off Japan's coast, launching sorties against mainland airfields. A single, lucky Japanese bomb hit. It exploded on the hangar deck, among fueled and armed aircraft, immediately starting a conflagration that burned through the topside flight deck. Bombs, torpedoes, ammunition, and fuel started to explode, killing 800 crew and burning away large sections of the wooden flight deck. Fire control efforts were desperate, crippled by a lack of firefighters and continual internal explosions. Despite this, dozens of individual acts of heroism sustained the struggle to save the ship. Springer's interviewees perfectly recreate the destruction, terror, and immediate chaos.

Great tales abound in *Inferno*. We see men fighting fires, blown off the ship into the sea, and trying to escape burning decks and work areas, while crewmates contain damage. Springer found accounts from the crew of the *Santa Fe*, a cruiser that pulled alongside the stricken *Franklin* to take on the injured and pass hoses over to fight the fires. Amid the chaos and heroism, the captain, Leslie Gehres, momentarily despaired of saving the ship, but the effort went on, often independent of him.

Gehres brought an imperious style aboard when he took over the *Franklin* after its operations in Luzon. In fact, much of *Inferno*'s most interesting reading explores this, along with his lapses of character. After the attack in March, he treated as deserters all who had left the ship. On reaching the States, he even initiated court-martial proceedings against some. He insisted on bringing the ship into the dock on arrival in Hawaii, then misjudged and crashed the *Franklin* into the moor, for which he blamed the mooring detail. His mean-spiritedness, amid so much self-sacrifice and professionalism, was disheartening.

Springer lets the men speak for themselves, and they do. It is no surprise that at one of the principal *Franklin* crew websites, no mention is made of Gehres, and no picture of him appears. During his life Gehres did his best to dishonor many of his surviving crew. The men have had the last word.

Inferno cries out for cinematic adaptation. The attacks, the firefighting, the crew's struggle to survive, and the ignominy of Gehres's treatment make an outstanding story. Until then, we are lucky to have a book as well done as this.

—Thomas Mullen
Flemington, New Jersey

ratchets up the tension.

Through it all, Flynn remains stalwart yet understated—a charismatic leader but not a superman. "I'd follow him down the barrel of a cannon," says Corporal "Gabby" Gordon (George Tobias). Still, it requires some suspension of disbelief to accept Tasmanian-born Flynn as an American, much less a man from Maine.

Of course, Flynn was never a soldier, either. One biographer even theorized that he spied for the Nazis, an accusation that seems far-fetched. He may not have served, but Flynn did fight some battles. One came in 1943, in a widely publicized statutory rape trial. Flynn was found innocent and the country gained a new expression, "in like Flynn." Two years later he got into a fistfight with director John Huston after making an unkind remark about Olivia De Havilland at a party thrown by producer David O. Selznick. The two men beat each other bloody in Selznick's garden, to the delight and horror of the other guests.

—Tom Huntington
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Atomic Tragedy: Henry L. Stimson and the Decision to Use the Bomb Against Japan, *by Sean L. Malloy, Cornell University Press, 225 pages, $26.95.*

THE NUCLEAR ATTACKS ON the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are difficult subjects for historians, and for all Americans. Those events and the historical narratives about them are fraught with the tension between America's willingness to inflict great suffering in the service of its perceived national interests and America's desire to think well of itself. The title of Sean L. Malloy's work *Atomic Tragedy* reflects this tension.

Henry L. Stimson, as Malloy paints him, was a contradictory figure, pulled between the demands of duty as Franklin Roosevelt's secretary of war and his own morality. He was a man of Victorian values, with all that implies: a devotion to duty, honor, and the protection of the weak, paradoxically intertwined with sexism, racism, and Anglo-Saxon elitism. After World War I, Stimson, though never a pacifist, energetically advocated against industrialized warfare and in favor of arms control and international conflict resolution such as the world court. When Stimson accepted the position of war secretary, Malloy writes, the man who "had spent much of the previous twenty years working for international peace" would become "one of the most prominent public advocates of American military intervention in Europe." Stimson saw no contradiction between the two positions. Soon he became the civilian commander of the Manhattan Project.

Malloy's text explores with sensitivity, insight, and rigorous attention to detail the complexity and contradictions of wartime research into atomic weapons. "While he welcomed the scientists' aid in winning the war," Malloy writes, "Stimson's Victorian values and his horror at the excesses of industrialized warfare left him acutely sensitive to the perils of unleashing nuclear fire upon the world."

In focusing on Stimson, far from succumbing to temptations of the "great man" approach to history, Malloy reveals the extent to which momentous historical events may be wrought by a large number of men—great, middling, or base—acting with incomplete or inaccurate information, according to differing value systems, in the service of contradictory ends. Copious references are provided in endnotes, where they offer support for Malloy's argument without interrupting his lucid narrative prose.

Malloy deftly manages the biographer's trick of portraying his subject with sympathy while stopping short of hagiography. He assesses Stimson's actions and motivations with clear eyes, acknowledging and distinguishing between the moral standards of his time and those of our own. As secretary of war, Stimson was one of the few men with the power and inclination to prevent or limit the destruction of civilian life by nuclear weapons. Why didn't he do

so? His failure "to closely engage with the details of both conventional bombing and nuclear targeting" led to a nuclear weapon that was designed for use against inhabited cities. His "belief that the atomic secret could be used as a bargaining chip in post-war negotiations [with the Soviet Union]—and his inability to figure out exactly *how* to use it for this purpose" led to a diplomatic situation where a demonstration of the bomb's power in Japan had strategic benefits on the global stage. Also, of course, his control over the project was far from complete, and his decisions involved a noticeable degree of wishful thinking.

The consequences of the Manhattan Project stretched far beyond the deaths and destruction in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of course, and Malloy does not neglect this broader context. The massive postwar proliferation of nuclear weapons cast its shadow over the balance of the 20th century, and we continue to face the "still-potent threat of nuclear annihilation." Stimson has received at least his fair share of the blame for that legacy because, like many of his compatriots, he often "succumbed to the temptation to gain short term [diplomatic] advantage" from the "atomic secret," rather than sacrificing such advantages for the sake of "crafting a long-term solution to the danger posed by nuclear weapons."

The simplistic article "The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb," published under Stimson's name in the February 1947 *Harper's* magazine, deflected or at least deferred much of that blame, and it continues to inform understanding of these events. Malloy is not interested in either placing blame on Stimson or shifting it away, however. As he points out, "None of the American leaders entrusted with the bomb were ignorant about the danger it posed to human civilization." He argues that "virtually every American policymaker with any knowledge of the bomb shared to some degree Stimson's conflicted and inconsistent attitude toward the future of nuclear fission." He urges us not to celebrate or chastise Stimson, but to study him and learn from his experiences. His book offers a powerful opportunity to do just that.

—*Dyon Stefanon*
Rockville, Maryland

★ 78 RPM

Young Blue Eyes

FRANK SINATRA HATED the new music they called rock and roll. "It is sung, played, and written for the most part by cretinous goons and by means of its almost imbecilic reiteration, and sly, lewd, in plain fact, dirty lyrics...it manages to be the martial music of every sideburned delinquent on the face of the earth," he complained in 1957. What he didn't explain was that he was angry over these upstarts stealing his act. Making teenage girls scream and swoon was *his* gig.

COURTESY OF DOCTORMACRO.INFO

Sinatra became this object of post-pubescent adoration during World War II. It happened almost literally overnight. A few months after leaving the popular Tommy Dorsey big band to strike out on his own, Sinatra was the opening act for the Benny Goodman orchestra at New York City's Paramount Theater on New Year's Eve 1942. The girls went wild like no audience ever before.

Still only in his mid-20s, Sinatra was already a big star, but now he was suddenly a big *solo* star and a teen idol. Through the 1942–1944 musicians union strike, which kept him and everyone else from recording, he continued to thrive, scoring a string of top-10 hits with previously unreleased recordings he had made with Tommy Dorsey and with Harry James before that. His voice found its way into most American homes on the radio programs *Your Hit Parade* and his own *The Sinatra Show*.

He made it big on the silver screen, too, co-starring with dancer Gene Kelly in *Anchors Aweigh*, Hollywood's biggest moneymaker of 1944. Once he was able to start recording again, he put eight top-10 hits on the charts in 1945, including his now-classic "Saturday Night Is the Loneliest Night of the Week."

Like success, controversy followed Sinatra through his career. In October 1943 a near replay of the scene at the Paramount that had kicked off his stint as teen heartthrob turned ugly. Police spent hours quelling the disturbance dubbed the Columbus Day Riot. Worse for Sinatra's reputation was the start of a string of FBI investigations, including a look into charges that he had paid a doctor $40,000 to declare him physically unfit for military service.

Like a few of the rockers he may not have cared for, Sinatra endured as a superstar through the decades because he was the best at what he did. Nobody could take a song written by someone else and make it his own like Sinatra could. He gave a knowing inflection to lyrical nuances that lesser singers crooned without a clue. He was a master at phrasing what could be a cloying rhyme so that you hardly notice any rhyme at all. Rock, and all the rest of pop music since, owes a great debt to Sinatra.

—*Carl Zebrowski*
Managing editor of America in WWII