

**Boston is always Boston.**



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# INVENTORY, U.S.A.

After the years of war, peacetime takes some getting used to, but the nation is slowly swinging into its postwar stride.

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**F**OR close to four years Americans longed for peace, dreamed of peace and tried to imagine what life would be like "when the lights went on again all over the world." Those lights have been on for four months now, and it is possible to piece together a kind of jigsaw picture of a country that has stopped fighting but is only gradually groping its way back to peace. •

Millions of men are spending their first Christmas season at home in years, and for them this alone is peace, this is the real thing. But Christmas doesn't last, and the returned GI, looking about him objectively, soon sees that the United States in the fading days of 1945 is not yet the peacetime nation that haunted his dreams on Christmases past as he stared up at the raw boards of a barracks ceiling or sat crouched in a soggy mudhole. Civilians in uniform are still scattered around the globe, still drilling, still pulling details, still sweating out chow lines. No peace treaty has been framed, much less signed. And in the country at large, factories that four months ago stopped grinding out the tools of death have only begun to turn out the comforts of life, those gaudy comforts which the advertising pages of magazines taught us to expect, in technicolor, in abundance and at prices that all could afford.

A quick picture of the U.S.A. in these dawn hours between war and peace is bound to be blurred. Any snapshot of a fast-moving object is likely to be on the hazy side, and the country today is moving as fast as it ever has in all its history. Hundreds of thousands of men and women are streaming out of separation centers, some bent on sliding as quickly as possible into their pre-war grooves, but a surprising number determined to avoid the old grooves and strike out on new courses not yet mapped in their own minds. Trains are jammed, ships are jammed, planes are jammed. The streets of American cities are crowded with men in uniform—on returnee furloughs, enroute to reassignment centers or already in that state of freedom indicated by a gold-eagle patch above the right pocket.

In the civilian population, millions, left jobless when the giant war-production machinery screeched to a stop on VJ-Day, have added the uncertainty of their plans to the national restlessness. Thousands of them are women who are withdrawing from the labor market to return to housekeeping—if they can find a house. Thousands are youngsters who may be induced to return to school, but who may just as well choose to compete for jobs. And hundreds of thousands are men who must stand by and wait for fac-

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tories to exchange the belt-lines that turned out guns, bombers and shells for those that will turn out cars, refrigerators and electric trains.

Sgt. Joe Blank, stepping into the civilian world in the closing weeks of 1945, will not see all this. He will not see any over-all pattern, probably, because he will be intensely and naturally concerned with his own immediate affairs and desires—to know his family again, to see his friends, to buy civilian clothes, to take a vacation, to see about getting a job and perhaps to find new quarters and furnishings for a wife and child nearly frantic with the trials of makeshift housing. But it is just these specific desires and problems, multiplied by ten million, which make up that over-all pattern, and it is therefore reasonable to look at the country through his eyes.

After two or three days of saturating himself with the sight, the sound and the feel of home, Joe decides that he had better go downtown and get himself some clothes. Having gone over the subject repeatedly in barracks bull-sessions, he is prepared for an intensive all-day hunt and prices to stagger the imagination. It is a pleasant surprise to discover that he can dispose of the whole business at any respectable department store in a few hours at a cost well within his mustering-out pay. A reasonably good suit, not noticeably different in style from the one he shed at the reception center though inferior in quality, will set him back from \$35 to \$50. Prices on shirts and shorts are up 50 to 100 percent, but he can figure roughly on an over-all boost of five to 10 percent in clothing prices. And he shouldn't have trouble finding what he wants, provided he doesn't want white shirts or suits of hard-finished worsted. As for styles, he will discover that outside the pages of *Esquire* they have scarcely moved at all beyond a trend in neckwear toward shrieking four-in-hands and long, thin bows, similarly garish.

Having been plunged into the realm of the consumer, Joe checks with his wife, looks at shop windows, and glances at the ads to see how far along the country has come in this "reconversion" that looms so large in the newspaper heads.

Cars, he knows, are far from ready. Government controls have been lifted, but shortages of upholstering fabric, plus strikes, plus the time required to make new dies, have kept the assembly lines down to a painfully slow rate of speed. Nevertheless, the lines are moving, and instead of the 4,000 cars produced throughout the country in August, the December quota is expected to reach 200,000. Like men's suits, motor styles have changed very little. A gadget here and a gadget there are all that distinguish them from the models of 1941, though the air over Detroit is still thick with talk of secret designs for dream cars, and one has been designed without clutches, transmission or even brakes.

Aside from the scarcity of new cars, many other wartime shortages linger on in Joe's new world of peace. He can get metal furniture for that new home he's thinking of, but wooden pieces are either scarce and inferior or prohibitively expensive. And he'll have to wait a while for a new typewriter.

If he can stand up under the battering of a crowd of frenzied women, Joe can probably buy his wife a single pair of nylons, but it will be a long time before he can get her anything in silk. On the other hand, if his wife has long dreamed of an electric refrigerator, a new vacuum cleaner, a pressure cooker or a laundry machine, he will find that stocks in those commodities are slowly creeping back toward prewar levels, though it's still a case of first come, first served. The same goes for a tricycle for Joe jr.

Toasters, irons, mixers and other small appliances are already amply stocked and can be

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whisked away for the asking—and the paying. So can the “family planes” now available at a leading New York department store for \$2,994. Similarly postwar in spirit are the two-way speaking systems now selling for \$33. Designed for use in Army tanks, these gadgets will now link up nursery and mother’s bedroom, or outside-gate and butler’s pantry.

**A**s for food, the United States finds itself in the winter of 1945-46 embarrassingly glutted while half the world hungers. Beef is coming back so rapidly that the Government has warned feeders that it will soon end its subsidy for fattening cattle. Butter is still spotty in distribution, but eggs are plentiful, and milk and other dairy items are approaching all-time production records. Potatoes, too, are reaching surplus proportions, while fish and vegetables, both raw and canned, are plentiful. Still hard to get, comparatively, are pork and lamb; and the sugar shortage, Joe finds, will be a problem for many months to come, since supplies from the Philippines and the South Pacific cannot be counted on much before 1947.

Dropping into a bar for the first time since his return, Joe discovers that he can get almost anything he wants but a good scotch, and if he’s lucky he can get even that. Four Roses and Canadian Club are also a bit on the scarce side, but barring particular brands, he can drink adequately at prices not more than a few cents a shot above the prices he paid before he left.

At the bar the Hot-Stove Leaguers are still mulling over the fantastic Series of two months ago, and the general feeling is that baseball could hardly have survived another wartime season. But things will be different next year. Look who’ll be back from the wars: Ted Williams, Enos Slaughter, Pete Reiser, Henrich and Joe DiMaggio among the sluggers; pitchers Beazley, Higbee, Lanier, Feller and others just as good; fielders Joe Gordon, Rizzuto, Reese and Fletcher.

Boxing, Joe hears, has been even more chaotic than baseball. With the best talent in the services, the fight game was reduced to the status of a cash-register racket, mediocre fighters drew huge gates and there were more mismatches than matches. But now the National Boxing Association has drawn up its first postwar list of ratings, and champions have been notified that they must defend their titles. It will be some time next June before ex-Sgt. Louis slugs it out with ex-Cpl. Conn; and light heavyweight Gus Lesnevich and middleweight Tony Zale will also be given time to rest up from the GI life. But the other champs will have to get on their toes. Aside from Conn, future possible contenders for Louis’s crown include Bivins, Mauriello and Bettina, names that still mean little to ex-Sgt. Blank.

On his way home, Joe gives the afternoon paper a thorough going-over, and gathers the impression that a country which achieved remarkable unity during the war has already returned to the squabbles and differences that characterize any democratic country in peacetime. Certain keywords keep popping out at him: strikes, atom secret, unemployment, occupation policy, price controls, peacetime army, Big Three and, far from least, demobilization.

Strikes, he learns, have occurred or threatened to occur, in rapid succession ever since VJ-Day—in autos, oil, steel, lumber, movies, coal, shipping. The case for labor, says one commentator, revolves about the cessation of overtime work. Men who during the war drew time-and-a-half for eight, 10 and even 20 hours beyond the normal schedule find themselves back on a straight 40-hour week, with a consequent loss of income in some cases exceeding 50 percent. At the same time, prices on food commodities have mounted,

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despite the efforts of the OPA. As a result, labor is demanding a 30 percent boost in hourly wage rates and arguing that industry can well afford to pay the difference out of higher production yields caused by technological improvements, to say nothing of wartime profits. But industry, Joe reads elsewhere, maintains just as stoutly that labor's figures are all wrong, that higher wages will mean higher prices, that nobody knows what prices the Government will allow for their finished product and that a 30-percent raise would be unreasonable and inflationary. Compromise increases, short of the asking price, have already been allowed by some industries, and others are expected to follow suit. Meanwhile the strike wave, paralleling that which followed the last war, runs its course.

Unemployment, Joe notes, is mounting throughout the country, as everyone knew it would, but the rate is not nearly so alarming as the more pessimistic prophets foretold. From the welter of speculation on the subject, he concludes that something of a race is on between full demobilization and reconversion. If industry gets into its production stride before the services are emptied out, unemployment should be brief and not forbiddingly extensive. If it doesn't, the period of joblessness may be longer and more acute. But at worst, it is the consensus of economists that there should be nothing like the crash of 1929 or the prolonged era of apple-peddling. They point out that there is too much in available savings, too much demand for goods of all sorts, too much eagerness for peacetime production profits and too many cushions provided by Government that were not present to absorb the shock in 1929. For all that, several papers, following the lead of *PM* smack more of future wars and international tension than of peace and harmony. There is still the painful question of returning to civilian life millions of Joe's comrades-in-arms. Congressmen are still squirming under a mountain of protest mail and are promising to call on the brass for further explanation. They are also involved in plans for reorganizing the armed forces and perhaps unifying them under a single command. The legislators and President Truman are still fearfully considering ways and means of controlling the Frankenstein monster which appeared on the world scene when the first atom was cracked. Should atomic energy, with its terrific potential for good or for evil, be strictly the province of Government—or should private enterprise be permitted to develop it as it developed electricity and other forms of energy? And should the secrets of manufacturing the atomic bomb be shared with the other nations of the world?

Here the delicate question of our relations with the Soviet Union enters into the picture, and Joe cannot fail to notice the numerous indications that the unity of the United Nations has slipped a



**They're still planting in Texas.**

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cog or two since VJ-Day. Throughout the fall there has been talk of blocs again, and mutual suspicions. The peace of the world had a bad jolt in October, when the first Council of Foreign Ministers adjourned in an atmosphere of bickering, without having made any headway toward a framework of treaties on which the peace of the world was to rest. Domination by the Big Three is still a sore point with many nations, and conflicting occupation policies reflect strains even within the Big Three. But also there is determination to overcome all obstacles; they must be overcome, because the threat of the tiny atom is too overwhelming to allow for failure. As one wag put it, "Atomic energy is here to stay. The question is, are we?" By the time Joe reaches home he has read enough of the paper to be convinced that the winning of World War II did not make certain a lasting peace; it only gave us a *chance* to push toward that goal—which is something, at that.

**L**IKE millions of other Americans, Joe is a bit tired. Life has been grim for a good many months, and for the moment he'd rather leave these headaches to Congress and step out for the evening. A cab, he discovers, is still something to be patiently tracked down, but when landed it turns out to be one of those very few glossy jobs beginning to bob up in contrast with the battered hulks that have carried on through four years of wreck-and-ration.

The Gay White Way of Joe's town is lively and crowded. People have money to spend—more than they have had at any one time in years, thanks to a long period in which the things they might have bought couldn't be obtained and thanks, too, to the channeling of savings into the U.S.



They're still planting in Texas.

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Treasury by way of war bonds. Now they are glad to spend, and theaters, movies and night clubs are enjoying a boom season.

With his wife and a few friends, Joe sits down to a fairly solid meal in a medium-priced restaurant. He thinks the service is bad because they have to wait 15 minutes before the table is cleared of their predecessors' left-overs. But the other members of the party insist that things have improved vastly. Only four months ago diners considered themselves lucky to escape without a bawling-out from an irate waiter.

The talk turns to houses and apartments. On this score the change-over from war to peace has apparently made a strained situation doubly strained. Demand for housing is greater than ever, but new building hasn't been started. Materials are still scarce, and potential landlords are unwilling to embark on new ventures until the OPA lifts rent ceilings. When that happens, Joe's friends fear, rents will go soaring into the blue and tenants soaring into the red. Hotels, too, and rooming houses are still enjoying (if that's the word for it) a wartime boom. Three actresses, stranded in Boston, were so hard put to it for quarters that they pitched a tent on the Common, enjoying the right of eminent domain until ejected by the police.

Joe gets along well enough on the dance floor on what he remembers of the rumba, the conga and the samba, and he is introduced to the bamba, recently imported from Mexico. He's a little rusty on the songs of the day, but it doesn't take him long to discover that the practice of "adapting" the classics is going strong. Chopin under other names dominates the Hit Parade.

**T**wo of Joe's old friends are involved in divorce proceedings, so he is not greatly surprised when one of his fellow-diners, just back from Reno, reports that the divorce capital is doing three times the business it enjoyed in 1940. They've had to build an addition to the Washoe County Courthouse to handle the extra traffic, and one Chicago court runs a nursery in the annex. The divorce rate over the entire country is nearly double the pre-Pearl Harbor figure. No wonder marriage figures as the theme in at least two best-sellers—Sinclair Lewis's "Cass Timberlane" and J. P. Marquand's "Repent in Haste."

Parallel with this trend, a new informality and independence are apparent in the public habits of American women. Casual conversation with GIs on trains, cars and buses became an accepted social amenity for American girls during the war, and the habit—simple, friendly and generally harmless—appears to have taken root. Moreover, women who in their husbands' absence paid bills, wielded the checkbook and in general took over the duties of head of the house have inevitably become interested in the world of politics. Selective Service, OPA, taxation and demobilization all struck close to home, and it now seems unlikely that women will once more entirely abandon the political field to men.

This new, free-and-easy air affected by American women is definitely not reflected in their clothes. Here the trend is all in the other direction, toward the frilly and the feminine. The

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reasons are obvious. Men have been scarce, and the struggle for the pick of the returning conquerors is on. What's more, American girls have been reading a good deal about the charms of their foreign sisters, especially the French, and the competitive urge has taken the form of a greatly heightened emphasis on the sexy, the alluring, the feminine. Tailored suits are ruled out, necks are low and formal evening gowns, almost unseen during the war, are back again.

Fashion authorities report a bit of a struggle between one school, favoring the sheath-like dress and the straight figure, and another, and probably winning, school favoring the return of the hour-glass woman. They even say that in the highest circles of fashion the stomacher has been reintroduced to simulate a tiny waist, and the bustle of grandma's day brought back to add expansiveness to the rear echelon. The top-knot is the prevailing rule in hairdress, and the whole temptress motif is exemplified by the name of the most popular shade in nail polish and lipstick: "Fatal Apple."

In the field of early postwar books, Joe finds, there are more important trends than the emphasis on the pitfalls of marriage, already cited. Mass production for GIs has given publishers ideas for far wider circulation of books than they ever figured on before the war. At least four concerns are in the field with inexpensive reprints, and the experience of GI libraries and mobile units is being eagerly studied. One result of the war is that hundreds of thousands of men have picked up the reading habit in the endless hours of waiting which all servicemen have had to endure, and publishers are hoping to stimulate that habit before it dies. Books on war subjects are still selling briskly, particularly picture volumes and those that round up and regroup material treated piecemeal in the hundreds of slim books, on this front and that, which poured out during the conflict. Serious subjects, stimulated by the war, still hold their own on the book-counters alongside the entertainment literature now pouring out for a war-weary nation.

**I**N Joe's new world of transition, the movies, too, are undergoing a reconversion. All sorts of trends are in the air over Hollywood. Picture makers, for one thing, appear to be convinced that the public is fed up not only with war pictures but with anything serious. Production schedules show musicals due for the heaviest boost, most of them of the super-duper variety long forbidden by wartime budgets. Next in line for volume output are historical and period pieces like "Saratoga Trunk" and "Bandit of Sherwood Forest," and no end of "life stories," particularly of theatrical luminaries. Third in the order of importance are light comedies, typified by the reunion of Bob Hope and Bing Crosby in "Road to Utopia." Escapism is the rule of the day, and themes of social significance appear to be headed for the nearest exit.

Shakeups in Hollywood personnel also are in progress. Tried and true box-office attractions like Robert Montgomery, Jimmy Stewart, Henry Fonda and Clark Gable are back from the war to supplant the collection of aging second-raters who furnished Class-B passion for the duration. Then, too, an increasing number of stars are leaving Hollywood for Broadway. Among those who have already made the shift or are reported about to do so are Spencer Tracy, Katharine Hepburn, Ingrid Bergman, Jean Arthur, Kay Francis and Fredric March.

The loss of other bright-lights is threatened by the appearance in Hollywood of J. Arthur Rank, the fabulous British producer. This pious Sunday-school teacher, who can invest \$5,000,000 in a single film and hardly miss it, has been

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plucking American talent and is regarded on the Coast as the first genuine threat to Hollywood's hitherto unchallenged monopoly in the movie world. Rank, who has already bought into several Hollywood studios, has the British film industry in the palm of his hand. Among his products already released or soon to come are "Blithe Spirit," "Colonel Blimp," Shaw's "Caesar and Cleopatra" with Claude Rains and Vivien Leigh, Shakespeare's "Henry V," and "Mary Magdalen," a five-million-dollar film starring Ingrid Bergman and Joseph Cotten. Britain's emergence as a film center, thanks to Mr. Rank, is probably the biggest movie news in the fading year, and there is much speculation as to how Hollywood will react to the competition.

Joe has been in places where American radio programs didn't penetrate, and he takes a nostalgic sort of pleasure in learning that, despite FM and other technical advances, the air waves vibrate to many of the same voices he heard before he left home. There is none of the tension, of course, that filled the air in those years in which crisis after crisis mounted in hysterical crescendo from Munich to War-in-the-West, to the invasion of Russia, to Pearl Harbor. News commentators, in fact, have gone into a sharp decline, and round-the-world hookups are neither so numerous nor so fraught with destiny. But otherwise the old familiar voices of radio are still going strong. "Duffy's Tavern" is still serving red-hot boners by Archy, Fred Allen makes his weekly tour of Allen's Alley, Charlie McCarthy carries on his eternal feuds with guest stars, and other veteran standbys—Benny, Durante, Burns and Allen—fill their same comfortable niches in the Crossley ratings. Goodman Ace is doing a series for Danny Kaye, and among the new programs is one by Barry Fitzgerald in the role of small-town barber and justice-of-the-peace. Soap operas supposedly lay bare the hearts of simple folk while commercials lay bare their digestive tracts; and the world's best music still comes to Joe by courtesy of the world's best laxatives.

Joe may well be excused if he looks about him with a certain bewilderment. The dreadful problems of the atom bomb, diplomatic unrest abroad and industrial unrest at home all weigh on the spirit of the country. But on sober second thought Joe knows that no one promised him the millennium, and if peace has not brought with it a world of music and rainbows, neither has it produced those calamities that Joe's more cynical friends predicted—runaway inflation, political war, mass starvation in half the world and general hell-raising all around. Paradise may or may not be just around the corner, and the





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victories of peace may come as hard as the victories of war, but anyone who has seen what Joe has seen knows that in the last analysis "there is nothing to fear but fear."



Quiet as usual in Falmouth, Mass.

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