women on other wartime posters reinforced existing racial (and gendered) presumptions. The need to question Germany’s attitude towards race was therefore one of the most difficult ways in which the war asked Americans to come to terms with what their nation was and what they owed to it, and one of the most important underlying reasons why the American vision of Germany was so ambivalent. It was only with the hindsight of decades that Wallace and Roosevelt’s depiction of the Second World War as a global war on slavery was fully integrated into the national panegyric in the way that is familiar to us today.
Moore might also have more strongly emphasized the distinction between the conflicted public debate of the time and a genuine state of intellectual openness, which was a far rarer quality. Indeed, Moore’s argument raises important questions about how we distinguish between ambivalence and pragmatism when accounting for collective action. While it seems that some elements in the Office of War Information (OWI), and to a lesser extent other parts of the propaganda machine, were genuinely experimental in their approach to understanding the enemy, American public opinion was largely made up of subgroups with divergent but strong views, which we struggle to approximate from the aggregations of George Gallup’s polling and thus run the risk of characterizing as more fluid than they really were. It is hard to argue that the substantial minority of Americans who repeatedly described Germans as honest, hardworking and decent; who judged the German people more favourably than their ostensible British and French allies; who sent far more CARE packages after 1945 to the erstwhile enemy than to the territory of Germany’s battered victims, were part of a pragmatic temper in the “American mind” so much as a bipolar one. In this sense, the complex image of Germany prior to and during the war so subtly unpicked by Moore did not preclude the formation of simplified others; it only required that different groups had different images of alterity to believe in. All of this would make the wartime attitude towards Germany less exceptional than it might otherwise appear, and substantially less meritorious. Perhaps we run the risk here of reifying the “debate” and thus crediting it with false nuance, when in fact it was nothing more than a melange of conflicting dogmas?

If these are criticisms, they are more of emphasis than of fact. I was also left a little unclear by Moore’s engagement with the realm of politics. Moore seems to argue that the diversity of views expressed by the American people and its government over Germany and Nazism proves that such matters were not straightforwardly political, but were cultural and social. By this, I take it to mean that the arguments did not simply run along left–right lines, for political they undoubtedly were. The continuing discussions over whether fascism could be seen as the product of unfettered capitalism (to be resisted by socialism); as a form of totalitarianism that, like Bolshevism, conflicted with the democratic ethos of the vital centre (resulting in a need to oppose extremism of the left and the right); or as a crucial bulwark against proletarian rage sweeping from the East reflected quite specific political divisions about the path American, as well as global, politics should take, and underpinned the attitudes taken towards the German people as a whole. The apparent lack of “ideological cohesion” (65) at the time was a product of the fact not that politics was tangential to public debate over Germany, but that American politics was multivariate and in the midst of a complex process of realignment caused by Depression and war. For instance, Moore points out as incongruous the fact that Herbert Hoover, “a spokesperson for conservatism and Wall Street,” had a view of the German people that was strikingly similar to that of many liberals (234). But, given Hoover’s historical trajectory from the 1910s to the 1940s, that this old progressive’s position on Germany was quite close to those held by the inheritors of Wilsonian liberalism seems far more consistent than a simplistic definition of Hoover as arch-reactionary would suggest.

Politics, broadly conceived, perhaps provides another addendum to the question why the German of the Second World War seemed so different from the “Hun” that was fabricated during the First, namely that the relationship of the citizen to the state had changed between 1917 and 1942 in a way that made domestic hate-mongering increasingly superfluous. During the First World War, the dominant vision of
progressive politics required (or at least was believed to require) widespread local engagement from civic groups with the war effort. The republican image of the virtuous citizen upholding draft, fund-raising and production programmes was intimately related to the parallel campaign to purge local communities of “seditious” German conspiracy. The “consumer’s republic” had not yet arrived by 1942, but the role of the citizen had nevertheless begun to change. Key war activities were arranged in negotiation between politicians, administrators and leaders of corporate bodies, not citizens; and so, quite simply, the need to propagandize the home front was felt less strongly. Despite Roosevelt’s statements in his February fireside chat, then, Americans on the home front were not required to make the same kind of commitments that past wars had required of them, while simultaneously, of course, the quality of life for most Americans rose substantially during the war as the Keynesian effects of the conflict finally brought the nation out of the depths of long depression.

Roosevelt’s claim that conflict would require Americans to reevaluate themselves and their relationship to their nation did, however, capture a profound and important truth about the global crisis the country faced. For many – most notably the GIs – America’s policies towards Germany would be a question of life or death. As Moore has powerfully demonstrated in her work, the animating ideals of personal and communal identity on the one hand, and the image of the enemy on the other, shaped and moulded each other in the forge of conflict. To understand the enemy required Americans to reflect upon themselves as well. The result of this process was not only pragmatism, openness and healthy exchange; it was also the exacerbation of deep fissures in American society, and growing divisions between the liberal America of Franklin Roosevelt and its coagulating, conservative opposition. Know Your Enemy will help scholars move substantially closer to a fuller understanding of the dynamics through which such contradictory outcomes were produced.

University of York

ALEX GOODALL

In what manner might one write the history of a “debate” and to what end? Conventionally, there has to be an object and a series of divergent statements referring to it that one can follow over time and perhaps space. The realm of statements, potentially open-ended, must then be delimited. “Debates,” then, are not self-evident entities but always nebulous and so in need of circumscription. Histories of such constructs tend thus to be driven (I think) by the end: one writes about them not only because there is something to be unearthed that should be known in the sense of being revealed but because one thinks there were a right and a wrong there somewhere which are relevant for the present. There has to be a problem, in short, beyond the operation of archaeological uncovering. From that angle, it is in fact impossible to write about a “debate” without being a participant. And Moore is very much a participant.

This, then, is not itself objectionable. On the contrary, I wish she had been explicit about her engagement, for it bubbles up to the surface on many occasions but only comes to fully fledged expression in the final couple of chapters (such as in her excellent account of the so-called Morgenthau Plan and the sundry myths pertaining to it, and in her biting conclusion). Moore’s “bubbles,” more precisely, express a deep existential investment in the subject matter at hand. This is a book
about Germany, German history and German historiography just as much as it is, in a different register, about the United States. One’s reaction, when all is said and done, is thus to wish she had rewritten this voluminous work stringently in terms of her finale.

Certain empirical oddities follow from her German focus, laser-like as it is. I will just rattle them off here since it is the overall perspective that is primarily at stake in our context, not the particulars of the history itself. First, the “object” and the “debate” march through time (much less space) with a constancy that is hard to square with the external history, a history which is in any case not emphasized. The fundamental break in the sequence is the entry of the United States into World War II, secondarily the outbreak of the war in 1939; but the structural reality of these ruptures never appears as profoundly as they would seem to warrant. For much of the Depression years, the vast majority of Americans had other things to worry about than Hitler and Germany, yet it seems as though the “object” is ready-made in 1933, Nazism seen not as a process but as an entity with a plan about to be executed which one could either understand or not, the polarity of either/or within which the unfolding account is situated. (As far as that understanding goes, Moore rightly points out that the print media in the United States, with their forty correspondents in the 1930s, produced some remarkably clearheaded accounts of these phenomena for those interested. However, no stable concept or view emerged.) “Germany” and “Nazism,” then, are peeled off, sans much reference to what actually happened or indeed how this object related to other contemporary entities.

Second, one consequence in turn is the almost total absence of any discussion of fascism in general or indeed the debate on that issue. Nazism is German (and, in a way, Nazism is Germany, but more about that later). Nazism is not a case of fascism but a case of German history. Moore is only interested in Germany and what people, more or less informed, said about it. Italy and, above all, Japan are very rarely to be seen, much less analytically related to Germany. It is as though, say, Abyssinia and Nanjing were not relevant for the “debate” about Nazi Germany. Surely, “fascism” was in the 1930s a whole semantic field (to deploy Koselleck’s term) which needs to be mapped if the contemporary conception of the particularity of “Nazism” is also to be grasped. Third, the related topic of the Soviet Union and so the heyday of “antifascism” in the latter part of the 1930s are largely and weirdly absent. The Popular Front in the United States, culturally and even politically significant, certainly when it came to arguments about fascism, receives no mention at all. Watch on the Rhine, anyone? Even Lillian Hellman and her indisputably German-focussed play about antifascism is nowhere to be found. Fourth, once we are in the war, it is as though it was almost exclusively about the United States and Germany, with a distinctly subsidiary role for Great Britain (when not represented by Lord Vansittart, for whom Moore reserves a great deal of sympathy and admiration) and a distant one for the Soviet Union, Japan having already been relegated to the status of diversion. A “problem” with US public opinion is thus that it “fails” fully to understand, as did Roosevelt, that Nazi Germany was the main enemy. It is as though it was Germany and not Japan that attacked the United States. It is obviously no wonder that a lot of people were more outraged by the one than the other at this stage. Nor is it perhaps so odd that US public opinion did not commit to any deep and abiding hatred of the Nazi enemy in the first couple of years of warfare, given that the United States, Spielberg history notwithstanding, did not do very much by way of actually fighting said Nazis until 1944, much to the obvious chagrin of the Soviets, who ended
up inflicting more than 90 percent of all Wehrmacht casualties. Here, too, the absence of any sustained comparative analysis of the views on Japan is troubling: is the unabashed racism of the conception of Japan not immediately, in fact functionally, related to the unstable and low-key attitudes on Germany? Can one be understood without the other? Whatever the answer, the question should be posed in the keenest analytical terms.

These are “effects,” then, of how the object (Germany and the US debate about it) is constituted in Moore’s account, effects resulting in lacunae and silences. Beyond that level, one can, as always with ambitious and expansive works, pick other kinds of empirical quarrel. Thus I am myself not persuaded by Hillgruber’s notion (ironically developed after his retreat after the chastening clash with Moore’s mentor Gerhard Weinberg in the 1950s) of some Stufenplan by which Hitler was setting forth the stages of his coming conquest of the universe, less, perhaps, the British Empire. Such controversies seem, however, quite settled here, over and done with. I also find it peculiar that nothing is said of the extensive British information/disinformation campaign from 1940 onwards, the “British Security Coordination” run by British intelligence on a fairly massive scale out of Rockefeller Center. After all, this campaign was no less “foreign” in principle to the neutrality of the United States than the German effort. It was certainly more effective. Moreover, fake Nazi maps and some exceedingly dirty tricks aside, its highly successful project included the services of very important participants in her “debate” here (such as Robert Sherwood, playwright and FDR speechwriter). Moore’s portrait of Roosevelt, finally, seems to me benign to the point of apologia (and I say this as a card-carrying follower of Warren Kimball’s largely favourable view of FDR). It is not odd that the President should figure so prominently in the proceedings, the rule of Adolf Hitler and Franklin D. Roosevelt, after all, having been virtually coterminous (March 1933–April/May 1945). FDR, at any rate, can do almost no wrong. We are told of “his abiding confidence in democracy, his belief in a common humanity, and his profound yet tolerant religious faith” (78). Far from signs of “shallowness and incoherence,” his inchoate and fluctuating views of Germany were really a matter of “great intellectual suppleness” (79). Cynical denigration of political opponents is never precisely that but explained away by some ultimately worthy aim. This is not inherently an indefensible position to take. Nonetheless, the voluble and extrovert FDR remains one of the greatest interpretative problems in the history of the US presidency (only Jefferson is in my view equally difficult), and Moore has had no more privileged access to the “real FDR” than anybody else. It should be said that she provides the most complete account of FDR’s views on Germany to date, which is very useful (as are, by the way, her references to the many outstanding works on the United States that exist in German).

What moves Moore (again, “existentially” is not too strong a word) is the nature of the Nazi regime and its place in German history, secondarily the degree to which more or less informed observers and, overall, “public opinion” in the United States understood these realities. In short, she measures the “debate” in terms of some external and historiographically settled truth, viz. essentially that Nazism was a very German phenomenon which enjoyed a great deal of popular support; an extreme and historically contingent German phenomenon, to be sure, but one well within the bounds of the Sonderweg of that abnormal nation, thus something not only in need of vigorous counteraction to the fullest extent but also requiring afterwards an equally vigorous outside effort at reeducation and restructuring. I am simplifying slightly but only slightly. Again, this is certainly an arguable (though controversial) position.
The trouble is that Moore only lets it trickle out here and there, almost in passing, as established truths amidst the overall account of the vagaries of virtually every US view on the matter except possibly that of FDR and a few others. Much better, then, to have stated, “this is my view, it isn’t universally accepted but it is what I consider the historically sound and proven truth, so now let us see how the sundry US views diverged from it or confirmed it over time and what were the effects on policy.” Or some such thing. As it stands, the intermittent appeal to “truth” becomes irritating and the argument hazy.

That argument does become clearer in the final chapters when the ultimate “effects” in turn also become clearer. We are, not accidentally, also coming closer to the end of the war, the end of FDR and of Adolf Hitler. We are entering the phase when the real Germany is going to have to be dealt with. Till now, Moore’s uncovering operation has produced an account of surprising variations, nuances and discursive abundance. On all three of her levels or realms of opinion (popular, elite and governmental) there have been divergencies and instability. Is Nazism a gangster regime imposed on a victimized German people or is it the natural expression, historical or genetic or whatever, of “Germany”? No consensus ever emerges. Moore, as intimated, is reluctant to go into material or contextual explanations but it appears to me that one obvious condition of possibility, if not direct causal agent, for the very existence of this “debate” (or, put differently, “variability of opinion”) about the nature of the enemy is that it really is not an overwhelming issue; that is, as with so many other external phenomena in the US context, the topic could receive any degree of attention or perspectival spin because there was no material effect one way or another. The issue of “Germany” and “Nazism” becomes central in 1940–41 when it comes to defining the “enemy” and the place of the United States in the world but it does not have to be resolved because (a) Japan attacks the United States first and (b) Germany then chooses to declare war on the United States. The issue does have to be resolved in 1944–45 when one has to decide what to do with the coming occupation and external considerations do enter into the calculus: as Moore finally says on page 289, there was the Soviet Union and its role to consider.

It is at this point indeed that her analysis becomes decisive and interesting. Her entry point is Morgenthau’s (and Harry Dexter White’s) attempt to define a New Deal-ish and interventionist recasting of Germany, not the agrarianization of the country ultimately but an unapologetic and not unreasonable case of social engineering to prevent any further outrages against the standards of civilization (I am extrapolating) such as wanton aggression, murder and genocide. To Moore this makes sense and I daresay I agree. Morgenthau was always aware that his plan(s) or attempt would be diluted but probably maintained some faith that his friend FDR would rescue its essentials. By the end of 1944, however, FDR had begun to waver and, moreover, deteriorate physically. The idea powerfully represented within the State Department and by Henry Stimson, Secretary of War, of reconstructing on the basis of some supposedly genuine and Western-orientated segment of “Germany” and limiting the surgical operation to the most egregious “gangster” Nazis, had begun a long and checkered ascendancy that would eventually receive its crowning glory in the creation of the Bundesrepublik and the mobilization of the most industrialized and powerful parts of Germany as an ally against the Soviet Union. The discursive conditions of this coda are well laid out here. The “debate” will thus be revealed as the unintended emergence (in Foucault’s Nietzschean sense) not of the final analysis of Nazi Germany but of the conceptual framing of the Soviet Union and the incipient
Cold War, providing a now stabilized set of axioms about world conquest and the ills of appeasement and diplomacy: fill in the blanks of what has, by then, become more or less explicitly the structure of NSC-68 minus the overly religious language.

This opens up, retrospectively, a lot of interesting questions.

**Columbia University**

**ANDERS STEPHANSON**

It is exhilarating and rewarding to have one’s scholarship taken seriously: I am honored that the editors of the *Journal of American Studies* chose my book for a round table and grateful to the two reviewers for their thoughtful, empathetic and critical reading. I could not have wished for more learned and engaged readers than Alex Goodall and Anders Stephanson. Their comments, including their criticism and objections, are evidence of a shared endeavor to understand better this critical period. Both reviews underscore the difficulties in judging the American debate on Nazism, its incoherent and inconclusive nature—and thus the striking contrast of wartime discussions to today’s prevailing memory of the “good war,” “the greatest generation,” and our recognition of the Holocaust as radical evil. In my response I will concentrate on three aspects: the broader interpretive context for the findings of my study, the benefit of integrating the public’s perspectives into our histories of foreign policy, and some additional thoughts on the “messy” nature of American responses to Nazism.

In reflecting on World War II and Germany’s break with civilization, Hannah Arendt emphasized the importance of understanding rather than remembering history; that is, of discerning the nature and consequences of political events. Arendt, who significantly shaped our thinking about the Third Reich, was only one voice among a larger chorus of public intellectuals, political activists, journalists, social scientists and émigré scholars who offered probing analyses of the meaning of the Third Reich at the time and who thus laid important foundations for subsequent academic and political interpretations of National Socialism.

The challenge of recognizing the ambition of Nazi political objectives and war aims and of grasping the extent of implemented German policies was particularly staggering for contemporaries. But the intense intellectual debates on “the German problem” in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s yielded some profound insights into the nature of German actions and their consequences. From different political and intellectual vantage points, American and European refugee commentators recognized that Nazi ideas and German policies had changed the course not just of German history but of “Western civilization.” To this day I remain impressed by the acuity and relevance of these early analyses of the Third Reich and how constructively they shaped American wartime policies and decisions.

In contrast to Stephanson’s assumption, my approach is archaeological rather than teleological. These contemporary deliberations were infused with a sense of urgency and anxiety that arose from conflicting evocations of historical precedents and perceived missed opportunities: these ranged from apparent patterns in German aggression, the earlier war and American military intervention to the previous peacemaking process. While it is true that for most contemporaries the genocide was beyond belief (or of no consequence), for a vast majority the nature of the postwar world—at home and abroad—was largely unclear and a source of great concern.

There is a remarkable gap between the complex intellectual and political responses at the time and the clear-cut foreign-policy lessons that were drawn from the same war.
From our current vantage point the connections between World War II, the long Cold War and the global War on Terror come into sharper relief around three points: (1) the merging of the Hitler and Stalin regimes into totalitarianism, not as an analytical concept but as a battle cry against an ideological enemy. The original antifascist blueprint caught on only after being transferred to a different ideological enemy of longer standing and apparently greater appeal – communism. (2) The generally enabling memory of World War II and the enduring career of the Munich anti-appeasement lesson in spite of its persistent failure to provide useful guidance for American postwar foreign policy. And (3) the branding and discrediting of any criticism of US intervention or use of force as “isolationism” and “appeasement.”

In 2010 John Bodnar provided a much-needed analysis of how American “culture, identity, and commemoration became more militarized” over the course of the twentieth century. He elucidated the central role that official and collective memories of World War II played in this process:

the land of the free increasingly became known as the home of the brave; acts of killing and dying were transformed into heroic deeds and cherished memories . . . the defense of the nation became as important as the old dream of uplift and equality. Americans talked not only about the pursuit of happiness but about the road to victory.1

Rhetoric of an empire for freedom and of manifest destiny, as well as an exceptionalist faith in the United States’ global and historical mission, can all be traced as central themes in American nationalism over the course of two centuries. But World War II and, more specifically, lessons drawn from that war in the context of anticommunism and an unprecedented American supremacy injected a new element into this mix: reliable popular support for a global mission of the United States as the “leader of the (free) world.”

Since the great debate of 1939–41 successive generations of Americans have become increasingly accustomed to the burdens and responsibilities of military globalism. Although not without challenges, most notably towards the end of the Vietnam War, a robust consensus has been maintained on an elite as well as broader public level which supports this nation’s exceptional international role. The consensus is well captured in Madeleine Albright’s formulation of the “indispensable nation.” Her phrase does not quite carry the nationalist hyperbole of “the greatest nation in the history of the earth” (Mitt Romney), with its unclear international commitments, but it expresses a (possibly somewhat resigned) acceptance of realist exigencies and international expectations. An activist globalism and a heavy reliance on military strength have become, since World War II, defining aspects of “who we are” as Americans.

The nation-state – that is, the government – has been the main beneficiary of this development, not the citizens. The balance between state and civil society – never an equal one when it comes to foreign policy – has shifted even more dramatically towards the former with the simultaneous rise of American globalism and the national security state. Yet for historians that makes the task of analyzing nongovernmental and dissenting voices all the more important. If for no other reason than historical faithfulness and democratic appreciation, it makes sense to pay attention to the rather

1 John Bodnar, The “Good War” in American Memory (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 8.
indomitable if at times exasperating diversity in American societal responses to international matters and national foreign policy. Foreign-policy scholars continue to argue over the relevance and impact of public opinion and sometimes appear to be as frustrated with it as policymakers are, especially when the public resists expert analyses. For historians, public opinion and foreign policy present additional methodological and archival challenges: how wide to cast one’s net to capture a representative overview of public responses and how to address the criticism that some minority positions do not make a difference and thus should be ignored? Moreover, populist movements and arguments that have challenged American globalism and rejected calls for overseas intervention have, over the course of US history, appeared on the left as much as on the right, have been pacifist–humanitarian as often as chauvinist–exclusionary, racist as well as cosmopolitan – and thus defy comfortable partisan appropriations while lending themselves to partisan attacks. Yet if as historians we recover and contextualize minority, marginal, dissenting, discredited or ignored voices – no doubt, often the losers of history – a very different picture of American foreign-policy attitudes will emerge than the normative realist one of most of our textbooks. This more complex narrative that includes alternative and nonconformist positions would yield a different portrait of American nationalism and internationalism in turn.

In the book under review I distinguish between three levels in the American prewar and wartime discussions about Nazism and this country’s responses, namely among government officials and politicians, among intellectuals and professionals concerned with Germany or international affairs, and finally among the American public at large. The latter included voters and subsequently soldiers (and their families). While being the least articulate group, this was the target audience for the other groups’ expository efforts. Not corresponding to these three levels, but rather cutting across them, three broadly different responses to the Third Reich can be distinguished. Traditional political elites oriented towards Great Britain revived a World War I-derived enemy image based on a deterministic cultural understanding that limited the problem of war to Germany and defined the enemy in Manichean terms as America’s ideological other. Among journalists, refugees and intellectuals with personal ties to or intellectual affinities with that country, a very different interpretation emerged that saw in German militarism, racism and antidemocratic populism the West’s own ignored dark side. What deserves to be highlighted is that many of the analyses by foreign correspondents, diplomats and others were remarkably accurate and insightful – whether they condemned Germany or found some redeeming features in “the other Germany.” Finally, there was a less articulate, vaguely ethnically based goodwill towards the German people which shaped the American debate in important ways. It dampened any effort to mobilize the American public around a hate- or fear-filled notion of the German enemy, and it prevented the incoming news about the genocide and the systematic brutality of German warfare from shaping the image of the enemy.

The reality of the Third Reich was complex. Several questions that lay at the core of American wartime discussions – German popular support for Nazism, Hitler’s war aims and Germany’s potential for reform – generated academic controversies for decades to come. Yet during World War II the command to “know your enemy” was accepted by politicians and intellectuals with great sincerity. The urgency of the “second chance” – to improve on the peacemaking of a generation ago, to learn the right lessons – is palpable in public and even more so in governmental deliberations.
Since World War I, historical analogies and lessons have played an increasingly prominent role in the making of foreign policy and public discourse, both as expository reasoning and as rationalization. In fact, the history of US foreign policy in the twentieth century could be told as a sequence of alternating, cautionary and enabling, lessons drawn from intervention in World War I (revisionism and pacifism), from the interwar period (failure of “isolationism”), from World War II (military preponderance and intervention work, appeasement doesn’t, Munich lesson and domino theory, totalitarianism), from Korea (fear of China, stop while you can) and from Vietnam (quagmire, arrogance of power, anticommunism as blinder, incremental approach doesn’t work, Weinberger/Powell doctrine). As Yuen Foong Khong has shown, already by 1965 several of these historical lessons and analogies were at war with each other and the subsequent trauma of the Vietnam War only exacerbated things. The intellectual contest of enabling and cautionary history lessons continued through Gulf War I and was further intensified by the War on Terror in Afghanistan and Iraq (democracy promotion and nation building à la Germany and Japan; another Vietnam).

The Great War had left a complicated and tragically inverted legacy for the American political class and the larger public alike as far as Germany and military intervention were concerned. The shock over the carnage of World War I and disillusionment with Wilsonianism – the crusading, missionary strand in American foreign policy aimed at making the world safe for democracy by military intervention – led in the interwar period to an unprecedented rise of pacifism and a loss of faith in war as a political means. Congressional investigations and popular books implied that the real threat against which Americans had to guard was not Germany, but domestic and international warmongers and government propaganda which had led the country into an unnecessary war. From the interwar revisionist period through the early years of World War II, government officials and many Americans deliberately rejected ideas and practices of the Creel Committee, including a clear-cut ethnic–ideological enemy image of the Germans as “Huns.” The backlash against World War I atrocity tales thus had the most problematic consequences. By 1942 the injunction against the use of atrocity stories had become a further obstacle to understanding the centrality of the Nazi racial dystopia and genocidal warfare.

The impact of World War II on the official foreign-policy discourse and the public imagination is a less-analyzed phenomenon. We are lacking a study comparable to Bodnar’s that connects memories of World War II with American foreign policy. Bodnar shows how official and public memories displaced the actual experiences of many Americans and transformed an often tragic and traumatic encounter with war into a sentimental–heroic memory. For the official foreign-policy discourse, it is clear that a carefully crafted narrative of World War II, with the antidiplomacy, promilitary message of the Munich lesson at its centre, proved enabling rather than cautionary. The reason, it seems to me, is less that this was the most compelling lesson to come out of the American World War II experience, than that it was the most useful one, commensurate with American power in the postwar era.

It is not surprising that in the context of the most recent disillusionment with US military interventions and the rediscovery of the limits of American power, we also find reevaluations of the “great debate” of 1939 through 1941. Previously, several generations of foreign-policy experts and diplomatic historians successfully labeled the non- and anti-interventionists naïve and misguided, parochial and narrow-minded people, led by morally corrupt or racist leaders like Charles Lindbergh and Father
Coughlin. Historians of the noninterventionist camps, from Wayne Cole, Manfred Jonas and Justus Doenecke to John Muresianu, Frank Warren and Peter Boyle, have pointed out that the story was more complicated and the positions more variegated and reasoned. More recently, Robert Westbrook has taken up the question Why We Fought and reexamined the political and societal debates about World War II enemies, ideologies, and the readiness to go to war. He reaches the same conclusion as I do when he finds that some of the noninterventionists’ strongest arguments against messianic–missionary–universalist crusades were seemingly forever discredited by having once been used against Nazi Germany.

Anti-Nazi interventionists from FDR to Dorothy Thompson and Toni Sender had to preface their advocacy of the use of military force by expressing their strong aversion to war. While this could be written off as hypocrisy – although it was not in many cases – my book explains why this was necessary and how it affected the argument in favor of war, including the establishment of casus belli beyond the attack on Pearl Harbor.

But not only the “great debate” deserves a reevaluation. Official wartime policies and the deliberations surrounding them were much more insightful and instructive than the anti-appeasement lesson in conjunction with totalitarianism would lead subsequent generations of Americans to believe. In the book I highlight in particular Roosevelt’s partial and cooperative internationalism; the determination to find political and diplomatic solutions and avoid war; the use of a wide range of area experts, including (technically) enemy aliens in and outside the government; the restraint on government propaganda. In spite of the at times intensely political and personal conflicts over how best to respond to the German threat, the participants shared a recognition of contingency, an understanding of the inherent dilemma of “imposing democracy,” of the conflict between military means and political ends, between outside intervention and need for internal reform. At the highest level, the President, like many experts on the “German question,” believed that the depth of the political and moral catastrophe which the Germans had wrought was beyond the power of American foreign policy to solve.

Like my colleagues, I look aghast at the failure to prevent the Holocaust, to stop the killing, to relieve the suffering. But it always struck me as an intellectual shortcut to suppose that the US should have prevented or stopped the genocide. The history of World War II does not lend itself to this US-centered approach. As diplomatic historians we need to think a bit harder about a set of interrelated questions: what purpose was American policy supposed to serve? What were the opportunities and chances for what we today call “humanitarian intervention” in the context of the Nazi racial war? Again, the preference for, reliance on and ennobling of military means as the key lesson from World War II strikes me as something that fit well the subsequent trajectory of American foreign policy. But it was an irresistible conclusion drawn neither by contemporaries nor by historians studying the Holocaust and Nazi aggression. Indeed, scholarly accounts support few of the comforting lessons regarding stopping aggression sooner and humanitarian intervention that ambitious politicians or the public would like to derive from this war.

Goodall and Stephanson’s more critical comments center on my characterization of the American debate on the Third Reich. The term “debate” is convenient but somewhat artificial; it is an attempt to avoid the alternative: “discourse.” The word covers up the fact that not everyone was deliberately or consciously participating in this discussion – respondents in public-opinion surveys, for example, simply answered...
questions or chose between preformulated answers. It also does not make room for the fact, as Stephanson rightly notes, that at a minimum there were several overlapping and interconnected conversations going on, about other international events, about fascism and totalitarianism, the Japanese enemy and the Soviet Union – although references to this wider context are not quite as absent from my book as Stephanson suggests. American responses to the Third Reich, then, may be a more precise idea that covers actual military and political decisions as well as the intellectual discourse.

In line with Stephanson’s critique that my analysis of how Americans responded to the Third Reich is not sufficiently contextualized with simultaneous cataclysmic events around the world, Goodall emphasizes the need to further explore the problem of racism in the context of World War II. Most studies, indeed, focus on one aspect, with only a few scholars (John Dower, Glenda Gilmore, for example) taking a more integrated approach. Connecting the stories of anti-Semitism, Euro-American racism against African Americans, black Americans’ struggle for civil rights, and racism in the Pacific war will yield a different picture of the domestic subcultures and context relevant to American foreign policy. It will also bring about a more refined and accurate understanding of the “history of human rights” at this critical moment. I wrote in the book that the dual challenge of grasping a foreign reality and determining its significance for one’s own country and community is brought into sharp relief in African American media coverage of the Third Reich. Many black civil rights leaders joined forces with American Jewish and antifascist organizations to educate fellow citizens on the interlinked threat of fascism and racism. But, especially in the South, African American leaders insisted – reminiscent of the noninterventionist argument to promote democracy at home rather than abroad – that the “cancer” of antidemocratic racism had to be addressed at home, not only or primarily elsewhere in the world. In response to Goodall’s further point about (societal) ambivalence versus (political) pragmatism, I would add that even within distinct communities – Jewish Americans, refugees, German Americans, African Americans, conservatives and liberals – views and opinions on a number of interrelated themes (racism, intervention, fascism, capitalism) were rather fractured and diverse and not at all predictably “partisan.”

I cannot honestly refute Stephanson’s criticism that the “German problem” has somewhat of an “existential” meaning for me. And, of course, it did so for many of the American actors who populate this book: from the President to GIs who fought in Europe, from the foreign correspondents to the emigrants active in the OSS, the military and the public sphere. Stephanson’s comment reminded me of Edgar Mowrer’s scolding of Dorothy Thompson: lavishing too much attention on the Germans at the expense of other peoples – and I accept the implied criticism. However, I do not recognize my work in Stephanson’s comment about tracking some kind of historical “truth”; I am more sympathetic to Goodall’s muted complaint about my ambivalence (or at least a kind of sowohl als auch) in the face of American collective ambiguity. As I emphasize throughout the book, most positions caught at least some important aspect of this complex reality, understood something that remained obscured when seen from a different angle.

While some views and positions in this “mélange” were indeed ill-informed, betrayed complete indifference to international affairs as well as to the victims of German aggression or suggested radically different ideological commitments, this domestic incoherence ought to be viewed more positively in view of much of the ideological certainty and moral self-righteousness that followed. John Fousek concludes his study of American nationalism and the origins of the Cold War with...
the observation that “the lack of fundamental public debate about the nature and purposes of U.S. foreign policy after 1950 contributed to the development of an increasingly militarized foreign policy controlled by narrow ideological blinders that obscured fundamental international realities.” By the 1950s, one of the protagonists of my study, Reinhold Niebuhr, found in his analysis of the “anatomy of American nationalism” that it was caused by “an undue reliance on purely military power and an almost pathological impatience with the frustrations of forces beyond our control.”

Others have shown how and why the political spectrum in this country both shrank and moved considerably to the right after 1945: the interwar and wartime cacophony has to be viewed and evaluated against the new Cold War consensus.

One may also point to the absence of any meaningful contestation among the wider public or foreign-policy elites in 2002–3 during the run-up to the invasion of Iraq to suggest that conflict and the absence of consensus might be – not only more democratic – but more beneficial for the foreign-policymaking process itself. I appreciate Stephanson’s endorsement of my revisionist Morgenthau account; and here, too, the conflict – at the highest cabinet level – between different threat perceptions and consequently different postwar policies and the fact that a compromise had to be forged resulted in the ultimately relatively successful outcome of German democratization and European pacification that has been so widely praised by diplomatic historians.

Had I a stronger background as an intellectual historian, I would venture – probably to both reviewers’ consternation – a further defense of Roosevelt’s pragmatism along the lines of Westbrook’s and James Kloppenberg’s characterization of pragmatism not as “an unprincipled politician’s weakness for the path of least resistance … [but as the philosophical embrace and acceptance of] uncertainty, provisionality, and the continuous testing of hypotheses through experimentation.”

In the absence of my competence in that field, I refer back to Czeslaw Milosz’s quote of “an old Jew of Galicia” (271) and my interpretation of Alfred Hitchcock’s Lifeboat. The best-informed analysts understood and accepted that “the German problem” – in the larger context of Europe – would not be solved solely by some cleverly designed American policy. Historians who have studied Germany’s return to the Western liberal tradition have emphasized the transnational dimension of this relative success story. While the military defeat of Germany was an exclusive Allied affair (though not exclusively American), denazification, democratization and reeducation required German (as well as other Europeans’) cooperation and will. Political actors with agendas as different as Morgenthau and the “pro-German” lobbyists of the Council for a Democratic Germany acknowledged the limits of American power and its inability to carry off nation-building or democracy promotion single-handedly.