

## American Propaganda

When it was suggested that World War II was approaching, Americans did not want to go to war. Having sustained losses in World War I and only now coming out of an economic crisis, most Americans thought that energies should be spent here at home, improving America, instead of becoming involved in war overseas. Even as the war started in Europe with the invasion of France, many Americans thought that the U.S. should avoid becoming involved. However, the government recognized that American participation was necessary, and quickly stepped up pro-war propaganda.

This was not extremely successful until after Pearl Harbor, when the war no longer seemed comfortably distant but very close to home. At this point, it was necessary for the American propagandists to continue to convince the public that war was close at hand. It was also necessary to begin stepping up production and conservation of materials for the war effort, because the Allies only tremendous advantage was their great production power. As the war began in earnest, America increased the flood of propaganda, utilizing especially the radio and visual media, most specifically posters.

This poster ([top. at right](#)) is very typical of early war posters, because it attempts to convince the viewer that the Nazi threat is closer than they think. The imagery is also very common; a dark Nazi swastika looms over a group of small innocent and apparently patriotic children. The viewer is instructed that he can save these children the fate that would befall them from the Nazis by purchasing war bonds and contributing to the war effort. This poster is also typical in that it urges the viewer to buy war bonds. The United States government, which had just recently emerged from the depression, did not have the amount of funds necessary to wage war on multiple fronts. Posters like this tapered off during the end of the war when financial support through war bonds was no longer necessary and it was becoming clear that America would eliminate the Nazi threat. However, posters such as this were extremely important during the early years of the war.

Posters such as this one ([second from top](#)), which implies that a man is dying because "someone talked," were also very common. They implied that enemy spies were everywhere and that, in the words of a similar poster, "loose lips can sink ships." Although spies were no great threat to America during World War II, it was said that even small amounts of information would help the Germans. This posters and others like it also served to bring home the reality of war to many of the citizens of America. When viewers realized that there was a danger of spies around them and that people, like the man on the poster, were actually dying, they began to realize that actual warfare was going on in the world around them and that America was at threat. This was probably the reason why this poster uses such dark colors and frightening imagery. Posters such as this warn viewers of the dangers of frivolous talk and help serve to demonstrate the actual proximity of warfare.

Since American leaders realized that the best hope of winning the war was through increased production and labor, many posters were circulated urging increased labor



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and production as well as conservation of materials for the war effort (see [third from top](#)). Since America's military was especially weak coming out of the depression, it was important to quickly produce many of the planes and tanks necessary for combat with Germany and Japan. Also, the quality of American tanks and weapons was much less than those produced in Germany, so strength in numbers was vital to victory. Since the Axis nations had been preparing for war for several years by the outbreak of war, it was extremely important for the Allies to close the gap in military forces. Poster like this were extremely common throughout the war and probably accounted for the bulk of American wartime propaganda.

This poster ([fourth from top](#)), which urges viewers to conserve gasoline by joining a car-sharing club, also belonged to a common type of wartime poster. Since materials and supplies for the war effort were scarce, conservation was encouraged by propaganda. Gasoline, especially, was important because it was necessary to fuel tanks and aircraft. This poster is a fairly typical example of this type, with the common suggestion that waste will aid the enemy. Hitler is often mentioned by name instead of referring to the Nazis or the Reich, because propaganda tended to personify the evil of the Nazis in Hitler. Interestingly enough, this is almost exactly the opposite of what occurred in Germany, where Hitler embodied everything good about the Reich. Also, in this poster, the stereotypical image of Hitler is used, in uniform with an exaggerated moustache and iron cross. The American is shown to be unaware that he is aiding the enemy, which implies that those who drive alone are also uninformed. The poster claims to correct that by urging the average viewer to quickly join a car-sharing club to conserve gasoline. Posters such as this were extremely common after America entered the war.

This next poster ([fifth from top](#)) not nearly as common as many of the others but was important nonetheless. This poster informs women that fighting for their country will not only help the country and the war effort but would also help gain more rights for women. This was part of an ongoing campaign to get more women involved in the armed forces and in wartime production industries. Although this particular poster only mentions the armed forces, women were also steadily encouraged to aid in production. As the war continued longer and longer more and more military personnel and laborers were necessary, and it was suggested to women to volunteer for these jobs in order to advance the cause of feminism. They were encouraged by the idea that by aiding their country, they would also be aiding themselves, although no substantial guarantee is made. Women began to believe that by taking place in industrial processes and the wartime efforts they would become more vital to society and therefore more empowered. The women in this poster are depicted in uniform and looking upward and outward. The implication is that women who have joined the armed forces are looking to the future, and see that by helping the government they can also help themselves in the future.

During World War II, America produced some of the most successful propaganda campaigns in history. The pushes for increased production, labor, and conservation may well have won the war for America.

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### **Bibliography**

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