

Remembering Pearl Harbor?
An Analysis of Media Portrayal of the Pearl Harbor attack from 1941 to 1946

Vikki Doherty

Undergraduate Junior

University of Wyoming

Phi Alpha Theta Nu Alpha

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, on December 7, 1941, remains to this day both a tragic and pivotal event in the American collective memory. It nullified the issue of previously divided public opinion on whether America should embroil itself in WWII, and for the most part unified the people of the United States under a common desire for reprisal. As Gaddis Smith phrased it in his review of Gordon W. Prange's *At Dawn We Slept*, "The initial American reaction was a combination of patriotism, vengeful indignation, and racism. The attack confirmed American courage in adversity... A banner inscribed 'Remember Pearl Harbor' would stream figuratively behind the atomic bombs falling on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945."¹ In the immediate aftermath of the attack, media across the United States reflected this outrage and issued an urgent call to war. In the years to come, however, media depiction of the attack altered, vacillating between accusing military officers of 'dereliction of duty' and accusing the government of either deliberately or unwittingly withholding information crucial to the protection of America and the prolongation of her noninterference in the war.

As the Pearl Harbor attack shifted America out of her isolationist state and into another world war, news media reflected the public frenzy to find someone to blame for the incident. Over the next five years—from the day of the attack itself until the final official investigation into Pearl Harbor published its results in 1946—while the government continually pushed the slogan "Remember Pearl Harbor" in propaganda targeted toward popularizing the war effort, the media 'remembered' Pearl Harbor as well.² Its memory, however, was skewed, as nationalist and anti-Japanese sentiment spurred the American people to lay the blame at whichever doorstep was

¹ Gaddis Smith, "Remembering Pearl Harbor," Review of *At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor*, by Gordon W. Prange, *New York Times*, November 29, 1981, Sunday Book Review, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/11/29/books/remembering-pearl-harbor.html>.

² "Remember December 7th," 1942, Photograph, U.S. Navy Art Center, Naval History and Heritage Command, Washington D.C. <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/events/wwii-pac/pearlhbr/pearlhbr.htm>

convenient. America could not bring herself to believe that Japan had out-maneuvered her excepting through some dereliction on the part of the military or government, and this necessity for inculcation led to continual evolution in the media response to Pearl Harbor in subsequent years.

The transformation over the five years following Pearl Harbor was in large part influenced by events not only directly related to the investigations into the attack itself, but also by the events in the Pacific Theater of WWII, both triumphs and defeats, and the American political arena. In the initial wake of the attack, newspapers and newscasts across the country took up the cry for war, for vengeance. Very soon, however, this cry shifted, and the pointing finger of the media looked to Army General Walter C. Short and Navy Rear Admiral Husband E. Kimmel as being responsible for the country's lack of preparedness on the eve of the attack. In response to the findings of the Roberts Commission investigating Pearl Harbor—which FDR and his administration declared classified—and its failure to indict anyone as culpable for the attack, media portrayal of Pearl Harbor again shifted. It reflected the growing discontent of the public at being kept in the dark and the steadily gaining perspective that perhaps Kimmel and Short were only scapegoats. This gradually evolved into suspicion that President Roosevelt either unwittingly withheld information crucial to Kimmel and Short's operations in Hawaii or deliberately incited a Japanese attack to sway the American public to accept global war. The media cited FDR's failure to provide a full, public investigation on the grounds that it would 'hinder the war effort' and the later disappearance of many of the documents relating to Pearl Harbor during the full inquiry performed under President Truman.

The actual events of the attack on Pearl Harbor began that infamous day, December 7, 1941, when Japanese Lieutenant Commander Mitsuo Fuchida "signaled for the general attack at

0750 [AM Pacific time].”³ By ten o’clock that morning, the attack was over. In just under two hours, 2,403 people, both military personnel and ordinary citizens, were either killed, missing, or died due to wounds suffered in the attack, and 1,178 suffered non-fatal wounds of varying degrees.⁴ In comparison, the Japanese attack force lost only fifty-five men.⁵ Six battleships, two destroyers, and one minelayer sank into the Harbor—although three of the battleships and the minelayer were later raised, repaired, and returned to service in the war—while nine other vessels were damaged in the attack.⁶ At Wheeler Field, ninety-six aircraft were destroyed and another 128 damaged, while the Japanese lost only twenty-nine planes.⁷ As Gary Gerstle wrote, “Since the War of 1812, no foreign power had carried out so devastating an attack on American soil, and virtually all Americans reacted to this one with shock, disbelief, and outrage.”⁸ Pearl Harbor was a turning point in not only American history, but world history as well. It launched the United States into another global war, and as the troops opened fire on the dual fronts, battle cries in remembrance of Pearl Harbor whipped nationalist, anti-Japanese sentiment into a fervor.

On December eighth, at 12:30 in the afternoon and less than thirty hours after the attack rained down upon Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt addressed both Congress and the general public in a nationwide radio cast.⁹ Capitalizing on the overwhelming outrage at Japan’s attack, Roosevelt used strong language and calculated diction to incite an emotional response from Americans, culminating in an appeal to Congress to declare a state of war between the United States and the Japanese Empire due to the “unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday,

³ Prange, *At Dawn*, 505.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 539.

⁵ Harry A Gailey, *The War in the Pacific: From Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay*, (Novato: Presidio Press, 1995) 96.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 191.

⁹ Prange, *At Dawn*, 558.

December seventh.”¹⁰ Roosevelt was careful to note that the “United States was at peace with that nation and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its government and its emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific” when it was “suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces.”¹¹ Roosevelt utilized Americans’ righteous indignation at the Japanese attack to inflame them into accepting America’s entrance into WWII, a direct inversion of the previously strong isolationist sentiment lingering since WWI.

The initial response, in the wake of the devastating attack and in light of Roosevelt’s words to the nation, was a call-to-arms, as media across the nation seconded the President’s call for war. As Harry A. Gailey writes in his book *The War in the Pacific: Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay*, “The attack on Pearl harbor on 7 December 1941 was the climax of nearly half a century of rivalry between Japan and the United States.”¹² This rivalry coupled with anti-Asian prejudice in the West to form clearly evident racial tension.¹³ Thus, when Roosevelt “summoned the nation to fight not just an enemy nation, but a treacherous people who would deceitfully negotiate for peace while preparing a surprise war,” the nation responded with a resounding battle cry.¹⁴ Mass media latched onto the calculated diction and emotional themes of Roosevelt’s address to the nation, and soon such racialized nationalism and emotional rhetoric cropped up in newspapers around the country. A December 22, 1941 article in *LIFE Magazine*—aptly entitled “Remember Pearl Harbor”—read, “From the tragedy of Pearl Harbor, from the blood spilled and the ships

¹⁰ “Day of Infamy,” Speech by Franklin D. Roosevelt, December 8, 1941, SEN 77A-H1, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives.

¹¹ “Day of Infamy,” Franklin D. Roosevelt.

¹² Gailey, *War in the Pacific*, 1.

¹³ Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 162.

¹⁴ Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live*, 12.

lost and the treachery of the foe, came the U.S. battle cry of WWII.”¹⁵ This quotation stands as evidence that these media depictions cradled Pearl Harbor at their core as a unifying tragedy, a rallying point.

On the same day that Roosevelt delivered his address to the nation, the *Springfield Daily Republican*, of Springfield, Massachusetts, published an article entitled, “Infamous, Says Hull of Japan’s Note Yesterday,” in reference to the Japanese response to the Secretary of State Cordell Hull’s ten-point statement to Japan which America—much later in the saga of Pearl Harbor media—came to see as an ultimatum prompting the Pearl Harbor attack.¹⁶ This article title echoes Roosevelt’s famous words citing December 7 as a day of “infamy,” and sits directly next to an aerial photograph of the destruction on Hawaii with white billowing smoke filling the air, entitled “How Honolulu Looks to Jap Raiders.”¹⁷ In appropriating the terminology of Roosevelt’s radio cast and juxtaposing the article with a view of the destruction on Hawaii, the newspaper invoked a heavy, emotional response to the attack, emphasizing the treacherous nature of the Japanese with a large dose of nationalism and outrage.

Many other articles and news sources took up this trend of rampant, conspicuous nationalism in the weeks following Pearl Harbor. The *Dallas Morning News* ran an article claiming “Civilian Dies First,” citing the owner of a civilian airport as “perhaps the first to die as

¹⁵ “America Goes to War,” *LIFE Magazine*, December 22, 1941, 15.

http://books.google.com/books?id=Y04EAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=life+magazine+1941&hl=en&sa=X&ei=wT6aUq6cHsj5oAS_14GIBQ&ved=0CEAQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=Pearl%20Harbor&f=false.

¹⁶ “Infamous, Says Hull of Japan’s Note Yesterday,” *Springfield Daily Republican*, December 8, 1941, *America’s Historical Newspapers*, 5. http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.uwyo.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=M55P5FQSMTM4NTk3NTEwMS4zMTExMTM6MTToxMTToxMjkuNzluMi4yNw&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=7&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=7&p_docnum=11&p_docref=v2:11BC3DF3E61E32B5@EANX-12A5BDB0837C1BDF@2430337-129E82052D7B38EC@4-12A5FC0AB12A329F@.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Japan opened war on the United States,” in a clear example of emotional rhetoric.¹⁸ In the weeks following the attack, other forms of media commemorated that Sunday as well, as with the prime example of Carson Robinson’s hit song of December 1941, “Remember Pearl Harbor.” This racially inflammatory song contains lyrics such as “Hiding behind their “peace talk” / They stabbed our boys in the back,” and calls for America to “Remember Pearl Harbor, the crime we can never forgive.”¹⁹ These, and the countless other examples of news and popular media in the direct aftermath of the attack, display the way that the “Roosevelt administration fashioned the ‘infamy’ at Pearl Harbor into a resonant and long-lasting symbol of nationalism,” which the media directly reflected until questions arose in the following months about culpability.²⁰

As the initial shock of the Pearl Harbor attack wore off, American retained the question of how the Japanese had enacted such a stunning blow on their country. The media depictions of the attack mutated, and suspicion turned, perhaps only naturally, to the officials in positions of high command of both Army and Naval forces on Pearl Harbor. Only a week post-attack, President Roosevelt established a commission consisting of two Army and two Navy officials and a civilian third party, namely Supreme Court Associate Justice Owen J. Roberts from whom the commission took its oft-repeated unofficial name.²¹ The purpose of what is known as the Roberts Commission was to establish with factual certainty, the events leading up to the Pearl

¹⁸ “Civilian Dies First,” *Dallas Morning News*, December 8, 1941, *America’s Historical Newspapers*, 16.http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.uwyo.edu/iwsearch/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=U54B5FRSMTM4NTkzOTEwNC41NDczODM6MToxMToxMjkuNzIuMi4yNw&p_action=doc&s_lastonissuequeryname=9&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=9&p_docnum=6&p_docref=v2:0F99DDB671832188@EANX-10337DC8FB585ADD@2430337-10337DC9584DA703@15-10337DCB33B50175@Civilian%20Dies%20First.

¹⁹ Frank Luther, writer, and Carson Robinson, performer, *Remember Pearl Harbor* (New York: Bluebird Records, 1941). http://www.authentichistory.com/1939-1945/3-music/04-PH-Reaction/19411200_Remember_Pearl_Harbor-Carson_Robison.html.

²⁰ Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live*, 32.

²¹ Prange, *At Dawn*, 592.

Harbor debacle and determine who was at fault. As phrased by Gordon W. Prange in *At Dawn We Slept*,

The Roberts Commission began its work too near the stunning events of December 7, 1941 to have a proper historical perspective...The American people wanted a quick definitive answer to how the Japanese had been able to inflict upon the United States the most incredible, disgraceful defeat in its history. The Roberts Commission uncovered no deep, dark secrets, dredged up no astonishing revelations... [It] verified only what the American people already knew.²²

The media responded to both the formulation of this commission and the findings reported only two months later on January 28, 1942—a summary was released to the public soon thereafter—with a firestorm of accusation against Navy Rear Admiral Husband E. Kimmel and Army Commander Walter Short.

Almost immediately after the formulation of the Roberts Commission, media began to stigmatize Kimmel and Short for their roles in the Pearl Harbor attack. On December 17, 1941, the *Dallas Morning News* ran an article on the front page with the headline “Three Hawaiian Commanders Removed,” citing that Kimmel, Short, and Major General Frederick L. Martin, commander of the Army Air Corps on Hawaii, were “not on alert when the Japanese attackers struck their murderous blows.”²³ Other articles, such as one in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, declared that “‘someone was asleep’—someone responsible for the defenses.”²⁴ Later, after the

²² Ibid, 602.

²³ “Three Hawaiian Commanders Removed,” *Dallas Morning News*, December 17, 1941, *America’s Historical Newspapers*, 1. http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.uwyo.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=I52A5CGPMTM4NTk2MTMxNi43Njk0NjQ6MT0xMT0xMjkuNzluMi4yNw&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=4&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=4&p_docnum=4&p_docref=v2:0F99DDB671832188@EANX-10337DFEBB16D4D1@2430347-10337DFECB2BD994@0-10337DFFAA24BE24@Three%20Hawaiian%20Commanders%20Removed.

²⁴ “Critics Rebuked After Blast at Hawaii Defense,” *Times-Picayune*, December 10, 1941, *America’s Historical Newspapers*, 12. http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.uwyo.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=I52A5CGPMTM4NTk2MTMxNi43Njk0NjQ6MT0xMT0xMjkuNzluMi4yNw&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=4&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=4&p_docnum=4&p_docref=v2:0F99DDB671832188@EANX-10337DFEBB16D4D1@2430347-10337DFECB2BD994@0-10337DFFAA24BE24@Three%20Hawaiian%20Commanders%20Removed.

publication of a bare-bones summary of the Roberts Commission report, Short and Kimmel were censured further, with media citing that they were “surprised and asleep when the Japanese attack came”²⁵ and even “incompetent and indifferent to their obligations.”²⁶ An editorial from the *San Francisco Chronicle* stated that it was “no wonder the board found...Kimmel and...Short guilty of ‘errors of judgment’ amounting to ‘dereliction of duty!’ ...The attack was a surprise, merely because the precautions against surprise had not been taken.”²⁷ Essentially, these newspaper articles and editorials compose only a small selection of the firestorm of recrimination against Kimmel and Short.

The media latched onto the portion of the Roberts Report that stated “it was a dereliction of duty on the part of [Short and Kimmel] not to consult and confer with the other,” and ran with it.²⁸ The response of the media, in many cases, was an overreaction that “made it appear that Kimmel and Short had been far more culpable than they actually were or than the Roberts report had charged,” because America refused to believe that the Japanese could have had the nerve, or the superiority, to pull off a surprise attack without a very serious miscalculation on the part of the United States.²⁹ The media response to the search for a guilty party, and the smearing of Short and Kimmel, was heavily influenced by the same racialized

4&p_docnum=1&p_doref=v2:1223BCE5B718A166@EANX-129E13A5DB89BA80@2430339-1292386B766BEB57@11-129E2DCC4DF05788@.

²⁵ “Roberts Report: Does Blame Fixing Go Too Close to Washington?” box 4, folder 4, Coll. 1357, Laurance F. Safford Papers, 1941-1967, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

²⁶ “In the News,” box 4, folder 4, Coll. 1357, Laurance F. Safford Papers, 1941-1967, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

²⁷ “Routine-Minded Chiefs at Pearl Harbor Asleep When Japanese Attack Came,” box 36, folder 2, Coll. 3800, Husband Edward Kimmel Papers, 1907-1999, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

²⁸ First Roberts Commission, Report of the Commission Appointed by the President of the United States to Investigate and Report the Facts Relating to the Attack Made by Japanese Armed Forces upon Pearl Harbor in the Territory of Hawaii on December 7, 1941, Senate, 77th Congress, S. Rep. No. 159, (1942) 20.

<http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/roberts/roberts.html>.

²⁹ Prange, *At Dawn*, 603.

nationalism that characterized the earlier call-to-arms in the aftermath of the incident, but in a different way.

One Washington D.C. *Times-Herald* article clearly illustrates this in comparing Pearl Harbor to the Japanese attack on Port Arthur, South Manchuria, on February 9, 1904, that resulted in a Japanese defeat of the Russian navy. This battle, the article writes, is where “the story of Pearl Harbor really began... For the first time since the Turks were in their heyday a non-white nation had licked a white nation, and a big and powerful one, at that.”³⁰ The writer compares this to “December 7, 1941, [when] the Japs struck at Pearl Harbor, and hit a grisly jackpot,” all the while reiterating words such as ‘Jap’ and ‘non-white’ to demonize and dehumanize the Japanese. As phrased by Gary Gerstle,

Japan’s attack on the United States...inflamed ingrained prejudices against Japanese among white Americans...The American-Japanese war in the Pacific, meanwhile, took on the coloration of a “race-war”...in which the two opposing sides engaged in savage struggle...to determine which race would triumph. Battles between the Japanese and the Americans were, on the whole, more vicious than those between the Americans and Germans and Italians in Europe.³¹

Gerstle situates the heavy sentiment of racialized nationalism—a factor in the public’s overwhelming support for the Pacific War after Pearl Harbor—within the narrative of WWII, and emphasizes the strong, anti-Japanese feeling both at home and on the ground.

The driving force behind America’s search for a culpable party at Pearl Harbor, after the initial patriotic smoke cleared and American troops dug into the Pacific, arose out of an inability to believe that Japan could have gotten the better of the United States, which was heavily rooted in these racist themes and the strong nationalism uniting America in the face of a

³⁰ “Three Years Ago Today,” *Times-Herald*, December 7, 1944, Coll. 1357, Laurance F. Safford Papers, 1941-1967, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

³¹ Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 201-202.

national tragedy. An article entitled “As the Parade Passes By,” from the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* on December 6, 1942—in commemoration of the first anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack—illustrates this resounding question most clearly. The article, addressing the public, reads, “You despised the treachery of the Japs and wanted to start right out to kill as many of them as you could find. But you wondered how such a thing could happen, why could the Japs get away with such an attack?”³² This blunt expression of disbelief at the Japanese attack was written even as public opinion was heavily implicating Admiral Kimmel and General Short for the attack. It illustrates clearly America’s inability—specifically through the question of “why could the Japs get away with such an attack?”—to accept the losses at Pearl Harbor as a mark of military superiority on the part of Japan, rather than some fault of her military or government officials.³³

In the wake of the publication of the Roberts report, depictions of Pearl Harbor in the media began another transition, gradually shifting from defaming Kimmel and Short to expressing suspicion that perhaps the government was withholding the whole truth. This was not without reason, as President Roosevelt placed restrictions on the full release of the findings of the Roberts report and deferred a full congressional investigation on the grounds that “such disclosure would endanger military security.”³⁴ FDR’s reluctance to fully expose the events leading up to the Pearl Harbor attack, coupled with the fact that neither Short nor Kimmel nor anyone else had been court-martialed or charged in relation to the incident, affected a shift in the tide. Suspicions grew—in the public consciousness and therefor the media as well—that perhaps

³² W.G. Vorpe, “As the Parade Passes By,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 6, 1942, *America’s Historical Newspapers*, 94, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.uwyo.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=E54P53HPMTM5MzcxMjcxcNC4zNzc2OToxOjExOjEyOS43Mi4yLjI3&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=3&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=3&p_docnum=1&p_docref=v2:122AFBBA107AC9E4@EANX-126C58CB1DA1C9F7@2430700-1267C00B2D54325D@93-126E92F54F4980AE@.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ “Mystery of Pearl Harbor May Soon Be Cleared Up,” *New York Times*, 1945, box 38, folder 4, Coll. 3800, Husband Edward Kimmel Papers, 1907-1999, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

officials in Washington—members of FDR’s administration—were partially at fault for the events of December 7, 1941.

In large part, this transitional period in the media portrayal of Pearl Harbor was heavily influenced by the events of WWII, specifically in the Pacific Theater. In 1942, America was losing the Pacific War. Although she suffered heavy losses beginning with Pearl Harbor and continuing into 1942, the tide of the war in the Pacific began to shift toward the United States with the Battle of Midway on June 4-7, 1942. By 1944 and 1945, during this transitional period, the American public no longer gave credence to FDR’s excuse that a full investigation and report on Pearl Harbor would harm the war effort. As the media turned its eye on Washington officials and inklings of outright accusation of FDR trickled through the papers, articles across the country cited the shifting upper hand in the Pacific with discontent. One article explicitly states, “There can now be no possible excuse for keeping the mystery of Pearl Harbor under wraps any longer. The plea of military security, indeed, wore thin along about the end of 1942, when the tide began to turn in our favor.”³⁵ Another, very similarly, states, “That excuse [of military security] may have been valid during the black months of 1942, when the Japs were kicking the Allies around the South and Southwest Pacific. But this is 1945—well into 1945—and the Pacific war situation changed for the better long ago.”³⁶ The frustration of the public at the withholding of answers about the Pearl Harbor attack clearly manifests in the wording and forceful language used in these articles, and was explicitly influenced by the progress of the War in the Pacific, which was juxtaposed with the lack of progress investigating Pearl Harbor.

Another article, from the Washington D.C. *Times-Herald*, reads,

³⁵ “End of World War II.” *Times-Herald*, April 12, 1945, box 4, folder 4, Coll. 1357, Laurance F. Safford Papers, 1941-1967, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

³⁶ “Pearl Harbor Gag Bill?” *Times-Herald*, August 15, 1945, box 4, folder 4, Coll. 1357, Laurance F. Safford Papers, 1941-1967, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

The Roosevelt Administration kept the solution of this mystery suppressed from Pearl Harbor to the time of Roosevelt's death, April 12 of this year. Its plea always was that military security required the withholding of the full story. It was obvious during the 1944 Presidential campaign that Roosevelt did not want the truth about Pearl Harbor to come out. That campaign is over now. So is the German war. Roosevelt is dead. There is no longer any excuse for keeping the Pearl Harbor mystery under wraps and Kimmel and Short under a cloud.³⁷

Not only was public opinion—as evidenced in the media—inflamed by the lack of answers concerning Pearl Harbor in spite of America's dominance in the Pacific, but other factors occurring during this period influenced media opinions about the attack as well. The 1944 presidential election marked a bitter struggle between republican candidate Thomas E. Dewey and the current president, Franklin D. Roosevelt. Then, only a few months after Roosevelt won his fourth term as President, he died. As the quotation cites, in spite of these events and the shifting tide in the Pacific, Truman and Congress yet failed to release any of the details of the Pearl Harbor investigations, and these contextual events played a large part in the shift in media coverage, during this period, from accusing Short and Kimmel to eventually accusing Washington officials. As the media's unanswered questions piled up, the finger slowly shifted to point more directly at Roosevelt and his Cabinet.

This period in the media coverage, which marked the transition between accusing Kimmel and Short and accusing FDR and his cabinet, is most evidentiary of the change over time in depictions of the Pearl Harbor attack. Although the media all but exonerated Kimmel and Short—calling them scapegoats when previously they had been characterized as derelict—it had not yet quite shifted to directly accusing FDR and specific members of his administration with misconduct and even conspiracy. Rather questions arose in the media concerning the Roberts

³⁷ "Decoration Day—Pearl Harbor," *Times-Herald*, May 30, 1945, box 4, folder 4, Coll. 1357, Laurance F. Safford Papers, 1941-1967, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

report's mention of persons "in the field and in Washington" who were also partially to blame.³⁸ As one article in the *Washington Post* asks, "Who were the officers in Washington who failed in their duty? [Why are] Kimmel and Short in the limelight of public censure while the officials in Washington who are...similarly negligent continue under the protection of anonymity?"³⁹ A plethora of newspapers and journalists asked similar questions, all the while reporting Admiral Kimmel's defense against the accusations of the Roberts report and his desire for a full, open-court hearing to exonerate him.

The increasingly broad scope of culpability depicted in the media was reflected not only in written news articles, but—in particular during this period—in political cartoons. These cartoons satirized the growing irritation of the public at being kept in the dark. One, from the *Washington Post*, depicts a sea chest with the words "Pearl Harbor" emblazoned across the side, which contains the figures of Kimmel and Short attempting to escape as Secretaries of War and Defense Stimson and Forrestal attempt to 'keep the lid on' Pearl Harbor.⁴⁰ Another depicts 'The Truth about Pearl Harbor' as a drowned woman with a question mark over her head, while still others depict 'Uncle Sam' withholding the truth about the incident.⁴¹ These images were perhaps the most effective barometer measuring the public's feeling of being kept in the dark—at the very least the most direct—and they indicate that, while the nationalist sentiment driving the public to assign blame was still extant, it no longer utilized the image of Pearl Harbor as the rallying point that it when America entered WWII.

³⁸ Roberts Commission Report.

³⁹ Eugene Meyer, "Pearl Harbor Inquiries," *The Washington Post*, December 3, 1944, box 4, folder 4, Coll. 1357, Laurance F. Safford Papers, 1941-1967, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁴⁰ "Pearl Harbor Political Cartoon," box 36, folder 3, Coll. 3800, Husband Edward Kimmel Papers, 1907-1999, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁴¹ "Pearl Harbor Political Cartoons," box 36, folder 3, Coll. 3800, Husband Edward Kimmel Papers, 1907-1999, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

By 1945, the war was all but complete. With President Roosevelt's death in April of that year, Vice President Harry S. Truman assumed that lauded office and the clamor for a full investigation of the Pearl Harbor attack reached a breaking point. By this time, news media that had only hinted at and questioned Washington's involvement in the Pearl Harbor debacle now directly accused Washington officials, from former Secretary of State Cordell Hull to Franklin D. Roosevelt himself of either unwittingly or knowingly causing the events on the infamous day. Newspaper articles cropped up with titles such as "F.D.R. Had Jap Note Night Before Pearl Harbor, Says Writer," "Congress Due to Blare Dec. 7 Role of F.D.R.," "Proof Conclusive F.D. Knew Japs Planned Sneak Attack," and even "Roosevelt Maneuvered for War While Promising People Peace."⁴² Political cartoons depicting the whitewashing of the Capital Building and the Washington Monument abounded.⁴³ By November of 1945, WWII was over, the atomic bombs had been dropped, and there no longer existed a security risk to prevent a full investigation into the Pearl Harbor attack.

The Joint Congressional Committee Investigating the Pearl Harbor Attack held its first hearing on the 15th of November 1945. In 1946, after month of hearings, evidence, and examination, the committee published "what can justly be described as the mother lode of data... under the title *Pearl Harbor Attack*...in 39 lengthy...volumes."⁴⁴ The findings seemed to rehash the earlier Roberts Commission Report, "exonerating Roosevelt and Hull, [and] putting the blame chiefly on Kimmel and Short and with varying emphasis on the military and naval

⁴² Newspaper clippings, box 38, folder 4, Coll. 3800, Husband Edward Kimmel Papers, 1907-1999, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁴³ Political Cartoon, box 38, folder 4, Coll. 3800, Husband Edward Kimmel Papers, 1907-1999, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁴⁴ Roland H, Jr. Worth, *Pearl Harbor: Selected Testimonies, Fully Indexed, from the Congressional Hearings (1945-1946) and Prior Investigations of the Events Leading Up to the Attack*, (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1993) xi.

authorities in Washington.”⁴⁵ Much of the media response was therefore negative, calling the investigation a ‘whitewash’ that lay only a minority blame at Roosevelt’s door and for the most part upheld his actions preceding the attack. As 1946 wore on, it became evident to the public that the investigation of the Joint Congressional Committee was to be the final—official, not historiographical—word on the Pearl Harbor attack. Most of the media reflected the shared blame for the attack, with headlines such as “Sharing the Blame for Pearl Harbor” and “Truman Says Public Shares Dec. 7 Blame,” and political cartoons entitled “Room for Everybody” showing the Navy, Army, Congress, the Administration, and finally “all the rest of us” under the dunce had labeled “The blame for Pearl Harbor.”⁴⁶ The question of remembering Pearl Harbor in the media died out as no new findings came to light and America was pulled into the post-WWII years leading into the Cold War.

In the aftermath of the Japanese attack on the United States in 1941, the nation resounded with the cry of “Remember Pearl Harbor.”⁴⁷ As America marched into WWII, American public media began a crusade of its own, to lay culpability at someone’s—anyone’s—door for the debacle that was December 7. As the smoke cleared above Oahu, however, the media quickly transitioned from its rallying cries of barbarism and desecration to ask the question of who held the responsibility for the events of that Sunday morning. What began as a patriotic call-to-arms in the face of a national tragedy evolved into a firestorm of accusation and shifting blame; first military officials and commanders, then government officials and even the President himself felt the accusing finger of the media point in their direction. This transition was not arbitrary, but rather deeply rooted both in the contextual events occurring in the Pacific

⁴⁵ John T. Flynn, “Dec. 7 ‘Whitewash is Congress Scandal,” box 38, folder 4, Coll. 3800, Husband Edward Kimmel Papers, 1907-1999, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁴⁶ Articles from box 38, folder 4, Coll. 3800, Husband Edward Kimmel Papers, 1907-1999, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁴⁷ “America Goes to War,” *LIFE*, 15.

Theater and at home and in the heavily racialized nationalism characterized by this period in American history. The “banner inscribed ‘Remember Pearl Harbor’ [which] would stream figuratively behind the atomic bombs falling on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945,” was there for a reason.⁴⁸ As phrased in *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*, “a December 1945 poll found that a quarter of Americans wished that the United States had had the opportunity to drop more atomic bombs on Japan before it surrendered...to the Americans, the Japanese were vermin who had to be exterminated. To the Japanese, the Americans were devils.”⁴⁹ Pearl Harbor, the Pacific War, and the atomic bombings had clear roots in racist sentiment. That American media struggled so hard and for so long to find a guilty party—other than Japan—for Pearl Harbor suggests that the public truly could not believe the “vermin who had to be exterminated” could have inflicted so much damage on the US of their own volition.

Throughout the five year period following December 7, 1941, media reflected America’s need to “remember” the attack on Pearl Harbor, yet these memories twisted in response to events occurring in the war and the racialized nationalism alive on the home front. These skewed reinterpretations of the events of Pearl Harbor, along with the initial push for vengeance and the government’s continual reiteration of this theme, simultaneously reflected and influenced public opinion about the attack through the lens of nationalist and anti-Japanese sentiments. Although already present in the country previous to 1941, these biases intensified due to the destruction at Pearl Harbor and America’s inability to answer the questions burning in the collective consciousness—how could such destruction occur on American soil? Who was to blame?—which would prove to be unanswerable.

⁴⁸ Gaddis Smith, “Remembering Pearl Harbor,” Review of *At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor*, by Gordon W. Prange, *New York Times*, November 29, 1981, Sunday Book Review, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/11/29/books/remembering-pearl-harbor.html>.

⁴⁹ Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 202.

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