

Word War II Propaganda And The “Ideal Citizen”

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Abstract

During World War II, the United States Office of War Information (OWI) produced and distributed posters, news reels, and radio broadcasts during the war. Many of these messages were produced for the home front, and advised citizens on how men, women, and children were to act and behave in society, how they should support the war effort, increase production, ration supplies, and fulfill their roles as citizens. This paper will focus on how government propaganda portrayed the “ideal citizen” during World War II. The government expected citizens to know why America was in the war, and how their efforts would shape and influence the outcome of the war. This research will contribute to the scholarship on World War II through an exploration of the way that propaganda tries to shape national goals and citizens’ behaviors.

Keywords: WWII, Propaganda, Advertising

1. Introduction:

In July of 1944, the War Department published a small educational pamphlet for the off-duty soldier titled “What is Propaganda.” The Disney icon, Donald Duck, was used to teach about and define propaganda. According to the War Department, “Propaganda isn’t an easy thing to define. ... It uses words and word substitutes in trying to reach a goal – pictures, drawings, graphs, exhibits, parades, songs, and other devices.”¹ This pamphlet allowed the War Department to define propaganda according to its terms and ideas. Propaganda came in various forms for the United States during the war years of 1941-1945; it was used to dehumanize the enemy and also to galvanize citizens and the military to continue to fight and end the war. Historian Allan M. Winkler stated that, “radio messages, leaflets, booklets, and films ... described the industrial miracles taking place as the United States created the greatest fighting machine ever known.”² Through propaganda the United States government tried to become involved in American life at home and abroad.

The United States entered World War II after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Historian Juliann Sivulka stated that “the war sped up industrialization, and production boomed at aircraft factories, shipyards, ammunitions plants, and other critical wartime industries.”³ Under the direction of FDR, the U.S. government created The Office of War Information (OWI) in June 1942.⁴ Shortly after the creation of OWI, the War Advertising Council was formed and “produced the largest, most extensive advertising campaign in history, promoting war bond sales, internal security, rationing, housing solutions, and precautions against venereal disease.”⁵ During the war years, posters and ads contributed to the war effort with phrases and slogans urging the populace to support the troops, increase war production, ration and conserve supplies, and buy war bonds.

The United States OWI produced and distributed posters, newsreels, and radio broadcasts during the war to help unify citizens. Many of the messages advised men, women, and children on how to act and behave in society, how to support the war effort, and how to increase production, ration supplies, and fulfill their roles as citizens.

The OWI and the Ad Council worked together during the War to create posters and advertisements that depicted war themes, and according to historian Inger Stole, the “Ad Council ... believed that advertisers had a ‘patriotic duty’ to help the government ...” during the war.⁶ Sivulka stated, “Advertising manipulated powerful human emotions, frequently evoking fear and pushing patriotism as the war progressed.”⁷ In contrast to advertisements, William L. Bird, Jr. and Harry R. Rubenstein analyzed posters and stated that,

World War II posters helped to mobilize a nation. Inexpensive, accessible, and ever-present, the poster was an ideal agent for making war aims the personal mission of every citizen. Government agencies, businesses, and private organizations issued an array of poster images linking the military front with the home front – calling upon every American to boost production at work and at home. Deriving their appearance from the fine and commercial arts, posters conveyed more than simple slogans. Posters expressed the needs and goals of the people who created them.^{viii}

Across the United States, these posters promoted civic action in both the public and the private sectors. The propaganda produced in the United States used images of “fighting for patriotism or liberty” with the hope or expectation of loyalty from the population. While advertisements also used war themes similar to posters, the advertisements were also attempting to sell a product in addition to supporting the war.

This paper will look at the home front, the soldier, government issued posters and advertisements, various non-government sources, and rationing and conservation. Citizens viewed propaganda that government, corporations, companies, and businesses produced. Food and supplies were important commodities needed both at home and abroad, rationing and conservation efforts allowed the public equal shares of food and urged conservation of supplies.

2. Home Front

With men going off to fight and leaving the work force, women were left at home to fill the gap. Women started to work in factories and other professions previously closed to them. Jean Reed Prentiss wrote of her experience working at the Weyerhaeuser Mill, in Longview, Washington, “it was a revelation. ... We worked at machine speed. ... My muscles were sore at the end of the day, and my ears rang all night. But I soon got used to that.”^{ix} Around 6.5 million women entered the workforce and contributed to war production for the war effort. These women worked in factories, on assembly lines, as nurses, as civilians, and in the military.^x

Initially, the government resisted using propaganda; according to historian Maureen Honey, “propaganda was equated with falsehood and illegitimate manipulation. ...”^{xi} There were many different types of propaganda used to encourage citizens to act in particular ways. Honey argues two main reasons why the government chose to enact these efforts: “first...the powers of the government to influence or direct the economy were very limited. ... [S]econd, ... the government hoped it could exert some influence on labor market patterns by providing an ideological framework compatible with wartime conditions.”^{xii} OWI and other government agencies hoped the home front women would work in the factories while the men were away fighting. According to Winkler, “Most of the propaganda stressed in some way American power and productivity.”^{xiii}

Power, production, and productivity were factors and concerns for the United States. For the state of Utah, “mining has played a significant role in the industrial, economic, and social life.”^{xiv} During World War II, with men leaving for battle overseas, women were required to help with the war effort. Across the United States, “Rosie the Riveter” became an example for women to emulate. In Utah, women were “Millie Miners,” because of the mining efforts across the state and especially at the copper mine. During World War II, the production of copper reached a high point.^{xv} There was a push for copper production for the war effort in Utah, and according to Bruce D. Whitehead and Robert E. Rampton, “Despite the labor shortage, Bingham mines ... produced ... over three billion pounds of copper - more than one-half of all the copper mined in the United States.”^{xvi} To keep production levels during the war at a constant standard, Honey states, “OWI wished to encourage an overall attitude of dedication and stoicism in the population. One of its main goals was to cut down on absenteeism, job turnover, and work shutdowns in vital industries.”^{xvii} With more women working, dedication and loyalty on the home front was a consistent theme in advertising and posters.

3. Government Posters and Ads

Posters, advertisements, and cartoons spread the OWI messages to American citizens and soldiers. This was a way that the government could disseminate information in a nonpartisan way. The following posters and advertisements show examples of the media that was used during the war years.

Fighting for liberty was a theme that OWI used in this poster (see figure 1), which depicted several soldiers from 1778 and three soldiers from 1943. The caption ‘Americans will always fight for liberty’ was printed across the bottom of the poster. It suggested that liberty was a driving force that unified soldiers regardless of the period in which they fought. It tied the current war, which many Americans had hoped to avoid joining, to a revered moment in U.S. history.



Figure 1. 1778 to 1943. Americans will always fight for liberty. Weber State University Stewart Library Special Collections.

Fighting for liberty and rights did not only apply to the soldiers at the front, according to historian Amy Bentley: “Part of women’s patriotic duty was to avoid hoarding food or buying on the black market.”^{xxviii} She also states that, “While the government called for Americans to reduce their consumption ... such messages contrasted sharply with wartime pamphlets, posters, newsreels, advertisements, and radio programs depicting the icon of the ordered meal.”^{xxix} In figure 2, a woman with a basket and shelves full of canned goods appears with the words ‘Rationing safeguards your share.’ Rationing and price controls were two ways the government chose to deal with demand exceeding supply.^{xx} Bentley states, “Distributing food equitably – especially those foods in greatest demand – was important politically.”^{xxxi}



Figure 2. Rationing Safeguards Your Share. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Accessed March 5, 2015. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/fsa.8b02931/>

Canning was a way to make the rations stretch and last longer during the war. Figure 3, a poster from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), showed a woman with her arms full of canned food. Bentley wrote that, “Canning was both time-consuming and labor intensive.”^{xxii} To plant a ‘Victory Garden’ and grow fruits and vegetables assisted in multiple campaigns on the home front.^{xxiii}



Figure 3. Am I Proud! USDA Poster. University of North Texas, UNT Digital Library. World War Poster Collection. Accessed March 15, 2015. <http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc541/>

These posters depicted American life during the war. Bentley states that, “World War II . . . increased this need for canning because significant portions of the nation’s canned goods were sent overseas to the military and Allied countries.”^{xxiv} Canning contributed to the war effort, and production rose over the years; however, women were concerned with sugar rationing which sometimes limited their ability to can.^{xxv}

In a letter Norma Yerger Queen, a woman living and working in Ogden, Utah, wrote to the OWI, she detailed some of her experiences working in Utah and following the advice of ‘Uncle Sam’:

Many women thoroughly enjoy working & getting away from the home. They seem to get much more satisfaction out of it than out of housework or bringing up children. . . . I am convinced that if women could work 4 days a week instead of 5 ½ or 6 that more could take jobs. . . . I never in the 14 yrs. of my married life canned 1 jar. Last summer I put up dozens of quarts per instructions of Uncle Sam. . . .^{xxvi}

As a workingwoman, Queen had suggestions about how to increase the workforce in Utah through canning.

Catherine Cole Lange wrote to her husband about her canning experience while living with her parents in St. Louis on August 19, 1943, “We’ve been canning tomatoes almost all day and it’s a long job. Alice was down and Mom was showing how to do it. All I did was skin tomatoes—and more tomatoes! It’s a good thing to can though for if you get them in the stores by the can you have to use so many ration points.”^{xxvii} Canning increased during the war and according to Bentley, “In the summer of 1942, when the government first stressed canning as a war obligation . . . 64 percent of American women canned food for their family’s use. By 1943, the number rose to 75 percent. . . . Women canned an average of 165 cans or jars of food, for a total of 4.1 billion.”^{xxviii} Canning was one of the methods that women as citizens became involved in the war effort.

4. Non-Government Posters and Ads:

Many companies used war themes in their product placement ads. Corporations and businesses used the war while advertising their products. According to Stole, “Wartime advertising that adhered to the . . . directive was classified into five groups. ‘All Out’ advertisements . . . ‘Double Barreled Job’ . . . ‘Sneak Punch’ . . . ‘Plug in a Slug’ . . . and . . . ‘Business as Usual.’”^{xxix} Ads that dedicated most of the image to war themes belonged to one of the first three groups, the other two either mentioned the war in passing or did not mention the war at all. The government and advertisers instructed citizens that every little bit helped to bring ‘a quicker Victory’ in the war.

The five classifications of advertisements were determined by content, war themes, and product placement. An “All Out” advertisement placed the focus of the ad on war themes with the product not being the center focus. A “Double Barreled Job” advertisement continued with war themes while at the same time placed the produce in a more prominent location of the ad. A “Sneak Punch” contained equal space for the war and the product. “Plug in a Slug” advertisements had only minor war themes in the background of the ad. Finally, “Business as Usual” was exactly as the name stated; selling the product was the goal of the advertisement.

Figure 4, a mixture between an “All Out” advertisement and a “Double Barreled Job” advertisement, was created by Frank Goodwin for Coca-Cola and was published in *Times* in 1944. The War Bond sales man was welcomed in, and the advertisement equated buying bonds with victory. The title at the top of the *Times* ad implied that if one bought more war bonds it would equal a quicker victory.^{xxx} Citizens were urged to support the war effort by buying war bonds and buying Coca-Cola.

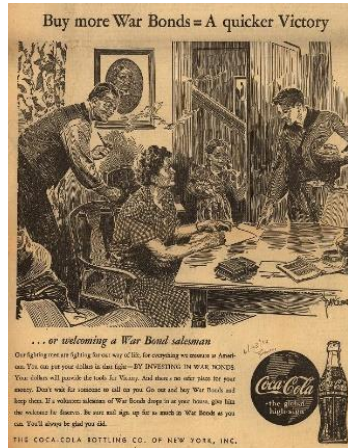


Figure 4. Buy more War Bonds. Duke University Libraries Digital Collections. Accessed March 17, 2015. http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_W0362/

5. Rationing and Conservation:

The OWI, the Ad Council, and the War Production Board worked together and in 1944 issued an advertisement in *Harper's Magazine* titled “Lesson in Logistics” with the statement that “our armed forces need every kind of paper to wrap the invasion ammunition, weapons, foods and medical supplies in.”^{xxxix} Supplies like paper and tin were not the only items that were rationed; grease and fat were collected and food items such as meat and sugar were rationed. Sivulka states “Americans conserved power, saved fat for explosives, and collected tin cans, paper, and rubber for recycling. Food staples such as butter, sugar, cheese, coffee, flour, and meat were rationed, and the limited supply of gasoline curtailed travel.”^{xxxix} According to Charles Duhigg, meat was being sent to Europe and the Pacific and “Federal officials became worried that a lengthy war effort would leave the nation starved of protein.”^{xxxix} Rationing and conserving food items continued these difficulties for the U.S. in having enough supplies and protein sources for both citizens and soldiers.



Figure 5. Meat Thief! Weber State University Microfilm, *Saturday Evening Post* July 17, 1943

Figure 5 and figure 6, from *The Saturday Evening Post*, depicted issues and concerns about Americans having protein sources. The cartoon (see figure 6), implied that woman running out of the market with her arms full of meat, was a horse thief. As Duhigg points out, it was important to “convince Americans to eat organ meats. ...

The secret to changing the American diet ... was familiarity. Soon, housewives were receiving mailers from the government ... Butchers started handing out recipes that explained how to slip liver into meatloaf.^{xxxiv}

Books and pamphlets advertised in magazines and newspapers contained advice on how to prepare meals. The American Meat Institute of Chicago advertised the sale of a recipe book with “120 helpful recipes ... delicacies [such] as sweetbreads, liver, kidney. Recipes for less familiar meats. Ideas for extending meat.”^{xxxv} Depicted in this ad (see figure 7), is a smiling woman holding a plate of meat with the ability to prepare a nutritious protein meal with the assistance of recipes from the American Meat Institute.



Figure 6. Meat! Weber State University Microfilm, *Saturday Evening Post* November 13, 1943

This “Double Barreled Job” advertisement, with a message from the government, in the 1943 *Ladies' Home Journal*, was sponsored by the Visking Corporation. Visking urged consumers to be more conscious of food purchases and to think about ways to use all of the food. Figure 7 shows a smiling home-front housewife preparing a meal. The advertisement asks women to “save dry bread and bread crumbs and to also buy skinless frankfurters.”^{xxxvi} Bread can be used in many dishes and choosing to serve skinless is a way to save on waste. Amy Bentley argues that, “the media and others presented images of what meals were supposed to be ...,”^{xxxvii} and the home front effort to save, conserve, and ration while still serving a nutritious meal to the family was an important task. How to prepare and serve food became a challenge.



Figure 7. Our Government Says: Don't Waste Food. Duke University Libraries Digital Collections. Accessed March 5, 2015. http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_W0286/

Due to a shortage in protein, Heinz Company advertised beans as an alternative protein source. According to this “Plug in a Slug” ad, beans were full of energy, rich in protein, saved time, work and fuel, and were a one-dish meal. A canned bottle of beans could be used as a protein substitute (see figure 8).



Figure 8. Beans Are Back! Weber State University, Microfilm, Saturday Evening Post July 24, 1943.

In 1943 in the *Newark Evening News*, the War Production Board issued the following “All Out” advertisement on, “How to Make Cooking Fats Do Double Duty!” Figure 9 shows a woman holding a frying pan and a can labeled “fats for gun-powder” paired with the statement, “There’s no conflict between rationing and saving your used cooking grease...” The ad implied that the conservation of supplies and rationing of food and supplies were important parts of life during the war.^{xxxviii} Every little bit helped to increase war production at home and increase the possibilities of supplies on the front.



Figure 9. How to Make Cooking Fats Do Double Duty! Duke University Libraries Digital Collections. Accessed April 11, 2015. http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_W0075

Tin was another important item needed for in the production of hand grenades, binoculars, portable flamethrowers, and machine guns. Saving tin contributed to the war. In 1943 in the *Minneapolis Star Journal*, the U.S. government urged citizens to save tin (see figure 10). The caption underneath stated, “Keep the cans rolling into the salvage heap. This plea to housewives is more urgent than ever, since rationing has resulted in less buying

of food in cans. Tin is used in many items used by our soldiers on war fronts, so save it and help win the war.^{xxxix} Efforts to contribute and support the war effort were evident through the various campaigns of the government.



Figure 10. Tin Is Saved. Duke University Libraries Digital Collections. Accessed April 11, 2015. http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_W0085

6. Conclusion

The government expected citizens to know why America was in the war and how their efforts would shape and influence the outcome of the war. Many of these messages were produced for the home front, and advised citizens on how men, women, and children were to act and behave in society, how to support the war effort, and how to increase production, ration supplies, and fulfill their roles as citizens.

The government employed propaganda to encourage women on the home front to join the work force, not waste food, and purchase war bonds. Newspapers and magazines, produced and distributed across the United States, contained posters and advertisements that gave advice on daily aspects of life. Citizens were exposed to multiple ads while reading magazines and newspapers or viewed posters that were displayed in store windows. Government agencies like OWI, the Ad Council, and USDA hoped to influence the public to support the war through posters and advertisements. Businesses, companies, and corporations used the war theme to entice buyers with the commitment to the War in “All Out” and “Double Barreled Job” ads. Citizen involvement was important during the war, the government and other organizations worked to produce messages or advertisements to spark interest and involvement.

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