

World War I Propaganda Posters

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I. Lesson Summary

Summary

In this lesson, students will examine World War I posters from the United States in order to learn about the objectives of wartime propagandists and the tools they use to meet those objectives. Working in pairs, the students will examine six propaganda posters, record the objective(s) they think each poster was designed to achieve, and the tools used in the poster.

Objectives

Students will:

- 1) Learn about propagandists' tools during wartime;
- 2) Examine World War I propaganda posters from the United States, and;
- 3) Discuss and record the objective(s) the poster was designed to achieve, and the tools used in it.

U.S. History Event

World War I

Grade Level

This lesson is designed with the high school-level American History classroom in mind, but could be adapted for a middle school classroom as well.

Materials

Copies of **Student Handouts #1 & #2** for each student (or pair), one copy each of **Posters #2-19**, transparencies of each poster (optional)

Lesson Time

This lesson could be completed in two 50-minute periods, or one block period. However, feel free to use a longer period of time in order to familiarize your students with the objectives and tools that propagandists use.

II. Lesson Procedures

Procedures

- 1.) Before class, place students in pairs. Prepare a map of the classroom for the overhead projector showing the seating arrangements for the classroom.
- 2.) Preview activity: Using magazines and newspapers, have students choose an example of an advertisement that they find particularly effective. Tell students to cut the ad out, paste or glue it to a piece of notebook paper, and write below the ad the objective they think the ad is designed to achieve. Have them use arrows to annotate the ad and show the tools — such as humor, celebrity endorsement, emotional images, and language — the advertiser uses to achieve that objective. Have several students share their work with the class. After they have shared their work, tell them that advertising and propaganda — the spreading of ideas or beliefs to further a particular cause or damage an opposing cause — are very similar. For instance, the purpose of advertising is generally to get people to buy a product or use a service. Likewise, the purpose of propaganda is to get people to think, act, or feel a certain way. Also, advertisers and the creators of propaganda use many of the same tools — such as humor, catchy slogans, emotional images or language, caricatures, and visual symbols — to make their work effective.

*Note: If your classroom has access to a SMARTBoard, you may also want to find some recent TV commercials that you find effective because of the use of humor, celebrity endorsements, etc. BE SURE TO PREVIEW FIRST!!!

- 3.) Inform students that in this activity they will examine WWI propaganda posters from the United States to learn about propagandists' objectives and tools during wartime. Pass out "**Student Handout #1: Propaganda Objectives and Tools**," and review with students the common objectives and tools of propagandists during wartime.
- 4.) Once students understand the common objectives and tools of propagandists during wartime, tell them that they will now analyze the objective and tools of a propaganda poster as a class. Project **Poster #1** on either a transparency, scan converter, or SMARTBoard, which shows a WWI propaganda poster depicting New York City under attack from waves of bi-planes and U-boats. Have students carefully examine the image and answer these questions: **What do you see here?** (planes and submarines, flames in the background, the Statue of Liberty with its head and torch on the ground) **What is happening in this poster?** (New York City is under attack) **What objective is this poster designed to achieve?** (the sale of war bonds) **What propaganda tools are used in this poster?** (emotional appeals, evocative visual symbols)
- 5.) After students have analyzed Poster #1 as a group, give a copy of one of Posters #2 – #6 to each pair (make more than one copy of each poster). Have pairs carefully examine the poster, determine what objective they think the propaganda poster is designed to achieve and which propaganda tools is used in it, and record their notes (individually or as a pair) on a piece of notebook paper.
- 6.) When pairs finish their first poster, have one partner bring the poster and their notes to you. Check students' notes for accuracy and thoroughness. If their notes are satisfactory, take their poster and give them another. You may also optionally award them points. Continue this process until most pairs have had an opportunity to examine each of the posters.
- 7.) When most pairs have examined all of the posters, tell them that the poster on which they are currently working is the one they will present to the class. Give them a few extra minutes to make sure they have thoroughly examined the poster and completed their notes.
- 8.) When students are ready to present their posters, project **Poster #2** (either on your SMARTBoard, scan converter, or as a transparency), which shows an American soldier hugging his wife and son. Ask one of the pairs that worked on **Poster #2** to come forward and present their answers to the class. Encourage students to point out details in the poster that support their answers. Use the **Teacher's Guide to Posters** to give students more information about the poster. Have students add to their notes. Repeat this process for **Posters #3 - #6** (if time runs short, feel free to discuss only posters that you think represent a good cross-section of differing styles of propaganda).
- 9.) After the class has discussed all of the propaganda posters, hold a class discussion centering on these questions:

- What were some of the common objectives you identified in the propaganda posters? Could you identify any other objectives besides the ones that were listed on Student Handout #1?
- What were some of the most common tools you identified in the propaganda posters? Could you identify any other tools besides the ones that were listed on Student Handout #1?
- To what extent does propaganda appeal to emotions and not reason? Why do you think this is so?
- Can you think of any forms of propaganda that affect your life? How do these forms of propaganda appeal to emotions of fear, hatred, sympathy, patriotism, or consumerism?
- Have you ever been personally affected by a piece of propaganda? Explain.
- How can you recognize propaganda in today's world? Should the government try to limit or ban propaganda? Why or why not?

Teacher's Guide to Posters #2 - #6

Poster #2: In this poster we see a U.S. soldier returning from service in World War I. The poster is designed to call to mind the patriotism and devotion to family among potential recruits. The caption "For Home and Country" is reinforced by the soldier's uniform and his loving family. The enemy helmet around his neck and the medal pinned to his lapel are symbols of the success in service to his country. The objective of the poster is to recruit soldiers, and to eliminate dissent and unite the country behind the war effort. In the poster we see evidence of the following propaganda tools: emotional appeals, patriotic appeals, catchy slogans, and evocative visual symbols.

Poster #3: In this poster we see an angry man ripping off his jacket after reading the newspaper headline at his feet: "Huns Kill Women and Children." The man almost seems to be ready to put on a Marine uniform right now. The newspaper headline refers to the Germans as "Huns" to evoke memories of past German aggression. The objective of the poster is to recruit soldiers. In the poster we see confirmation of the following propaganda tools: demonization, emotional appeals, name-calling, patriotic appeals, half-truths or lies, and evocative visual symbols.

Poster #4: In this poster we see a female gardener with a variety of fruits and vegetables going "over the top" of a trench to assist in achieving victory over the enemy. The U.S. flag flies proudly in the background. The poster encourages Americans to plant "victory gardens" so that more of the nation's farm products could be shipped overseas to feed U.S. soldiers. During the war, the U.S. Food Administration used posters like this one to encourage victory gardens as well as conservation efforts called "wheatless Mondays and Wednesdays," "meatless Tuesdays," and "porkless Thursdays." The objective of this poster is to seek support for the conservation of resources. In the poster we see evidence of the following propaganda tools: emotional appeals, patriotic appeals, catchy slogans, evocative visual symbols, and humor/caricatures.

Poster #5: In this poster we see a soldier returning from war and facing a student in a graduation cap and gown. The caption reads, "When the Boys Come Home. While I was Over There what were You Doing Here? Students of America how will you answer him?" The poster was created by a home-front organization, the United War Work Campaign. The objective of the poster is to recruit participants for the organization to support the war effort. In the poster we see evidence of the following propaganda tools: emotional appeals, patriotic appeals, and evocative visual symbols.

Poster #6: In this poster we see an ape-like creature, half-crazed and baring fangs, carrying a swooning woman. This creature carries a club that has "KULTUR" written on it. Based on the German helmet on the creature's head and his straddling of a type of border that reads "America," we can assume that the creature is symbolic of Germany. The viewer is meant to see Germany leaving destruction behind, and carrying away the innocent, after an attack on the homeland. The objective of this poster is the recruitment of soldiers, as seen by the caption ("Destroy This Mad Brute. Enlist U.S. Army"). In the poster we see evidence of the following propaganda tools: demonization, emotional appeal, half-truths or lies, and evocative visual symbols.

Propaganda Objectives and Tools

I. Common Objectives of Wartime Propaganda

- A. Recruitment of soldiers or other wartime personnel, either through a draft or voluntary enlistment.
- B. Financing the war effort through the sale of war bonds—loans from citizens to the government—or new taxes.
- C. Eliminating dissent and unifying the country behind the war effort.
- D. Conservation of resources—such as food, oil, and steel—necessary to wage war.
- E. Increase factory production of war materials.

II. Common Tools Used in Wartime Propaganda

*Demonization - This tool involves portraying the enemy as purely evil, menacing, murderous, and aggressive. The propagandist attempts to remove all confusion and ambiguity about whom the public should hate. The enemy may be portrayed as a hairy beast or the devil himself. This tool becomes more powerful when the enemy can be blamed for committing atrocities against women, children, or other noncombatants.

*Emotional Appeals - This tool involves playing on people's emotions to promote the war effort. Since the strongest emotion is often fear, propagandists create their work based on the premise that the more frightened a person is by a communication, the more likely he or she is to take action. Thus, propagandists are careful to explain in detail the action that they want the consumer of the propaganda to carry out.

*Name Calling - This tool involves using loaded labels to encourage hatred of the enemy. Labels like "Commies," "Japs," and "Huns" reinforce negative stereotypes and assist propagandists in demonizing the enemy.

*Patriotic Appeals - This tool involves using patriotic language or symbols to appeal to people's national pride.

*Half-Truths or Lies - This tool involves deception or twisting the truth. The propagandist may attempt to include some element of truth in the propaganda to make an argument more persuasive. For example, blaming the enemy for complete responsibility for the war and portraying one's own country as a victim of aggression is a common propaganda tool.

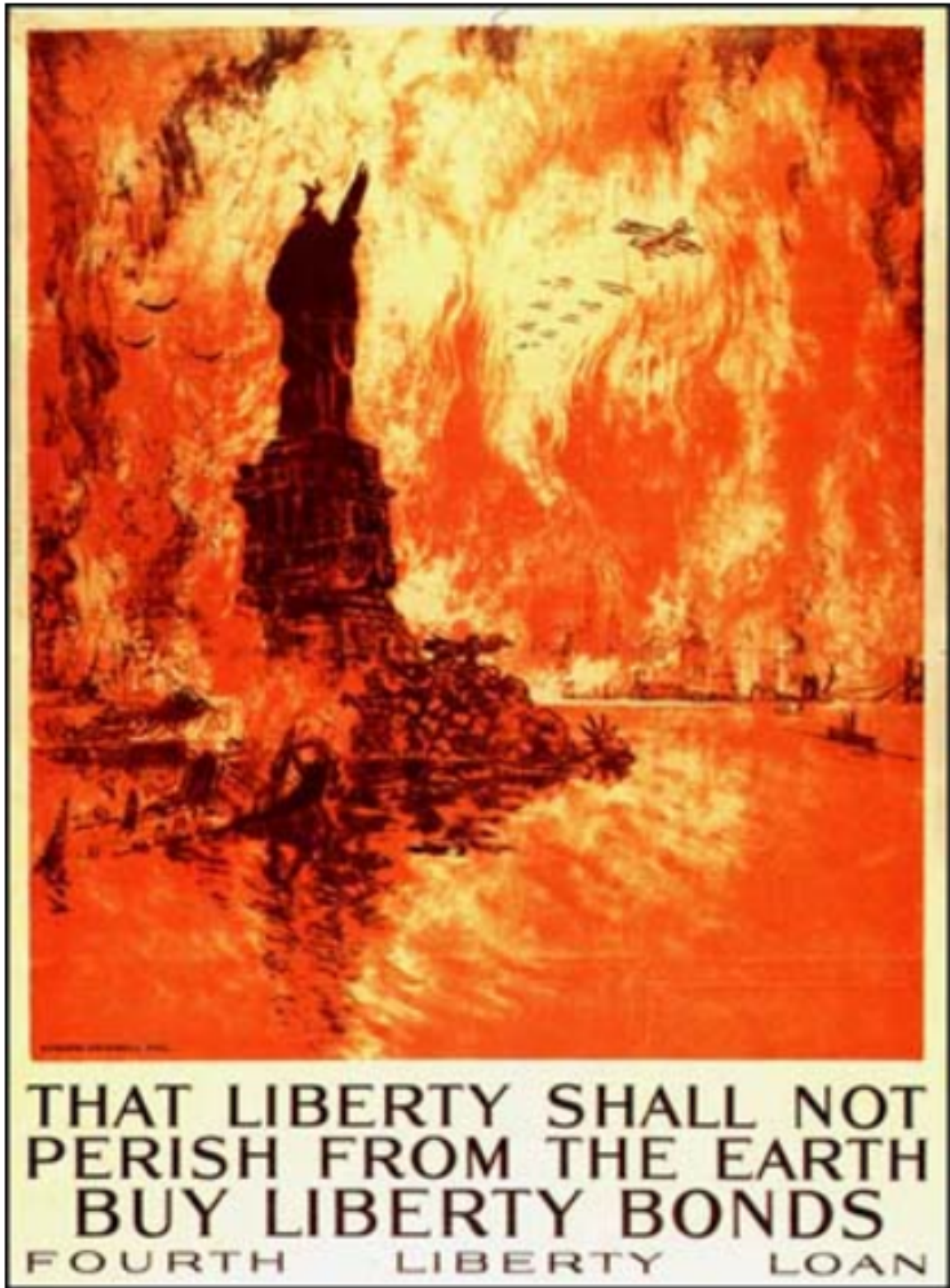
*Catchy Slogans - This tool involves using memorable phrases to foster support for the war effort. For example, short phrases like "Remember the *Maine!*" and "Remember the Alamo!" have been very successful in motivating Americans to strongly support the use of arms against Spain and Mexico, respectively.

*Evocative Visual Symbols - This tool involves using symbols that appeal to people's emotions—like flags, statues, mothers and children, and enemy uniforms—to promote the war effort.

*Humor or Caricatures - This tool involves capturing the viewer's attention through the use of humor to promote the war effort. The enemy is almost always the butt of the jokes used by propagandists.

III. Activities

Poster #1



For Home and Country



VICTORY LIBERTY LOAN

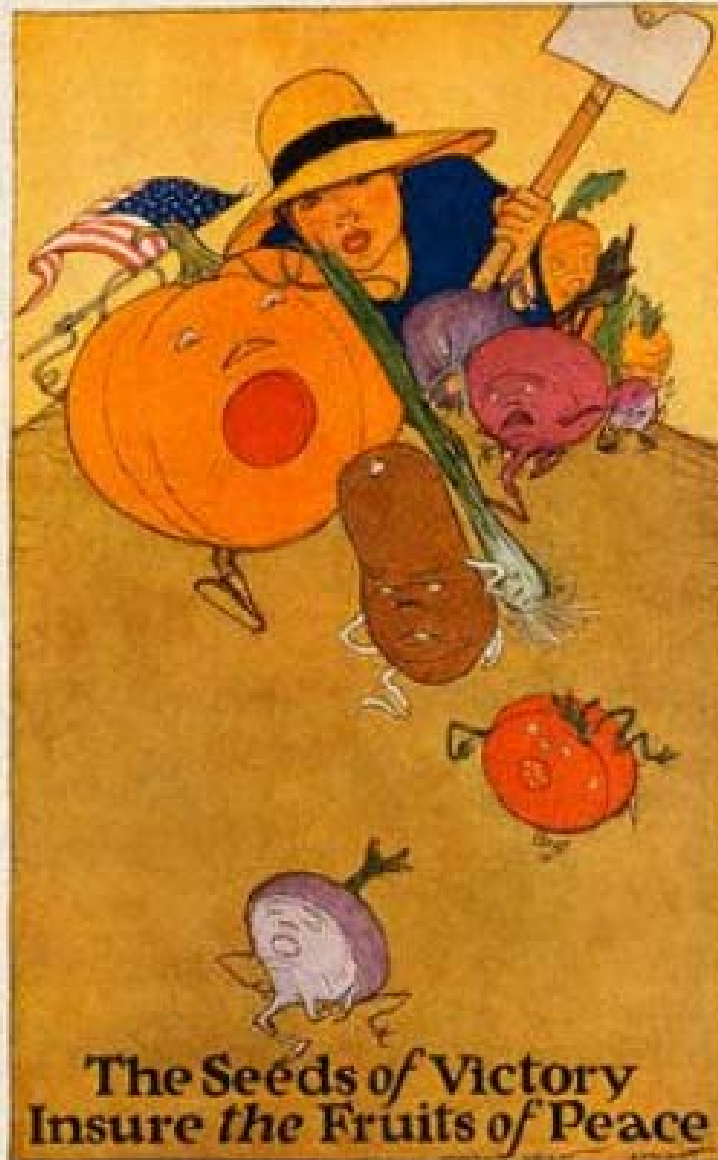
TELL THAT TO THE MARINES!

AT 24 EAST 23rd STREET



WILL WINDHAM TUCKER

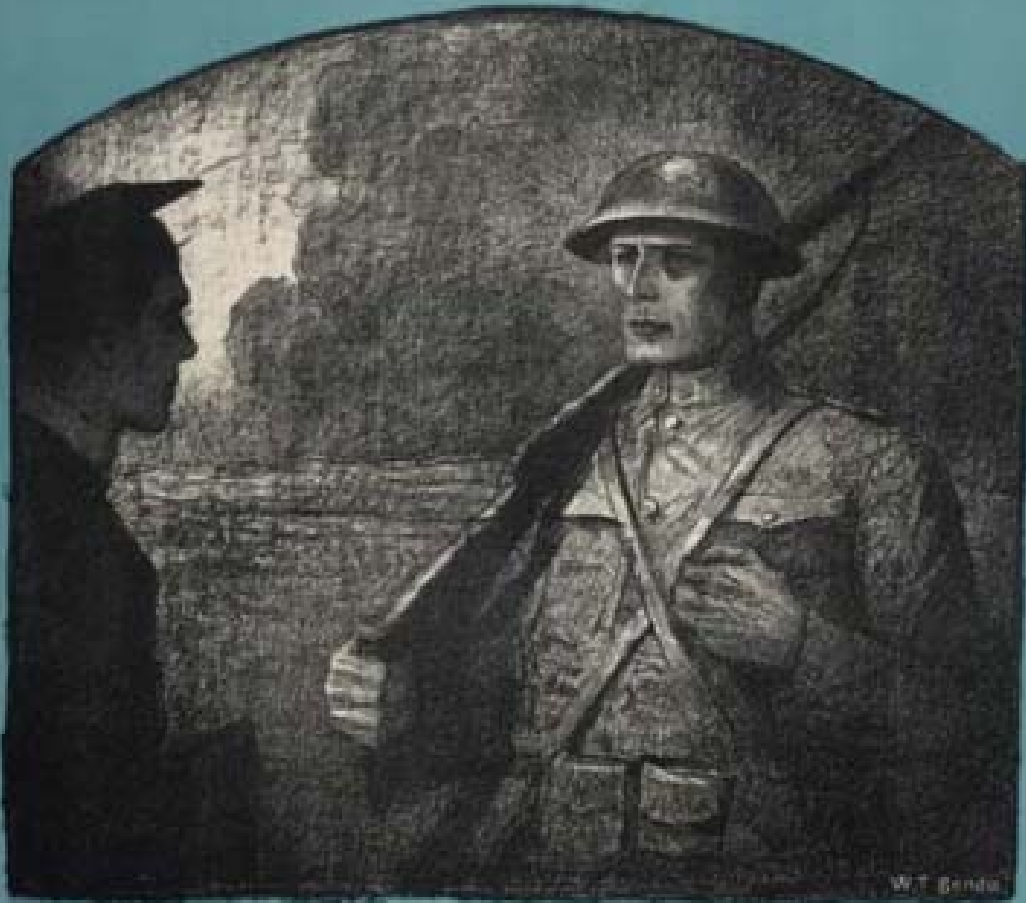
WAR GARDENS OVER THE TOP



FOR FREE BOOKS WRITE TO NATIONAL WAR GARDEN COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Charles Lathrop Pack, President

Percival S. Ridsdale, Secretary



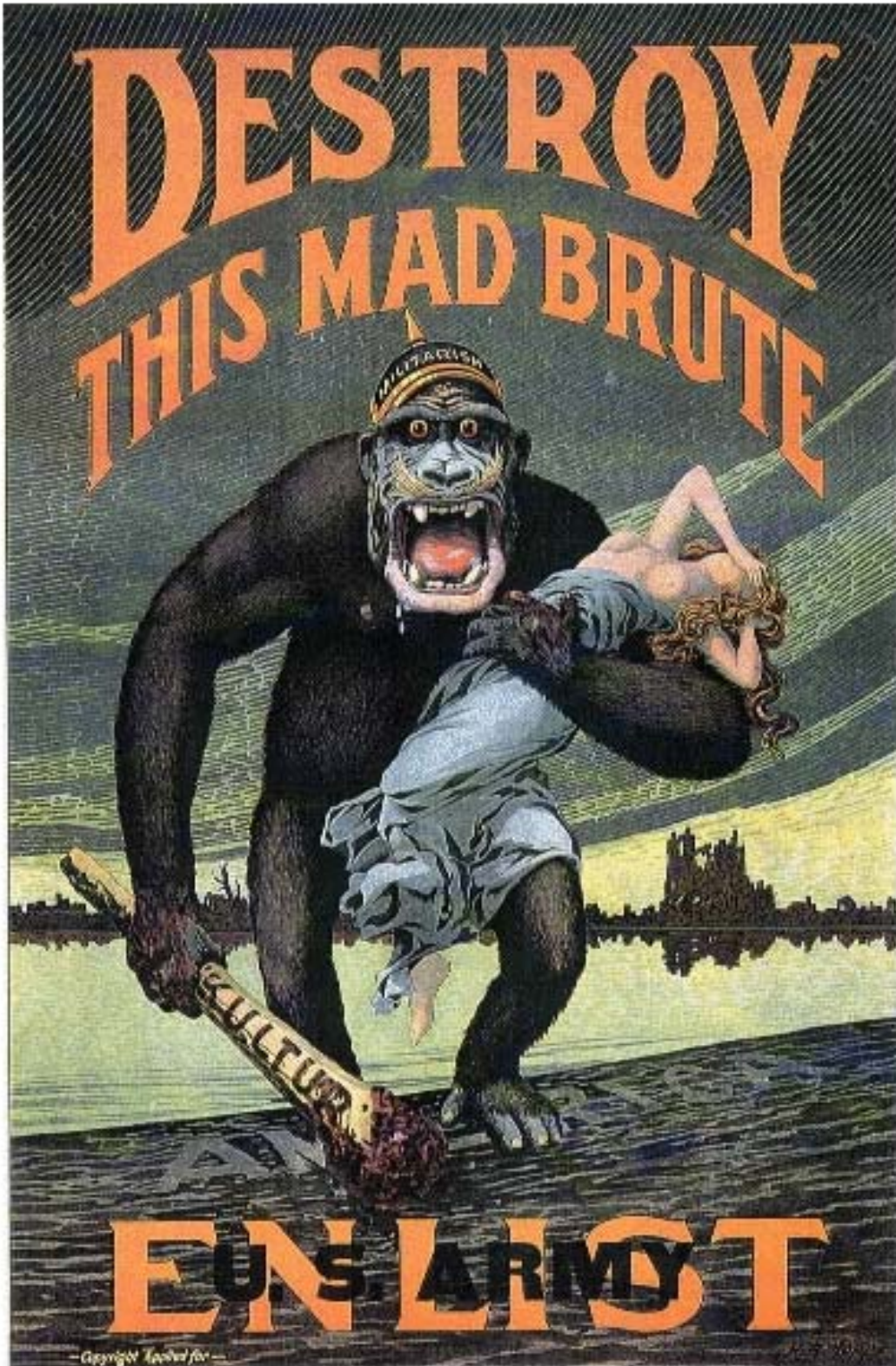
WHEN THE BOYS COME HOME

**While I was Over There
what were You Doing Here?**

STUDENTS of AMERICA

HOW WILL YOU ANSWER HIM?

UNITED WAR WORK CAMPAIGN—NOV. 11-18



IV. Assessments

During World War I, the United States established a department of the government whose sole purpose was to convince Americans that they should support the war effort. Posters were made, songs were written and performed, films were produced, and advertisements were produced that all had the same message: support your troops and your government...to do otherwise would be traitorous.

Of course, other countries were also active in producing propaganda for their own citizens, and for enemy soldiers. Below are two examples of propaganda dropped behind American lines by German pilots, the first of which is targeted towards American soldiers of German descent. The second is written to African-American soldiers.

#1 - "To the American Soldiers of German Descent..."

You say ... that you serve in an honorable way in the U.S. Army. Do you think it honorable to fight the country that has given birth to your fathers or forefathers? Do you think it honorable to fall upon any country after it has heroically defended itself for four years against a coalition of peoples tenfold its superior in numbers? Look at the map and compare that tiny little spot representing Germany with the vast territories assigned to Russia, England, and the United States, to mention only the biggest of Germany's adversaries, and you cannot remain in doubt that the heroism is entirely on Germany's side.

We are fighting for everything dear to us, for our homes, our very existence. What are you fighting for, why did you come over here, 4,000 miles away from your own home? Did Germany do you any harm, did it ever threaten you? Your leaders are MisLeaders; they have lied to you that we are slaves of a tyrant, and you are guilty of gross ignorance if you believe one word of it! Everybody knowing anything about human nature and the history of European nations will tell you that slaves can never stand up against the whole world of fierce enemies; only free men fighting for their happiness in life will endure so many years of fighting against the most colossal odds that ever a nation encountered!

An everlasting shame it is that 20 millions of German-Americans could not prevent that man Wilson, who never was a genuine American but rather an English subject in disguise, to raise his hand against their mother country! Read George Washington's Farewell Address and imagine what he would have to say of the total collapse of real Americanism in our days. His golden words to his fellow citizens to only mind their own business have been thrown to the winds by the present administration.

Go and repent ere it is too late! We shall welcome every lost sheep that finds its way back to its herd. There is more freedom in Germany indeed than in the land of Dictator Wilson. We do not try to deceive you, we do not promise you a farm, but we assure you that every honest man willing to work has infinitely better chances in Germany where we do not suffer corrupt politicians, deceiving land speculators, nor cheating contractors. Lay down your gun, your innermost soul is not in this fight. Come over to us, son of Germany, you will not regret it!

#2 - "To the Colored Soldiers of the U.S. Army"

Hello, boys, what are you doing over here? Fighting the Germans? Why? Have they ever done you any harm? Of course, some white folks and the lying English-American papers told you that the Germans ought to be wiped out for the sake of humanity and Democracy. What is "democracy"? Personal freedom; all citizens enjoying the same rights socially and before the law! Do you enjoy the same rights as the white people do in America, the land of freedom and Democracy, or are you not you rather treated over there as second-class citizens?

Can you get into a restaurant where white people dine? Can you get a seat or berth in a railroad car, or can you even ride in the South in the same street car with white people? And how about the law? Is lynching and the most horrible crimes connected therewith, a lawful proceeding in a Democratic country?

Now, all this is entirely different in Germany, where they do like colored people; where they treat them as gentlemen and as white men, and quite a number of colored people have mighty fine positions in business in Berlin and other big German cities. Why, then, fight the Germans only for the benefit of the Wall Street robbers, and to protect the millions that they have loaned to the English, French, and Italians?

You have been made the tool of the egotistic and rapacious rich in America, and there is nothing in the whole game for you but broken bones, horrible wounds, spoiled health, or – death. No satisfaction whatever will you get out of this unjust war. You have never seen Germany, so you are fools if you allow people to make you hate us. Come over to see for yourself. Let those do the fighting who make the profit out of this war; don't allow them to use you as cannon fodder!

To carry a gun in this service is not an honor, but a shame. Throw it away and come over to the German lines. You will find friends who will help you!

- 1.) Read the two German-produced propaganda pieces. Highlight or underline each instance where you can find an example of the tools used by wartime propagandists.
- 2.) What are the *objectives* of the German propagandists?
- 3.) Given your prior knowledge of both the reality of second-class citizenship for African-Americans in the home country they were fighting for, and the anti-immigrant/anti-German feelings dominant among native-born Americans during the early 20th century, would these propaganda pieces entice you to switch sides? Why or why not?
- 4.) True or false. Wartime propaganda is most often based on factual information.
- 5.) True or false. Advertising and wartime propaganda are very similar in that both attempt to get people to think, act, or feel a certain way, and both use many of the same tools to make their work effective.

V. Resources

Teachers' Curriculum Institute, Palo Alto, CA – www.teachctci.com (for Student Handout #1)

Poster #1 - <http://workofthepoet.blogspot.com/2007/07/world-war-i-recruitment-posters.html>

Poster #2 - <http://www.argonautbookshop.com/images/For%20Home%20and%20Country.jpg>

Poster #3 - <http://www.usmcstore.com/images/Posters/tell%20it%20to%20the%20Marines.gif>

Poster #4 - <http://www.earthypursuits.com/WarGarV/WarGard2.htm>

Poster #5 - <http://docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/41937/100.html>

Poster #6 - <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/collections/art/holdings/poster/images/enlarged1.html>

Propaganda Reading #1 - "To the American Soldiers of German Descent..."
(http://encarta.msn.com/sidebar_761593275/world_war_i_german_propaganda_leaflet.html)

Propaganda Reading #2 – "To the Colored Soldiers of the U.S. Army" (*Combat Multipliers: African-American Soldiers in Four Wars* by Krewasky A. Salter I; Combat Studies Institute Press, Fort Leavenworth, KS)

