

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: *“Beans are Bullets” and “Of Course I Can!”
Exhibiting War-Era Posters from the Collection of the
National Agriculture Library*

Cory Bernat, Master of Arts, 2009

Directed By: Associate Professor, David Freund, Department of History

An exhibit of food and agriculture posters in the Special Collection of the National Agriculture Library will display posters from World Wars I and II side by side. What did these messages look like and how did they change over time? Public servants produced the earlier posters to reflect “reason-why” approaches to mass communication. During WWII, the Advertising Council’s business-minded admen, took over with their techniques for modern advertising and mass persuasion. Poster text shortened, the tone lightened and images were more frequent and splashier. This collection of posters bear witness to the professionalization and rising influence of the advertising industry in the 1920s and 30s, and reveals the agendas of the creators and their assumptions about homefront populations. The posters raise questions about the sources and ambitions of government sponsored messages designed to encourage cooperation with war efforts and modify homefront behavior.

*“Beans are Bullets” and “Of Course I Can!”
Exhibiting War-Era Posters from the Collection
of the National Agriculture Library*

By

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INTRODUCTION

“All you gentlemen have to do is to induce the American people to change their ways of living — that’s all.”¹ With this ironic remark, the chief of publicity of the Food Administration’s Educational Division reminded a conference of state educational directors in 1917 that their fundamental duty was to encourage Americans to modify their behavior on a grand scale during a time of war. The reminder also warned them the task would not be easy. In the 1910s, United States citizens valued “individual initiative” and the democracy they believed existed because of it. Yet, the Food Administration asked the American public — reluctant to enter a European war — to put the interests of the nation and the concerns of global events before their individual interests. They were asked to willingly adjust consumption habits by conserving food staples like wheat, meat and sugar. WWII agencies with similar goals, such as the War Food Administration and the Office of Price Administration, formed in 1941 under different political circumstances, and with different rules and expectations from the public. For both wars, a combination of agencies produced publicity materials, including posters, in an attempt to capture the American public’s attention, and to encourage citizens to cooperate with their government and act in the interests of the nation. What did these messages look like?

The planning of an exhibit of posters from World Wars I and II at the National Agriculture Library (NAL) is the starting point of this inquiry. The posters at NAL focus on food and agriculture in wartime, including issues related to food production,

¹ John S. Pardee quoted by Maxcy Robson Dickson, *The Food Front in World War I* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Public Affairs, 1944), 26.

farm management, food consumption, and other homefront behavior. The poster campaigns express seemingly similar intentions — to modify the daily behavior of large homefront populations. However, different political, economic and social environments shaped the government messages produced during the two wars. Through NAL’s poster collection, researchers can compare the visual information and propaganda campaigns from two time periods, in addition to poster production techniques and styles. This comparison reveals the agendas important to the authors of the posters when they were produced, and the way messages were communicated in times of war to a mass audience. And most of all, what they felt would work.

While decorative at times, the mass-produced poster was a primary form of one-way communication in the late 1800’s and early 1900s — before radio and television guaranteed regular contact with the public. Like TV and radio, however, posters conveyed messages intended for a mass audience. They were designed to be easy and quick to understand, or at the very least, attention-grabbing. As the chairmen of the WWI propaganda agency explained, “I had the conviction that the poster must play a great part in the fight for public opinion. The printed word might not be read, people might not choose to attend meetings or to watch motion pictures, but the billboard was something that caught even the most indifferent eye.”²

² George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (1920; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1972), 133.



Figure 1
War Department Publicity Photo, 1917.
Fatty Arbuckle, famous actor and comedian, photographed pasting up a Liberty Loan poster in Times Square, New York. This show of celebrity support would have been sent to newspapers by a government publicity office. The photograph illustrates how posters were displayed in urban spaces, and in what quantities.
Photographer: Paul Thompson
Source: American Unofficial Collection of World War I Photographs, 1917-1918, NARA, College Park.

The changing styles of the war posters bear witness to the professionalization of the advertising industry in the US in the 1920s and 30s. Commercial advertisers, who formed the Advertising Council, staffed the non-commercial Office of War Information during WWII and produced most of the government's posters during the later war. The posters present an opportunity to understand the messages and the agendas of the advertisers who produced them. Consequently, this research project is also an argument for using the posters and popular visual media as historical evidence.

My guides are cultural observers who believe that public messages and popular media have consequences worthy of investigation — that they relay messages about society and how it functions. Public messages are capable of creating “a symbolic universe where certain cultural values are sanctioned and others are rendered marginal or invisible.”³ George Roeder contends, “It is impossible fully to understand twentieth-century events like World War II without careful attention to

³ T. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 3.

the role played by visual images in stirring and shaping public attitudes.”⁴

Additionally, competing interests have influence over personal habits, especially consumption habits, which are never completely private; “they have public sources and public consequences.”⁵ During WWI, the public consequences of responsible, private behavior were often described in the text of a war poster, while similar posters from WWII usually opted to prioritize private gain. Why the change?

By investigating posters as a form of one-way communication from above, I will examine the types of messages sent, the methods used to send them, and how the messages reflected the needs of war and the posters’ creators. What assumptions and agendas of the creators did the posters make visible? How did these agendas change over time? What do the posters reveal about strategies to induce the American people to change their behavior?

PART 1

A comparison of canning posters reveals a particularly sharp divergence between homefront posters produced during WWI and II. During both wars, home canning was encouraged as a way to conserve food and avoid waste, especially of surplus garden produce. Canning was a popular, agreeable poster topic, which served as an excuse to promote reassuring images of women in the home and abundance on the homefront. When shown canning, a wartime homemaker was shown creating

⁴ George Roeder, *The Censored War: American Visual Experience during World War Two* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 6.

⁵ Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 290-1.

something for later use, as opposed to going without, and businesses appreciated that canning posters did not instruct consumers to buy *less* of anything. In WWI, posters about canning emphasized war, allies, duty, thrift, and famine. A poster produced in New Hampshire warned, “The Situation is Critical. We must save THE FOOD SUPPLIES,” and declared, “Every woman who saves food is a patriotic soldier in the nation’s army” (fig. 2). Another asked women, “Help to feed our soldiers in France.” Others read, “Food Thrift—Your Patriotic Gift,” (Fig. 3) and “NOW is the TIME to DO YOUR BIT: Know Foods and Food Values” (fig. 4). Another WWI poster depicted a bright and colorful array of produce, but behind it was a woman in patriotic garb with a serious face and the text, “WIN THE NEXT WAR NOW”— a somber message to ponder when planning what to can for future use (fig. 5).

In contrast, WWII canning posters created by the Ad Council depicted the smiling faces and carefree homemakers that had been featured in commercial advertising. In one poster, a cute young girl grinned at her attractive, blonde mother as she helped with a jar, and asked, “We’ll have lots to eat this winter, won’t we mother?” (fig. 6). In a poster created for the National Garden Program, a rosy-cheeked woman with jars spilling out of her arms declared, “OF COURSE I CAN! I’m as patriotic as can be — and ration points won’t worry me!” (fig. 7). For another, canning was referenced enthusiastically: “IT’S A REAL WAR JOB!” (fig. 8). And yet another WWII poster depicted a smiling woman in overalls and a straw hat standing in front of impressively colorful jars of produce that were taller than her. With an outstretched arm as if she were a product model, she showed off the abundant jars and reminded other women, “Get your canning supplies now!” (fig. 9).

The WWII posters transformed somber messages about conservation, and a practical wartime activity, into an opportunity to worry less and consume more. How did this happen?

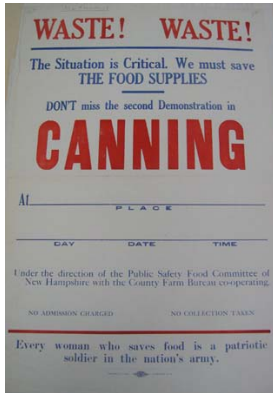


Figure 2
 “The Situation is Critical. We must save THE FOOD SUPPLIES.”
 Public Safety Food Commission of New Hampshire with the County Farm Bureau, c.1917.

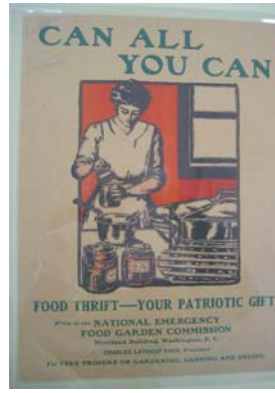


Figure 3
 CAN ALL YOU CAN
 Food Thrift—Your Patriotic Gift.
 National War Garden Commission, c. 1917.



Figure 4
 Women of the Home
 NOW is the TIME to DO YOUR BIT
 Know Foods and Food Values.
 The PA State College School of Agriculture and Experimentation Station, c.1917.



Figure 5
 Win the Next War Now.
 National War Garden Commission, c. 1917.



Figure 6
 “We’ll have lots to eat this winter, won’t we mother?”
 United States. Office of War Information. Division of Public Inquiries, 1943.
 Source: Posters, World War II, UNT Catalog b2850376



Figure 7
 “Of Course I Can! I’m as patriotic as can be— And ration points won’t worry me!”
 Dick Williams, artist. National Garden Program. USDA, 1946.

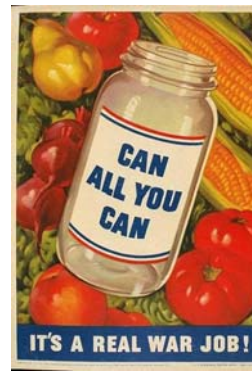


Figure 8
 CAN ALL YOU CAN
 IT’S A REAL WAR JOB!
 OWI, 1943.



Figure 9
 Grow More... Can More...
 In '44
 Get Your Canning Supplies Now!
 USDA, 1943.

While the strategies of mass persuasion and poster design had visibly changed between the wars, figures 2–9 highlight a striking consistency among the canning posters. Posters from both wars addressed women as similar, and in many cases, as unchanging. Despite public discussion and apprehension over women’s entry into the wartime workforce, which placed women in a production role, posters almost always depicted women in traditionally acceptable scenarios as consumers and caretakers, in the home, with food, and later, shopping patriotically within the guidelines of rationing. Women depicted in traditional roles served as symbols of stability, and delegated women as the “guardians of a way of life temporarily disrupted by uncertainty, violence, and prolonged separation from loved ones.”⁶ Some posters did recruit women for war work outside of the home, but in general, war was no time to publicize expanded roles for women. Advertisers *and* government administrators consistently promoted a mainstream, non-threatening set of assumptions “a way to make sense of the tumultuous times; it fed the hope that once the war was over society could be restored to its previous order.”⁷ By reinforcing gender norms in popular media, the homefront adopted a feminine persona, since the “real” front was unquestionably masculine.⁸ Such clear distinctions provided government administrators and advertisers with a defined homefront audience for whom clear messages could be created and disseminated during both wartimes.

Wartime food conservation and rationing functioned simultaneously to elevate women’s status and to maintain gender hierarchies. In WWII, by taking the Home

⁶ Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 132.

⁷ Amy Bently, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Food Rationing* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

Front Pledge to “use ration points in full” and “pay no more than ceiling prices,” women not only swore to make food matters part of their war zone, contends historian Amy Bentley, but they also “implicitly acknowledged that food matters were women’s work.”⁹ For the previous war effort, Hoover clearly referred to women’s work in 1917 when he announced, “There is no royal road to food conservation.” He continued, “It can be accomplished only through sincere and earnest daily cooperation in the 20,000,000 kitchens and at the 20,000,000 dinner tables of the United States.”¹⁰ In other words, conserving food would be an unglamorous, daily effort performed by those who spent time preparing and serving food. For the later war, OWI’s head administrator, Elmer Davis admitted, “There is no question of the general willingness to do the obvious things, the spectacular things; but plenty of people are going to have to do dull and drab and uninteresting work besides, if we are to win the war.”¹¹ Since men got to do the spectacular things, metaphorical war language was usually invoked to bestow wartime importance to women’s work, and it often revealed patronizing undertones. Declaring kitchens as battle stations or canning as “A REAL WAR JOB!” (fig. 8) enabled media to adhere to mainstream assumptions about the appropriateness of certain types of work for women. If cooking and shopping were patriotic acts, then homefront contributions could be kept within the status quo of consumerism and consumption. This sentiment existed between the wars, too. During the National Recovery Administration’s Blue Eagle campaign, female shoppers

⁹ Bentley, 38.

¹⁰ Hoover quoted by Maxcy Robson Dickson, *The Food Front in World War I* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Public Affairs, 1944), 22.

¹¹ Elmer Davis, “War Information,” *War Information and Censorship*. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1943, 45.

specifically had been encouraged by General Hugh Johnson, director of the NRA publicity campaign, to shop only at stores displaying a Blue Eagle logo. “It is women in homes and not soldiers in uniforms who will this time save our country from misery and discord...It is zero hour for housewives. Their battle cry is ‘Buy Now under the Blue Eagle.’”¹² At least one female voice, Susan B. Anthony II, suggested an alternative battle cry for women during WWII, and argued, “The actual Key to Victory in this war in the extrication of women — all women — from the relative unproductively of the kitchen, and the enrolling of them in the high productivity of factory, office and field.” In her book, *Out of the Kitchen—Into War*, she criticized private interests and the homefront expectations placed on women:

Lurking behind the nutrition posters, the committees and conferences, [is] the hoary notion that in the solemn business of winning a war women’s chief contribution should come through *more* hours of shopping and *more* conversation about food, meat cuts, vegetables and vitamins....from the point of view of serious women’s work the suggested confining of womanpower to the monotonies of nutrition seems about as enlightened as limiting them to knitting. Able-bodied women [are] exhorted as a primary war aim to “prepare adequate meals for your own families and reform your own families’ poor food habits.” Women’s time is expendable — that was the only conclusion you [could] come to.¹³

Anthony’s ideas could not compete with advertisers, politicians and other women. Too many parties had invested in what the homefront kitchen symbolized. According to Bently, minimizing women’s kitchen duties would have undermined WWII’s “prevailing wartime politics of sacrifice, which promised citizens that the American emphasis on private consumption need not be relinquished in the name of the war

¹² General Hugh Johnson quoted by Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 111.

¹³ Susan B. Anthony II, *Out of the Kitchen—Into War: Women’s Winning Role in the Nation’s Drama* (New York: Stephen Day, 1943), 5, 43-44.

effort.”¹⁴ Assumptions about the roles of women on the homefront may have stayed the same, as posters from both wars show, but other features changed dramatically — the posters look different and communicate differently.

The WWI posters are somber, rational and serious. They reflect the urgent tone of a United States government entering into major international conflict for the first time, and in need of unprecedented citizen cooperation. Passage of the Lever Act on August 10, 1917, and the creation of the United States Food Administration, exemplifies the expanded emergency powers President Woodrow Wilson believed he needed after the US entered World War I in April 1917.¹⁵ He recognized the need for a government agency to coordinate a food conservation campaign and to allow the US to continue to send food to allies while preventing inflation, hoarding and shortages at home. He wanted to grant the Food Administration power to control food supplies, distribution, and pricing, which meant unprecedented government intervention in the market to purchase and distribute foodstuffs, and if necessary, to impose rationing. Aware of the American public’s traditional suspicions of authoritarian government, Wilson emphasized democracy and freedom when he appointed Herbert Hoover as Food Administrator on May 19, 1917: “The successful conduct of the food administration... will be the finest possible demonstration of the willingness, the ability, and the efficiency of democracy, and of its justified reliance upon the freedom of individual initiative.”¹⁶ Wilson’s reference to public

¹⁴ Bently, 42.

¹⁵ The bill was passed, and the Food Administration was established, on Hoover’s 43rd birthday. See George Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover: Master of Emergencies 1917-1918* (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 71.

¹⁶ Woodrow Wilson, statement on the Lever Bill, quoted in *New York Times*, May 20, 1917, section 1, p. 1, cited by Nash, 24.

volunteerism — the “willingness” — underscored a national reverence for business-minded efficiency and a libertarian spirit, which many believed constituted the core values of a strong democracy. Government administrators had been traditionally hesitant to interfere in the “freedom of individual initiative” or in the economic matters of private business. They understood their public role as administrative only. Unsurprisingly, a few members of Congress strongly objected to granting unprecedented power to war agencies like the Food Administration, even when the public supported it. Opponents feared the proposed control of profits and a “revamping of the economic order” of the country. Supporters pointed to the “oppressive price of food” and “the violence of starving thousands” in Europe.¹⁷

Herbert Hoover actually shared the fears of those opposed to centralizing so much economic and regulatory power. He rarely used the Food Administration’s power to fine businesses or to regulate private industry. He emphasized cooperation and rejected the need to *force* Americans to do anything. Like other government administrators hired for the war effort, Hoover believed his job was to educate and inform rational, cooperative citizens. A rational citizenry could be trusted to arrive at sound conclusions regarding matters of principle. Similarly, the Committee on Public Information’s (CPI) approach to wartime propaganda “was educational and informative throughout,” explained chairman, George Creel, “for we had such confidence in our case as to feel that no other argument was needed than the simple, straightforward presentation of facts.”¹⁸ These administrators had tied their belief in a rational citizenry to a belief that the United States was manifestly superior to the

¹⁷Nash, 45-6.

¹⁸ Creel, 4-5.

oppressive Central Powers who kept their people “in darkness and delusion.”¹⁹ Following this logic, Hoover believed *voluntary* instead of mandatory rationing proved that the Food Administration did not contradict American democratic ideals. In fact, it embodied them: “There is no dictatorship in volunteer effort. It is by voluntary mobilization that we can answer autocracy with democracy.”²⁰ Wheatless and meatless days were merely suggestions, but they were made popular through the use of slogans, pledge cards and visual propaganda — techniques borrowed, writes historian Harvey Levenstein, from the incongruous combination of the prohibition movement and the fledgling advertising industry.²¹ The Food Administration’s posters spelled out *recommended* changes to homefront diets (fig. 10).



Figure 10
Two US Food Administration posters, c. 1917.

During WWII, most of the government’s war messages passed through the hands of the professional admen, who replaced somber government slogans with

¹⁹ Ibid, 4.

²⁰ Herbert Hoover quoted by Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politic*, 58.

²¹ Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 138.

images and text reminiscent of 1940s advertising, as the WWII canning posters demonstrate. Ad men worked directly for the Office of War information OWI after they formed the War Advertising Council in June of 1942. Composed of corporate advertisers and advertising agencies, the Council became a “private vehicle for public information and persuasion.”²² Just as private businesses were learning they could not function without the assistance of the government and the stability and continuity it provided, the ad men reluctantly agreed to donate ad space and their work time to produce publicity materials and war posters. To convince them to help Roosevelt’s New Deal administration, government official explained, “the position of companies after the war, whether high or low, depend[ed] on their contributions to winning the war.”²³ Later, the Ad Council’s Chairman agreed that for transmitting information, advertising, more than newspapers, magazines, and radio, was “the most effective because it [was] the most direct.”²⁴ By 1943, a *Time* magazine article, “Advertising in the War,” purported that advertising had reached “new high standards.” and gushed, “Advertisers, like other human beings, are inherently patriotic and sensible. Inevitably they saw the nation’s real needs — strong morale, capacity production, patriotic sacrifice — and began to shape their advertising to fit it.” Back in the office, however, advertisers wanted to ensure that businesses would be around after war to hire them. They also recognized the opportunity to improve their public image which had been tarnished in the 1920s and 30s when promoting free enterprise had become a central tenet of their profession. They believed their trade was more valuable to

²² Robert Griffith, “The Selling of America: The Advertising Council and American Politics, 1942-1960,” *The Business History Review* 57, n. 3 (Autumn, 1983): 391.

²³ Fox, 48.

²⁴ No author listed, “Advertising in the War,” *Time Magazine*, 22 March 1943.

businesses engaged in a free market, and that free enterprise was integral to a functioning economy, a democratic society, and to their survival. Consequently, when examining WWII posters, the motivations of the creators borrowed from private industry become enormously significant. Posters were used to sell war, ask for cooperation, and to inform the public. But they were also used to sell other ideas, especially socio-economic ones held dear by the sellers. Advertisers not only influenced government methods of communication, but by WWII, they *were* the government's communicators.

By the time the Ad Council started producing materials for the government, consumer purchasing power was a preoccupation of consumers, advertisers, businessmen and politicians alike. President Franklin Roosevelt referenced consumer purchasing power when he delivered a "Cost of Living" message to Congress on April 27, 1942, and declared a need for mandatory rationing on the homefront. "It is obviously fair that where there is not enough of any essential commodity to meet all civilian demands, those who can afford to pay more for the commodity should not be privileged over those who cannot. ...where any important article becomes scarce, rationing is the democratic, equitable solution."²⁵ Fearing the spread of false rumors about rationing, Elmer Davis, the director of OWI, gave U.S. consumers two months warning before expanded food rationing took affect in 1943. Working with the Office of Price Administration (OPA), who had been given authority to enforce rationing, rent control and price control, Davis emphasized necessity, facts, participation and fairness in his December radio address, "Rationing and the War." After explaining the many pressures on the food supply and why the laws of supply and demand under the

²⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Cost of Living" message to Congress, April 27, 1942, quoted by Bently, 14.

circumstances would give some people an unfair advantage, Davis reassured that while rationing may be a nuisance, “it is the best way anybody has yet been able to figure out to make sure that what we have is fairly passed around.”²⁶ In fact, OPA officials had worried that savvy advertisers would play on consumer fears of shortages, which led them to doubt the effectiveness of voluntary rationing without government restrictions.²⁷ As one OPA document put it, “The natural reaction of American citizens when rumors of threatened shortages reach their ears is to rush to buy. Rumors of rationing, of limitation orders, and even of style restrictions have been used in the trade to promote sales and have provided incentives for buying sprees by the public.”²⁸ Public officials readily promoted the importance of fairness and purchasing power at a time of war, and they hoped to enlist the power of advertising to influence homefront behavior.

Franklin D. Roosevelt had already embraced consumer language during in his 1932 campaign for president, when he proposed that the government assure “well distributed” purchasing power “throughout every group in the nation.”²⁹ One year earlier, when Governor Roosevelt addressed the New York chapter of the Advertising Federation of America, he called attention to the untapped powers of advertising: “National advertising had been educating us for prosperity...now its great and necessary powers should be applied to government.” He asked the ad men to “Help us to interest people in the machinery and production of government.”³⁰ Roosevelt

²⁶ Elmer Davis, “Rationing and the War,” Radio address reprint, OWI, December 27, 1942.

²⁷ Bently, 21.

²⁸ “OPA Policy Statement on Rationing Presented to the Office of Economic Stabilization, November 25, 1942,” in Ayers Brinser, “History of the Administration of Rationing in the United States During the Second World War,”

²⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt quoted by Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 104.

³⁰ Lears, 243.

recognized the usefulness of adopting consumer's language for political ends. He did not fear government solutions to the country's social and economic problems as advertisers did, but he seemed to share one common assumption with them: the American public was a mass audience to be persuaded.³¹

Advertising agencies and their clients began to view the mass audience as “the prize in the struggle between American Business and Big Government.”³² In November of 1929, the President of the American Association of Advertising Agencies suggested that since the damage inflicted by the stock market crash was primarily psychological, advertising, “with its power to sway the public, was best prepared to deal with such a ‘mere state of mind.’ ”³³ In this way, the Depression exposed the relentlessness of advertisers and their drive to promote businesses' interests regardless of the public's actual needs, which increased for many during the Depression. In 1930, when business leaders and politicians came up with the “Buy Now” campaign, the *Journal of Commerce* observed, “The consumer is being asked to buy more of everything at a time when he is often unable to pay for pressing immediate necessities. ...Slogans can not bring about revival.”³⁴ Not only did the campaign not bring revival, but by the spring of 1931, businesses began to cut wages and purchasing power declined. Shortly thereafter, social reformers, labor leaders, and economic thinkers turned to the government and away from business for leadership. President Hoover urged businesses to maintain wage levels to prevent an even greater loss of consumer demand. Many leaders now recognized the important

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 286.

³⁴ *Business Week*, cited by Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 96.

role of the worker — as a consumer. *Business Week* reported that instead of merely a production cost, businessmen have begun to “look upon the labor more as a consumer of mass production.”³⁵ But even those who had jobs saw their income fall. Many social reformers had already argued that the worker’s and consumer’s interests were linked. For them, The Depression had proved the consumer was “powerless in the face of manipulative advertising, mass technology, and a maldistribution of income.”³⁶ Reformers called for a drastic overhauling of government’s control of business, which businessmen and their advertisers believed would have a negative affect on their ability to operate freely.

To the dismay of business, government price controls during WWII signaled a growing regulatory state and encouraged popular participation and mobilization. According to historian Meg Jacobs, the OPA served as a “radical model of state management: a popular government agency working in alliance with a labor, consumer, social liberal coalition that challenged the right of private industries to set their own prices and sell their items freely.”³⁷ Among the 30 million consumers OPA affected in the most “minute economic decisions,” many recognized the benefits of price controls and OPA enjoyed popular support. It mobilized and relied on thousands of mostly female volunteer price-checkers, whose housewife and consumer statuses had earned new legitimacy and a national purpose. They reported dishonest pricing, decline in product quality or skimping on contents. They argued for product grading

³⁵ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 98.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1951), appendix A, xx.

³⁷ Meg Jacobs, “‘How About Some Meat?’: The Office of Price Administration, Consumption Politics, and State Building from the Bottom Up, 1941-1946,” *The Journal of American History* 84, No. 3 (Dec., 1997): 911-912.

and price lists that women could carry with them while shopping. In short, OPA empowered women to ask for information that would enable them to be smart, discerning consumers. One administrator referred to OPA as “democracy in action.”³⁸ The agency’s Consumer Advisory Committee reported that housewives “not only accepted rationing as necessary, but have been glad for the assurance it has given them.”³⁹ By legitimizing consumer interests, this agency had also heightened business fears of government regulation. Mass media and posters created during WWII often made these fears visible. The simple message of an Ad Council poster about carrying packages and conserving trucks and tires was eclipsed by the depiction of a woman shopping and filling her arms with goods she could purchase in a freedom-loving, capitalistic society (fig. 12). When contrasted with a WWI poster conveying a similar request (fig. 11), and a conspicuous reference to “THE GOVERNMENT,” the Ad Council’s poster appears to obfuscate an otherwise clear message by bending it to serve a business-friendly agenda.

³⁸ Chester Bowles, quoted by Jacobs, “‘How About Some Meat?’: The Office of Price Administration, Consumption Politics, and State Building from the Bottom Up, 1941-1946,” 925.

³⁹ Judith Russell and Renee Fantin, *Studies in Food Rationing* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Temporary Controls, Office of Price Administration, 1947), 86–87.

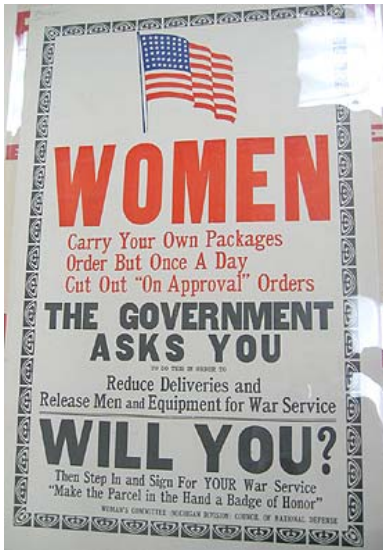


Figure 11
 Women, The Government Asks You, Will YOU? Carry Your Own Packages, Reduce Deliveries, Step In and Sign For YOUR War Service, Make the Parcel in the Hand a Badge of Honor. Women's Committee, Michigan Division Council of National Defense, c.1917.



Figure 12
 I'll carry mine too! Photographer: Valentino Sarra, for Emergency Management Office, War Information Office. 1943. Source: University of North Texas, Rare Book and Texana Collections: <http://digital.library.unt.edu/permalink/meta-dc-221>

In the decades leading up to WWI, many public officials were as fearful of an expanded government as businesses were. Hoover knew his Food Administration would be perceived as intrusive and he proceeded cautiously by insisting on a volunteer-only effort and by disseminating information widely to regional offices and agencies. Every state had its own food controller and local volunteers. Hoover believed these local, more personal levels of government could achieve citizen cooperation in ways his newly formed federal agency could not. “We must centralize ideas but decentralize execution.”⁴⁰ Instead of sending strict orders down to the states, the Food Administration’s Educational Division disseminated guidance and recommended messages to State Educational Directors and State Food

⁴⁰ Herbert Hoover quoted by Walton Rawls, *Wake Up, America! World War I and the American Poster* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 113.

Administrators. The Educational Division was run by Ben S. Allen, whom Hoover had recruited from the London bureau of the Associated Press.⁴¹ His division had been divided into narrower sections with titles that reflected various strategies and media outlets: Publications, Illustrations and Plate, States Publicity, Copy Desk, Press Clipping, Library and Exhibition, Magazine and Feature, Farm Journals, Trade and Technical Journals, Religious Press, Negro Press, Retail Stores, Advertising and Motion Pictures.⁴² State Councils of Defense and agricultural Extension Services recruited volunteers to display messages in churches, schools, rural feed stores, post offices, train stations, clubs and other public places; they also produced their own posters, traveling speaker series, slide shows, and state fair exhibits.⁴³ Disseminating messages this way helped to diminish fears of an oppressive food dictatorship, and produced many unique state interpretations, as the posters will show.

When the states produced their own posters, they often incorporated more insistent, more authoritarian language than Hoover would have allowed in the FA's national campaigns. The poster in figure 11, for example, produced in Michigan, emphasized "THE GOVERNMENT" even though Hoover consciously attempted to minimize centralized commandments directed at homefront citizens. A poster created by Arizona's state council of defense invoked the autocracy versus democracy dichotomy by stating, "The German government would make you feed yourself. Uncle Sam wants you to feed yourself" (fig. 13). The poster followed with, "Do you appreciate liberty? Then show it by growing a garden." The war bread poster from Kansas concluded that "First in war bread" meant "First in peace," and that "Waste of

⁴¹ Dickson, 26.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, 26-32.

food is disloyalty” (fig. 22). A poster from Oklahoma demanded to know, “Is your home harboring and feeding German Allies?” Then proclaimed, “All insects which destroy garden crops are German Allies,” and provided detailed instructions about how to “declare war on insects” (fig. 14). In Iowa, posters implored farmers, “Help Uncle Sam: Put your Corn in a Silo,” and grabbed attention with the text, “Your Country Calls” (figs. 15 and 16). Hoover may have been weary of citizen’s loyalty toward centralized government, but for some constituencies, the US government was a valid rationale for a call to action.

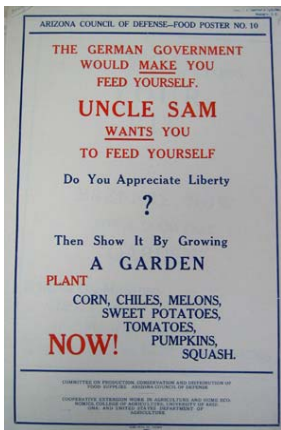


Figure 13
The German Government Would Make You Feed Yourself.
Arizona Council of Defense, c. 1917.



Figure 14
German Allies are Here. Is Your Home Harboring and Feeding German Allies?
Oklahoma State Council of Defense, c. 1917.



Figure 15
Help Uncle Sam: Put Your Corn in a Silo.
Iowa State Council of Defense, c.1917.



Figure 16
Your Country Calls: Save Food with a Silo.
Iowa State Council of Defense, c.1917.

Appeals to rational citizens used in WWI posters echoed the “reason-why” style of advertising used in commercial advertising at that time. Through their “convincing” prose, advertisers provided the consumer with reasoned justifications

for their smart purchase.⁴⁴ An illustration or use of bolded type may have captured one's attention, but ultimately, images led the viewer to the rational argument in the copy. In a similar way, war posters justified requests for changes in homefront behavior with explanations and reasons why. The Food Administration poster, titled, "Why is it necessary to eat less meat and wheat bread?" answered the title question with approximately 14 detailed paragraphs, methodically explaining, "What the food situation is" (fig. 17). Even when the copy was kept brief, rationale was still provided: an illustrative Food Administration poster, followed the request, "Eat less wheat, meat, sugar and fat," with the reasonable, "To save for the army and our allies" (fig.18). The regular adherence to this style of informative mass communication, for commercial and governmental messages alike, suggests a commonly held belief in the 1910s that the best method of persuading the public was achieved by supplying detailed facts, logical explanation and reasoned evidence. It also reveals how government publicity officials looked toward popular media and commercial advertisers for guidance about how to reach the public.

⁴⁴ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity 1920-1940* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1985), 153.



Figure 17
 Why Is It Necessary to Eat Less Meat and Less Wheat Bread?
 US Food Administration, 1917.



Figure 18
 EAT MORE, EAT LESS To Save for the Army and Our Allies.
 US Food Administration, 1917.

Some rational WWI posters exaggerated their rational appeals by illustrating the early twentieth-century admiration for scientific reasoning and bureaucratic methods of tackling problems. These posters employed a chart-like logic to encourage new habits, especially eating habits. When deciding the best method of convincing the public to adhere to Food Administration guidelines, the agency consulted modern home economists who supported a scientific approach to food. The economists advised the “wheatless” and “meatless” days, believing that “if Americans could be taught about interchangeability of proteins, fats, and carbohydrates,” they could be persuaded to adopt the concept of substitution.⁴⁵ Consequently, when USDA posters suggested consuming specific foods, they often depicted unnecessary charts and chart-like illustrations as a way to suggest the rationality of the food substitution

⁴⁵Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table*, 138.

requested. Text of one USDA poster stated matter-of-factly, “Eat more cottage cheese, you’ll need less meat.” Next to images of five varieties of meat producing animals, the poster produced a black and white photograph of a pile of cottage cheese, a series of red diagrammatic lines with arrows, and an explanation that one pound of cottage cheese supplied more protein than the animal derived protein sources (fig. 19). This poster’s scientific approach to foodstuffs purposely disregarded the cultural or emotional factors that influence food choices; it was created in an age “that assumed an automatic connection between accurate data and rational action.”⁴⁶ Using a similar approach, other posters described corn and potatoes as “palatable and nutritious” substitutes for wheat (fig. 20 and 21), and another depicted two large loafs of bread — exactly the foodstuff the poster asked consumers to eat less of — as a way to methodically diagram “the loaf that must win the war.” The bread illustration cleverly indicated, with a knife cutting the bread, the larger amount of wheat needed by the allies, and thus, the smaller percentage of wheat Americans should consume. If wheat is not conserved, the poster explained, “Democracy is doomed,” and then added, “Personal sacrifice must supplant previous extravagance” (fig. 22).

⁴⁶ Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 181.



Figure 19
 Eat More Cottage Cheese, You'll Need Less Meat. USDA, c. 1917.



Figure 20
 Build Your Meals Around Potatoes and Have you Eaten Your Pound of Potatoes Today? USDA, c. 1917.



Figure 21
 Eat More Corn. USDA, c.1917.

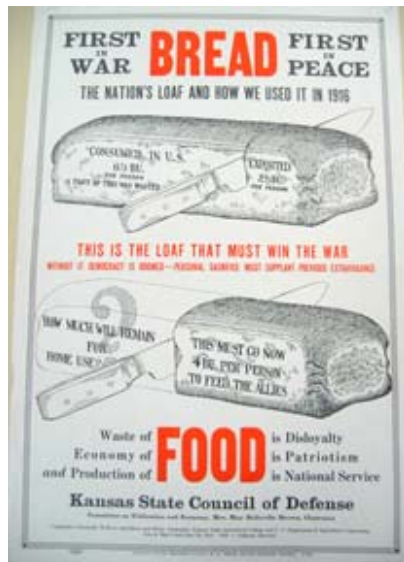


Figure 22
 First in War Bread First in Peace. Kansas State Council of Defense and Home Economics, c. 1917.

State agricultural colleges and bureaus produced posters during WWI aimed at rational citizen-farmers. These posters were heavy with text, and devoted significant space to practical, regional-specific information including practical advice about what to plant and when. In 1917, independent farmers grew livestock and crops all over the

country by responding to specific landscapes, growing seasons, weather conditions and the perceived market. Although the USDA had formed in 1862, the agency's ability to collect data about farm output, or to predict production on a national scale, had not formalized until after WWI with the creation of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in 1922.⁴⁷ Consequently, farmers during WWI had not yet embraced the "industrial ideal" that encouraged more uniform, more business-like farming practices.⁴⁸ During WWI, the USDA relied on state agriculture administrators and extension agents, knowledgeable of their regions, to create wartime messages and to address crop, dairy, and poultry farmers with specific, practical information useful for their day-to-day operations. These posters often reveal regional growing abilities, seasonal expectations, and distinct populations who farmed. Posters from North Carolina addressed "Negro Farmers" and "Patriotic Colored Men and Women" specifically (fig. 23). A poster from Connecticut explained why rye is a "Safe, sane and sensible crop for Connecticut" (fig. 24). Florida's farmers were encouraged to grow native grasses and forage crops including sorghum, cowpeas, peanut hay and beggarweed (fig. 25). Mississippi's farmers were instructed to "Grow all the corn you can in March," and in Nebraska, "Plant the wheat with a drill to insure better germination and to economize on seed" (fig. 26 and 27). This level of specificity, Hoover would have agreed, enabled messages to be more meaningful to the specialized audience, and thus, more likely to influence their behavior.

⁴⁷ Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 35.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.



Figure 23
Attention Negro Farmers!
+ Work to Win the War.

State College of Agriculture,
State Department of Agriculture,
and USDA cooperating,
c.1917.



Figure 24
Grow Rye.

Connecticut Committee of Food Supply,
c.1917.



Figure 25
Grow Forage Crops in Self Defense.

University of Florida Division of Agricultural Extension and USDA, c.1917.

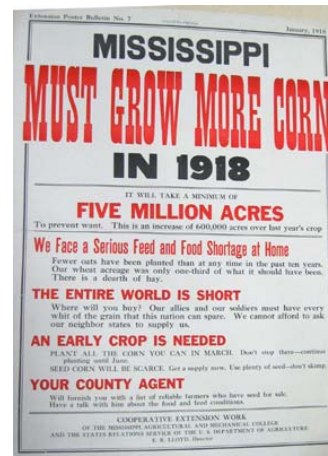


Figure 26
Mississippi Must Grow More Corn in 1918.

Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College and the States Relations Service of the USDA, c.1917.



Figure 27
Plant Winter Wheat.

Nebraska State Council of Defense, c.1917.

In contrast, NAL's poster collection does not contain any state-produced posters from WWII. During WWII, the Ad Council focused their efforts on national poster campaigns and general messages designed to reach large segments of the population. Information in the posters, if there was any, was less specific than WWI

posters and certainly not regionally-specific. The generic quality of many of their war posters reflected advertisers' desire to reach who they believed was their largest, most desirable audiences, and to not offend. This strategy typically ignored many populations, including all minorities, working women and populations who still farmed. In this way, as one critic asserts, advertising "explains everything in its own terms.... It interprets the world as essentially eventless...made homogeneous, simplified."⁴⁹ In a time of war, when national unity was particularly desirable, advertisers defended their understanding of the public's temperament and the need to perpetuate mainstream desires and beliefs with common symbols, myths and sentiments. The commercial illustrator, Norman Rockwell, mastered the ability to capture the hearts and minds of the public when he illustrated Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech in a series of paintings with same the title. As soon as OWI recognized how his paintings resonated with the public, they used the series in posters and as a theme for promoting the 1943 nation-wide war-bond drive.⁵⁰ Although the paintings were not devised or created by ad men, Rockwell's paintings functioned like advertising by depicting idealized scenes of American citizens instead of the harsh realities of war. Unlike advertising, however, he realized Roosevelt's speech with depictions of humble citizens exercising intangible freedoms unrelated to free enterprise or consumerism.

⁴⁹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972), 153-4.

⁵⁰ Stuart Murray and James McCabe, *Norman Rockwell's Four Freedoms: Images That Inspire a Nation* (Stockbridge, MA: Berkshire House, 1993), 74.



Figure 28

Artist: Norman Rockwell

OVI poster no. 45, 1943.

Since many of Rockwell's neighbors, who served as his models, were farmers, it is very likely the turkey was not a purchased item (and should not be read as a sign of overt consumerism), but was raised by the couple standing at the head of the table.⁵¹

State produced posters from WWI attempted to encourage general, patriotic sentiments, too, but they had been created within the “reason-why” framework used in the earliest decade of the 20th-Century. The frequent use of only two colors in regionally produced state posters from WWI, for example, often blue and red inks, suggest limitations of two-color printing for most local poster productions. But these ink choices also highlight obvious appeals to patriotism. Patriotic elements functioned as the primary decorative or design element in these posters containing few, if any, images. Many of the state posters relied on text to persuade the audience, as many WWI posters have shown. The messages emphasized duty, sacrifice and patriotism in a time of war, and encouraged citizens to think of their individual efforts as directly linked the nation's interests, like the canning poster in figure 2, in which women's thriftiness was their “patriotic gift.” According to figure 11, dutifully carrying packages “released men and equipment for war service,” and was a way for women to symbolically “sign up” for their “war service,” and in figure 22, production of food meant “National Service.” Some WWI posters used the language of a military to equate homefront and farm front efforts with the actual military on the front lines.

⁵¹ Ibid., see Introduction and Chapter 1.

A poster from Michigan asked farmers to “Enlist! [in] Michigan’s Bean Brigade,” and insisted that “Beans are more important than bullets in this war” (fig. 29). Posters aimed at Georgia farmers claimed, “Beans are bullets and potatoes are powder,” and that “The man behind the plow is as important as the man behind the gun” (fig. 30). A Missouri poster asked farmers to “Join the army of food producers” (fig. 31), while in North Carolina, “An Army of Poultry Will Help Win the War” (fig. 32). A Kansas poster declared that “To feed the nation is to fight its battles,” suggested a “Plan of Attack,” and added gratuitously, “A Kansas soldier never sleeps at his post whether serving in the trenches or in the furrows” (fig. 33). In an illustration on a poster from Iowa, a farmer in overalls stands before his volunteers and receives a command from an army general. The general, pointing to a depiction of “The Hunger of the World,” tells the saluting farmer, “Your division will attack at once” (fig. 34). A poster from Texas used a cartoon to suggest that farmers “invest in a few hens” as a way to increase the food supply, and “Let the Hen Whip the Kaiser!” (fig. 35)



Figure 29
Enlist! Michigan’s
Bean Brigade.

Michigan Food
Preparedness
Committee, c.1917



Figure 30
Get A War
Garden Going,
Beans are
Bullets—Potatoes
are Powder.

Extension
Division,
Georgia State
College of
Agriculture, c.
1917



Figure 31
 Increase the Nation's Food Supply, Join the Army of Food Producers.

University of Missouri College of Agriculture, c.1917



Figure 32
 More Food this Year is Patriotism. An Army of Poultry Will Help Win the War.

North Carolina Department of Agriculture, c.1917.



Figure 33
 Arms and Agriculture, To Feed a Nation is to Fight its Battles.

Kansas State Council of Defense, c. 1917.



Figure 34
 War Food Volunteers.

Iowa, c. 1917



Figure 35
 Let the Hen Whip the Kaiser! By Increasing the Food Supply Peace with Plenty.

Extension Service, College Station, Texas, c.1917.

Food Administration posters created for wider, national distribution in WWI were typically printed using more colors, and like WWII posters, they incorporated striking illustrations by professional artists and devoted less space to practical information. Yet, unlike WWII posters, they still echoed the “reason-why” approach to mass communication and used informative text to reference dire circumstances

abroad and to persuade a mass audience that wartime sacrifices were necessary. The richly illustrated posters focused on broadly relatable issues like food conservation and home gardens, and appealed to the moral, religious, and patriotic convictions shared by most Americans at this time. Just as the poster in figure 11 appealed to honor when it asked women to “Make the parcel in the hand a badge of honor,” these posters did more than instruct citizens to “eat less” and “waste nothing,” they also instructed them to “be thankful,” “be patriotic” and “sign your country’s pledge.” Though colorful, the illustrations depicted somber faces that reflected the seriousness of war and famine. The text matched the tone of the images and pleaded for an understanding of how individual actions were tied to bigger, global circumstances. A poster aimed at recent immigrants implored, “You came here seeking freedom, you must now help to preserve it: Wheat is needed for the allies. Waste nothing” (fig. 36). Other FA posters linked homefront behavior to the welfare of “those who fight for freedom,” the “millions of women and children behind our lines,” and the women of France “struggling against starvation” (figs. 37–39).





Figures 36, 37, 38 and 39

Examples of WWI Food Administration posters. Educational Division. Advertising Section. Source: NARA, Still Pictures Records Section, Special Media Archives, College Park, MD.

WWI posters incorporated the phrase “do your share,” “do your bit,” or “Your country calls,” as a way to spread a sense of duty and shared responsibility. A USDA poster described canning as “a vital necessity under war conditions,” but not strictly for selfish reasons, it also suggested, “Make saving, rather than spending, your social standard” (fig. 40). During WWI, posters spread the message that citizens were expected to contribute to the larger effort, the responsibility belonged to everyone, and the need was great. Posters aimed at younger audiences retained the same overall tone and encouraged shared responsibility for citizens of all ages. Posters asked children to “enlist” in the School Garden Army (fig. 41), and suggested to young gardeners, “We eat because we work,” and others referred to war explicitly (fig. 42). Children reading a recruitment poster for sheep clubs learned that “Twenty sheep [were needed] to equip and clothe each soldier” (fig. 43) A poster in Connecticut told Junior Agricultural Volunteers that “Soldiers must be fed and you should do your share” (fig. 44).



Figure 40
 Help Feed Yourself.
 Somebody Has to Raise or Pack Everything You Eat, Do your Share! Make Saving Rather than Spending Your Social Standard. USDA, c. 1917.

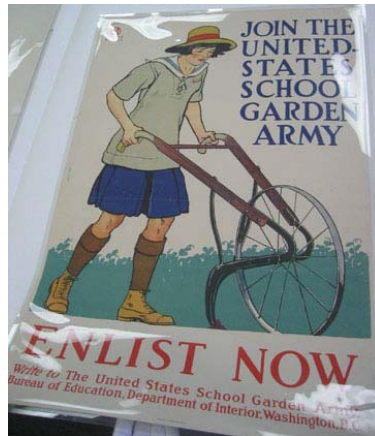


Figure 41
 Join the United States Garden School Army, ENLIST NOW.
 Bureau of Education, Department of Interior, c. 1917.



Figure 42
 We Eat because we Work.
 We belong to the U.S. School Garden Army.
 Bureau of Education, Department of Interior, c. 1917.

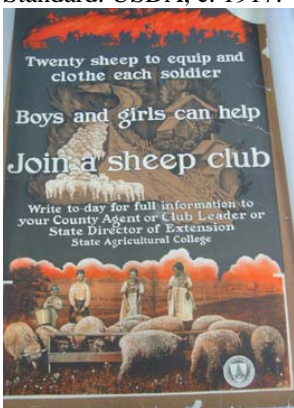


Figure 43
 Twenty sheep to equip and clothe each soldier, Boys and girls can help, Join a sheep club.
 USDA, c. 1917.



Figure 44
 The War at Home.
 School Boys of Connecticut: Help the farmers with the harvest! Soldiers must be fed and you should do your share.
 Connecticut State Council of Defense, c. 1917.

During WWI, George Creel was convinced that an advertiser’s goal — to persuade and influence the behavior of a mass audience — paralleled his own as Chairman of the Committee for Public Information (CPI). In his 1920 memoir, he referred to CPI as “the world’s greatest adventure in advertising,” and even titled the

autobiographical account, *How We Advertised America*.⁵² According to Creel, advertisers helped CPI reach more of the public by connecting his office to artists and ad space. He was proud he had incorporated advertising's "dynamic abilities" into the "war-machinery of government."⁵³ He believed the exercise in cooperation helped to legitimize advertiser's existence and gave them the "dignity of a profession."⁵⁴ Creel's regard for advertising spurred greater professionalization of the advertising industry, and supplied a key argument for its importance after the war had ended. Creel's ideas would receive even more attention, took on new meaning, during WWII.

PART 2

After WWI, advertising devoted less ad space to text and more to images, just as professional advertising literature shifted from "seeing human nature as rational to seeing human nature as emotional."⁵⁵ One historian reports that, advertisements based on logical appeal decreased from 62 percent in the 1900s to 35.5 percent in the 1930s.⁵⁶ Where prose had been more adapted to logic; pictures spoke the language of emotion.⁵⁷ For consumers who were already feeling powerless against a backdrop of post-war depression and uncontrolled wartime inflation, decreased ad copy meant *less*

⁵² Creel, 4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Michael Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 59.

⁵⁶ Inger Stole, *Advertising on Trial: Consumer Activism and Corporate Public Relations in the 1930s* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 22.

⁵⁷ Marchand, 154.

information, and a diminished ability to compare products and get the most value for their money. Wages that had been unable to keep up with high prices led to wide spread preoccupation in the 1920s on consumer purchasing power, contentious labor disputes over wages and newly found consumer consciousness. Politicians who had labeled big business as wartime profiteers fueled the working-class consumer's ire and the growth of grassroots consumer organization. Fair Price Committees, comprised primarily of women, formed to report "excessive" pricing by merchants and to call attention to unfair economics of capitalism. The idea of underconsumption became accepted, even among politicians, who started to study the issue of purchasing power and how to increase it. Instead of increasing wages, businessmen relied on new advertising techniques to ensure demand for their products. Advertising for brand-name products, for example, exploded during the 1920s, which failed to inform or overtly misinformed consumers about the value of their product. Other advertising trends preyed on consumer's insecurities by devising ailments, like "halitosis," for which consumers would feel compelled to purchase a brand-name mouthwash. By deploying marketing research, advertisers surveyed consumers "to analyze their buying habits and the effectiveness of advertising," and to become better persuaders.⁵⁸ When new advertising methods were combined with a lack of standardized weights and product materials, consumers were left feeling defenseless in the marketplace. In 1927, Stuart Chase, of the Labor Bureau, and F.J. Schlink, of the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Standards, teamed up to call attention to

⁵⁸ Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*. (3d ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999), 165.

the consumer buying “blindly” and “chaotically.”⁵⁹ Their best-selling book, *Your Money’s Worth*, exposed manipulation and fraud of manufacturers and argued for consumer access to the same product information that the government had access to.⁶⁰ The book “crystallized a vaguely felt, but widespread, discontent,”⁶¹ among consumers and set the stage for a consumer’s movement and rising consumer consciousness throughout the thirties.

While messages in commercial advertising used people’s insecurities to encourage consumption, President Roosevelt used popular media to reassure the public and to promote economic stability. Once elected, he began implementing his New Deal programs and used advertising techniques to publicize them. In addition to use of radio technology, made famous by his reassuring fireside chats, some of his programs had their own logos and publicity campaigns. The National Recovery Administration (NRA) had a goodwill trademark, the Blue Eagle logo, designed by the art director of the A.J. Ayer agency (fig. 45).⁶² Displaying the Blue Eagle poster or placard in a window, or printing the logo mark on receipts, labels and ads, was a way for businesses to show they agreed to policies enacted to create employment and increase purchasing power. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), established to restore a better balance between farm prices and industrial prices, paid farmers to *reduce* production. In response to reports of farmers destroying good food and land, and to public skepticism of this policy, a colorful AAA poster showed an illustration of a healthy family standing in front of toiling, industrious farmers

⁵⁹ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 89.

⁶⁰ Stole, 23.

⁶¹ Helen Sorenson quoted by Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 89.

⁶² *Ibid.*

between the words, “America has Plenty of Food for Everyone” (fig. 46). In 1936, *The Plow that Broke the Plains* was the first film produced by the United States Government for commercial distribution and, “the most widely publicized attempt by the federal government to communicate to its entire citizenry through a motion picture.”⁶³ Through documentary film, the director Pare Lorentz justified New Deal programs like the U.S. Resettlement Administration, which aided families devastated by natural disaster. The film showed heroic farmers who patriotically, yet inadvertently, stripped the prairie of grass in order to answer calls for increased wheat production during WWI (fig. 47). Lorentz had wanted to supply an explanation for the Dust Bowl, to encourage audience sympathy, and to help New Deal programs resist accusations of supplying hand-outs to undeserving sectors of society. His film combined a musical score, based on recognizable hymns, with documentary-like narration and imagery to unabashedly appeal to the public’s emotions.



Figure 45
NRA Blue Eagle Emblem and poster displayed in restaurant window stating their participation and support for government program, c. 1934.
Source: Franklin D. Roosevelt Library Public Domain Photographs, 1882 – 1962, NARA ARC Identifier: 512587.



Figure 46
America has Plenty of Food for Everyone.
USDA, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, c. 1933.

⁶³ Neil Lerner quoted in Joseph Horowitz, liner notes, *The Plow that Broke the Plains and The River: The Original Pare Lorentz films with newly recorded soundtracks of the classic scores by Virgil Thompson*, DVD (K&A Productions Ltd., 2007).



Figure 47

Still from *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936), produced and shown by the Farm Security Administration (which absorbed the Resettlement Administration).

Source: Internet Archive, Prelinger Collection:

<http://www.archive.org/details/PlowThatBrokeThePlains1>

“World War II came at a favorable time for building unity by visual means,” asserts George Roeder.⁶⁴ Americans readily participated in “a communal viewing experience” that included movies, *Life* magazine, newsreels, and New Deal propaganda.⁶⁵ Documentary photography appeared regularly in newspapers and newsreels, and in the photojournalism of *Life*, and taught viewers to equate photography with truth. A George Gallup poll of 40,000 newspaper readers in the 1930s revealed that “pages with pictures commanded greater reader attention.”⁶⁶ Advertisers sponsored more surveying and polling, and increased their use of images in ads. Images helped advertisers create the reality they wanted their audiences to believe. According to advertising historian Roland Marchand,

The very ambiguity of the relationship between things-as-they-are and things-as-we-like-to-fantasize-them was the quality that came increasingly to endear the photograph to advertising.... The photograph did not provoke the viewer to conjure up an image of the photographer who devised it. Rather, it encouraged the viewer to remain

⁶⁴ Roeder, 4.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Marvin Heiferman, “Everywhere, All the Time, for Everybody,” in *Image World* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989), 24.

unconscious of any intervening, manipulative creator and to experience the voyeur's sense of directly glimpsing the world's reality.⁶⁷

From the advertiser's perspective, realistic imagery inspired belief and discouraged "psychological resistance." People believe what they *see*.⁶⁸ In 1942, the vice president of Young & Rubican advertising agency, and chairman of the Ad Council, conducted a survey to establish conventions of effective war poster design. The result was a pamphlet, "How to Make Posters that Will Win the War," created for OWI staff. The document concluded that the best style for a war poster was a realistic one with emotional appeal:

Anyone whose job it is to select war posters can be sure of getting only the most effective posters by asking two simple questions:

Does the poster appeal to emotions?
Is the poster a literal picture in photographic detail?

The most effective posters appeal to emotions. No matter how beautiful the artwork, how striking the colors, how clever the idea, unless a war poster appeals to basic human emotions in both picture and text, it is not likely to make a deep impression.

The poster should be a picture, not an all-type poster or symbolic design. And by a picture is meant a true and literal representation, in photographic detail of people and objects as they are, and as they look for millions of average people who make up the bulk of the population of the United States.

If it isn't a picture, it is not likely to make a powerful appeal.

Consumers in the 1920s and 30s had felt the impact of advertising's trend toward emotional appeals when attempting to comparison shop, but what was the impact of this shift in style on war messages? The OWI poster in figure 12 targeted a similar audience with a similar message as the WWI poster in figure 11, but used a fifth of the verbiage (56 words compared to 11 words) to encourage women to carry

⁶⁷ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity 1920-1940* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1985), 152-3.

⁶⁸ Marchand, 154.

their packages. To understand the simplified, more assertive and enthusiastic, “I’ll carry mine too!” the viewer had to see the poster’s image and fill in its intended meanings. The earlier poster used the linguistic-only appeal, “Release men and equipment for war service” and “Make the parcel in the hand a badge of honor” to connect the men needed for duty and the pride a woman could feel when seen carrying her own parcels. According to the text, a woman’s decision to carry her own parcels could have symbolized her support of fighting men at war, but it could not have symbolically duplicated the soldiers’ actions on distant battlefields. This implied connection — and the additional, emotional motivation to act — became a possibility in the second poster through its use of images.

Much like ads that offered the consumer something “better,” and insisted the option was yours to make, the message in the second poster was carefully crafted to encourage the audience to make the “right” choice themselves. On one level, to have emulated behavior depicted in a poster, was to have aligned with the belief promoted by the Director of OWI during his special radio broadcast in 1942: “This country was organized on the principle that if the American people understood what was going on, and what had to be done in their own best interest, they would do it.”⁶⁹ Instead of asking for sacrifice, figure 12’s first-person, highly affirmative text “I’ll carry mine too!” and the directness of the woman’s gaze *showed* how her “parcel in the hand” was not a burden, but a source of pride — her symbolic badge of honor for her action *and her attitude*. According to the image, her action then became a visible signal to others that she would carry her own parcels, and do what was necessary, much like

⁶⁹ Elmer Holmes Davis, National Address, *Food Rationing and the War: An Address by Mr. Elmer Davis on 27 December 1942*. (1942; reprint, Washington, DC: Office of War Information, 1943).

the soldiers depicted behind her, or the “too” with whom she is aligning in the “I’ll carry mine too” statement. Her action echoed theirs, as did her honorable volunteerism.

As the posters from WWII show, advertisers had learned that *reason* need not be emphasized when addressing a mass audience, and in fact, it should probably be disguised, without appearing so, wherever possible. Images helped serve this purpose, and by the 1940s, ad men were convinced that pictures relayed their messages better than copy. One ad executive decided, “The eye gets the facts quicker and more graphically than the mind.”⁷⁰ The earlier, “reason-why” posters from WWI referred directly to a time of war, famine and sacrifice, but in the WWII posters, war and somber calls to duty had been replaced, to paraphrase Roland Barthes, with a “blissful clarity” that is not an explanation or a rationalization of complicated facts, or in this case, of global events. The WWII posters provided a clarity that comes not with questions, but with images’ statements of fact, and showed a world “wallowing in the evident.”⁷¹ To “sell the war,” advertisers had argued, the government needed messages designed not for thinking, but for acting. Communication theory suggests that the image-based messages presented an ‘uncoded,’ or naturalistic representation and “specific, authoritatively prescribed way[s]” of understanding them.⁷² Barthes explains that images “are more imperative than writing, they impose meaning at one

⁷⁰ Marchand, 154.

⁷¹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, Trans. Annette Lavers. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 143.

⁷² Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, “Reading Images,” in Paul Cobley, ed., *The Communication Theory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1996), 174.

stroke, without analyzing or diluting it.”⁷³ Or as Charles Kettering of General Motors put it: “The fewer words an advertisement contains, the better it will be.”⁷⁴

When George Creel claimed he had wanted to educate the public and to “reach people through their minds, rather than through their emotions,”⁷⁵ his analogy between advertising and WWI government propaganda, fit the period’s “reason-why” style of advertising. When his WWII successor, OWI’s Elmer Davis, a respected news reporter, described his agency’s intentions similarly, the uses of emotional appeals by the Ad Council appear at odds with the goals of OWI. Davis’s commitment to facts about the war effort, evident in his slogan, “This is a people’s war, and the people are entitled to know as much as possible about it,” contradicted the advertisers’ often cheery, ad-like eagerness to push post-war expectations for renewed free-market consumerism. The Ad Council claimed to believe in an informed public, but their idea of educational war information looked like ads of the day: “bland and inoffensive...a selective reality of sacrifice and struggle exorcised of troublesome detail.”⁷⁶ As one art director explained, Business desires to “create an attitude about the facts, not communicate them. And only about some of the facts...to say as little as necessary in the most impressive way.”⁷⁷ Thus, the business-minded approach to informing the public rarely reflected, and at times obfuscated, the public servant’s or journalist’s idea of an informed public.

⁷³ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, 110.

⁷⁴ Charles Kettering quoted by Marchand, 154.

⁷⁵ Marchand, 4, 116.

⁷⁶ William L. Bird and Harry R. Rubenstein, *Design for Victory: World War II Posters on the American Home Front* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 48.

⁷⁷ William Golden quoted by Cipe Pineles Golden, Kurt Weihs, and Robert Strunsky, eds., *The Visual Craft of William Golden* (New York: George Braziller, 1962), 61.

Roosevelt and OPA had stressed fairness for all consumers as a way to quell fears over mandatory food rationing, which the Ad Council saw as an opportunity to reinforce individual gain in the marketplace. Posters often depicted citizens, usually women, as shoppers in scenes that existed completely within the framework a consumer situation. Communal responsibility and voluntary effort emphasized in WWI and in New Deal propaganda had been replaced by an emphasis on getting one's "fair share." The woman in figure 12 for example, did not just demonstrate patriotic parcel-carrying behavior, she also displayed business-friendly shopping behavior. The audience most likely to have related to the woman depicted probably looked like her, or aspired to emulate the lifestyle of women who did: married white women who dressed well enough to identify as at least middle class, and who could afford to fill her arms with purchased goods. Another WWII poster used a before-and-after illustration of two scenes in a grocery store to show how rationing meant "a fair share for all of us." At first, one woman is shown leaving the store with an entire box of food while another is left empty handed, to the dismay of her and the shopkeeper, then, with rationing, a smiling shopkeeper is able to hand the same amount of a product to both women (fig. 48). With rationing, the poster claimed, more women were given the opportunity to procure goods successfully and thus, to avoid disappointment and experience happiness. Other publicity materials, like price lists, were designed specifically for placement within store settings (fig. 49). Posters created especially for butcher shops reminded housewives they could exchange used fats for two ration points (fig. 50). Another shopping-related poster depicted a shopkeeper pointing patronizingly to a Home Front Pledge poster of a woman with

her hand raised. To the women whom the poster assumes must have been hassling the shopkeeper, it claimed defensively, “WE ARE COOPERATING With the 15,000,000 women who are keeping the HOMEFRONT PLEDGE” (fig. 51). Thanks to mandatory rationing, fear of black marketeering and the women who dutifully checked ceiling prices and managed ration points, a hyper-focus on consumer purchasing power continued throughout WWII. When combined with an image’s ability to convey multiple meanings, WWII posters depicted the desire for goods and the act of shopping as proper, patriotic behavior. Poster art enabled the Ad Council to conflate support for the war with consumer spending and personal gain.

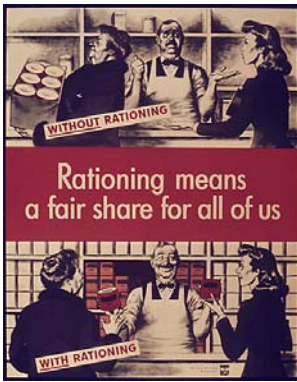


Figure 48
Rationing Means a Fair Share for All of Us.
Office of Price Administration, 1943.



Figure 49
Ceiling Price List displayed in a Greek market. Office of Price Administration photograph, 1943. Source: Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress, Digital ID: fsa 8b07444



Figure 50
Butcher Shop Signage with ration point reference. OPA, c. 1944.



Figure 51
We are Cooperating. Office of Price Administration, c. 1943. Source: NARA, Record group 44, Series: World War II Posters, 1942 – 1945.

Some OWI employees, who worked alongside members of the Ad Council, understood their job to inform the public differently from the admen. This led to a clash over poster designs: some felt dedicated to promoting war aims with serious,

informative war messages, while others championed the effectiveness of modern advertising techniques. This disagreement led to internal conflicts based on rival ideologies, and to the 1943 resignation of a large group of OWI writers and the Graphics Bureau chief, Francis Brennan. In his resignation letter, Brennan agreed that some advertising techniques, like printing and distribution were valuable,

But if you mean psychological approaches, content and ideas, I most firmly do not agree.
In my opinion those techniques have done more toward dimming perceptions, suspending critical values, and spreading the sticky syrup of complacency over the people more than any other factor in the complex pattern of our supercharged lives.⁷⁸

The writers, too, claimed the admen “tended to discourage material emphasizing the grimmer side of war,” and felt strongly that they could not work for “high pressure promoters who prefer slick salesmanship to honest information.”⁷⁹ The writing staff included established journalists and writers hand-picked for intelligence and integrity, and were described by one historian as “one of the most erudite groups in Washington.”⁸⁰ They shared a conviction that their most urgent task was to inform Americans as much as possible about the war and had been given freedom to write pamphlets on any topic they chose. Shortly after a publication ready for printing was cancelled against their wishes, and an internal OWI consolidation left them working directly under a former vice-president of Columbia Broadcasting

⁷⁸ Francis Brennan letter to Elmer Davis, 6 April 1943, general corresp., folder: D 1941-43, box 1, Pringle papers, LC, cited in Fox, *Madison Avenue Goes to War*, 52.

⁷⁹ Sydney Weinberg, “What to Tell America: The Writer’s Quarrel in the Office of War Information,” *The Journal of American History* 55, no. 1 (1968), 87.

⁸⁰ The writing staff had been hired originally by Archibald MacLeish, a poet turned bureaucrat, for the Office of Facts and Figures (OFF), created in the fall of 1941. They included Charles Poore, Malcolm Cowley, Samuel Lubell, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Henry Pringle, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and McGeorge Bundy. OFF merged with other information bureaus to form OWI in June 1942. See Weinberg, 75-8.

System and a former vice-president of Coca-Cola, fifteen writers and researchers resigned en masse from their OWI positions.⁸¹ One of the writers, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., explained his decision to resign by describing an intellectual and ideological shift in OWI that he viewed as a power grab:

The advertising men have been striking out for more and more power over the whole domestic information policy. This has meant a primary interest in manipulating the people, not in giving them the facts. It has meant an increasing conviction that any government information campaign likely to affect a vested business interest should first be approved by that interest. It has meant a steady replacement of independent writers, newspapermen, publishers, mostly of liberal inclination, by men beholden to the business community for their livelihood and thinking always as the business community thinks.

Similarly appalled by the new bosses' preference for superficial advertising imagery, and how they "treated the American people as if they were twelve years old," Francis Brennan and artist Ben Shahn created a poster that they believed suited the office's new outlook. They depicted "the Statue of Liberty, arm upraised, carrying not a torch, but four frosty bottles of Coca-Cola...with a motto 'The War That Refreshes: The Four Delicious Freedoms!'"⁸² One advertising executive chalked up "the hullabaloo made by the resigning writers" to confusion over OWI policies, and defended the role of advertisers by equating their persuasive abilities to the Church:

In the president's directive setting up this agency, the word "propaganda" does not appear. It is technically an "information" agency...But the fact is that the home front needs propaganda. Not in the sense of deceit, as its opponents use the word; but in the original sense, as used by the Church, for the Propagation of the Faith. Elmer Davis wavers between his rightful dislike of propaganda in the deceit sense, and his somewhat dim awareness of its need in the Faith sense.⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid., 85-86.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ James Webb Young, *The Diary of an Ad Man: The War Years June 1, 1942-December 31, 1943* (Chicago: Advertising Publications, Inc., 1944), 144.

These accounts of the behind-the-scenes episode known as The Writer's Quarrel substantiate what the posters made visible: that the Ad Council brought distinct ideologies with them to their war work. The myths of homefront America depicted in their posters were just one way of viewing and depicting the American public, albeit a heavily marketed one.

There was no shortage of commercial advertising outside of OWI's publications, either. Private companies continued to advertise during the war to align a company or industry with the war effort and to improve their image. Many businesses adopted a self-congratulatory stance, and hoped to take advantage of the good will of patriotic fervor. Materials produced by the National Association of Food Chains in 1942, to help promote the national nutrition plan, included their own logo linking "producer," "chain store" and "consumer," along with the slogans, "Better living at Lower Cost" and "Cooperation — The American Way" (fig. 52). The logo suggested a commitment to lower prices and a cooperative relationship between the three actors that had been lacking in the preceding decades. The National Cotton Council of America developed a series of posters (fig. 53) to announce "factoids" of cotton's usefulness in the war effort, including, "A soldier in the best fed army of the world consumes slightly more than 4 1/2 pounds of food daily, of which about 3 1/2 pounds moves in cotton bags!" In a poster titled "Camouflaged Angels," the Cotton Council informed a homefront audience that nurses in tropical combat areas wore cotton seersucker uniforms, which blended in with the jungle background, "yet still retain[ed] a crisp and neat appearance!" (fig. 53). Other industries gained permission

to incorporate government logos for national food campaigns directly into their ads.⁸⁴ Consumers were left to wonder if the company was endorsing the national nutrition campaign or if the government endorsing the product. Levenstein writes that large companies agreed to help spread messages about nutrition, but did so in ways that distorted the government's messages to highlight the importance of their own products.⁸⁵ In their own series of magazine ads, the American Gas Industry declared itself "the wonder fuel for cooking," and integral to "victory cooking" as called for by the government's nutrition program (fig. 54). The American Meat Institute prepared a series of ready-to-print "Wartime Meat Recipes" for newspapers and local butcher shops to run at will, including the pork recipes in figure 55 and the logo that mimic one of the government's. And in 1942, Borden sponsored a short documentary film about the production of milk titled, "White Ammunition." In the film, the wholesomeness of milk — a topic typically reserved for home economics classes — was transformed into a substance central to national defense. The male narrator described the bottles in the automated filling machine as "an army of glass soldiers lining up...to receive their quota of white ammunition" (fig. 56). These promotional efforts represented an intentional muddling of advertising, wartime propaganda and entertainment, which many feared did little to inform the public and instead, encouraged the public to become more reliant on the manipulation of images and symbols.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ See Katherine J. Parkin, *Food is Love: Food Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 93-98.

⁸⁵ Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 75.

⁸⁶ Jowett and O'Donnell, 157.

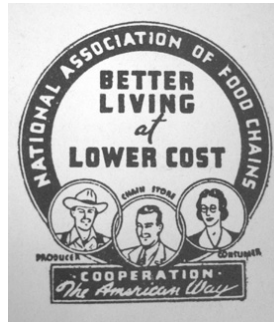


Figure 52
National Association of Food Chains flier to businesses and detail of logo, 1944.
“An opportunity to perform an outstanding public service... with advertising material designed especially for food chains... Endorsed and approved by Government”

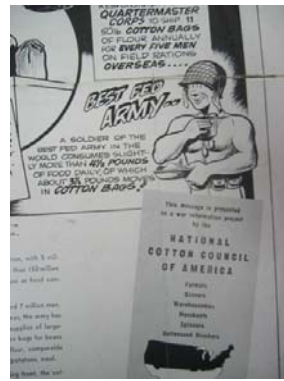


Figure 53
Selections from the poster series by the National Cotton Council of America. c.1943-6.



Figure 54
Gas Industry internal promotion. Included ads, and where they were placed, and offered an opportunity to tie-in a local company with the national campaign. Uses the USDA's "U.S. Needs US Strong" national nutrition campaign logo, c. 1943.



Figure 55
Wartime Pork Recipes.
American Meat Institute, c. 1943.



Figure 56

White Ammunition, c. 1942.

Producer: Blake (B.K.) Inc., Source: Internet Archive, Prelinger Collection:

<http://www.archive.org/details/WhiteAmm1942>.

CONCLUSION

The National Agriculture Library's collection of wartime posters and other publicity reveals the attempts to persuade a mass homefront audience to change their behavior. By making visible the agendas behind the government sponsored messages, posters are evidence of the bias often present in mass communication. A broad view, including a comparison of WWI posters with WWII posters, highlights important changes in the methods used to persuade, and in the advertising industry trusted by the US government to deliver those messages. The Ad Council produced messages and frameworks that supported a consumption- and advertising-friendly atmosphere. Advertising's messages did not reflect reality, but an idealized version of it intended to elicit desire and to promote the habits of consumerism, on which their industry relied. A cooperative partnership with the Ad Council, offered private interests opportunities to influence public messages about idealized behavior, while operating within a government-endorsed capacity.

Advertising cultivates desires and needs, writes Michael Schudson, including, "freedom, fulfillment, and personal transformation," which materialistic consumption

can never fulfill.⁸⁷ Cultural observers lament that citizens are rarely reminded of this fact in popular culture, and worry about commercial interests turning consumption into a substitute for democracy, where choices presented to the consumer take the place of meaningful political choice, and serve to “mask and compensate for all that is undemocratic within society.”⁸⁸ The National Agriculture Library’s poster collection provides an opportunity to consider the source and ambitions of public messages in popular media.

⁸⁷ Schudson, xix.

⁸⁸ Berger, 149.

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