readable *Gatsby* did not reach thirty thousand in its first twelve months, four years before the depression. A fair analysis of the comparative sales of *Tender Is the Night* would have to take into consideration the taste of the American reading public in 1934. I can’t go into this in any great detail, but it is interesting to point out that two tremendous sellers of that year and the year before, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* and *Anthony Adverse*, were well at the top of the list.

It is true that the critical reception of *Tender Is the Night* profoundly depressed its author, but many critics who reviewed it unfavorably have since revised their estimates upward, and Hemingway, on whose judgment Fitzgerald greatly depended, said in 1935 that the book seemed much better to him than it had when he first read it. As for all the talk about Fitzgerald's books having been out of print when he died in 1940, it should be remembered that this was a good six years after the publication of his last novel. Even the most popular books do not have a way of staying in print very long in a country of fickle and restless tastes that goes in for the Book of the Month, the Man of the Year, and the Song of the Week.

The good and simple truth is that Fitzgerald never disappeared into a lonely literary limbo. I am sorry if this fact disturbs the dreams of the careless romantics who like to believe that a quiet oblivion somehow sweetly suits the short, unhappy life of the “Symbol of the Twenties.”

*The* stature of the writing Fitzgerald, the best of all the Fitzgeralds, has undergone many distortions, from emotional magnification to the sort of cold mental dissection that misses or minimizes his warm understanding, his indestructible honesty, the fine perception that always, in the end, saw through the illusions that plagued him, the charm of his “jeweled prose,” and the literary grace and artistic soundness that were born in him. He thought of his talent as something that could be lost, like his watch, or mislaid, like his hat, or slowly depleted, like his bank account, but in his last year there it still was, perhaps surer and more mature than it had ever been. This is a happy thing to remember.

—JAMES THURBER

Mood of the Midwest

One correspondent hears the voices of disunity and confusion rising

In Fremont, Ohio, a few weeks ago, the program director of radio station WRFo asked seven housewives to take part in a series of broadcasts on peace. There was a time when the subject would have seemed innocent enough. But in 1951, Fremont, a town of fifteen thousand notable chiefly as the home of President Rutherford B. Hayes, found it too hot to handle.

The woman assigned to organize the program, Mrs. Harry Barnard, a newspaperman's wife, has no political affiliations; in lining up speakers her only intention, as she put it, was “to voice the appeal of a mother and housewife for peace in our world today.” But before she got properly started, she ran into opposition.

It came from Warren T. Curtis, Fremont's civil-defense director. As he understood it, the programs were to advocate “peace at any cost,” which sounded to him like “appeasement of our enemies.” He announced his disapproval of the project, because he said civil defense did not want anything to “divide community thinking.”

Nobody ever explained how the civil-defense director (who is also chairman of the local American Legion Americanism committee) had worked into the position of Fremont's director of thought control, but Mrs. Barnard's programs never went on the air. “Something akin to the police state,” the Toledo Times commented, “has bobbed up in Fremont.”

The incident was one clue to the Middle West's mood in the early months of 1951. Some said the Middle West was on the way back to its old moorings of comfortable isolationism. The Chicago Tribune preached that gospel, which is the one closest to its heart, with fresh zeal. Senator Taft produced a new, slightly revised version of it. Herbert Hoover told the Middle West what it wanted to hear: that security can be bought cheaply, without drafting too many boys, because we have a hemispheric Gibraltar.

But in the Middle West, as elsewhere, there is no single body of opinion. Every point of view has its adherents, and there is constant shifting from one to another. The Middle West has its preventive-war advocates and its absolute pacifists. It has a sizable but now nearly silent group of “old internationalists” who think we can and must get along with Russia by negotiation. It has a great many preparedness advocates; a great many converts to collective security, who genuinely hope that the United Nations will somehow open a new era of co-operative peace; and, of course, the inevitable complement of unreconstructed nationalists and imperialists.

The conclusions and opinions in this report are based on the attitudes of the very sizable number of Middle Westerners this correspondent talked to in the past couple of months who were confused, resentful of the casualties in Korea, puzzled and frightened by a remote and mysterious war, disillusioned with the United Nations, scared of Russia, fed up with Britain and India. But these emotions did not, after all, fall into the easy category of isolationism. The State Department, organizing “opinion-leader” discussions to combat the new turn in foreign-policy sentiment, was wrong if it assumed that this was the battle of the 1930's over again.

That the Midwest was unhappy over foreign policy was plain enough. But few Middle Westerners thought the country could retreat into a shell or do without friends overseas. What
seemed to have happened was that for the first time the people had come face to face with the full consequences of the Truman Doctrine. Containment had once been a word, a nebulous feeling that Communism could be stopped (as the Truman Administration kept implying) merely by spending American money and perhaps other people's lives. Now it was clear that containment meant the expenditure of American lives.

The people groused, grumbled, and wrote letters to the newspapers. (Dear Editor: As the mother of a boy about to be sent to the Korea battlefront I ask why others seem so indifferent at the news that 3,500 boys are being hurried to MacArthur. I am powerless to stop this war but I believe that great wrong is being done. So this is freedom!) If Taft-McCarthyism is gaining ground in the Midwest, a major cause is the default of Administration leadership. Mr. Truman and Acheson fought back when the Republicans assailed their Americanism—and then adopted the Republicans' policy. The Midwest has no special affinity for Chiang Kai-shek; before Korea it might have supported a strong policy designed to disengage American interests from identification with the Formosa exile. The Administration let the moment go by, and today a great many Midwesterners cannot understand why we do not put Chiang back in business on the Chinese mainland.

As for Europe, the majority undoubtedly support an American troop commitment on the continent, and would not insist on fixing hard-and-fast limits to the size of the commitment. But they sympathize with Taft's demand for a Congressional voice in the decision because of a widely felt distrust of the Administration. They remember that when the North Atlantic Treaty was ratified they were told that no American forces would be required. Now that they are required, the suspicion arises that somebody sold somebody a bill of goods.

Basically, the distrust of the Administration can be traced to a distrust of Mr. Truman. Some Middle Westerners seize with joy the convenient scapegoat offered them by McCarthy—the idea that all their troubles can be laid to Communists and fellow travelers in the government—but more are concerned by Mr. Truman's shortcomings as a leader in times of crisis. His letter writing and his outbursts of public temper have done him no good. His "tetchiness" might be condoned in times of less anxiety, but not now. With all his fundamental earnestness and all the allowances people are ready to make for the burdens he carries, he fails to persuade them that he knows where he is going. The negativism of a policy that devotes itself so largely to countering the moves of the Kremlin, the absence of inspired purpose, the feeling that no basic philosophy underlies Mr. Truman's day-to-day actions—these elements work against his ability to rally the people.

One can respond to great objectives only when he feels that the objectives are truly great. Many a Midwesterner is afraid that somehow Mr. Truman has got the country into a situation leading to no plausible end except the dreaded general war. Missourians who knew him when Tom Pendergast was starting him on his career are likely to ask themselves: Who is Harry Truman to be asking for blood, sweat, and tears? (Dear Editor: Truman, who has the easiest job in the world, spending other people's money, is too reckless, even to the point of daring Congress to save a dime.)

In Rolla, Missouri, the Daily News asked its readers to answer eighteen questions on the crisis. They were about three to two in favor of withdrawing
from Korea. A similar majority wanted to kick Russia out of the U.N.; a bigger majority opposed seating Communist China. Asked whether foreign nations should supply the bulk of troops for a U.N. army, 243 replied "Yes" and 48 "No."

Yet confusion over the Korean War did not extend to Gibraltarism. To the question "Should we send American troops to Europe?" 171 answered "Yes" and 117 "No." "Should we continue to send substantial aid to foreign countries?"—162 "Yes," 126 "No." "Should we simply defend our sea bases with air and sea power, and keep our armies out of foreign countries?"—126 "Yes," 171 "No."

Of one thing Rolla was fairly certain: There should be a tremendous national effort for armament and inflation control. For all-out war preparation, for higher taxes, for price and wage controls the majorities were substantial. Everybody favored unity—and there had seldom been so much disunity.

City people looked at the steadily rising price of food, and suspected that the farmer was making a killing behind the privileged sanctuary of parity. Union members watched big business run mobilization, and feared that the freeze was going to end with wages. When the Treasury's first-bite tax program came out, calling for a flat-rate increase in all brackets, it slowly dawned on middle-income people that under this program they would be paying more taxes than they paid in 1946 and 1947, whereas the lucky dogs who earned above fifteen thousand dollars a year would be paying less.

The divisive elements implicit in any period of national sacrifice lurked just beneath the surface, untamed by the unifying appeals of all-out war and reinforced by a pervasive cynicism. Noting that prices had not been frozen until they reached the highest levels on record, consumers looked on Michael V. DiSalle and Eric Johnston with jaundiced contempt. (Dear Editor: Price control—what a joke! Why don't they let some high-school boy handle price control, they could do as good as we have.)

Almost nobody likes the draft of eighteen-year-olds. (Dear Editor: The arguments for drafting eighteen-year-olds seem to me to be based on shortsighted expediency, fright, and unconvincing statistics. The likely long-range effect will be a recurring wave of weakened, cynical, and unstable citizenship running decades into the future.) Families with sons in Korea and wives whose reservist husbands had been called back for their second war deeply felt that the sacrifices to which all had been exhorted were being unevenly distributed. Yes, the citizen was ready for a national effort, but he was not at all sure about his neighbor. (Dear Editor: This disastrous war could have been prevented if President Truman and his State Department had exercised greater prudence and assisted the U.N. in accomplishing a peaceful solution of Korean squabbles. But the President's fears and emotions prevailed over his intelligence again.)

What did it all add up to? Not isolationism—at least not yet. One St. Louis businessman, listening to a State Department official describe the need for a program of bristling armaments and cold war for as long as "ten or twenty years," put it bluntly: "The people out here just will not carry a load of that sort for ten or twenty years. You may want them to, and it may be necessary, but they are not going to do it."

This, perhaps, was an attitude the national leadership had left out of the reckoning. It was, of course, true that many people had to be scared into supporting heavy overseas expenditures by shaking the hammer and sickle at them, but the country had gone from one scare to another—always with the Kremlin's kind co-operation—and some felt that possibly Washington wanted the condition to become permanent. On the assumption that no peace could be established with the Soviet Union until the West had achieved an overwhelming superiority of power, the Administration had embarked on a program that might be bucked through Congress for one year or two, but what about long-range public support? What would happen if there were a day of revulsion? A switch to isolationism of a more virulent kind than had yet been seen? An overpowering urge to end the tension by using the weapons bought so dearly?

Fundamentally, the Midwest's reactions to the crisis may not differ much from any other section's. People in the Central States read the same news services, hear the same commentators, listen to the same speeches as anybody else. Their inland location gives them a certain detachment. The war scares do not flame quite as intensely along the Mississippi as on the coasts; people are not swept along quite so completely on the tides of official opinion as in Washington. Tradition also plays a part in shaping current attitudes. Because Middle Western politicians have usually been isolationists, an anti-Truman politician today tends to think first in isolationist terms. Senator Wherry of Nebraska in a sense follows in the footsteps of Senator Norris. But Norris, an isolationist in the First World War, had become an interventionist by the Second, and thousands of Midwesterners who lagged behind him then have caught up by now.

Wherry speaks for the Middle West not primarily as an isolationist but as an Old Guard enemy of New Deal, Fair Deal, F.D.R., and H.S.T. He speaks the language of isolationism, but in fact a family with a son in Korea or Germany does not look on the world in those terms. Taft spoke for the Middle West as well as anybody when his initial opposition to an American troop commitment in Europe gradually simmered down to a quibble over the precise number of troops to be sent.

What the Midwest's final position will be is still unresolved. The answer will depend, no doubt, on the choices open when choices are made. As things were going in the Middle West early this year, public opposition to the Truman Administration seemed to be building up almost to the point where it might soon accept any alternative presented, simply because the only way to express a variety of discontents would be by voting the ins out. The incalculable power to shape and direct and lead public opinion would thus be transferred to whoever was in position to receive it. If that proved to be Taft in alliance with McCarthy, then Taft and McCarthy would become major factors in determining future Middle Western attitudes—and people in towns like Fremont, Ohio, could expect civil-defense directors to take an even sharper interest in maintaining the solidarity of "community thinking."

—Robert Lasch
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