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This paper examines several periods of military conflict in American history and how these periods had an effect on the spread of propaganda through public libraries. First, it investigates the events leading up to, and including, the First World War in the years from 1914 to 1918. Although America was only actively involved in the war for a short period of time, propaganda was at work in the years leading up to military involvement. The paper then looks at propaganda in the aftermath of the war and the period leading up to and including World War II, mainly the years 1941 to 1945. Propaganda was still in heavy use at this time, although librarians were more aware of its existence and effects. After this war ended, the United States became involved in the Cold War and propaganda was not as often discussed in library literature. This paper will briefly look at how McCarthy, Korea, and Vietnam all played a role in refining librarians' views on propaganda through the middle of the century. The paper concludes with an examination of how the legacy of the twentieth-century has followed librarians into the 1990s and 2000s. Modern warfare coupled with the attacks on 9/11 brought propaganda into a new, high-tech arena, and librarians have had to learn to teach patrons to find and judge information on their own.

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AMERICAN LIBRARIES IN WARTIME: THE ROLE OF PROPAGANDA

by
Ashley M Smith

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Jerry Saye

In the twenty-first century most people would consider propaganda a dirty word. However, its definition has not always had such negative connotations. At the turn of the last century, propaganda was basically another word for advertising, but it was over used in both of the world wars and public acceptance waned. The fact that new technology allowed its spread much more rapidly and in larger quantities than in the past also contributed to its downfall. Librarians have always struggled over what should go on their shelves. Usually their decisions are related to collection development policies, budget, or space issues. However, everything changes during wartime, and suddenly the choice of reading material is a personal matter with the librarian torn between private beliefs, professional duties, governmental aims, and availability of material. American libraries during times of military conflict have generally been good distributors of propaganda, whether or not they intended it that way.

This paper will cover the aspects of propaganda in public libraries throughout the 1900s, with emphasis on the earlier half of the century. Special and university libraries are excluded because of the different natures of their collections. Special libraries generally have a very narrow collection focus, and university libraries often have much more liberal collection policies and budgets (i.e., buy everything). Also, when most people use libraries they go to state, county, or town sponsored public libraries. The paper will also touch upon the American Library Association (ALA) and its history with the Freedom to Read Act and history of intellectual freedom rights.

This paper will cover several periods of military conflict in American history. First, it will examine the events leading up to, and including, the First World War in the years from 1914 to 1918. Although America was only actively involved in the war for a short period of time, propaganda was at work in the years leading up to our military involvement. In addition, it will briefly look at the view of propaganda in the aftermath of the war. Next, it will look at the role of library propaganda during World War II, a period from 1941 to 1945. Propaganda was still in heavy use at this time, although librarians were more cognizant of public awareness and skepticism and tried to temper their use of it. After the war ended, the United States found itself involved in a different kind of conflict – the Cold War. This paper will briefly look at how McCarthy, Korea, and Vietnam all played a role in refining librarians' views on propaganda through the middle of the century. Finally, we will examine how the legacy of the twentieth-century has followed us into the 1990s and 2000s. With the outbreak of the Gulf War, America was fighting new and different enemies, and the government needed to justify what it was doing. After 9/11, patriotism and love-of-country was high, and everyone wanted to help defend America. However, with the Patriot Act, divided political ideals, and exposé power of the internet, librarians are much more wary of propaganda in this day and age.

The Oxford English Dictionary gives two definitions of propaganda that should be familiar:

- 1) Any association, systematic scheme, or concerted movement for the propagation of a particular doctrine or practice.
- 2) The systematic propagation of information or ideas by an interested party, esp. in a tendentious way in order to encourage or instil (sic) a particular attitude or response. Also, the ideas, doctrines, etc., disseminated thus; the vehicle of such propagation (“Propaganda”).

In other words, propaganda is the act of trying to make other people share your beliefs. However, there is more than meets the eye with this definition. It does not pass judgment on the inherent “goodness” or “badness” of propaganda. Most people today would automatically view it as a bad thing and attack any person or group using it, but historically it has just been a part of life. Lavine and Wechsler make the point that “if there is a right and a wrong in propaganda, it is to be found in the relation between means and ends, methods and purposes, and not in propaganda itself” (Lavine vii). By their judgment, the current American emphasis on education is a type of propaganda, but everyone believes in it because they feel the end result is worth it.

Another thing to note is that not all propaganda comes from the federal government. It comes from our enemies, special interest groups, concerned citizens, and others. Propaganda in wartime is a weapon that is used on three fronts – at home, against enemies, and to the rest of the world. The home front is potentially the most important of the three, for if “the home front cracks, the war is over” (Lavine 5). Citizens can be convinced to sacrifice many luxuries, but only for a limited period of time before they cry for peace. If keeping morale high is the goal of propaganda at home, then the opposite is true of propaganda directed towards the enemy. Here, the goal is to destroy morale and create discord between allied enemy nations (Lavine 11-12). Finally, propaganda is directed to neutral nations as a way of justifying war and finding new allies (Lavine 13). The only thing the varying kinds of propaganda have in common is the ultimate goal of swaying public opinion in one direction or another. At different times in the history of the nation, Americans have been more or less receptive to government propaganda, and librarians have jumped on the bandwagon and supported it when they saw fit.

Just as propaganda is generally seen as a negative, censorship does not have many fans either. The OED reports that a censor is “one who exercises official or officious supervision over morals and conduct” (“Censor”). Although similar to propaganda, censorship does not try to overtly convert people to particular ideas. In popular language, censorship is the act of removing material from the public eye, while propaganda places material back in focus. For one reason or another, people seem more willing to talk about censorship. In professional journals and statements, censorship is a topic that can be debated openly, but when propaganda is talked about it is usually not mentioned openly. This could be because librarians all feel the same way about censorship, but there are those who see value in utilizing propaganda. Whatever the reason, it is unavoidable to discuss propaganda in libraries without occasionally mentioning censorship.

At the start of the twentieth-century, America was a growing nation. Issues such as immigration, urbanization, and moral reform were hot topics of debate. Into this mix was thrown the growing professional group of librarians. With the first school for librarians barely a decade old, the profession was still establishing itself and developing a code of ethics to guide its members. Carnegie had begun his campaign of donating libraries, but reading as a pastime had not yet caught on. Librarians had to wrestle with the popular notion that not all literature was worthy of being read, although their case for reading was seen as a healthy alternative to other activities commonly engaged in by the working class (Geller 81). As the wave of immigrants continued to pour into the nation, many librarians perceived that reading was a good way to teach them the language and indoctrinate them with American culture. Even though it was all in the spirit of “good works,” it should be obvious to even the most casual observer that

librarians were already gaining experience in the fields of censorship (choosing good literature) and propaganda (Americanizing immigrants).

In 1914, Europe dissolved into open warfare after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. The battle lines were drawn with Russia, France, Britain, and Italy united against the Austro-Hungarian, German, and Ottoman Empires. At this time, President Woodrow Wilson declared that America would stay neutral, and he admonished the public to remain neutral in their thoughts and sentiments as well (Kennedy 46). With that in mind, some librarians rushed to encourage their peers to do the same. Librarian Corinne Bacon called for those selecting books to “avoid all bias, religious, political, or economic. Have books on both sides of a question” (Geller 102). Public libraries tried to honor this goal, although it was easier said than done. For one thing, the public was interested in current periodicals, newspapers, and literature, yet these items were being delayed or intercepted on their way from war-torn Europe to the United States (Wiegand 11). This, coupled with the destruction of foreign book collections, led many librarians to feel biased towards peace. The director of the District of Columbia Public Library made a speech at the 1915 ALA conference titled “How Far Should the Library Aid the Peace Movement and Similar Propaganda.” In it he offered that “librarians are interested in peace and should, I believe, promote it as a matter of self-preservation” (Wiegand 8-9). Not everyone shared this lofty ideal though. Edmund Lester Pearson wrote an editorial in the *Boston Evening Transcript* in which he countered, “books discussing the war would not keep it going; conversely, books emphasizing universal peace would not deter it.” He went on to indicate that librarians

naturally develop collections of books on the war as a reaction to patron requests and interests (Wiegand 8).

Leading up to the start of World War I, the American Library Association strongly advocated a policy of library neutrality. This neutrality meant not promoting one side or the other, but it also encouraged librarians to disseminate peace literature. In 1916, ALA president Mary Wright Plummer praised libraries for “the opportunity to be and to continue truth’s handmaid” (Wiegand 10). The ALA even reached out to the director of the National Library of Mexico in a token of good will for continuing friendship (Wiegand 10). Once war was declared, ALA appointed a committee to investigate propaganda and create a list of books that “should be guarded against” (Thomison 66). However, it appears that this committee never made an official report or published a list of questionable books (Thomison 66).

Not everyone believed that neutrality would last for long. John Dewey, the philosopher and educator, believed that the war was a time in history “when the world was made momentarily more malleable to the guiding influence of reason” (Kennedy 50). However, different groups had different opinions of what was reasonable. American libraries and other public institutions were quickly flooded with both British and German propaganda, each presenting their side of the conflict and hoping to sway public opinion their way. As has been seen, librarians initially tried to present all sides of the conflict in a neutral fashion, but circumstances such as blockades of literature prevented that goal to be fully realized.

German propaganda faced a major hurdle from the beginning - finding good translators was often hard, so German propaganda often came off as heavy handed to its

American audience. Many Germans living in the United States were torn about whether to support the fatherland or their new homeland. Because of the difficulty in receiving German-language newspapers, they had to join their fellow citizens in sifting through what was available and make judgment calls about what to believe. Many turned to General Friedrich von Bernhardi's book *Germany and the Next War*, which suggested that Germany needed to focus on world domination or it would face national destruction (Wiegand 12). The German ambassador set up a German Information Service organization in New York to disseminate propaganda. By 1916, it claimed to have sent over 400 titles (books and pamphlets) to American public libraries (Wiegand 13). In other cases, articles by prominent authors were subsidized by German supporters and sent to libraries without indicating the source of funding. In addition to official German propaganda, there were German-Americans who felt it their duty to defend their homeland. George Sylvester Viereck was one such example. He wrote a weekly newspaper called *The Fatherland* that arrogantly defended Germany and maligned Britain. Although it saw wide circulation, the official German propaganda machine cringed at its heavy-handedness and cautioned temperance (Wiegand 15-16). In spite (or because of) German efforts, as the war progressed it became evident that national sentiment seemed to shift toward the Allied powers, and both librarians and their patrons began to censor pro-German material.

The British quickly realized that they needed to do all they could to gain American support. Charles F.G. Masterman was selected to head a secret propaganda organization from his offices as a member of the House of Commons. The name of his office, Wellington House, eventually became the name by which the entire propaganda

agency was known. Masterman had a more orderly, sophisticated approach to his job than the Germans. With the help of his assistants, Sir Claude Schuster and E.A. Gowers, Masterman streamlined the organization into departments focused on individual neutral nations, including the United States. Each department was charged with studying the national press, translating and publishing propaganda, and corresponding with individuals in a position to influence public opinion. Sir Gilbert Parker, a Canadian author already known in the States, and Dr. Norman Kemp Smith, an Englishman who had taught at Princeton and was friendly with Woodrow Wilson, led the American department (Wiegand 17-18). Parker and Smith learned how to best make their position heard in America, often by disguising the source of information. For instance, “works written from the French point of view or by French authors could be given wide distribution in the United States regardless of regional or ethnic prejudices” (Wiegand 20). In the course of the war, they sent out hundreds of pamphlets, books, and speeches supporting the Allies point of view.

In this time of neutral America, public libraries collected and displayed a wide range of information from both sides of the war. Often, the librarians did not know they had received propaganda material because of where it was printed or because the author donated it. However, as it became more evident that America might have to enter the war, librarians started being more selective about what they provided to the public. As the United States was friendlier with Britain than Germany, libraries began carrying less material supporting the Central Powers. After the war ended, it became clear how much more widespread British propaganda was in libraries than their German counterparts. A survey of library holdings revealed that there was an average 50:1 ratio of pro-Ally to

pro-German propaganda (Young 6). Some librarians fell into the compromising position of “putting the role of citizen above that of the professional, putting advocacy above their traditional neutrality, they happily censored their libraries and helped prepare lists of prohibited books” (Geller 109). There were also those who “began to develop an ideology of freedom” and objected to this blatant censorship, although their voices were hard to hear in the fervor of the pre-war buildup (Geller 109). Whatever their beliefs, librarians were cautioned to put them aside and “differentiate their private convictions from their personal responsibilities (Young 5). While this was often easier said than done, it soon became a publicity nightmare to disagree with the majority. As war seemed imminent, the Wisconsin State Library Commission reminded its librarians that “to be neutral now is disloyal” and “the library must remain above suspicion” (Geller 111-112).

After Wilson stood before Congress and broke formal diplomatic relations with Germany in February of 1917, some librarians began to take the stance that they should help the United States disseminate useful information to its citizens. George Creel and the Committee for Public Information (CPI) encouraged this idea and provided the information libraries were looking for. Created on April 14, 1917, CPI’s “primary purpose was to drive home the absolute justice of America’s cause, the absolute selflessness of America’s aims” (United States 1). A secondary goal was to “strive for the maintenance of our own morale. (United States 1). The idea of maintaining a high level of morale for soldiers and civilians was a common theme (and often a euphemism for propaganda) in the wartime discourse. Creel believed that “public opinion was without shape or force” at this time and it was his duty to guide it towards the right conclusions (Creel 100). CPI philosophy was “faith in democracy ... faith in the fact” (Kennedy 60),

and using this as a guide George Creel set up a system to disseminate “educational and informative” information (United States 1). However, he “did not call it ‘propaganda,’ for that word, in German hands, had come to be associated with lies and corruptions” (United States 1). Already, the word itself had begun to pick up negative connotations, although most continued to agree that it was necessary to win the war. Creel himself had been a prominent muckraker and progressive reformer, who wholeheartedly believed that publicity, not censorship, was the best way to sway public sentiments (Kennedy 59-60). CPI “was a gargantuan advertising agency the like of which the country had never known” (Mock, *Words* 4). Unlike later U.S. propaganda organizations, CPI was unique in its strong focus on national, rather than international, opinion. It was “clear that *ideas*, for whatever reason they were held, took [America] into the war and kept alive the fiercely burning fires of industrial and military and naval activity” (italics in original) (Mock, *Words* 5). CPI made sure that immigrant farmers, factory workers, and middle class mothers all shared the idea that America had to go to war to protect their way of life, and that they could help. Although they never entered into a formal agreement, CPI found that libraries were an ideal outlet for their books and pamphlets explaining America’s position in the war. Indeed, Creel encouraged librarians to pay “special attention...to the task of collecting and exploiting material giving the reasons for America’s participation in the war” (Wiegand 53).

In addition to the influx of biased material coming to them from CPI, librarians faced increasing difficulties getting other material that they wanted. Postmaster General Albert Sidney Burlison was in charge of what materials were allowed through the mail, and he exercised his censorship powers to their fullest. In June of 1917, Congress passed

the Espionage Act, which gave the Postmaster General the authority to ban from the mail all materials advocating treason, insurrection or resistance to U.S. laws. Burleson took this as a decree to suppress mailings (mainly of journals and magazines) from radicals, pacifists, and foreign nationals (Kennedy 75-76). To make it even harder to get materials through, in October, Congress passed the Trading-with-the-Enemy Act. This required that all foreign language newspapers submit to the Post Office an English translation of any articles relating to the U.S. government, foreign government, or the War. Not only was this process costly and resulted in delayed publication of issues, but also in many cases the censorship was so harsh that editors were forced to suspend publication indefinitely (Kennedy 77). In at least one instance, Burleson revoked mailing privileges for propaganda being disseminated by Creel and the CPI (Kennedy 77-78). It became increasingly difficult for libraries to obtain material that had differing viewpoints on the war. This necessitated that they circulate a high percentage of material viewed favorably by the U.S. government, whether or not it was actually described as propaganda. From a librarian's perspective, the one good thing to come out of the Post Office was the decision to ship used magazines to army camps if the owner placed a one-cent stamp on the cover. These shipments were especially welcomed at hospitals and quarantined camps (Yust 189).

In May of 1918, censorship moved from the printed to the spoken word with the passage of amendments to the Espionage Act. Commonly known as the Sedition Act, this bill prohibited, among other offenses, "any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language" about government, Constitution, or flag of the United States, or the uniform of the Army or Navy (Kennedy 80). Interestingly, there is scant evidence that any librarians

protested this or other acts of censorship by the government - other than the delay in getting materials delivered (Wiegand 91).

The German propaganda and anti-war literature that did get delivered also posed problems for librarians. Most were worried about having it in their libraries at all. They did not want concerned citizens seeing it on the shelf and accuse the libraries of being unpatriotic. However, there was a movement not to throw away these materials, but instead keep them locked up in the central library and available only to scholars because “‘even the most ardent propagandist’ would want to know what his opponents were saying in order to specify their errors” (Geller 84). Edward H. Anderson, a librarian at the New York Public Library, put it another way by saying, “if Satan wrote a pro-German book we should want it for our reference shelves. It might be of use to future historians” (Mock, *Censorship* 162). Many librarians ended up bowing to public pressure to remove questionable materials from their shelves, but a few stood up for what they believed. John Cotton Dana, director of the Newark Free Public Library, was embroiled in controversy when he refused to remove several books sympathetic to Germany. A member of a local group, the Vigilantes, went to several libraries requesting that certain publications be removed from circulation. She contended that they were nothing more than German propaganda. While most librarians were happy to oblige, Dana declined under the assumption “that liberty of thought is a very desirable thing for the world and that liberty of thought can only be maintained by those who have free access to opinion” (Wiegand 96). The controversy went all the way to trustees of the Newark Free Public Library and was much discussed in the press. Ultimately, Dana’s decision was upheld, even if it was not popular at the time. In a March 1918 *Library Journal* editorial, the unnamed author

makes clear that there was still no good way to define seditious and propagandist materials towards the end of the war. The author states that the Vigilantes were overzealous, and Dana had a more reasonable view of circulating questionable material ([Seditious] 145).

Although the endorsement of propaganda by librarians may seem out of character, many saw the value in having civilians and especially soldiers of a single mind to win the war. William F. Yust, a librarian for the city of Rochester, New York and a camp librarian, noted that propaganda books, though extreme, “are performing a useful service in arousing people to the seriousness of the situation and the need of throwing their whole resources into the fray. People must be made to see the demons coming in order to hate them” (Yust 200). He also suggested that books “for getting a soldier into the right mental attitude” should “appeal to the intellect, the sensibilities, and the will (Yust 200). These would include personal narratives of the war, speeches by Woodrow Wilson and others, “books giving a correct idea of the Germans,” and more. (Yust 200).

Libraries did more during World War I than just make judgments about what books were appropriate for the public to read. They pitched in and made their buildings available for community meetings, collected books for soldiers, sold liberty bonds, educated their patrons on preserving food, and much more. The fervor to spread “good works” and be the go-to place for community and patriotic activities helped establish the usefulness of libraries in many places. However, knowingly or not, these same libraries were buying into the government’s propaganda efforts to support them during war time.

Libraries also engaged in propaganda of their own – self-promotion. One New York library established a War Service Department to showcase what it could do and services

it could provide during wartime in a display placed prominently in the reading room. A New Jersey library engaged in self-promotion by sponsoring a group of girls in a Fourth of July parade. These young ladies carried signs describing the war services of the library (Wiegand 32-33). These, and similar, activities brought patrons into the libraries in large numbers. Once there, the men, women, and children were bombarded with war-related material.

Library collections focused on the war effort. Several libraries reported that fiction circulation numbers declined as, “many women who are accustomed to take out books to read during their leisure hours are now devoting these hours to Red Cross or other work” (Wiegand 34). Instead, when patrons had time to read, they wanted information about the war or home front war work. William Howard Brett, of the Cleveland Public Library, suggested that libraries purchase books and magazines that offer instruction in military matters, books on food production and conservation, materials that will promote “a wholesome public sentiment in support of the government,” and avoid books that “tend to divide public sentiment ... and favor giving aid and comfort” to the enemy (Wiegand 34).

Libraries opened up their space to local groups such as the Red Cross or women’s groups. Some libraries were used as temporary recruiting stations. In Salt Lake City, the public library helped identify and register boys not in school for the Boys’ Working Reserve, and organization that recruited boys 16 or older for farm work. A Wisconsin library was used as a recruiting station for nurses, and in Minneapolis, several rooms were given over to the draft board (Wiegand 40). In addition, they provided instruction in wartime services such as knitting, scrap booking, and preserving food. The New York

Public Library gave specific directions to knitters about the quality and construction of socks for the troops. The Rochester (NY) Public Library provided materials and instructions to patrons willing to make scrapbooks for soldiers. They were mandated to be cheerful (to keep spirits high) and it was recommended that the contents include “good jokes and jingles, short stories and illustrated articles” (Yust 189).

Some libraries looked at the war as a way to instill the habit of reading into the American people. The main target for this goal was to “hook the kids on libraries” (Wiegand 46). A children’s librarian at the Boston Public Library commented that, “the War presents a great opportunity ... to stimulate an interest in history and to arouse and quicken a true sense of patriotism” (Wiegand 46). In many places, schools and libraries worked together to encourage reading. Librarians suggested project themes to teachers, and were often invited to talk directly to the students about “conservation and patriotism” (Wiegand 48). In addition, librarians used children as a means of getting pamphlets and books to their parents. As more and more children had to drop out of school and help out at home when older siblings or parents went to war, the libraries began offering course material to help them continue their education.

The other major focus of libraries during World War I was on providing reading material to soldiers. After the United States declared war on Germany, the president of the ALA appointed a War Services Committee. The government’s Commission on Training Camp Activities then voted to give this body responsibility to provide library facilities in camps (Koch 7). Under the direction of Woodrow Wilson, the ALA joined with six other organizations to streamline the collection of funds and books. The other agencies were YMCA, YWCA, War Camp Community Service, National Catholic War

Council, Jewish Welfare Board, and Salvation Army (“We are Seven” 1). ALA declared that: “the Government will furnish the supplies and equipment to make fighters. The America Library Association will furnish the material to help keep the minds of our soldiers in fighting trim” ([Notes] 5). The Secretary of War also appointed a group to the Library War Council with the aim of collecting a million dollars to be used for buildings, supplies, and personnel for the library work. This group met their goal quickly, and in addition to personal donations, they were given a grant of \$10,000 for each camp library from the Carnegie Corporation. At the same time the financial drive was going on, a nation-wide book drive was being held (Koch 7-8).

The book drive was centrally organized for getting the books to soldiers, but it was really up to the local libraries to promote and collect donations. Newton D. Baker, Secretary of War, eloquently explained what the books were needed for:

These boys are going to France; they are going to face conditions that we do not like to talk about, that we do not like to think about. They are going into a heroic enterprise and heroic enterprises involve sacrifices. I want them armed; I want them adequately armed and clothed by their government; but I want them to have invisible armor to take with them. I want them to have an armor made up of a set of social habits replacing those of their homes and communities, a set of social habits and a state of social mind born in the training camps, a new soldier state of mind, so that when they get overseas and are removed from the reach of our comforting and restraining and helpful hand, they will have gotten such a state of habits as will constitute a moral and intellectual armor for their protection overseas (Young 14).

An appeal was made for “many kinds of books, but especially good fiction, poetry, biography, history and travel, essays and drama, books for studying France, her country, people and language, Baedeker’s guide books (ironically enough) and books on citizenship, patriotism, and the War” (Yust 187). People were encouraged to give books in good conditions, and to give “their favorite volumes, from which it would hurt them to

part” (Yust 187). This last was from the notion that soldiers would enjoy your favorite books just as much, or more so, than you had, and he would certainly like them more than the dusty volumes you had never read. ALA worked closely with the Red Cross and YMCA during the book drives. In general, ALA material went to camps, the Red Cross sent theirs to hospitals, and the YMCA sent books to soldiers on the fronts (“Where” 5).

Once the books were collected, they had to be sorted. Although most of the books were of good enough condition and contents to be shipped out, many of the books that had been donated were unsuitable to send to soldiers. These were either recycled or sold and the money used for more suitable books. The unusable books included copies of children’s literature, a set of *Undertaker’s Review*, and “at least one copy of every improper book that was ever written” (Koch 15-16). Other volumes that were rejected for the soldiers included out of date textbooks, books predating the Civil War, “a diary for 1916 partially filled in by the donor,” and, of course, German propaganda (Koch 16). Although these are extreme examples, a lot of book judgment was subjective and ultimately came down to the question of which books would enhance soldier morale and remind them of what they were fighting for.

Soldiers appreciated their access to a library, and they did not seem to complain about their choices of reading material. The ALA described their use of camp libraries in self-praising terms: “the men frequent by hundreds the various library centres [sic]. Tired, homesick and perhaps discouraged, they there associate for a time with buoyant, optimistic spirits, well-stored minds, constructive thoughts, and come out refreshed, filled with a new hope, and heartened to carry through their immediate task” (Koch 1). Army officers also valued the effect that reading had on their men, and often “expressed

appreciation of the value of good propaganda material in building the morale of the men (Koch 23).

Even after the Armistice, the ALA did not stop providing books. Two major concerns were the prisoners of war (POWs) in Germany and Austria, as well as the wounded soldiers recuperating in hospitals across Europe and America. By this point, the purpose of books and other propaganda was not to inspire patriotism, but was solely focused on keeping up morale. Within the network of Red Cross, YMCA, and Knights of Columbus, the ALA was able to distribute books across Europe. Everyone involved was still happy to help the effort, for books in POW camps were thought to “mean life and sanity to some ... [and] hope and joy to all” (“A.L.A. Follows” 7). In hospitals, men began to think of returning to life after the war, and “every sort of technical books” were in high demand as many soldiers began vocational training and needed to supplement their training (Koch 32).

Another concern after the war ended was that soldiers stationed in peaceful areas while waiting to be shipped home were eager to read but did not have the means to do so. Most of the books and magazines that had been provided during the fighting had been “read to pieces” or torn apart and read in serial fashion by the men in a unit (Yust 204).

As the soldiers returned home and life settled back into routine, librarians had a chance to look back at what they had spent the past years doing and reflect on the choices they had made. For the most part, they praised themselves for the good work that had been done in providing books to soldiers and answering the needs of those still at home. The librarians were more concerned with rebuilding in Europe and a return to normalcy in the U.S. to dwell on their controversial actions of war time propaganda and censorship.

By the end of the 1930s, America was pulling out of the Great Depression and girding itself for war in Europe again. According to contemporary writers, “public opinion is primarily a response to propaganda stimuli” and “ours is an age of competing propagandas. The task of the thoughtful citizen ... then becomes that of distinguishing and choosing between rival propagandas” (Lavine vii). In other words, propaganda was pervasive in pre-World War II society and people were expected to be able to recognize and filter it.

In Europe, the Axis countries were restricting free thought in dramatic ways. Adolf Hitler was ascending to power in Germany, and he began fighting his own propaganda war there and abroad. With the help of Paul Joseph Goebbels, German Minister of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment, Hitler began a campaign to turn the collective German mind to his way of thinking. Before war was declared, the British dropped leaflets on German towns and cities in a weak attempt to counteract what was happening. Goebbels declared the British attempt at propaganda to be “childish and laughable” and Hitler declared: “if they want to know something about propaganda, let them learn from us” (Lavine 2). Librarians in the U.S. were attuned to this use of propaganda and were well aware that Americans would not stand for having others’ views shoved down their throats.

There was much discussion within the library community about censorship and propaganda. Americans were jaded about force fed information, both as a result of World War I information campaigns and the obvious propaganda being distributed by the Nazis. In a *Library Journal* article titled “Libraries in the Present Emergency,” Felix Pollak

looks at the way the Nazis treat information as compared to American libraries. The tone of the article is decidedly reactionary, and plainly lays out the threat:

“What we are experiencing today is more than a war against men and machines. It is a systematic revolt against spiritual life itself. Books are burned and banned. The writers of books are silenced in concentration camps. The free spirit is persecuted and hunted across the earth, for “free spirit” is the name of Hitler’s Enemy No. 1, and unless it is totally dead totalitarianism cannot live” (Pollak 17).

Benjamin Chubak agreed with this sentiment, but cautioned librarians not to force this idea at patrons. However, he suggested that, “the role of the librarian in this present war effort is no small one. He can help build morale not only by having in his library all those books that give us this needed goal to fight for, but he should actively “sell” them to the public. We must forget our peacetime attitude of permitting the public to choose their own reading matter. If censorship is called for, then let us censor!” (Chubak 348). He suggests caution because of the lingering ideas about propaganda from the last war. The former president of A.L.A. was not so shy about the role of libraries and propaganda. Charles Harvey Brown rallied the librarians to “hope that our American library will be an ever-increasing menace to fascism and the philosophy it represents” (Brown, “Contribution” 598).

On December 7, 1941, Japanese forces attacked the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor and Japan declared war on the United States and Great Britain. The next day, America declared war on Japan, who declared their allegiance to the Axis powers. Three days later, on December 11, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States as well (Shaw 61-7). Almost overnight, our nation mobilized and went to war. In 1942, librarians identified their goals and duties on the home front, and librarians across the country found ways to support the war effort. Although libraries were not considered “essential”

services by the government, librarians still felt they had a moral duty to keep the nation well informed with wartime information (Becker 56). This goal had many facets, but the main efforts were to (1) inform patrons why we were fighting, (2) who we were fighting, (3) educate them on what they could do to help, and (4) provide lighter readings to give them an escape from the war. Although the dual approach to both inform and protect American civilians seems contradictory, librarians provided these essential services to a nation eager to put them to use.

Even more so than in the First World War, books were seen as essential to sway public opinion. Most in the publishing, bookselling, and library communities agreed on “the importance in a wartime society of books as disseminators of information and ideas and as morale-builders” (Council 3). Even the nation’s leaders agreed. In late 1942, Franklin Roosevelt sent a letter to this effect to the Council on Books in Wartime, an organization of publishers and booksellers who developed cheap paperbacks for shipment to soldiers. Roosevelt declared: “we have seen the growing power of books as weapons ... a war of ideas can no more be won without books than a naval war can be won without ships” (Council contents verso). In addition to books, librarians were encouraged to promote other forms of propaganda. Posters and pictures were championed as “propaganda of nutrition, civilian defense, housing, and public health” (New York Public Library 17).

The American Library Association developed policies to help guide librarians through the war. Two of the objectives of libraries were to “disseminate authentic information and sound teachings” and “make available valid interpretations of current

facts and events” (Unger 3). Libraries were also encouraged to help maintain civilian morale.

In the January 1, 1942 edition of *Library Journal*, much was being said about the war. The first articles after entry into the war had a feeling of rallying the troops and getting them prepared to face the enemy. It was quite well known who the enemy was – the Axis powers and their corrupt ideals. It was up to libraries to strengthen themselves internally to face this onslaught in the mental battlefield. Franklin F. Hopper, Director of the New York Public Library, was quick to admonish that: “our first duty is to maintain our own morale in these difficult days. There is no question that librarians officially and personally are likely to encounter trying times. The funds to maintain our work are not unlikely to be reduce, although we shall need money as never before to render the service that will be never more needed” (Hopper 9). That service was providing Americans with reading material to both strengthen their feelings for their nation and to give them the skills to be able to contribute to the war effort. Later that month, Mrs. Mary Peacock Douglas, agreed and wrote: “In order to learn the real meaning of Americanism and of democracy, boys and girls, and men and women, must be supplied with books and printed materials which give stirring pictures of those activities which have gone into the making of the American way of life” (Douglas 114-5).

Obviously, the self-proclaimed role of the librarian at the start of the war was to provide information. The type of information was spelled out in a January 1 *Library Journal* editorial quite clearly. The author admonished libraries to have on hand both fiction and non-fiction to cover their obligations. First, technical information was necessary for defense work and factual books were needed to give patrons background on

the places and people involved in the war. In terms of fiction, there was a need for juvenile books to give children “havens of refuge” and adult fiction to give their parents “mental escape that will relieve strained nerves, anxieties, and heart-aches” (Mead 30-31). Franklin F. Hopper put it another way: “While the young men of the nation are fighting our battles, we librarians have a supreme duty not only to aid them but to help their fathers and mothers, their brothers and sisters keep the faith. We have in our hands the materials to give them the facts, to develop their understanding, to preserve their belief in our standards of value” (Hopper 11). This borders on a call for propaganda, although that word is never used. It is obvious that the writer feels it is a moral, upstanding duty that librarians must perform. In an editorial later that year, the need for information was made to seem even more pressing. The author makes clear that “actual war has come to the United States and complete victory depends as much on the civilian state of mind as on our armed forces. Books and libraries are indispensable, for every citizen must know clearly the issues at stake, speculation must become conviction, and through a knowledge of this country’s history and literature, we must understand that it stands for democracy, well worth living for and defending” (Americanism 124).

Not only was the idea of providing information important, but librarians began to consider books themselves as weapons. In fact, civilians were told that “books are powerful weapons and your library urges you to use these weapons. Defense is army and navy; defense is also education and intelligence” (Fitzpatrick 213). Not only did the public have an obligation to choose their reading wisely, but one author admonished libraries to make a “decision about the kind of weapons we are to store and the use that will be made of them, a use designed for our destruction or a use serving the fight against

destruction” (Pollak 14). The same author went on to warn: “If we librarians fail to recognize the true nature of this menace, we will have failed in our mission altogether. Our decision today, whether to make libraries the arsenals of weapons for intellectual and moral resistance or the arsenals of weapons with which to kill time – this decision, as I see it, may well determine the role that libraries will play in decenniums to come” (Pollak 14). Although not completely aware of what was happening overseas, librarians did know that Hitler “was inspired to destroy cultures” and that as a result of his efforts “mankind will be forever poorer” (Shaffer 428-9). The American Library Association did not idly sit by and watch the issue pass before them. In fact, A.L.A. formulated a statement of war-time library policy which included the following:

“Every library must organize its services and expenditures without delay to meet the necessities of a nation at war. Each library activity must stand a triple scrutiny. Will it contribute to victory?
Will it help to make a better America?
Will it help to make a better world?
Whatever fails to meet this test must yield to things more urgent” (Library Policy 72).

America was a nation at war, and librarians made sure that they did not forget this fact. Between harsh editorials and lighter patriotic pieces, members of A.L.A. could not forget that they now had a greater duty to uphold.

Librarians were increasingly concerned about the destruction of books and libraries overseas. One result of Hitler’s attempt to assimilate other cultures into his Third Reich was destroying the evidence – often in the form of books – that their culture was different from his ideal. In both German and Japan, books filled with contradictory ideas were seen as “not only weapons to wage war but also the enemy to be tagged for obliteration” (Shaffer 428). Librarians clearly saw that “the great cost of war is in cultural

and spiritual values, and this loss is absolute” (Butler 9). While the loss of physical books and buildings was devastating, even harder to swallow was the idea that the extent of loss would never truly be known as many of the catalogs were destroyed too. Images of book burnings and destroyed libraries hit close to home for American librarians, and it gave them renewed vigor to support the government during the war.

As the first year of war drew to a close, Americans realized that it was not going to end quickly and morale sagged. As early as June, Howard F. McGaw sparked controversy by suggesting that libraries should be stewards of peace, not champions of war. However, within the next month, the Japanese burned the Library of the University of the Philippines in order to ensure the “destruction of all books having any reference to democracy, the United States, Great Britain or Anglo-Saxon culture,” and the libraries reaffirmed their cause (Library Burned 801). In November, reports began to suggest that America was losing the war, and Charles Harvey Brown questioned, “why are we losing this war and what can we LIBRARIANS do about it? No one of us can doubt that defeat would mean the end of libraries as we know them. It would mean the end of all those liberties we cherish most dearly” (Brown, “First” 931). Although he too sounds less sure of victory, he realizes that “this war effort demands the best of all of us. If we lose, everything will be gone except life itself” (Brown, “First” 933).

One way in which libraries, as well as communities, could make sure the “American way of life” was carried on was to participate in the Victory Book Campaign “sponsored by the American Red Cross, the U.S.O., and the A.L.A.” (Hopper 9-10). The goal of this book drive was to “collect from five to ten million good readable books to be placed in the U.S.O. buildings at the camps, on the ships of the navy, and the merchant

marine” (Hopper 10). Although this drive was initially not encouraged by the military, they soon realized that “the army did need books, and whether invited to do so or not, the American people – from school boys to club women – urgently desired to give them” (Jamieson 60). It was deemed best to have organized book drives rather than hodgepodge giving, and these drives “gave civilians a sense of participation in the war effort” (Jamieson 60). The Victory Book Campaign was advertised in almost every issue of war-time *Library Journal*. As one librarian pointed out, “the civilian librarian may or may not find time to knit sweaters or join the motor corps, but all librarians are gladly and generously giving their time and knowledge in their own field” (MacCloskey 117).

Military libraries swelled due to Victory Book donations and increased government spending. Similar to the civilian libraries, they made it their goal to supply servicemen (and women) with whatever they wanted or needed as part of the war effort. Elizabeth MacCloskey, a librarian with the Sixth Corps in Chicago, described her work as follows:

“Army libraries are for men living in a man’s world. We want to give our patrons what they want, rather than what we think they should have. We feel proud that no request is made timidly, whether it is an occasional one for *Alice in Wonderland* or the more usual “Got any new Zane Grey’s?” Westerns are the outstanding leaders everywhere, yet the two most popular individual titles are *Mein Kampf* and *Berlin Diary*. The American soldier knows what he is fighting for but wants to learn more about what he is fighting against” (MacCloskey 119).

It is important to note that learning more about the enemy was popular with both military and civilian patrons. The Director of Libraries for the Navy was especially proud of the work that had been done for the military. She described the expansion of libraries thusly: “The libraries have increased to a thousand or more agencies afloat and ashore; and when we realize that geographically they must cover the whole world now wherever a huge

battleship goes, wherever a lonely outpost listens on the edge of a jungle, we salute the effort made to provide books for the Navy men” (Du Bois 445). The zeal of librarians in providing reading material to servicemen was praised by the military as “maintenance of morale,” and was seen as vital in helping the boys come home (Jamieson 5).

At the start of World War II, librarians knew that they faced a challenge to both educate about and shelter Americans from the facts of war. This two-sided task was publicly tackled with vigor and cheerfulness, although there were those who asked tougher questions in the safety of their professional association. Overall, librarians provided a great service to the hardworking men and women who served their country at home and overseas. There was a sense of pride at being the guardians and disseminators of American culture and knowledge. Even when the war seemed to drag on too long, librarians still did their best to help out. In the end, they agreed with Charles Harvey Brown who cheered on the librarians and wrote: “All of us must fight, not for the glorification of our profession or our libraries, but because our work is essential. Food, books, or even tanks or planes would be useless in achieving victory without the aid of other instruments, but all are necessary in varying degrees” (Brown 597-8).

World War II ended in 1945, and soon a new enemy appeared on the horizon – the specter of communism. America was now involved in a new kind of war: a war of ideas. This new arena was uniquely suited for libraries as battlegrounds and books as weapons. Communism was used as a justification for almost every government action over the course of the next four decades. Even when those actions were not popular, it librarians were expected to help spread the idea that communism was a moral evil that should not be allowed to infiltrate the United States. Librarians were aware of this threat,

and one described it thusly: “during the past three or four decades we have seen a comparatively peaceful and serene way of life broken by a series of wars, panics, depressions, phenomenal developments in methods of destruction, more wars and the accompanying rising tides of statism[sic], nationalism, communism, socialism, and other world-wide “isms”” (Miller 833). New things were happening, and librarians had to adjust to this new way of life. It is interesting to note that during the Cold War, most government sponsored propaganda was focused internationally instead of on the home front. Many librarians were sent overseas to help sell Americana and democracy to countries that looked vulnerable to communism. At home, television was quickly becoming the popular way to communicate with the average American citizen, and this insulated librarians somewhat from the full responsibility of spreading propaganda during this period.

Setting aside the technological advances that allowed the government to spread its message across many mediums and strata of society, the librarian was still faced with a task of educating a new generation. The “baby boomers” were learning how to read, and as the Cold War continued, they would go off to college and learn how to run the country. In 1950, Herman W. Liebert encouraged librarians to take their responsibilities seriously. In his eloquent prose, he goaded them:

In a world of such destructive forces as the atomic bomb and Senator McCarthy, I suppose that few people, especially librarians, would regard library work as one of the most dangerous professions in existence. Yet, in a curious way it is. Many jobs are dangerous because they involve the handling of perilous materials— molten steel, death-dealing bacteria, high explosives— with which a single mis-step may mean a local disaster. But none of these is so powerful, so full of good if handled correctly, so full of destruction if handled carelessly, as the commodity that librarians handle every day. That commodity is ideas (Liebert 1865).

Liebert's main concern was that the library was losing ground to other activities, such as watching TV or going shopping. His worry is that the American citizens will come to take democracy and freedom for granted, and that ultimately this will be the fault of the librarian who did not push their patrons to learn about it.

Liebert and other librarians of the 1950s and 1960s became increasingly concerned about social justice and intellectual freedom. The latter became a popular buzzword for the profession, and one that has lasted to the present day. In 1950, this was described as: "the kinds of books we select for others to read are a very clear index of whether we are exerting leadership or whether we are playing it safe or pandering to our own prejudices" (Liebert 1871). In other words, librarians could easily exercise censorship or promote propaganda, but to do so would do an injustice to the library patron and the free exchange of ideas. Librarians had to face censorship from within the community, as activists called for the removal of certain books and magazines from library shelves. Although remaining personally unbiased was hard, librarians were encouraged to do so and to "see that the public is provided with unbiased materials" (Miller 834).

The American Library Association took a stance on propaganda and censorship in 1953. In that year, they adopted the Freedom to Read Statement that had been written in conjunction with the American Book Publisher's Council. The statement addressed the right of the public to read what they wanted, and it warned that: "when so many of our apprehensions are directed against an ideology, the expression of a dissident idea becomes a thing feared in itself, and we tend to move against it as against a hostile deed, with suppression" (Thomison 190).

When censorship and propagandist activities did take place, there was not the nationwide acceptance that had been there in past decades. In 1955, a group of California librarians compiled a list of books that they believed should be banned from local high school libraries because the authors had Communist leanings. Edward R. Murrow picked up on the story and broadcast it to the nation in a broadcast of *See It Now*. Several guests, including librarians, debated the position of librarian as censor during the program. Murrow, at the conclusion of the program, noted that five books had eventually been returned to the shelves, but several others were still missing (“Murrow’s TV program 1245-46). A decade later, censorship was still being practiced, but with a different audience in mind. In 1968 a Huntsville, AL lawyer had the book *Why Are We in Vietnam?* removed from library bookshelves. In this case, the book was soon returned after the librarian and community rose up against such a practice (“Huntsville Public Library” 138). Archibald MacLeish, a former Librarian of Congress, saw the effects of McCarthyism and censorship in something as simple as a library dedication. He notes that the emphasis “shifted from the building to the books: it was the books you fought for because it was the books that were under attack” (MacLeish 3519).

The librarian’s view of intellectual freedom went beyond just freedom to read. Librarians, especially in the South, were concerned about free speech and racism. John N. Carter, assistant director of libraries at Mississippi State University, became embroiled in a campus-wide controversy when he supported a student decision to invite a radical speaker to campus. The Board of Trustees demanded that the speaker be uninvited, and the issue went to court. Carter used his experience to encourage other librarians to stand up for their beliefs because of the respect he gained from the students and faculty

members. He learned that “despite their personal prejudices, most people deeply respect intellectual courage,” and he encouraged other librarians to stand up for their beliefs (Carter 3618). The fine line between spreading propaganda and sharing a personal opinion in a professional setting was not discussed however.

Throughout Korea, McCarthyism and Vietnam, the U.S. government toned down their propaganda campaign at home. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Americans denounced the propaganda that had been force fed to them from the government. Librarians revved up a campaign for “freedom to read” and against censorship and propaganda. No one believed that such events would occur in the U.S. again. However, in 2001, terrorists flew a plane into the World Trade Center in New York City and a familiar scene repeated itself. It may be true that if we forget history we are doomed to repeat it, and in this case it seems to be true. In the wake of 9/11, America witnessed a surge of patriotic zeal that is reminiscent of the way the country behaved following Pearl Harbor.

The ALA has promoted its policies of Freedom to Read and the Library Bill of Rights in this new era. Building on their traditions established during the Cold War, libraries look at themselves as neutral zones where anybody can read or say anything. The current ALA Freedom to Read statement notes:

We trust Americans to recognize propaganda and misinformation, and to make their own decisions about what they read and believe. We do not believe they are prepared to sacrifice their heritage of a free press in order to be "protected" against what others think may be bad for them (Freedom to Read Statement).

At one time, librarians were billed as the “keepers of knowledge” whose role it was to provide American citizens for the best and most appropriate literature for them to read. It seems fitting that as libraries have moved into the 21st century they have given some of this power back to the citizens.

Libraries have seen many shades of propaganda during the 20th century. In many ways, the following statement rings true: “The line between education and propaganda, as we practice it, is always a fine one” (Stephens 129). This line is taken from a Cold War propaganda guide, but in many ways it describes the world in which librarians operate. There are always teachable moments, and librarians strive to spread the love of reading and the thrill of finding information. With so much information available, librarians can no longer be the thought police. They have to take a step back, teach patrons to think for themselves, and be satisfied that they have done their jobs.

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