

THE IMPACT OF THE POSTER

During World War I, the impact of the poster as a means of communication was greater than at any other time during history. The United States, even with its late entry into the war, produced more posters than any other country. However, countries on both sides of the conflict distributed posters widely to garner support, urge action, and boost morale.

During World War II a larger quantity of posters were printed, but they were no longer the primary source of information. By that time, posters shared their audience with radio and film.

Many WW I posters rely on symbolism to illustrate their point. Uncle Sam appears quite frequently as a symbol for the United States. John Bull and Britannia represent the United Kingdom, while France is personified by Marianne. Posters produced by the Allies often depict Germany as a caricature called a "Hun" who was usually portrayed wearing a pickelhaube (spiked helmet), often covered in blood. Whistler's mother, from the famous painting formally titled, "Arrangement in Grey and Black," is used to represent all motherhood on one Canadian poster. Men are asked to join the Irish Canadian Rangers and "fight for her."

The Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division

THAT LIBERTY SHALL NOT PERISH FROM THE EARTH (Poster)

Joseph Pennell's design for the Fourth Liberty Loan Drive of 1918 showed New York City in flames and the Statue of Liberty in ruins. Although the likelihood of enemy attack was small (aircraft of the day could not cross the Atlantic Ocean), Pennell's visual argument made for a particularly haunting poster. It was printed in approximately two million copies.

The Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division has extensive holdings of World War I era posters.

Food shortages were widespread in Europe during the war and, even before the United States entered the war, American relief organizations were shipping food overseas. On the home front, it was hoped that Americans would conserve food that could then be sent abroad. Americans were told to go meatless and wheatless and to eat more corn and fish. Americans were also encouraged to plant victory gardens and to can fruits and vegetables.

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ARTISTS AND WW I

Within weeks of the United States entering the First World War, in 1917, the Society of Illustrators in New York City was tasked to find a way that artists might assist in the war effort. Under the leadership of Charles Dana Gibson, Society members launched what became the Division of Pictorial Publicity. It was part of the Committee on Public Information, created by President Wilson and charged with designing posters that would encourage patriotism and sacrifice on the home front, and, most importantly, confidence for victory. More than three hundred of America's foremost designers, illustrators, painters, and cartoonists worked for the division.

Posters, projecting a sense of patriotism, made an important contribution to America's successful war effort: "the stuff that holds a nation together." Their symbols, icons such as the American flag, the Statue of Liberty, Uncle Sam, and the girl next door inspired American citizens to stand up and take their patriotic place in the defense of our great country. To do less would be un-American.

After the war, Congress tallied up the bill and found that two-thirds of the cost of the war was raised by poster bond drives.

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THE POSTERS THAT SOLD WORLD WAR I TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC: A vehemently isolationist nation needed enticement to join the European war effort.

On July 28, 1914, World War I officially began when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. It took three years, but on April 2, 1917, the U.S. Congress joined the battle and declared war on Germany. The government didn't have time to waste while its citizens made up their minds about joining the fight. How could ordinary Americans be convinced to support a distant, unpopular war?

"Posters sold the war," said David H. Mihaly, the curator of graphic arts and social history at the Huntington Library in California. "These posters inspired you to enlist, to pick up the flag and support your country. They made you in some cases fear an enemy or created a fear you didn't know you had. Nations needed to convince their citizens that this war was just, and we needed to participate and not sit and watch." There were certainly propaganda posters before 1917, but the organization and mass

distribution of World War I posters distinguished them from anything previous, Mihaly said.

Adapted and edited from a 2014 article by Jia-Rui Cook, [SMITHSONIAN.COM](https://www.smithsonian.com)

HANDKERCHIEFS

During WW I soldiers wanted souvenirs, and many a cottage industry developed to meet that desire. French and Belgian women would embroider on silk mesh that would then be sent to factories for trimming and mounting on postcards. These embroidered silk handkerchiefs, many with intricate designs and colors, provided a souvenir that could easily be carried and mailed home to a mother, wife, or sweetheart.

Corporal Walter Bullard, 603rd Engineers, American Expeditionary Forces in France, wrote his mother on August 16, 1918: “I am enclosing a handkerchief that I bought for you. It is rather pretty with the French flag and the Stars and Stripes together. They sell quite a bunch of them to the boys to send home, and there is hardly a town that I have been in that you can’t find hundreds in stores. They have all colors and with different words and such. Some have the Allied flags worked in the corner.”