



# **A Call to Arms: Mobilizing America for World War II**

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Today, when the United States has possessed the world's greatest arsenal for more than half a century, it is difficult to conceive how stunningly unprepared we were to fight World War II. But in 1939, when Hitler's tanks surged across Europe, American war materiel was disastrously scant, and most of it obsolete. President Franklin Roosevelt, frantically trying to ready the nation for war, called for America to build 50,000 airplanes a year. Critics said his goal was not just unachievable, but preposterous.

The critics were wrong. By 1945, American factories had turned out a staggering 325,000 aircraft. At the peak of production, huge B-24 bombers were rolling off the assembly line at the rate of one an hour. The Axis powers might have fielded better trained soldiers, tougher tanks, or faster planes, but it could not match American productivity. The United States simply buried its enemies with an industrial output such as the world had never seen.

The scale of effort was titanic, and the result historic. It turned the tide of the war, and changed America forever. Small towns in the South and West swelled into cities overnight. Vast numbers of rural workers migrated to urban centers, never to return. Women joined the workforce in unprecedented numbers. War mobilization almost doubled the nation's GDP within four years, ended the Great Depression, and set the United States on the road to the greatest prosperity it had ever known.

Until now, this crucial dimension of World War II has never been the subject of a comprehensive history. Maury Klein has delivered a brilliantly textured narrative of epic scope, full of memorable characters—from the canny, ever-improvising FDR, to the captains of industry who overhauled their businesses on the fly, to the real-life Rosie (and Ralph) the Riveters on countless shop floors. *A Call to Arms* captures when the United States was transformed from a depressed nation, shrinking from global challenges, to a superpower that bestrode the world.

## **A Call to Arms: Mobilizing America for World War II Details**

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# **From Reader Review A Call to Arms: Mobilizing America for World War II for online ebook**

## **Shawn D. says**

After some deliberate effort. I finally finished Maury Klein's "A Call To Arms: Mobilizing America for World War II". It looked to be a comprehensive volume on home-front issues from building planes to growing food. I expected to firm up a lot of what I'd barely got to mention in the book "X-Day: Japan", and to pick up material for a new project, which will be a home-front detective story.

If you're into petty politics, with unusually high stakes, this is your book! Biographies and maneuverings of every high level bureaucrat are the meat of the text. They are the only source of continuity or storytelling in the text.

There are ample anecdotes from 'little people', from farmers to millwrights. Titans of industry are profiled, from dotting bits on Henry Kaiser to a dismissive attack on Henry Ford. Technical explanations of industrial processes are generally accurate and appropriately informative.

There is no question that the work is well researched. The notes and bibliography add 90 pages, mostly in specific citations. Most citations refer directly to current events magazines of the day and other contemporaneous records. This is honest history.

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## **Timothy says**

Detailed encyclopedic account of America's. war preparation. Lifting the veil in the infighting and conflict this huge undertaking precipitated. The unsung heroes of American enterprise and civil service are highlighted. Recommended for anyone interested in World War II.

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## **Aaron VanAlstine says**

While most WWII books deal with the European or Asian theater of operations, this massive tome is solely concern with the home front. It doesn't delve much into public attitude towards the war; it's focus is manufacturing, manpower, agriculture, with a lot of Rooseveltian politics.

While not at all the main theme of this book, the author successfully destroys the myth that Americans as a whole set aside their differences, rolled up their sleeves, and worked for their Uncle to win the war. Millions did; however, there were also labor disputes, strikes, and slowdowns throughout WWII. Political wrangling in Washington, D.C. and of course, racial conflict (including the internment of Japanese-Americans, which hit our agricultural industry very hard) all continued for the duration of the war. In fact, if not for rationing (and everyone fighting and dying overseas), life on the home front sounds a lot like peacetime.

I never read about the angst over "reconversion," that is, politicians and workers apprehensive over the inevitable contraction of manufacturing jobs after the war. Reconversion became a very important political

issue as early as 1943.

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## **TR Peterson says**

Maury Klein's *A Call to Arms* is an intricately researched and incredibly detailed account of the mobilization of the United States to meet the challenge of providing weapons and machinery to the Allied powers in WW2.

While the reader may already be aware of the extent of changes to large companies such as Ford Motors and the giant steel plants to meet unprecedented production goals, Klein delves even deeper into the lesser known, but no less important, contributions - the "mom & pop" manufacturing shop, the machinist who was able to rejig his machine to make airplane parts or bullets instead of tools. In short Klein shows how every single American with a machine and the ability to in any way produce war materiel was called upon to create the cumulative mass output during the war years.

The spirit of American innovation and optimism shines through as Klein details a variety of ingenious ways in which not only production but the relationship between employer and employee was changed. Many businesses saw women and African-Americans brought into the industrial workforce in great numbers for the first time causing desegregation on the shop floor as well as prompting employers to experiment with providing childcare. As workers became more and more needed - most able bodied men were overseas - some employers increased employee salaries and benefits to unprecedented levels to maintain employee loyalty.

Even so, for the most part the interests of business and labor remained diametrically opposed. It is clear that it took tremendous skill, and at times sheer luck, for FDR's administration to maneuver these competing interests. Even though there was some collaboration as evidenced by the new joint employee-management committees, overall production still occurred in the midst of wildcat strikes and an anti-union sentiment of employers that threatened to bring key war industries to a standstill at the most crucial moments.

The contribution of US production to eventual allied victory in the war is undisputed. Klein's book is an excellent, detailed overview of precisely how the US was able to overcome serious divisions and challenges to make that production occur and is an essential book for anyone interested in the US home front in WW2.

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## **Ken says**

When we think of the United States during the Second World War we tend to think of the thirteen million citizen soldiers who fought in Africa, Europe and the Pacific theaters. But just as significant to the Allied victory was the mobilization and sacrifices of another army: the people on the American home front. With amazing speed Americans created the Arsenal of Democracy that made the victory over the Axis powers possible. When war erupted on a global scale, Great Britain increased its armament output three-fold, Germany and Russia doubled theirs while Japan quadrupled theirs. In this same period the United States increased arms production by a stunning twenty-five times. What makes this fact even more astonishing is the fact that the United States prior to 1939 had no long established industries committed to the development of armaments. And sacrifice is indeed appropriate word and in many cases ultimate sacrifice applies. Between December 1941 and August 1945, more Americans were killed in industrial accidents than were killed in combat.

Maury Klein, one of the nations preeminent historians of the American economy has written a tour de force book concerning this much-neglected aspect of the central event of the twentieth century. Most books about the American home front fall into one of two categories: Those dealing with one small aspect of mobilization. Others resort to relating sentimental stories that reinforce the “Greatest Generation” myth with sentimental stories of Rosie the Riveter or give the impression mobilization as a smooth flowing process with patriotic Americans dutifully coming together and sacrificing against a common enemy. The reality was that mobilization was often contentious grind of conflicting personalities, interests and wants. Distrust clouded any move made by any group. Major industries worried about a cadre of New Dealers taking over their particular industries. Also persistent was the fear mobilization would result in a repeat of the First World War where industry ramped up production only to have wartime contracts cancelled after armistice and not tax write-offs for equipment and facilities that were neither obsolete. New Dealers concerned the rise industry would use war as an excuse to roll back hard won social programs.

It may come as a surprise to many as to how the war was far from the “all for one and one for all” mythology that has been established. To quote one Congressman sum up the nature of complaints he was hearing from his constituents: “It’s amazing how willing people are to have somebody else sacrifice for the war . . . They say they’re will to make more sacrifices for the war but they bellyache if any of their food or gasoline is taken away.” Not that people at home weren’t doing everything they knew how to aid the war effort giving freely their time and energy. Yet most of what was being asked of them rarely fell out of the realm of inconvenience. Of course, for many the sharp agonizing pain of war came home only when those who had a friend or family member was killed or maimed.

To people who that endured a decade of the worst depression in US history, Klein demonstrates convincingly that the war years seemed a strange and ghastly mixture of the best and worst of time. Arms buildup met Americans pocketed record earnings, paid off debt and amused themselves and spent freely on whatever they could find. This gave rise to a black market that provided anything that was lacking and promised a profit, especially gasoline, meat, cigarettes, tires, and stolen or counterfeit gas coupons. Despite the best efforts no one seemed to get the message that the surest way to bring on rationing was hoarding of goods or panic buying. Incredibly the total consumption of civilian goods was higher in 1943 than it had been in 1940. On the third anniversary of Pearl Harbor, Macys Department store took recorded its largest ever one-day-sales in its history. A survey conducted midway through the war found that 7 of 10 Americans admitted the war had not required them to make any “real sacrifices.” By 1944 it could not be denied that an air of prosperity hung over the land contrasting sharply with anxieties of war. Whatever their private sorrows, most people were doing well if not much better than when the war started.

Regardless of ones personal politics it’s hard not come away from this book impressed with the thirty second President of the United States: Franklin D. Roosevelt. First as the consummate politician attempting to warn a country about a threatening crisis overseas that it believed did not exist. Particularly during the election of 1940 where he had to walk a fine line between speeding up the tempo of mobilization while avoiding doing anything that might cost him the election. Following Pearl Harbor, the daunting task of organizing the economy for war while preserving the essential machinery of democratic government. Not to mention serving as the country primary morale builder and keeping the American people focused and on the task at hand especially in the early days of the war when there was one defeat after another. Despite the criticism of many FDR insisted upon keeping the reins in his own hands, making all key decisions himself fearing the dual threat of militarism and domination of the economy big business. And to his credit no one man understood the staggering complexity of running the wars production or its intricacies better. Not until well into 1943 did FDR relent and create by executive order the Office of War Mobilization to be headed by Jimmy Barnes to free up time to focus on foreign policy.

Given the sheer size of this book there are many detailed stories that are too numerous to take up in one short review. It is the story of how airplane manufacturing went from a “boutique” industry to one of mass production. And the crash program to create synthetic rubber when virtually all supplies from the Far East fell into enemy hands. You’ll learn how men like Donald Nelson, Henry Kaiser, and Paul McNutt were just as essential to victory as the name of Dwight Eisenhower, George Marshall, and Omar Bradley. It’s the story of how the strategic stockpiling and allocation of resources was carried off while minimizing bottlenecks and keeping prices and inflation down. Also how the seemingly impossible task of getting resources to the right place, in the right amounts at the right time was accomplished. Readers will see what came to be called the Military Industrial Complex at its inception. It’s the story of how the West Coast was transformed from an economic colony of the East Coast into an economic powerhouse unto itself. You’ll learn how the war jump-started the post-war civil right movement by having whites and blacks working along side each other for the first time.

If there is any drawback to the content of this book it is the authors periodic excursion to go into too much detail about aspects of the war that have little to do with mobilization. At times it seems as if Maury Klein, is writing at length more for his own understanding and some editor at Bloomsbury Press should have taken out the red ink pen and used it more freely. For example, there is way to long an explanation of the nature of the war in Europe and its implications prior to Pearl Harbor Also aspects of FDR’s personal life in the White House and the accounting of his death are overdone. Most readers who will pick up this book probably are familiar enough with these facts to begin with so writing about them in detail is superfluous. Furthermore, at one point Klein devotes an entire chapter: “Life in the Days Of” that is devoted to subjects such as the limited supply of civilian doctors, juvenile delinquency and other forms of vice, that while interesting seem out of place. Taken together, eliminating or whittling down these aspects of the book would have allotted more time for a fuller discussion of more relevant topics such as the development of penicillin, which is only discussed briefly.

All in all, this book is well worth the time and effort for anyone wanting to gain a fuller understanding of how World War Two played out on the American home front. Given its length it can also serve as booster seat for a baby or toddler if one is lacking.

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### **Alex Krembs says**

Maury Klein's extensive book would refute the claims made by Tom Brokaw's popular work regarding the WWII generation. Klein examines the preparations made for WWII by America in detail, and characterizes the majority of the work done as fraught with ordinary industrial difficulties.

American's have long looked at their participation in WWII as extraordinary, creating a savior myth within their culture. Klein's work does chip away slightly, factually, and accurately at part of this myth.

In my opinion, steps to deflate the savior myth will help reconcile remnants of WWII leverage that the US feels it has, but in no way diminishes the personal sacrifices of soldiers who fought the war. All Allied countries made the same sacrifice, and have equal merit.

The US should change the way it teaches WWII history to shift the narrative from populist and nationalist themes towards that of an important contributor and a valued leader.

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## **Eric says**

As a student of World War II, I've read numerous works on that conflict's battles, tactics, weapons, and military and political leaders. But what about the folks "behind the scenes?" Somebody had to build the tanks, rifles, aircraft, naval vessels, etc. to win the war. The Axis Powers had a huge head start on the Allies in equipping their nations with the necessary equipment and manpower to wage war.

"A Call to Arms" is the story of how America quickly turned from a nation cranking out washing machines and refrigerators to building B-29s, aircraft carriers, and other weapons of war. It wasn't easy, especially before the attack of Pearl Harbor. Many Americans doubted that their country would get involved in another European war. Business and industry leaders still remembered their experience in World War I and feared losing money creating weapons for a war that might not last very long.

If you like books on World War II, read "A Call to Arms."

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## **victor harris says**

This is information by the pound. If you are looking for the definitive coverage of World W. II mobilization, this is certainly it. Unfortunately you get lost in the morass of agencies, who ran what, and all the internecine rivalries in the competition for resources and finances. It certainly demonstrates that converting the U.S. to be the "arsenal of democracy" was hardly a coherent or patriotic effort, despite all the post-war propaganda to the contrary.

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## **Brian Eshleman says**

It battles with being numbers heavy, but the fourth star is for the author's fighting the good fight in that regard. Just when the reader wants to screen that he didn't really want to know exactly how many of certain goods were produced, the author will steer back into the narrative flow with a real-life character who either has the soft touch to persuade people to change their ways for the good of the country, or who is such a stubborn cuss that people would rather give in than put the comfort of the status quo in front of some production goal.

He does a number on the idea of The Greatest Generation, questioning the value of any label we would put on such a huge group of people just because of what they went through. That, he says rightly, they had no control over. Response to hardship is what makes greatness, and he says within that generation, as well as within his pages, we can find both greatness and selfishness.

I didn't realize until taking on this book that the American lack of a war-ready industrial base was not solely a matter of naïveté. The author reminded me that war suppliers were derided as profiteers and manipulators in the aftermath of World War I, even claimed by some for causing the war. Hence, he says, many in the industry wanted to stay as far away from making money on armed conflict as they could. Also, I didn't realize just how many interrelated factors were involved, and sometimes contradictory, in mobilizing the United States for World War II. Meeting one goal the military wanted often meant using resources the military would rather have available for itself. Definitely an interesting read.



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## Chris Jaffe says

This is a massive in-depth (over 770 pages of text) on the American war machine during WWII. It covers not only the post-Pearl Harbor phase, but even the isolationist period, when America began to build up its arsenal. On the whole, I was rather disappointed by it. First, it clearly relied very heavily governmental sources (which is OK) – but really overdid it. Most of this book focuses on in-fighting in governmental agencies, so you don't get much sense of the actual war machine coming to life. It focuses so heavily on the corridors of power in DC that WWII ends up being a rather lifeless and bloodless affair. For instance, part of the war mobilization involved a tremendous uprooting of people from one part of the country to the next. But that stuff every so barely makes it in the book. Oh, there are a few pages on black migration and a reference to the rise of industry in the west - but that's it. You'll get far more info about a particular agency's formation and floundering than you will on any of that. Housing crisis in a big industrial center like Chicago or Detroit? I didn't see that at all. Also, by focusing so heavily on Washington committees and agencies, the book tends to be too thick with details. Ever heard the phrase, "can't see the forest through the trees"? Well, on the info it focuses on, you get a tree-intensive look at WWII, but not much of a forest view. Hell, even in terms of statistics – something ordinarily dry – that's something the book lacks. It really needs some – just to give a sense of the scope of armaments, but you rarely see any. There is just a foggy sense of things getting done.

There is some info in the book, though. Early on, the shadow of WWI played a role, not just in questions of involvement, but in questions of mobilization. The Great War had its contracts terminated suddenly when the war ended, hurting many businesses, so they were wary early on of getting too caught up in it. Also, people didn't want to repeat the inflation of those days.

During the war, the three main concerns/crisis with mobilization were: 1) converting industries to war production, 2) raw materials shortages, and 3) manpower shortages. The government tried to prioritize things as best as possible, but it was always tricky. Some stuff like rubber and steel and copper there was a chronic need for. The government engaged in some rationing, and myths to the contrary that was never popular. Agencies like the Office of Product Management and War Production Board and the Office of War Information and the Office of War Mobilization were established. There was a food crisis because so much manpower was being taken off the farms. But it was more inconvenience than actual sacrifice most people said they felt in the homefront. There was even a teacher shortage. FDR said Dr. Win the War replaces Dr. New Deal. Women went to factories but still did housework. (New York state even had its first female mail carriers). Even prisons got involved, as prisoners donated lots of blood and bought bonds. Juvenile delinquency was up as kids became "eight hour orphans" during the war. There was also a major shortage of doctors, especially in rural areas. Oil pipelines had to be built because U-boats could sink oil tankers taking the stuff to the east via the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic. Pay-as-you-go taxation was introduced. Liberty Ships could be built in 10 days.

There is some info in this book, but overall it was a let down.

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## Andrew says

Whew! That took no small effort to plow through. This book, with 775 pages of text (and more than 200 additional pages of notes, bibliography, and index), is an incredibly detailed and thorough overview of the mobilization of the U.S. economy to support the Allied effort during WWII. For anyone who wants a better understanding of what it took to produce the so-called "Arsenal of Democracy", this book will certainly provide it.

However, in its detail, it becomes a bit of a chore to read. While some may find the descriptions of the political in-fighting in the Roosevelt administration interesting or entertaining, they were just tedious for me, and I much preferred to parts of the book that detailed the more local experiences at the factories, mines, and farms, and the stories of the individuals who actually did the work of producing what the nation needed. These stories highlighted the struggles involved in converting an economy that was still struggling to recover from the depression into a powerhouse production engine for war in ways that the descriptions of the policy struggles didn't. Together, they provided an eye-opening understanding of just how difficult it was to balance all the demands placed upon the economy during the war.

While I understood that the war had induced a huge migration as people moved to find work in war production, I had never considered the impact of that migration on the local economies that had to absorb a huge influx of new residents. While these workers may have been making more money than ever before, they struggled to find adequate living conditions. This was one among many other details about how the war impacted the "home front" that I had never before considered, and which were highlighted in this text.

This book should appeal to a wide ranges of interests, from those who are interested in the economic impacts, to those who find the social upheavals fascinating and others who are intrigued by politics.

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### **Charles Inglin says**

I had to take several shots at reading this massive volume. I actually began back in October. It's well written but at times heavy going, because the subject matter is vast and the cast of characters large. The great varieties of acronyms for government boards doesn't help.

The story told is quite remarkable, turning the US economy into a massive, unified war production machine. The fact that it was achieved to the degree it was is a tribute to a handful of men, not the least being Franklin Roosevelt. To begin with, many businessmen, particularly the steel industry, were leery of investing in expanding production. Planning for World War I had not gone well and the unexpected end of the war in 1918 (it had been expected to continue into 1919) meant the sudden cancellation of contracts and industries left with excess capacity and unrewarded investments.

The fighting between various interests, the Army, Navy, manufacturers, agriculture, labor, was utterly vicious. The military saw their requirements as paramount, even if filling them would have used up every bit of scarce material, leaving none for anyone else. The end of civilian vehicle production impacted farmers and truckers, who needed repair parts to keep their equipment running. The need for manpower for the services conflicted with the need for skilled labor in industry.

How all the competing demands were balanced and the production lines to support a war that was won largely by the ability to out produce enemy is an amazing story and one that should be studied by anyone with an interest in the full story of World War II.

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## Steven Hull says

As the subtitle to Maury Klein's lengthy book aptly notes, America's mobilization for World War II was "epic", if not more. Klein is an expert on American business and railroad history. *A Call to Arms* is a tribute to the overwhelmingly successful mobilization of American business, the economy and the people in World War II. The passage of time and the passing of those who toiled to achieve victory has left us with the impression that success was a foregone conclusion; that American patriotism and ingenuity were the engines of triumph; that the road towards victory was predictable; and that defeating fanatical, totalitarian foes assured freedom's preservation for a war weary United States and its return to a war ravaged world in 1945. This fairytale ending never materialized. As Klein demonstrates, Italy, Japan and Germany, despite their relatively small economies, held the upper hand in the conflict until mid-1943. Patriotism at home was often trumped by self-interest and politics. American ingenuity was a crucial factor, but was constantly in combat against old habits and ways of doing things. And, despite the beating administered to the Axis Powers, the Soviet Union and anti-colonial movements abroad and racism at home assured freedom remained illusive for many. America's domestic mobilization for war was more like combat overseas—unpredictable, costly, inefficient, highly complex and chaotic. Yet in the end it helped to rescue the world from an incomprehensible darkness.

Some criticize Klein for incorporating too much detail. But the detail is necessary to appreciate the exceptionally difficult and complex material, production and political roadblocks that stood in the way of success. In 1938 America was economically depressed. Unemployment was 17%. War clouds in Europe and Asia sparked little domestic interest. Isolationism in international affairs, or what Klein labeled unilateralism, drove foreign policy. Hitler's continued expansion and the outbreak of war with Britain and France did little to change American minds. The economy began to pick up in 1939 and early 1940, but business was wary of expanding to help the British and French. They had been left to pay for the excessive industrial capacity and the sudden loss of government contracts following victory in World War I and were consequently reluctant to expand production for military reasons. Once France fell during the spring and of 1940, leaving a tottering Britain to face the Nazi onslaught alone, President Roosevelt influenced a fearful public to begin mobilizing in earnest to not only help Britain and the Soviet Union, but to arm America for what appeared to be inevitable conflict with the Axis. Pearl Harbor soon ended the intervention versus isolation debate and from thence forward the challenge was to convert the civilian economy to an efficient war-fighting juggernaut. Klein's detailed account shows why this was so difficult and how leaders and leadership and the will of the people ultimately accomplished production miracles that materially overwhelmed the enemy.

Mobilization was indeed "epic", but "epic" with an asterisk. Transitioning to a war economy was a constant struggle as shifting civilian and military priorities were buffeted by the dynamic demands of worldwide combat and civilian needs at home. Critical materials and manpower had to first be acquired, then allocated and then trained. What began as food fights for resources among business, the military, Congress and labor soon morphed into all out warfare. Above the fray stood Roosevelt. He refused to give up control of mobilization to any faction, was adept at solving temporary crises, and used the power of the Presidency and his forceful personality to manipulate, cajole and sometimes bludgeon the various factions into working things out. Even as the tides of war turned beginning in mid-1943, these conflicts did not abate, although a systematic approach to resolving them gradually emerged. But no one approach was ever perfected because of the complexities of the war and the need, once victory was gained, to transition back to a civilian economy without the severe economic distress that had followed World War I.

Perhaps the most difficult piece of the “epic” asterisk to swallow was that which represented the social status quo at home—a status quo that kept selected Americans in their place or worse. For Americans of color, the war changed little. Kept from full military participation in the war, their skills were underutilized and their love of country undervalued. It was not until 1943 that Blacks were allowed in the Marine Corps and then only as enlisted. Army rolls had fewer than a handful of Black officers in 1942. The well documented story of Japanese-Americans during the war grotesquely speaks to the racism that simmered beneath the sheen of Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms. These Americans had a hard time swallowing the rhetoric about a war to save the world through the barbed wire of remote relocation camps. Racist politics never became a casualty of the war either. Congressional southern Democrats shamelessly teamed with anti-New Deal Republicans to keep Blacks in their place, control labor and undermine New Deal gains at every opportunity. Nothing better reflected this sad state of affairs than an incident in a mid-western cafeteria where Black soldiers were refused entry and service at the same time German prisoners of war were eating at the counter. Only in America where plentiful resources and geographic separation brought security, could such injustices and misuse of precious resources be tolerated without jeopardizing victory

In spite of the initial chaos and the failure to use all domestic resources in the fight, the United States became Roosevelt’s Arsenal of Democracy. Talented leadership and patriotism drove most, despite the ever-present self-interest embedded in the American character. Yes, the ration system at home never fully functioned. People cheated and the black market flourished. Not every able bodied male volunteered to serve, many avoiding the military until gobbled up by the draft. Thousands of others, aided by lenient local draft boards, falsely claimed exemptions for questionable reasons. Nevertheless, free from the war’s destructiveness and blessed with a wealth of resources including uncanny ingenuity and superb leaders, America produced such prodigious amounts of goods, weapons and food that even major inefficiencies had little impact on the overall war effort. For example, the U-Boat menace was marginalized by a combination of new anti-submarine warfare tactics and the completion of new cargo ships at the rate of seven a day. This won the Battle of the Atlantic. In a relatively short time, a whole new science, weapon system, production capability and means of delivery was created to produce two bombs that would bring a tenacious Japan to her knees within a week of their use. The B-29 Superfortress and the Atomic Bomb were, respectively, the first and second most expensive projects ever undertaken and could only have been accomplished under the conditions that existed in the United States. Other examples of what were once thought to be impossibilities abounded. The invention of the proximity fuse provided an efficient killer of ground troops on the battlefield and planes in the sky. The hardy M-1 proved to be the best rifle in the war and the P-51 Mustang the best fighter. American aircraft production was staggering in quantity and quality. Building airplanes in 1940 was a plane-by-plane, slow, handcrafted process. By 1944 unprecedentedly accurate mass production techniques were churning out a B-24 bomber every hour, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at the huge Willow Run plant near Detroit. By war’s end the U.S. had produced 303,000 military aircraft, roughly equal to the total number produced by Britain, Germany and Japan combined. Whether it was machine guns, tanks, anti-aircraft guns or rifles, the American production advantage over the Axis powers was staggering. Japan was America’s most formidable enemy on the high seas, yet was only able to field 16 aircraft carriers to American’s 137.

The American labor force was taxed. Military and domestic needs caused labor shortages, but these were never serious enough to affect the total war effort. For many workers moving to a new part of the country, living in substandard housing and working long hours were acceptable currency in exchange for a job and a piece of the war. Women, many with children, did more than their fair share knowing at the end of the war they would revert to their former status as underpaid and sometimes unappreciated national assets.

On August 15, 1945 Japan surrendered. The contentious collective effort to mobilize and win the war had succeeded. Not everyone had been a willing participant or devoted patriot. Societal change that promised freedom for all Americans was a casualty of political expediency and deeply held archaic convictions.

Political partisanship did not take a vacation during the war either. The 1944 election campaign was particularly partisan and ugly. Klein shows that all of these obstacles were overcome. American industrial production and the people's will combined to achieve victory in history's most desperate conflict.

Blindly calling the generation that won the war the "Greatest Generation" overlooks American domestic injustices that were purposely ignored. Yet, failing to acknowledge the genius of the enormously successful war effort belies the magnitude of the victory and the scale of the sacrifices of those who worked at home and fought overseas. What we are left with is a generation of preponderantly great Americans who made exceptional sacrifices on the battlefield and at home to save the world. A Call to Arms gives the reader deep insight into complexities of the war's domestic challenges and full appreciation of what the great Americans of this generation achieved.

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### **Regina McLaughlin says**

Hold it. Before you crack "A Call to Arms", make sure you can set aside four hours a day for maybe a week. Take a look at the book's size and swear you won't be lured back to World of Warcraft until you're done.

Okay. Seat yourself in a rigid straight-back chair, preferably at an oak library table--no sinking into upholstery. No snarfling out on ding-dongs or swirling merlot. Muster some discipline, man. You are about to enter a mind-game that will drag you, ricocheting and screaming, through a vast, complex embroidment of personality, event and military imperative. This means you should drop that joystick and ponder the problems of mobilization during World War II. It also means a serious investigation of industrial organization as the policy coursed from peripheral neutrality to titanic engagement.

Oh, and bring along to the table your endurance, for as I mentioned, it's a huge tome, chockful of inchoate acronyms and segmented topics; the complex issues of wartime mobilization do not tease apart readily.

Again I warn you... All your vigilance is required, lest you be lulled into a stupor of facts and drift aimlessly forward and backward through bureaucratic, military, political, and of course industrial time. Do your intellect a favor, do try to appreciate the scholarship and refer back to the end-notes, and respect the author for not oversimplifying.

Not that the writer deserves anything but your strictest attention. The transmission of content is faultless and the truths are relentless. More likely, the problems lie in the reader's poor power to comprehend. Ask, always ask: Shall I spare this fine work of history--so deserving of a careful reader--my flippant inattention?

Here's what I think. Were there honor among readers, weak-minded critics would admit they don't give a shit about parity prices during the Great Depression or the skimpiness of the workforce in Detroit circa 1939, or improvements in fabricating steel. Nor can they imagine a different reader who, beyond caring about these "details" thinks the whole story of US mobilization resides in an accounting of its details.

I'm only here to advise you to avoid this tough-minded, sober, rarified slab of American history if uncommon richness of reportage strikes you as excess of detail. For you, it's going to be an uphill slog through this coal-begrimed factories. So leave the bushel-basket atop all this Roosevelt-era politico-socio-militarist-industrial argle-bargle and return to your single-shooter ecstasy.

After all, why should anyone else have as much hypertrophic bibliophilic fun as me? Just let me ramble alone through the twisted decay of yesterday's industrial boneyards, kicking at old tin cans and hobnobbing with ghosts?... The rest of you folks, have fun gaming the future.

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### **Washington Post says**

The story of how America became the “great arsenal of democracy” is the subject of “A Call to Arms,” and I can’t imagine it being told more thoroughly, authoritatively or definitively. Maury Klein, professor emeritus of history at the University of Rhode Island and the author of numerous books on the history of business and industry, crowns his long career with this massive examination of one of the most important aspects of 20th-century American history and one of the least documented or understood. We know a great deal about the battles that were fought in Europe, Africa and Asia, but we know far less about the incredible mobilization of American industry that — together with the appalling sacrifices made by Russian soldiers and civilians — made it possible to win the war. Read the review: <http://wapo.st/1b9y8kW>

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