



AMERICA ON THE WORLD STAGE

ALBEMARLE | CHARLOTTESVILLE | GREENE | MADISON | ORANGE

A
TEACHING
AMERICAN
HISTORY
GRANT PROGRAM

PROJECT TITLE:

The War of Words: Propaganda as a Weapon and Glue

AUTHOR: William P. Daisley Jr.

GRADE LEVEL & SUBJECT Middle
School/ High School

SCHOLARSHIP & RESEARCH

1. **Primary Investigative Question(s)** – Essential Question: How did Germany, Great Britain, The United States, and Japan use Propaganda during World War II?
2. **Contextual Essay** –

The War of Words: Propaganda as a Weapon and Glue

The years leading up to the breakout of World War II were filled with chaos, anxiety and suffering. In many ways all of this was a direct result of the end of World War I. The general mindset of the major players of World War II was forged in large part by the condition the country was in at the end of World War I. The Germans, who were villains of the first war, were left with little national pride, no standing army and a debt they could not repay. The people were looking for a rallying point, and Adolph Hitler gave them such a figure. The Japanese felt that England and the United States' holdings in the Pacific were a threat to them as well as an insult. More importantly, they felt that expansion into China was necessary for their economic survival, for they were short on natural resources. The British were brought into the fight by the invasion of Poland by Germany. The Russians and Americans looked ready to sit on the sidelines until provoked to fight. The Germans provided a reason for the Russians in mid-1941 while the Japanese drew the Americans into the conflict with their attack on Pearl Harbor. At the breakout of World War II, all of these countries faced the same challenges. How do you get your people to hate another group, nation or race enough that they were willing to participate in a total war effort where everyone was called on to make sacrifices? It was the job of propaganda to accomplish this, and the success of the propaganda determined a country's success within the war.

Propaganda can be defined as "ideas, facts or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or damage an opposing cause" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). All sides used propaganda for the two basic goals of making the enemies an object of hate while keeping their own people believing and focused on the task of winning the war. The effectiveness of the propaganda directly impacted any involved country's ability to continue the fight. Indeed, this notion may best be summed up in James H. Madison's book World War II, A History in Documents when he stated:

"If citizens were to endure hardship and danger, their leaders had to explain why the sacrifice was necessary. The best leaders were masters at communicating to their people and answering the hard questions..... Civilians on the home front had to know

exactly how and why they were to do their part of the war. They had to be convinced to do their part, and they had to have assurance that others were also sacrificing and that everyone was in this together. Maintaining civilian morale was a key for victory” (Madison, 2010).

Each side (Germany, Britain, U.S. and Japan) was given different challenges to overcome. The Germans needed to motivate people to hate enemies both inside and outside their own country while inspiring the people to take up arms for the second time in less than 50 years. Japan was forced to prepare each person to ready themselves to make the ultimate sacrifice, for as the approached the war, they were lagging behind in natural resources. The British were to not only inspire their people to fight against a bigger land power, but they also needed to find a way to bring the United States into conflict. Finally, the United States had the challenge of getting its people to once again fight a war which was not on their soil. While the different sides were challenged in completing the various stated tasks, they used propaganda, which was sometimes done in similar and contrary fashion. The success or failure of these campaigns of the pen was linked to the success or failure the country ultimately saw within the conflict.

The Germans propaganda incited the people to hate a group of people within their own community (the Jews) as well as promote a fear and loathing of the Communists. Indeed, early on Hitler saw his country becoming a partner with the United Kingdom (Rees 1997). Their propaganda drove the nation into war with several world powers, and it was imperative for this propaganda to be focused. Hitler, perhaps more than the other leaders, knew how important propaganda was because he began his advertising campaign earlier than the others. He understood how it was used and, more importantly, who it was to be used upon. In his own writing he asked the question “is it to be focused on the intelligent or ‘less educated masses? It must be addressed always and exclusively to the masses” (Hitler, 1999). Nazi propaganda started with rallying the people to nationalism. The German propaganda machine, like Germany itself, decided to not only start conflicts with external opponents such as the United Kingdom and the United States but to also fight an internal conflict, the Jews. At times, Hitler’s propaganda attacked the Jews and his opponents simultaneously. In 1939, the Nazis released a poster declaring that the Jews considered Franklin D. Roosevelt a modern day Moses (Berenbaum, 1993). The Nazis released a children’s book, The Poisonous Mushroom, telling children of the evils of the Jews (Luckert, none), an art exhibit (Luckert, none) and movies such as *The Jew Suss* (Luckert, none). In the movie *Joseph “Suss” Oppenheimer*, a court Jew in eighteenth century Wurttemberg, aids in the corruption of the ruling prince while despoiling the land of its wealth, a crime that will lead to his death (Luckert, none). The Jews were portrayed as doing better than most Germans during the early 1930’s because of the positions they held in the financial world. What the propaganda omitted was that many times the Jews held these positions because they were not allowed to pursue jobs such as farming (Rees, 1997). German propaganda, like the German army, was stretched thin by attempting to fight on so many fronts. The attention to detail the Germans showed early in their propaganda gave way to simpler, sometimes rushed artwork. In the end, the people and the army’s will to fight was broken.

The Japanese propaganda faced its own unique challenge of getting its people to fight in a war believing they had to win because their Emperor said they would, while the evidence was clear they did not have the resources to maintain a long invasion of the United States. Japan was feeling the imperialist push of the West in their region. World War I saw even more land handed over to the West. Japan was envisioning themselves as the liberators of the East; they also saw China as a threat. While military service was required, the Japanese were still able to get their population to buy into the fact they could win a war against countries much larger themselves, and they made their warriors embrace the ideal of the ultimate sacrifice. Perhaps no better piece copulates this than “The Story of Tank Commander Nishizumi.” It is a film about a heroic tank captain who eventually dies. The Japanese also used printed materials to remind people the concepts of Bushido

or the way of the samurai where death was considered a better option to capture. They also created many pieces of propaganda against the British and their intrusion into the Eastern Hemisphere (Rhodes, 1976). These leaflets were also dropped on the Australian and American soldiers fighting in the Pacific in an attempt to break their will. By the end of the war, the Japanese were almost out of fuel, pilots and planes and their final strategy, that of kamikaze pilots and soldiers fighting to the death on islands mirrored the propaganda with which they began. This strategy that involved killing and destroying the few valuable resources the country had left may have been a concept of total war, but it was hardly the way to win one.

The British were wary of another conflict. Neville Chamberlain attempted to negotiate peace with the Nazis to no avail. In signing the Munich agreement, Chamberlain allowed the Nazis to reclaim some land, hoping that this would satisfy Hitler; it did not. While the British paid dearly in World War I, they still felt a need to protect their allies on the European mainland. They also knew they needed the United States in the war if they were to prevail. A situation that was made more difficult by the fact that their propaganda machine wore out its welcome in World War I making sure the U.S. joined in that effort (Cull, 1995). The United States was hesitant to once again become too involved in European affairs. Once successful in obtaining the United States entrance into World War II, the British may have even celebrated this victory a little too much. On February 15, 1942, Churchill in one of speeches admitted the United States joining the war was the event they “dreamed of, aimed at and worked for” (Cull, 1995). Perhaps their most popular piece, the ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’ series, best encapsulated the British focus of trying to maintain calm and a sense of normalcy while the war continues. British propaganda convinced people to eat less, use less and perhaps even send your children away to a safer place, all for the sake of defeating the Germans. For a period of time, it was truly only the British standing against the Germans, and they never wavered.

The United States encouraged people to join a war not fought on their soil. They, like most of the world, were in a depression and many people were already living without many of the basics. They focused a lot of attention on turning the enemy into a creature of loathing, especially the Japanese as they were characterized in the propaganda pieces as animals, focusing in on a beast like appearance and slanted eyes. A knife was a common theme in anti-Japanese posters, symbolic of the knife they placed in America’s back at Pearl Harbor. Perhaps one of the more disturbing parts, however, was the fact that even American-Japanese citizens were to some extent placed in the same grouping. A famous drawing by none other than Doctor Seuss showed Japanese-Americans with the same animal like appearance preparing to assist in the invasion of the west coast (Minear, 1999). The United States faced the least of the hardships on the home front as the war was not to come to the mainland. Their propaganda was tasked with getting people to sacrifice when many times it was hard to see the reasons why. The United States did an excellent job of getting all of the population committed to a total war, which ultimately led to the success of the allies.

Russia’s propaganda, like the war strategy, was simple. It was each citizen’s duty to do everything they could to defeat the Germans because they attacked our homeland. Stalin signed a non-aggression pact with Germany, which Germany broke. Russia was not the most technically advanced power in the war, but they had the most of two things in the European theater, people and land. All of Russia’s propaganda focused on these and ultimately these were the two deciding factors for Russia’s victory.

Can we draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the propaganda and the success or failures of the powers involved in the war? This conclusion may be simpler than we think. First, we can look at the winners. Russia’s propaganda tended to stay simple, as did their war strategy. They gave a little land at a time, drawing the Germans in at just the right time as the Russian winter destroyed them. One interesting note is that Russian propaganda was the only one to make hero out of the sniper, a job most armies felt was a bit cowardly, but the Russians needed to slow down the Germans at all costs. The British needed to obtain the U.S. entrance into the war which was

successful. Secondly, they kept an island nation focused on and prepared for the Germans. If we consider Winston Churchill's famous 'we will fight them' speech, he was preparing his people to stay with the fight even if there were losses or if they were forced out of the cities; they were to keep fighting. The British were able to maintain a single focus, and it was successful. The United States figured out how to encourage men to fight and women to help. Perhaps there is not a better known piece of American Propaganda than Rosie the Riveter. Feminine yet strong, she embodied all that was asked of the American public.

Although we clearly see propaganda's use in the war's victors, the better comparisons may be with the losers. As noted, the Japanese soldiers were given no choice, so it was important that their propaganda focused on soldier being ready to die rather than willing to serve. It was as if even early on the Japanese leadership admitted that they were out manned. When looking at the German propaganda machine, it made the mistake that Hitler made by fighting on too many fronts. While the allies focused on demonizing the enemy and rallying the public, the German propagandists tied in the Jews in all these things. They not only rallied the public but also made them okay with eliminating another group of people. The effort to move and exterminate the Jews cost the Germans valuable resources and time; perhaps their propagandists found themselves with same problem the army had of fighting too many enemies. Was all of this propaganda successful? The Germans propaganda was successful enough that many of the German public could not believe they supported Hitler's Final Solution once they began to see how this solution was carried out (Rees 1997). After the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the President's speech, enlistment offices could not keep up with the influx of people for several days (Rhodes 1976). The country that needed its people to be prepared for the ultimate sacrifice became famous for its kamikaze plane attacks and nearly always fighting to the last man as the United States slowly island hopped across the Pacific. The British were able to keep the Germans off their shores and eventually with the United States help, turn the tide of World War II. What is clear is that even though we tend to see wars as won on the battlefield, there can be little doubt that World War II reinforced the fact that the pen, the voice and the creative mind were and are valuable weapons in whatever conflict man finds him involved in fighting.

3. Annotated Bibliography , Sources for Essay –

<http://www.ushmm.org/propaganda/> The United States Holocaust Museum Web Site. This site provides a huge selection of primary sources not only dealing with Propaganda but obviously the Holocaust as well. Parts of the site are geared to more sensitive learners. This site would be a great location to dive deeper into the propaganda of Germany. This site is ever changing and has many examples of possible lessons dealing with the Holocaust.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/theartofwar/> From the National Archives in the United Kingdom, this portion of the site is dedicated to propaganda and the "Art of War". Here teachers can get more primary sources and illustrations to enhance the study. Students can also be allowed to do some hands on research with this site. One of the highlights of this site is that each poster has a description and history attached to it.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Michael Berenbaum, The World Must Know, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993 A good resource for diving deeper into the Holocaust topic. Gives great background to how the rest of the world was reacting and gives more insight to the use of propaganda.

Nicholas John Cull, Selling War, Oxford University Press, 1995 A perspective of the use of propaganda of one ally against another. It gives a detail account of the British push to get the United States to join the war. Give good background even before the war making the point the United States was tired of the British after they pushed for our entrance into World War I.

Peter Darman, Posters of World War II, Brown Bear Books, 2008 A good resource for collecting posters from the various powers of World War II. A useful if classroom sets were available to allow student to make comparisons of the various propaganda tools.

Adolph Hitler, Mein Kampf, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999 Chapter six can be considered the bible of propaganda. Hitler was an undisputed mad man, but his thoughts on propaganda were copied by every other power in the conflict.

Steven Luckert and Susan Bachrach, State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda, W.W. Norton and Company, none. This book is available from the United States Holocaust Museum. It dives deeper into the ideas and concepts of the Nazi propaganda machine as it was used against the Jewish people. It is a great resource in showing the step by step process Hitler and the Nazi's used to change their peoples opinion.

James H. Madison, World War II, A History in Documents, Oxford University press, 2010 A great book on how to look at documents. Its introduction is extremely helpful for anyone beginning the study of primary documents. Most of the book are actual pieces of letters and writings from this time and can be great background information.

Richard H. Minear, Dr. Seuss Goes to War, The New Press, 1999 A great book to cover not only propaganda drawings but the concept of total war. It gives a good history of how Dr.Seuss became involved with the war effort and will challenge both teacher and student when it comes to the subject of the treatment of the Asian-Americans living on the west coast.

Laurence Rees, The Nazis: A Warning from History, The New Press, 1997 A great in depth study of the Nazi's, has great insight on their use of propaganda and spends a lot of time covering how Hitler and his brain trust focused on controlling what people thought.

Anthony Rhodes, Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion: World War II, Chelsea House Publishers, 1976 This book like the previous one has a good collection of Propaganda posters from World War II. This book however has better analysis of the various techniques and can used by a teacher to gain background on the Propaganda itself.