

# Reviews

**G. Kurt Piehler (ed.), *The United States in World War II. A Documentary Reader*, Hobokan, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell 2013, ISBN 978-1-4443-3119-6.**

The interest for World War II shows no signs of decreasing. Battlefield excursions and re-enactments, nostalgic posters, in-depth documentaries, dramatic film adaptations, modern museum exhibitions and books on various war-related subjects are just a few examples of activities and products that are available for enthusiasts.

Are there then more to be said? G. Kurt Piehler, director of the Institute of World War II and the Human Experience and associate professor of history at Florida State University, is one of many who most likely would respond affirmatively. He has, in his capacity as one of the leading experts on US and World War II, written and edited a great deal on the subject, for instance *Remembering War the American Way* (1995), *The Atomic Bomb and American Society: New Perspectives* (2009), and *The United States and the Second World War: New Perspectives on Diplomacy, War, and the Home Front* (2010).

His latest volume, *The United States in World War II. A Documentary Reader*, includes documents from 1932 to 2008. He has collected all together 78 documents in twelve themes, from debates about the gathering storm in the 1930s to recent discussions concerning commemoration and memory. The texts are of various origins. Some are interviews, letters, excerpts from diaries, song lyrics, political speeches and diplomatic notes or reports on what effects the war had on veterans, while others were published in newspapers and journals. Another category is eye-witness accounts from soldiers who saw action in the Philippines and Iwo Jima or wrote home about the horrifying events that had taken place in newly liberated concentration camps.

A conservative reader would perhaps say that modern texts by authors like Kurt Vonnegut and John J. Toffey have less to do with US and World

War II compared to articles from the war years in *The New York Times* or Franklin D. Roosevelt's speech to the Joint Session of Congress in 1941. I would argue that the great variety of sources is this documentary reader's greatest advantage. The variety, which is notable in material from different "genres" and over a period of eight decades, reveals on and between the lines some of the different reactions that the world-wide conflict have resulted in among Americans in different capacities. Another advantage is different perspectives on, for instance, the attack on Pearl Harbor. The mobilizing rhetoric of President Roosevelt's speech to the Congress on December 8 is different but yet related to Eleanor Roosevelt's radio address on December 7, 1941. She then spoke alongside Leon Pearson, Dan Seymour and Corporal James Cannon. The text is interesting since it reveals both the chock and the will to soon look ahead. Cannon cannot hide his irritation over how soldiers been treated up until now. "First, the civilians can cut those stale jokes and stop that mocking salute too many of them hand a man in uniform. Let them give a soldier the dignity he is entitled to", was his credo. The interview with the US Navy nurse Ruth A. Erickson, later Director of the United States Navy Nurse Corps, is of a different kind. She talked about how her heart was racing when the wounded started to come to the hospital and in what ways she and her colleagues tried to solve problems as the chaos grew worse when the electricity was cut off. Patriotic phrases had no place when she in 1977 recollected the traumatic events 36 years ago.

Piehler's compilation is valuable for all those who teach or study modern American history. It is perhaps not the most suitable a book for those who want to learn the complete history of the US in the Second World War. *The United States in World War II* is on the other hand ideal for anyone who seeks insights based on a variety of subjects, from different battle grounds via discussions on how to best mobilizing the Home Front, what freedom is as well as democracy versus dictatorship, the Atomic Bomb, the American Response to the Holocaust, to different approaches to World War II in the post-war decades. In short: here is something for everyone with an interest in US, World War II and in what ways it has been discussed, from its prelude to modern times.