

World War II Propaganda

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The primary author is the individual who drafted the first version of this section; a section that could have been modified since it was originally published.

What is Propaganda?

Propaganda was a vital part of the war effort in World War II. It was used by the Allies and the Axis to rally support from their citizens and to discredit the enemy. The question is: what exactly is propaganda? Propaganda is a term used to describe the dispersal of information intended to influence an audience. According to Bruce Lannes Smith, propaganda is a deliberate manipulation of people's ideas and beliefs. The idea that propaganda is deliberate and manipulative helps to separate it from information used impartially to educate an audience. Propaganda must reach its targeted audience in order to be useful however.



Types

Propaganda can be dispersed using a variety of methods or types. During WWII, propaganda took many forms. Everything from cartoons in a newspaper to animated movies were used to influence the minds of people. Two of the main ways that propagandists relayed information was through media and print.

The use of media to disperse propaganda included outlets such as television, movies and radio. During World War II, both the Axis and the Allies relied on all these forms of propaganda. Some of the media campaigns were straight propaganda, for example [radio programs](#) like *Lord Haw-Haw*. Others were more indirect like commercials for cigarettes or soda that incorporated a war message. The movie industry also became an outlet for propagandists to reach more people. [Leni Riefenstahl's](#) *Triumph of the Will* is a fascinating study in the use of everything from camera angle to content used to incite emotion and influence a large number of people.

Media was a useful form of propaganda but it could only reach individuals with access to television, radios and movies. Print sources had the ability to reach a broader audience. Enemy planes might drop leaflets aimed at undermining the military or newspapers might carry articles meant to inspire the war effort. Books such as *Mien Kampf* written by Adolf Hitler also relayed specific ideologies. Posters were another form of propaganda prolific on all sides of the war effort.



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Photo Caption: German propaganda poster directed at American servicemen.

Themes

Propaganda had many ways to reach a great number of people, but what did it say? Every propagandist had their own message to impart but there are some general themes that seem to appear from all sides of the war. Those themes were aimed largely at gaining support and discrediting the enemy.

Without the support of the people, governments would not be able to be successful in times of war. In order to gain that support during WWII, countries employed propaganda as a strategy to boost morale and share specific ideologies. Germany, for example, had large media and print campaigns denouncing Jewish individuals as well as other cultural groups that did not fit into the Nazi ideal. The Nazis were not the only ones to use propaganda to gain support. Posters depicting brave soldiers and patriotic symbols were common in many countries including Britain and the United States.

It was important to have people stand behind the ideals they were fighting for. It was also important to have their support in more tangible ways. Propaganda was used to motivate citizens to contribute to the war effort. Individuals left on the home front were encouraged to build victory gardens, buy war bonds and go to work in war-related fields. This was especially true for women, [Rosie the Riveter](#) became an iconic image of the war effort.

Gaining support for the war was important but so was preparing citizens for the dangers of war. Campaigns in Britain urged parents to send their children to live in the country until the fighting was over. Other campaigns informed citizens of the necessity of having blackout drills or of the importance of not sharing information that might be used by the enemy. In the United States, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt even warned of influences on labor in a newspaper article.

The enemy was an important target of propaganda during WWII. Leaflets were dropped behind enemy lines in an attempt to undermine confidence by the British early on in the war. Radio programs often sought to spread false or exaggerated information to the other side. Not only was the enemy the target of propaganda but they could also be depicted in cartoons and animated films by showing exaggerated features such as sharp teeth and claws in order to gain an emotional response.

Axis and Allies

In using propaganda to discredit the enemy, it was important to know who the enemy was. Many countries participated in World War II but there were some key players on each side. The two sides consisted of the Axis and the Allies.



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The Axis countries main participants were Germany, Italy, and Japan. Of these countries, Germany had the most well known propaganda program in effect. German propaganda was carefully engineered by the minister of propaganda, [Joseph Goebbels](#). Goebbels worked to portray a specific image of the Nazi party as well as to discredit any opposition. Japan and Italy also had propaganda programs in place. For example, Tokyo Rose was a radio personality that dispersed Japanese propaganda.

The Allies also had propaganda programs in place. The main participants for the Allies were the United States, Britain, Russia, France, and China. Propaganda was a large part of the war effort for these countries as well. A common focal point for Allied propaganda would be [posters](#).

Post-war Propaganda

The end of the war between the Axis and the Allies did not necessarily mean the end of propaganda. Propaganda used during the war created ideals that the post-war world did not always live up to. In Japan, there was a sense of disillusionment when reality did not match up with what people had been told. Countries also used their propaganda programs to continue to influence individual ideas about the war. In post-war Germany, films promoted an idea of forgetting about the atrocities of the war. In the United States, images that were left out of mainstream propaganda are now being used to show the involvement of African American women.

Individuals who had helped create the propaganda used during WWII faced different fates. Many were permanently affected by their participation in the war effort. Leni Riefenstahl's career was clearly affected by her association with the Nazi party and radio personality William Joyce (Lord Haw Haw) was executed for treason.

Regardless of the outcomes for those involved, it is clear that propaganda played an important part in the war effort during WWII. Whether it was a poster selling war bonds or a book about the Nazi ideals, intentional information was provided to a broad audience to serve the purpose of influencing individuals.

Works Consulted

"Advertising News." *New York Times* (1923-Current file): 25. Jul 22 1944. ProQuest. Web. 26 Sep. 2014 .

This brief article offers suggestions for using advertising to target women and get them involved in the war effort. The article not only focuses on ways to advertise to women but also ways to incorporate women in advertising for other things. This article is aimed at individuals who would use advertising for various things. This is a brief article with some valuable suggestions.



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Andrews, Evan. ""[6 World War II Propaganda Broadcasters](#)." History.com. A&E Television Networks, 13 Aug. 2013. Web. 09 Oct. 2014.

This article introduces different radio programs used for propaganda during WWII. It looks at programs used by both the Allies and the Axis. This piece gives a brief overview aimed at the general population with an interest in WWII history. This article was posted on the History channels website.

"[Anti-Japanese sentiment and war propaganda: \(Torikai Gyo-haku laboratory\) US war posters of the Second World War. Anti-Japanese sentiment and war propaganda](#)." US war posters of the Second World War (Torikai Gyo-haku laboratory) Np, nd Web. 21 Sept. 2014.

This article, written in Japanese, looks at various WWII posters and how they portray Japan. The article looks largely at American propaganda and puts a Japanese perspective on the posters while giving some background into the original sentiment. The article seems to be aimed individuals with an interest in using posters as a reflection of cultural and political bias. This article is very thorough.

Baird, Jay W. *The Mythical World of Nazi War Propaganda 1939-1945*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974. Print.

This book provides a comprehensive overview of the use of propaganda by the Nazi's during WWII. The focus of this book is that Nazi propaganda was based on "myth". The book appears to be very well researched and provides a great deal of researchable data. The intended audience appears to be at the college level or higher with an interest in history. This book can provide a great deal of specifics including personal interviews on the topic.

By, A.H. (1941, Jun 22). "The Art of Propaganda-by Adolf Hitler." *New York Times* (1923-Current File).

This article is an excerpt from "Mein Kampf" by Adolf Hitler. This particular excerpt was chosen for being the "most important" by the newspaper. In the fact that only a portion of the original material is used, it is in fact propaganda in it's own right. The intended audience is the general public and it is intended to relay a specific perspective. This piece provides an excellent example of using one piece of writing by both sides to convey their own message.

Balfour, Michael. *Propaganda in War 1939-1945*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979. Print.

This book provides a thorough look at both British and German propaganda. It begins with a before the war approach to propaganda, thoroughly dissects several aspects of war time propaganda, and ends with a look at propaganda itself. The author of this book provides a great deal of research as well as some personal experience with the topic. The intended audience is college level individuals with a true interest in the topic. This book is very dense in facts.



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Cecilia Bruzon, Guy Desormeaux, Raffi Karamanlian, Cindy Pacheco and Nadia Popatia. "Selling World War II to Canadians." *Toronto Star* (Canada) n.d.: Newspaper Source. Web. 2 Oct. 2014.

This article looks at how propaganda was used in Canada during WWII. It provides some excellent insight into what propaganda is and why it was used. The article is written in retrospect and aimed at a general audience. It is from a major Canadian newspaper.

Coronado Ruiz, Carlota. "Mujeres En Guerra: La Imagen De La Mujer Italiana En Los Noticiarios Luce Durante La Segunda Guerra Mundial (1940-1945). (Spanish)." *Revista De Estudios De Genero La Ventana* 4.37 (2014): 177-209. Academic Search Complete Web. 21 September 2014.

This article looks at the Italian's use of propaganda during WWII to influence citizens, specifically women. The focus of this piece is largely looking at Luce's newsreels. The intended audience appears to be individuals interested in the use of propaganda during WWII from a historical context as well as a sociology context. This article is a peer-review article.

Davis, Myron, and William C. ShROUT. "[U.S. is Losing the War of Words](#)." *Life* 22 Mar. 1943: 11-14. Google Book Search. Web. 2 Oct. 2014.

This article examines the author's belief that the US needs to utilize propaganda more fully during WWII. The article also gives some excellent examples of propaganda used by the US and other nations at the time. This is a period piece written for a general audience. The article appeared in a major magazine.

"[Defining Propaganda I](#)." *Defining Propaganda I*. American Historical Association, 2013. Web. 2 Oct. 2014.

This page looks at the definition of propaganda. It also has links looking past the base definition into a more comprehensive view of propaganda. This article is aimed at providing a working knowledge of the topic for all individuals. This article is from a professional organization and has a bibliography attached.

Feldmann, Martha J. "[Totalitarianism without Pain: Teaching Communism and Fascism with Film](#)." *The History Teacher* 29. No. 1 (1995): 51-61. Journal.

This article shows how to teach a unit about Communism and Fascism to a freshman level class. It looks at the film *Triumph of the Will* as well as others. It gives a very brief look at the background of the film and its effect on people. The lesson seems to be well researched. As stated before it is aimed at a freshman level class. It gives some basic information.



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Fussell, Paul. *Wartime*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. Print.

This book looks at the effects (intended and not) of propaganda on the population as a whole. It focuses mostly on American propaganda but touches on the British as well. There are also connections made to the influence on the general public as well as those on literature. This is a thoroughly researched book that seems intended for a college level student with an interest in WWII and in literature. It is dense in facts but also more story like than a text book.

Gallo, Max. *The Poster in History*. New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1974. Print.

This book looks at how posters have reflected the ideals and events of their time. The time period is from the 1780's to the 1970's. It addresses WWII but also how propaganda is used to influence in general. This book is image heavy but contains research on the specific ideas of the time as well. This book seems intended for individuals interested in art or marketing. It still contains a unique perspective on this one aspect of propaganda.

Golubev, Alexey. "Between Social Reformism And Conservatism: Soviet Women Under The Finnish Occupation Regime, 1941-1944." *Scandinavian Journal Of History* 37.3 (2012): 355-376. Academic Search Complete. Web. 21 Sept. 2014.

This article explores the changing roles of women caused by the occupation of Soviet Karelia. It looks at the changing roles of women by the Bolshevik social agenda. Specifically the difference in ideas by the Bolshevik's and the Finnish. There is a portion of this article that looks at the role of propaganda in this clash. The article is aimed at college level individuals interested in women's studies and WWII history. This is a peer reviewed article with a strong bibliography.

Honey, Maureen. "[*Bitter Fruit African American Women in WWII*](#)". Columbia: The University of Missouri Press, 1999. Google Book Search. Web. 28 Sept. 2014.

This book seeks to bring light to the role African American women played on the home front during WWII. One of the aspects of this book covers the lack of African American women in propaganda campaigns at the time. This book is aimed at college level individuals who seek to broaden their knowledge base of women's roles in WWII. The author has written multiple books on women's rolls in WWII. She provides an extensive bibliography.

Honey, Maureen. "[*Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II*](#)". Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984. Google Book Search. Web. 21 Sept. 2014.

This book looks at the changing roles across class lines of women in the United States during WWII. It focuses heavily on the influence of propaganda in these changing roles especially in popular media of the time. This article is aimed at individuals at a college level interested in the use of propaganda during WWII and the changing roles of women at this time. This book is very well researched and received excellent reviews.



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Hoyt, Alila. "[How Propaganda Works](#)." HowStuffWorks, 24 Sept. 2008. Web. 11 Oct. 2014.

This article gives an overview of propaganda in general. It looks at what propaganda is, how it's used and why it's used. This is an article aimed at a general audience. It provides a bibliography and links for further research.

Keitz, Ursula von. "Between Dramatization And Epicization: The Portrayal Of Nazi Crimes In Exemplary German Films From The Late 1940S To The 1970S." *New German Critique* 102 (2007): 45-60. Academic Search Complete. Web. 2 Oct. 2014.

This article examines the continued use of propaganda in post war Germany and its changing attitude toward Nazi ideals. This article is aimed at college level individuals interested in the psychological effects of propaganda. This is a peer reviewed article.

"[Leni Riefenstahl](#)." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. United States Holocaust Memorial Council, 20 June 2014. Web. 01 Oct. 2014.

This article looks at Leni Riefenstahl who created the movie "Triumph of the Will" which was a huge part of Hitler's propaganda program. The article looks at how she came to make the movie and the impact that it had. This is aimed at a general audience interested in learning about WWII and the Holocaust. This is a recognized national museum.

Levitt, Nina. "Ephemeral Presence." *Canadian Review Of Art Education: Research & Issues* 34.1 (2007): 44-57. Academic Search Complete. Web. 28 Sept. 2014.

This article discusses the masculinity of propaganda during WWII. It looks at how that perception made it possible for women to enter into fields such as spying because they did not fit the perception of women at the time. The article is aimed at college level individuals interested in history. The article is a peer review article with many examples and resources.

Mie, Ayako. "Surrender had lasting impact on many Japanese after war's end." *Japan Times* 15 Aug. 2014: Newspaper Source. Web. 2 Oct. 2014.

This article looks at the disillusionment of the Japanese people after WWII. It looks into how propaganda at the time created an image of post-war Japan that did not happen. This was written to inform people of a different perspective of the war. It was written by a man who was a young man in Japan at the end of the war.



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Metzl, Ervine. *The Poster Its History and Its Art*. New York: Watson-Guption Publications, Inc., 1963. Print.

This book looks at the origin of the poster and its uses. This book has some information on WWII posters but the majority of the book is on posters from several time periods. This book does not contain a great deal of research about the general historical portions of the book. This is a book geared toward the artist or art historian. It could be useful for specific images.

"Mrs. Roosevelt Says Propagandists Seek to make Soldiers Anti-Labor." *New York Times* (1923-Current file): 1. Apr 25 1942. ProQuest. Web. 25 Sep. 2014.

This article quotes Mrs. Roosevelt regarding the effect that propaganda can have on labor as well as on soldiers. In the article she states that "clever" use of propaganda can undermine the confidence of individuals. This article is aimed at the general public. It has direct quotes and appeared in a major newspaper of the time.

Palomino, Michael. ""[Drittes Reich: Propaganda 1933-1945](#)." N.p., 2014. Web. 21 Sept. 2014.

This article looks at various propaganda posters in Germany during WWII. It gives a brief narrative for each poster discussing its cultural and political influence. This piece is taken from a section of the book *History of the Second World War, Volume II, D. Psychological warfare* by AG Ploetz. This piece is aimed at individuals with an interest in the psychology behind German propaganda. This piece has an extensive list of credits and seems to be well researched.

"[Paul Joseph Goebbels](#)." Bio. A&E Television Networks, 2014. Web. 02 Oct. 2014.

This article looks at the life of Paul Goebbels who was a key player in the Nazi party's propaganda machine. The article doesn't address propaganda much but does provide background into one of its key players. This is a brief article aimed at the general population interested in history. It has a fact check link for accuracy.

"[Powers of Persuasion](#)." National Archives and Records Administration. National Archives and Records Administration, n.d. Web. 11 Oct. 2014.

This site from the National Archives uses posters from WWII to discuss the different messages given to citizens in the United States during WWII. It breaks down into two parts, one aimed at gaining support and one at warnings about the enemies. This exhibit is aimed at the general population and is produced by the National Archives.



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Roetter, Charles. *The Art of Psychological Warfare 1914-1946*. New York: Stein and Day, 1974. Print.

This book looks at the use of propaganda during war. It details the usage by the major nations involved in WWI and WWII. It looks at the motive behind propaganda, the strategies used to employ a successful campaign and propaganda's effects on the outcomes of those wars. This book is heavy in research. The author also has personal experience in the field.

Ryan, Kathleen M. "'Don't Miss Your Great Opportunity': Patriotism And Propaganda In Second World War Recruitment." *Visual Studies* 27.3 (2012): 248-261. Academic Search Complete. Web. 21 Sept. 2014.

This article looks at how propaganda was aimed at women during WWII. The article discusses how women were convinced to enter into new roles by the use of posters by the Navy and Coast Guard. This piece is aimed at college level individuals interested in women's studies, art and history. This is a peer review journal.

Simpson, Pat. "Parading Myths: Imaging New Soviet Woman On Fizkul'turnik's Day, July 1944." *Russian Review* 63.2 (2004): 187-211. Academic Search Complete. Web. 2 Oct. 2014.

This article looks at a magazine cover in Russia in 1944. The article then looks at how the "ideal" Russian woman is portrayed and what that says about the Soviets attitude toward women and the hope for the current and future situations. This article is aimed at individuals with some background in the time period. It is a peer review journal.

United States. National Park Service. "[Rosie the Riveter WWII Home Front National Historical Park \(U.S. National Park Service\)](#)." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior, 11 Sept. 2014. Web. 02 Oct. 2014.

This site introduces the Rosie the Riveter/WWII Home Front National Historical Park which is dedicated to bringing to life the history of Rosie the Riveter. There are some good links and pictures on this site though many of the pages are "under construction". This is aimed at a general audience and provides first hand accounts.

"[We Can... We Will... We Must!](#)" Allied Propaganda Posters of WWII. National WWII Museum, n.d. Web. 02 Oct. 2014.

This site is an excellent resource on propaganda used by the Allies during WWII. It has links and discussions about how propaganda was used, why it was used, and the psychology behind it. This is a museum website aimed at individuals interested in WWII. The site has many resources listed.



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Weinberg, David. "Approaches to the Study of Film in the Third Reich: A Critical Appraisal." *Journal of Contemporary History* 19.No. 1, Historians and Movies: The State of the Art: Part 2 (1984): 105-126. Journal.

This article looks at how film was used as propaganda by the Nazi's during WWII. There were a few select films looked at in this article. The films were looked at as the films themselves as well as their usage by the Nazi's to present a specific ideology.

Winkler, Allan M. *The Politics of Propaganda The Office of War Information, 1942-1945*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978. Print.

This book looks at the Office of War Information and its implementation and control of propaganda during WWII. It also examines propaganda in depth in and its use by the United States. This book is heavy in research, even having a bibliographic essay. The writer aims his work at a college level student looking for a comprehensive look at the history as well as the motivation behind propaganda.



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