

Introduction

When the local Chamber of Commerce published its laudatory history of Richmond, California, in 1944, it concluded its account with before-and-after photographs. Taken only six months apart, the two pictures captured the dramatic transformation of one city during the tumultuous era of World War II (see plates 1 and 2). The earlier photograph, taken in June 1942 from a hilltop in south Richmond, reveals a pastoral scene of fields and marshes. The later picture, taken in January 1943, provides a startlingly different view of the same terrain. Here, virtually every lot is covered with barrackslike war housing projects that stretch as far as the eye can see.¹

Offering a unique before-and-after perspective, the two photographs illustrate the sweeping impact of World War II on one West Coast city. They show at a glance the rapid burgeoning of defense industries, war housing, and accompanying urban development that transformed many American cities during the war years. What the pictures do not show, however, are the people involved in this transformation—the thousands of workers who migrated to war production centers between 1941 and 1945 and the longtime residents of such besieged communities.

Most urban historians have portrayed World War II in similar terms. Focusing on structural changes in the economy and the dynamics of urban development, these scholars have shown how the war significantly affected urbanization in America. In *The Martial Metropolis*,

a collection of essays on the impact of militarization on American cities, Roger W. Lotchin concludes that recent wars and defense spending brought lasting changes to many cities, accelerating the development of some, precipitating the decline of others.² This study adds to the body of literature on war and urbanization but takes a somewhat different tack. In focusing on a single urban area, I hope to move beyond the structural dynamics of wartime cities to explore the human dimension of the war experience as well.

In West Coast cities, defense migration and the human drama of the war boom would be the most enduring legacy of World War II. Between 1940 and 1945, millions of war migrants headed for the Pacific Coast, increasing the racial and cultural diversity of its cities and transforming social relations and cultural life. World War II migration, in fact, was one of the most powerful forces in the spatial rearrangement of the population in the twentieth century. According to the Census Bureau in 1948, "Probably never before in the history of the United States has there been internal population movement of such magnitude as in the past seven eventful years."³

Between 1940 and 1947, some twenty-five million people (21 percent of the total population) migrated to another county or state in search of new opportunities in the military and civilian sectors. By comparison, only 13 percent had moved in 1935–1940 and even less during the early thirties. A considerable percentage of war migrants were nonwhite, far more so than during the depression.⁴ Although some of the wartime movement was for the duration only, many migrants remained in their new destinations, extending the process of chain migration to friends and relatives into the postwar period.

Surprisingly, though, we know relatively little about this dynamic period of internal migration. Social historians have amply demonstrated the significance of rural-urban migration in shaping early American community life. Herbert Gutman and other historians of the working class have likewise examined the key role of European immigration in northern cities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵ Little attention has been given, however, to the renewed importance of internal migration in the post-1920 period, particularly for cities in the South and West.

Recently, a few historians have begun to address this issue, most notably Jacquelyn Dowd Hall et al. in *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* and James N. Gregory in his study of California and the dust bowl migration.⁶ These historians demonstrate the

significance of rural and regional migration in shaping the social and cultural life of industrial communities in the South and West. Their work describes the effects of migration and settlement on southern families, but also shows how migrants created their own social world through distinctive religious, familial, and cultural practices. By focusing on the World War II years, this book seeks to contribute to an understanding of internal migration in the twentieth century, evaluating its impact on migrants and nonmigrants alike.

In focusing on the war era, this study is also an attempt to address the ongoing historical debate over the impact of the Second World War. Looking at the national level, historians of the home front have reached conflicting conclusions about the significance of the war as an agent of social change. More recent studies of specific localities have yielded greater insights by probing beneath such net national findings to examine the divergent patterns of various regions and communities. Alan Clive's study of Michigan and Gerald D. Nash's work on the West during World War II demonstrate the importance of the war in expanding regional economies, accelerating urbanization, and transforming local racial and gender relations.⁷ They do not, however, provide the individual personal perspectives and detailed sociological focus of a community study.

In 1988 historian Marc S. Miller published the first community-based study of World War II, *The Irony of Victory*. Focusing on the economically declining community of Lowell, Massachusetts, Miller argues that the war was a temporary boom phenomenon in the long-term downward course of the city. As such, he finds, it essentially perpetuated prewar social and economic trends, resulting in the eventual abandonment of the city by employers and workers.⁸

In many ways, this book is the flip side of the Lowell story—the more positive, growth-oriented saga of western cities that grew at the expense of those in the Northeast. At the receiving end of this exchange, western cities gained major new industries, housing, and immigrant populations. Unlike Lowell, the East Bay experienced more change than continuity, more possibility and hopefulness than decline and despair. In time, however, West Coast communities would experience their own difficulties, many of which grew out of the unresolved conflicts of the war boom era. Neither “Sunbelt” nor “Rustbelt,” the Bay Area exhibited elements of both types of economies, allowing us to see how western cities and their residents coped with wartime social change and the postwar dislocations that followed.

The Case of the East Bay

As one of the nation's largest shipbuilding centers, the San Francisco Bay Area offers a good window on the wartime experience of West Coast cities. The East Bay region in particular hosted an extensive zone of shipyards and other defense industries that attracted hundreds of thousands of war migrants—both black and white—from around the country.

Defense migration, more than the economic changes that triggered it, permanently transformed life in the East Bay. The massive wartime influx changed the racial and regional composition of the population, enriching the cultural life of East Bay communities. In the workplace, the arrival of unskilled migrants and other new workers prompted a radical restructuring from skilled crafts to mass production. In response, shipyard unions tightened their control of the membership, resulting in undemocratic practices and new forms of labor organization.

Federal government programs, meanwhile, transformed the spatial and social relations of these communities. The construction of war housing projects with corresponding social service systems served to isolate defense migrants within certain sectors of the city, augmenting their physical and psychological separation from the native community. Migrants, though, would construct their own social world within the confines of these new federal ghettos, cultivating regional subcultures that would eventually permeate the larger community.

As Louis Wirth and other sociologists observed in the 1940s, mass defense migration resulted in bitter conflicts between natives and newcomers over material resources, political power, social prestige, and public behavior.⁹ Unlike their more immediate predecessors in the East Bay, most war migrants were native-born southerners and midwesterners; the “natives” they most often encountered were former immigrant and white ethnic workers. World War II thus reversed the historic roles of native and immigrant, creating a complex and unstable social hierarchy. Old-timers of the native-born middle class contributed to anti-migrant sentiment as well, primarily out of class-based fears of public disorder. For old-timers of all classes, the wartime influx of black migrants provoked fears of social unrest and a disintegration of established racial boundaries in the community.

As in earlier episodes of urban class and ethnic conflict, wartime struggles between newcomers and old-timers were played out on city

streets under the banner of crime control. As downtown areas turned into raucous boomtowns, local elites mobilized to reassert control of public space through law-and-order campaigns aimed at migrants and other groups whose social autonomy grew with the war. In the postwar era, wartime campaigns to control public space provided the ideological underpinnings for urban redevelopment and helped fuel white flight to the suburbs. Throughout these struggles, the federal government was an active intermediary, seeking to facilitate the war effort and postwar reconstruction.

Although the newcomer–old-timer dichotomy is a compelling model, it has limitations as a tool for explaining all wartime conflict. First, newcomers and old-timers were themselves internally divided over issues of race, class, age, and gender. Conflicts occurred within families and among migrant neighbors, and newcomers and natives sometimes formed alliances based on race or other common characteristics. In the postwar period especially, newcomer–old-timer boundaries proved to be quite permeable. Many white migrants found social acceptance in nearby suburbs, so that by the 1950s the remaining battle lines were largely racial ones. Racial conflict, which had not been as visible a problem in the prewar era, would become the most troublesome legacy of the war.

World War II also presented opportunities for a class-based challenge to the conservative business interests that had long ruled East Bay cities. The influx of thousands of new working-class voters and the corporatist nature of municipal politics during the war enabled a coalition of labor, black, and other progressive forces to mount a sustained attack against conservative rule. Under the leadership of a united labor movement, the progressive coalition would grow to become a major contender in postwar urban politics, particularly in Oakland. Although these challenges ultimately failed by the 1950s, they nonetheless demonstrated the powerful potential of the war as an agent of social and political change.

Unlike national studies, a sharply focused community study enables us to see these conflicts by exploring social relations within the family, neighborhood, and city. This approach allows us to move beyond the structural preoccupations of most urbanists to understand the social experiences of different individuals and community groups. From this perspective, we can better understand the options and limitations of East Bay residents and their families and the choices made by urban policymakers both during and after the war. In wandering through the

shipyards and housing projects of the East Bay, the historian also has an opportunity to examine the ways in which the federal government constructed and reshaped local communities and institutions during those years.

The East Bay region offers a good locale for exploring the wartime transformation of urban life. Like other urban centers around the country, the San Francisco Bay Area grew at the expense of the nation's less developed interior. Nationally, the defense boom augmented the historical shift from rural to urban areas. From 1940 to 1947, U.S. farm areas lost more than three million inhabitants, or one in every eight residents living on farms in 1940.¹⁰ More generally, population in counties outside metropolitan areas declined dramatically—with a nationwide loss of nearly five million civilians between 1940 and 1943 alone. Smaller cities, towns, and rural areas of the nation's interior—the North Central and South Central census regions—contributed the greatest number of urban migrants (see table 1). The wartime population of the Bay Area reflected these shifts, drawing the bulk of its newcomers from precisely those areas. Furthermore, the racial mixture of East Bay migrants mirrored national trends and allows for a comparative analysis of defense migration by race and region.

The Bay Area also represents one of the fastest-growing urban areas of the war era. As noted earlier, World War II helped redistribute urban populations away from northeastern cities and toward newer urban centers in the South and West. From 1940 to 1943, the civilian population of metropolitan counties in the Northeast dropped by 1,023,000 while those in the South and West grew by 2,314,000 (table 1). Despite an overall population decline in the South due to heavy outmigration from rural areas and small towns, southern cities continued to grow, particularly shipbuilding and military centers along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts.¹¹

The most spectacular growth, however, occurred in the West. While all other regions experienced a net loss of population, the West grew by 14 percent between 1940 and 1947. The most marked increase occurred in the Pacific Coast states, where population jumped by almost 40 percent. Unlike the East, which converted existing urban industries to defense production, the West expanded its industrial facilities along the perimeter of strategically located coastal cities. Primarily distribution and processing centers for raw materials in the prewar era, West Coast cities developed into major shipbuilding and aircraft manufacturing centers during World War II. In the Northwest, the population

Table 1 *Changes in Civilian Population, April 1, 1940, to March 1, 1943*

Regions (census grouping)	Counties outside metropolitan areas*			Metropolitan areas*		
	Pop. 1940 (000s)	% change since 1940	Net loss/gain	Pop. 1940 (000s)	% change since 1940	Net loss/gain
New England (Me., Mass., N.H., R.I., Vt., Conn.)	1,935	-6.3	-122,000	6,468	-2.4	-157,000
Mid-Atlantic (N.Y., Pa., N.J.)	5,550	-6.9	-382,000	21,944	-3.9	-866,000
S. Atlantic (Del., N.C., Md., S.C., D.C., Va., Ga., Fla., W.Va.)	11,923	-4.7	-560,000	5,800	+13.6	+791,000
E. N. Central (Ohio, Mich., Ind., Wis., Ill.)	11,902	-6.6	-790,000	14,697	+1.9	+272,000
W. N. Central (Minn., N.Dak., Iowa, S.Dak., Mo., Nebr., Kans.)	8,734	-12.9	-1,127,000	4,762	+1.2	+59,000
E. S. Central (Ky., Ala., Tenn., Miss.)	8,486	-8.2	-700,000	2,277	+9.4	+213,000
W. S. Central (Ark., Okla., La., Tex.)	9,550	-8.5	-811,000	3,468	+11.3	+390,000
Mountain (Mont., N.M., Idaho, Ariz., Wyo., Utah, Colo., Nev.)	3,286	-5.2	-172,000	847	+8.4	+73,000
Pacific (Wash., Ore., Calif.)	3,132	-1.6	-51,000	6,544	+12.9	+847,000

SOURCES: All statistics derived from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Estimates of the Civilian Population of the United States, by Counties: March 1, 1943*, issued October 31, 1943. Table based on Catherine Bauer, "Cities in Flux," *American Scholar* 13 (Winter 1943-44):74. Copyright © 1943 by the Phi Beta Kappa Society.

*"Metropolitan counties," as used by the Census Bureau, include cities of 50,000 or more plus the urbanized counties around them. "Counties outside metropolitan areas," therefore, include smaller cities as well as villages and rural areas.

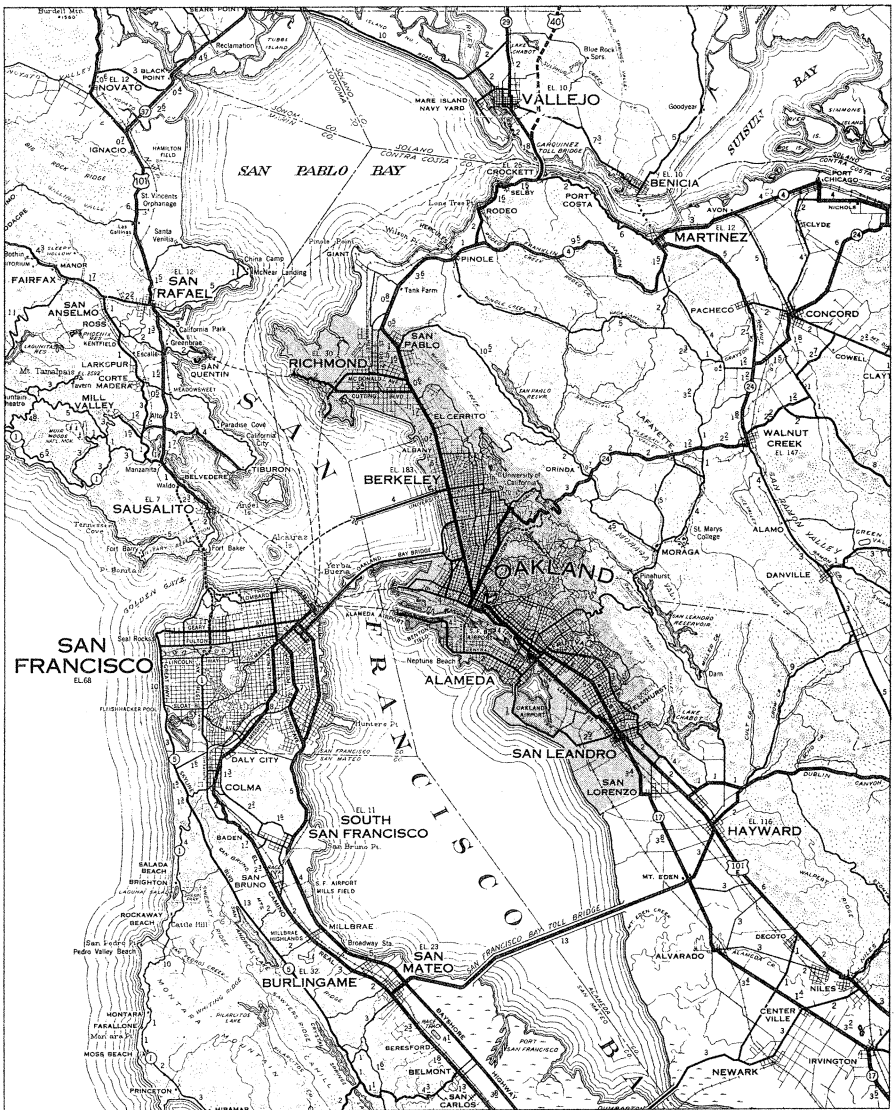
of the Seattle region grew by 30.5 percent and the Portland area by 33.6 percent. The San Diego area experienced the most dramatic population gain with a 110.5 percent increase. Los Angeles added 17.8 percent and the San Francisco Bay Area 39.9 percent. The Bay Area, then, was the second fastest-growing urban center on the West Coast.¹²

California, more than any other state, reaped the benefits of wartime defense development. Of \$360 billion in total federal expenditures in the period 1940–1946, the U.S. government spent some \$35 billion in California, accounting for 45 percent of the personal income of state residents. California likewise received more interstate migrants than any other state, absorbing more than 1.5 million newcomers between 1940 and 1944. Nearly one-third of these migrants settled in the San Francisco Bay Area.¹³

The majority of these newcomers settled outside of central cities in suburban and urban satellite communities closest to new war industries. Unlike the congested urban core, the urban periphery offered large expanses of undeveloped land that permitted rapid industrial and residential development. In fact, in all of the nation's ten busiest defense centers, the greatest proportional population growth occurred in outlying areas. World War II, then, hastened the process of metropolitan growth, favoring the suburbs at the expense of the central cities.¹⁴

The East Bay region offers a prime example of this type of outlying metropolitan growth. During the war years, the majority of migrants settled there adjacent to massive shipyards and military installations that sprang up along the San Francisco Bay. By 1945, the population of East Bay counties surpassed those on the opposite side of the bay, including San Francisco and its peninsula suburbs. The regional focus of this study also reflects the emergent commuter economy of the mid-twentieth century that connected East Bay cities not only economically but also physically and psychologically. This pattern of metropolitan growth was typical of West Coast defense centers, including the industrial corridors of Seattle-Tacoma and Portland-Vancouver and the southern and western suburbs of Los Angeles.¹⁵

For the purposes of this study, the East Bay encompasses the coastal areas of Contra Costa and Alameda counties bounded by the towns of San Pablo on the north and San Leandro on the south (see map 1). It includes the shipyard boomtowns of Richmond, Oakland, and Alameda, as well as the quieter communities of Berkeley, Albany, El Cerrito, and Emeryville. In the prewar era, this territory was known as the "Oakland metropolitan area," reflecting the city's dominance of the



Map 1. East Bay Study Area, 1935

region prior to the completion of the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge in 1936. During the war, the East Bay shared many common characteristics with other shipyard suburbs such as South San Francisco, Marin City, and Vallejo. The East Bay experience, then, parallels that of the Bay Area generally and offers insights into the wartime transformation of Seattle, Portland, Los Angeles, and San Diego.

In terms of sources, cities and counties offer new documentation for the study of wartime society. Reports of housing authorities, city crime commissions, school districts, social welfare organizations, and local newspapers have all enriched this project by providing detailed information on community development, social conflicts, and urban decision-making. In addition, the personal recollections of local residents, when balanced with written sources, provide invaluable insights into wartime family and community strategies.

In some respects, however, reliance on local sources can be problematic. Most western cities do not maintain municipal archives, and many city and county agencies routinely discard their records after a decade. The bureaucratic frenzy of wartime cities only aggravated this problem. Stretched to the breaking point under the strain of ballooning population and service needs, local agencies often could not keep pace with routine record-keeping. Consequently, many of the records that survive are less substantive than those from before or after the war. In some cases, information on local communities appears in the records of federal war agencies. At other times, the historian must splice the story together from a combination of newspapers and other sources.

Fortunately, the notoriety of East Bay boomtowns generated a considerable amount of national and academic interest. Government officials dubbed Richmond the “Purple Heart City” in 1944 because of the war’s damaging effects on the community. Postwar observers produced an abundance of documentation about the city’s wartime experience, and racial strife in the 1960s encouraged renewed interest in the city’s past. The proximity of the University of California at Berkeley also resulted in a number of useful graduate student theses on housing, social welfare, and urban planning in the 1940s and 1950s. Similarly in Oakland, Mills College students canvassed local neighborhoods, reporting on employment, housing, crime, and other community issues. This fortuitous combination of sources offers the historian a bird’s-eye view of the East Bay during and after World War II. Whenever possible, I have also tried to place the East Bay in a larger, comparative perspective by offering data and observations on other West Coast cities.

There are other sources that I have chosen not to explore for this study, in particular, those dealing with the environmental impact of wartime growth. As Gerald Nash and other historians have pointed out, urban-industrial development during World War II had critical effects on western cities, including increased air pollution in Los Angeles and water pollution and loss of wetlands in the Bay Area. These issues are timely and important but deserve a separate and thorough treatment. This book, then, will be limited to the social, cultural, and political aspects of the war experience.

Beginning in the prewar era, the study starts with a historical overview of East Bay history, outlining the major political, economic, and social developments in the region from the 1840s to the eve of World War II. This discussion sets the stage for chapter 2, which examines the coming of war and its impact on industrial development, labor recruitment, and migration in East Bay cities. The next two chapters describe the reorganization of work, labor organization, and housing in and around local shipyards, emphasizing the structural segregation of newcomers and old-timers. Focusing on the internal dynamics of new migrant neighborhoods, chapter 5 explores the social experience of migrant families and communities. This section also describes migrants' attempts to sustain their own cultural traditions in the face of a comprehensive corporate welfare program designed to instill modern urban-industrial values.

The focus of the last three chapters shifts away from migrants to examine the social and political conflicts that plagued war boomtowns both during and after the war. Chapter 6 traces the development of newcomer–old-timer conflicts in East Bay cities and the response of local leaders who attempted to tighten control over downtown areas. Focusing on municipal politics, chapter 7 traces the wartime development of a progressive labor coalition and its rise to power in the postwar era. The final chapter examines the unraveling of war boom society, showing how social and political developments of the late forties led to the defeat of urban progressives and their vision for the postwar reconstruction of the city. As with other aspects of war-born change, however, the political transformations of World War II foreshadowed future trends in urban affairs both in the East Bay and throughout the country.