

POWERS

of PERSUASION

POSTER ART FROM WORLD WAR II



Guns, tanks, and bombs were the principal weapons of World War II, but there were other, more subtle, forms of warfare as well. Words, posters, and films waged a constant battle for the hearts and minds of the American citizenry just as surely as military weapons engaged the enemy. Persuading the American public became a wartime industry, almost as important as the manufacturing of bullets and planes. The Government launched an aggressive propaganda campaign to galvanize public support, and some of the nation's foremost intellectuals, artists, and filmmakers became warriors on that front.

This online exhibit features 33 posters and 1 sound file from a more extensive exhibit that was presented in the National Archives Building in Washington, DC, from May 1994 to February 1995. Like the original, this exhibit is divided into two parts, which represent two psychological approaches used in rallying public support for the war.

Part 1 These posters motivate the viewer by instilling patriotism, confidence, and a positive outlook. Patriotic colors of red, white, and blue predominate. Pictures of fists, muscles, tools, and artillery convey American strength. American heroes and familiar national symbols appeal to patriotism.

- [Man the Guns!](#)
- [It's a Woman's War Too!](#)
- [United We Win](#)
- [Use it Up, Wear it Out, Make it Do, Or Do Without](#)
- [Four Freedoms](#)

Sound File

Song: "Any Bonds Today?"

- [WAV file for Windows, 393K](#)
- [AIFF file for Macintosh, 393K](#)

Part 2 These posters rock people out of their complacency with grim, unromantic visions of war. They depict the human cost of war, confronting the viewer with corpses, bloodshed, and gravestones. These images appeal to darker impulses, fostering feelings of suspicion, fear, and even hate.

- [Warning! Our Homes Are in Danger Now](#)
- [This is Nazi Brutality](#)
- [He's Watching You](#)
- [He Knew the Meaning of Sacrifice](#)
- [Stamp 'em Out!](#)



Visit our award-winning [Online Exhibit Hall](#) to see more historic documents.

Citations and Credits

All posters used in the **Powers of Persuasion** exhibit were made from the original posters in the custody of NARA's [Still Picture Branch](#) at the [National Archives at College Park, MD](#). A NARA identification number appears at the end of each caption.

Additional images of WWII posters are available in the [NAIL database](#).



[National Archives and Records Administration](#)

URL: <http://www.nara.gov/exhall/powers/powers.html>

webmaster@nara.gov

Last updated: August 10, 1998

Powers of Persuasion

Accentuate the Positive,
Eliminate the Negative,
Latch on to the Affirmative,
Don't Mess with Mr. In-Between.

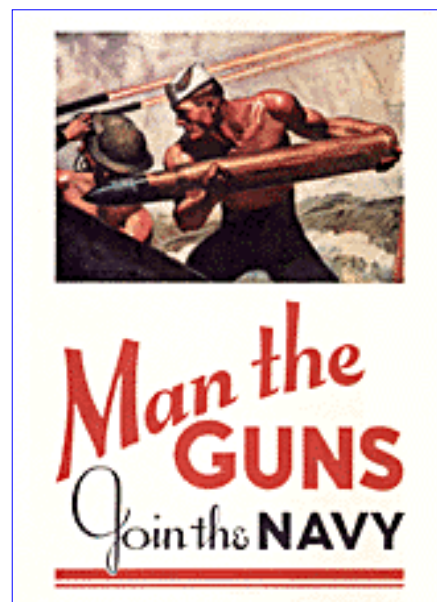
--Hit song, 1945

Music by Harold Arlen

Lyrics by Johnny Mercer

Man the Guns!

Masculine strength was a common visual theme in patriotic posters. Pictures of powerful men and mighty machines illustrated America's ability to channel its formidable strength into the war effort. American muscle was presented in a proud display of national confidence.



Man the Guns--

Join the U. S. Navy

by McClelland Barclay, 1942

Produced for the Navy Recruiting Bureau

NARA Still Picture Branch

(NWDNS-44-PA-24)



Keep 'em Fighting

Printed for the National Safety Council, Inc.
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-44-PA-1171B)



Get Hot--Keep Moving

On the back of this print is inscribed
"Bridgeport Brass."
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-179-WP-1256)

To More Posters

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URL: <http://www.nara.gov/exhall/powers/manguns.html>
webmaster@nara.gov

Last updated: October 23, 1997

Powers of Persuasion

These jobs will have to be glorified as a patriotic war service if American women are to be persuaded to take them and stick to them. Their importance to a nation engaged in total war must be convincingly presented.

--Basic Program Plan for Womanpower
Office of War Information

It's a Woman's War Too!

In the face of acute wartime labor shortages, women were needed in the defense industries, the civilian service, and even the Armed Forces. Despite the continuing 20th-century trend of women entering the workforce, publicity campaigns were aimed at those women who had never before held jobs. Poster and film images glorified and glamorized the roles of working women and suggested that a woman's femininity need not be sacrificed. Whether fulfilling their duty in the home, factory, office, or military, women were portrayed as attractive confident, and resolved to do their part to win the war.



Victory Waits on Your Fingers
Produced by the Royal Typewriter Company
for the U.S. Civil Service Commission
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-44-PA-2272)



**Longing Won't Get Him back Sooner . . .
Get a War Job!**
by Lawrence Wilbur, 1944
Printed by the Government Printing Office for
the War Manpower Commission
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-44-PA-389)



Of all the images of working women during World War II, the image of women in factories predominates. Rosie the Riveter--the strong, competent woman dressed in overalls and bandanna--was introduced as a symbol of patriotic womanhood. The accoutrements of war work--uniforms, tools, and lunch pails--were incorporated into the revised image of the feminine ideal.

We Can Do It!

by J. Howard Miller

Produced by Westinghouse for the War
Production

Co-Ordinating Committee
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-179-WP-1563)

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URL: <http://www.nara.gov/exhall/powers/women.html>
webmaster@nara.gov

Last updated: October 23, 1997

National Archives and Records Administration

Powers of Persuasion

We say glibly that in the United States of America all men are free and equal, but do we treat them as if they were? . . . There is religious and racial prejudice everywhere in the land, and if there is a greater obstacle anywhere to the attainment of the teamwork we must have, no one knows what it is.

Arthur Upham Pope, Chairman of the Committee for National Morale, in
America Organizes to Win the War

United We Win

In spite of overt racial discrimination and segregation in the military and in civilian life, the overwhelming majority of black Americans participated wholeheartedly in the fight against the Axis powers. They did so, however, with an eye towards reconciling American ideals of equality with American practices of discrimination. This objective was expressed in the call, initiated in the black press, for the "Double 'V'"--victory over fascism abroad and over racism at home.

The Government was well aware of the demoralizing effects of racial prejudice on the African American population. In its publicity campaigns, the Government presented an idealized view of race relations in America. Racial tensions disappeared in portrayals of black Americans as full and equal participants in American society. The images of racial harmony belied the profound feelings of unrest that, on occasion, erupted into episodes of racial violence during the war years.



United We Win

Photograph by Alexander Liberman,
1943

Printed by the Government Printing
Office for the
War Manpower Commission
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-44-PA-370)



During World War II, the military employed policies of racial restriction and segregation. At the beginning of the war, for example, blacks could join the Navy but could serve only as messmen.

Doris ("Dorie") Miller joined the Navy and was in service on board the U.S.S. *West Virginia* during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Restricted to the position of messman, he received no gunnery training. But during the attack, at great personal risk, he manned the weapon of a fallen gunman and succeeded in hitting Japanese planes. He was awarded the Navy Cross, but only after persistent pressure from the black press.

**Above and Beyond
the Call of Duty**

by David Stone Martin

Printed by the
Government Printing
Office for
the Office of War
Information

NARA Still Picture

Branch

(NWDNS-208-PMP-68)

**Private Joe Louis
Says--**

NARA Still Picture
Branch

(NWDNS-44-PA-87)



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URL: <http://www.nara.gov/exhall/powers/united.html>

webmaster@nara.gov

Last updated: June 12, 1998

Astronomical quantities of everything and to hell with civilian needs.

--Donald Nelson, Chairman of the War Production Board,
describing the military view of the American wartime industry.

Use It Up, Wear It Out, Make It Do, or Do Without

Although the United States did not suffer the same kinds of war deprivations that Europe did, there were wartime shortages. Gasoline, rubber, sugar, butter, and meat were among the rationed items. Government publicity reminded people that the shortages occurred because the materials were going to the troops and that civilians should take part in conservation and salvage campaigns.



Waste Helps the Enemy

by Vanderlaan

Produced by the Douglas Aircraft Company

NARA Still Picture Branch (NWDNS-79-WP-103)



When You Ride Alone You Ride With Hitler!

by Weimer Pursell, 1943

Printed by the Government Printing Office for the
Office of Price Administration

NARA Still Picture Branch (NWDNS-188-PP-42)



**Save Waste Fats for Explosives--
Take Them to Your Meat Dealer**

by Henry Koerner, 1943

Printed by the Government Printing Office
for the Office of War Information

NARA Still Picture Branch (NWDNS-44-PA-380)

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URL: <http://www.nara.gov/exhall/powers/waste.html>
webmaster@nara.gov

Last updated: April 28, 1998

Powers of Persuasion

We look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression--everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way--

everywhere in the world.

The third is freedom from want . . . everywhere in the world.

The fourth is freedom from fear . . . anywhere in the world.

--President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Message to Congress, January 6, 1941



You can [hear this excerpt](#) from President Roosevelt's address (920K WAV File).

Four Freedoms

President Roosevelt was a gifted communicator. On January 6, 1941, he addressed Congress, delivering the historic "Four Freedoms" speech. At a time when Western Europe lay under Nazi domination, Roosevelt presented a vision in which the American ideals of individual liberties were extended throughout the world. Alerting Congress and the nation to the necessity of war, Roosevelt articulated the ideological aims of the conflict. Eloquently, he appealed to Americans' most profound beliefs about freedom.

The speech so inspired illustrator Norman Rockwell that he created a series of paintings on the "Four Freedoms" theme. In the series, he translated abstract concepts of freedom into four scenes of everyday American life. Although the Government initially rejected Rockwell's offer to create paintings on the "Four Freedoms" theme, the images were publicly circulated when *The Saturday Evening Post*, one of the nation's most popular magazines, commissioned and reproduced the paintings. After winning public approval, the paintings served as the centerpiece of a massive U.S. war bond drive and were put into service to help explain the war's aims.



Save Freedom of Speech

By Norman Rockwell
Printed by the Government Printing
Office
for the Office of War Information
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-208-PMP-44)



Ours to fight for--Freedom From Want

By Norman Rockwell
Printed by the Government Printing
Office
for the Office of War Information
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-208-PMP-45)

Save Freedom of Worship

By Norman Rockwell
Printed by the Government Printing
Office
for the Office of War Information
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-208-PMP-43)



Ours to fight for--Freedom From Fear

By Norman Rockwell
Printed by the Government Printing
Office
for the Office of War Information
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-208-PMP-46)

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[National Archives and Records Administration](http://www.nara.gov/exhall/powers/freedoms.html)

URL: <http://www.nara.gov/exhall/powers/freedoms.html>
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Last updated: October 24, 1997

Powers of Persuasion

Civilians must have the war brought home to them. Every individual must be made to see the immediacy of the danger to him. . . . He must be made to understand that he is an integral part of the war front, and that if he loses the war, he loses everything.

Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry
Office of War Information

Warning! Our Homes are in Danger Now!



WARNING! Our Homes Are in Danger Now!

Produced by the General Motors Corporation, 1942

NARA Still Picture Branch (NWDNS-44-PA-2314)

Poster makers used fear to mobilize the public. In the absence of any immediate physical danger, American propagandists exaggerated the physical proximity of enemy forces. Though separated from the actual warfare by great distances, Americans appeared within arm's reach of the enemy. They were shown to be in imminent danger--their backs against the wall and living in the shadow of Axis domination.



A study undertaken by the U.S. Government found that images of women and children in danger were effective emotional devices. The Canadian poster at left was part of the study and served as a model for American posters, such as the one at right, that adopted a similar visual theme.

Keep These Hands Off!

by G. K. Odell
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-44-PA-97)



Don't Let That Shadow Touch Them

by Lawrence B. Smith, 1942
Produced for the Government
Printing Office
for the U.S. Treasury
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-44-PA-97)



We're Fighting to Prevent This

by C. R. Miller
Think America Institute,
Kelly Read & Co.
NARA Still Picture
Branch
(NWDNS-44-PA-2376)

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URL: <http://www.nara.gov/exhall/powers/homes.html>
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Last updated: October 15, 1997

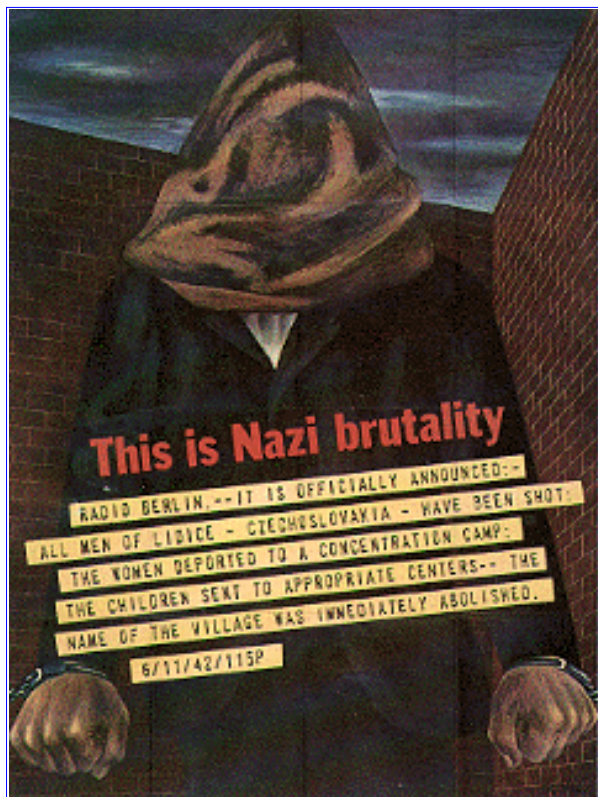
Powers of Persuasion

Under their system, the individual is a cog in a military machine, a cipher in an economic despotism; the individual is a slave. These facts are documented in the degradation and suffering of the conquered countries, whose fate is shared equally by the willing satellites and the misguided appeasers of the Axis.

--*Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry*,
Office of War Information

This is Nazi Brutality

Many of the fear-inspiring posters depicted Nazi acts of atrocity. Although brutality is always part of war, the atrocities of World War II were so terrible, and of such magnitude, as to engender a new category of crime--crimes against humanity. The images here were composed to foster fear. Implicit in these posters is the idea that what happened there could happen here.



This is Nazi Brutality

by Ben Shahn, 1942

Printed by the Government Printing Office for the Office of War Information

NARA Still Picture Branch (NWDNS-44-PA-245)

Lidice was a Czech mining village that was obliterated by the Nazis in retaliation for the 1942 shooting of a Nazi official by two Czechs. All men of the village were killed in a 10-hour massacre; the women and children were sent to concentration camps. The destruction of Lidice became a symbol for the brutality of Nazi occupation during World War II.



We French Workers Warn You . . .

by Ben Shahn, 1942

Printed by the Government Printing Office
for the War Information Board

NARA Still Picture Branch

(NWDNS-44-PA-246)



The Sowers

by Thomas Hart Benton, 1942

NARA Still Picture Branch

(NWDNS-44-PA-1966)

Artist Thomas Hart Benton believed that it was the artist's role either to fight or to "bring the bloody actual realities of this war home to the American people." In a series of eight paintings, Benton portrayed the violence and barbarity of fascism. "The Sowers" shows the enemy as bulky, brutish monsters tossing human skulls onto the ground.

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Last updated: October 15, 1997

National Archives and Records Administration

Powers of Persuasion

Words are ammunition. Each word an American utters either helps or hurts the war effort. He must stop rumors. He must challenge the cynic and the appeaser. He must not speak recklessly. He must remember that the enemy is listening.

--*Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry*

Office of War Information

He's Watching You

Concerns about national security intensify in wartime. During World War II, the Government alerted citizens to the presence of enemy spies and saboteurs lurking just below the surface of American society. In a campaign that seemed to encourage a mild paranoia, "careless talk" posters warned people that small snippets of information regarding troop movements or other logistical details would be useful to the enemy.

Well-meaning citizens could easily compromise national security and soldiers' safety with careless talk.



Art for **He's Watching You**

By Glenn Grohe, ca. 1942

Gouache on cardboard

NARA Still Picture Branch

(NWDNS-208-AOP-119)



Someone Talked!

by Siebel, 1942

Printed by the Government Printing Office for the Office of War Information
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-44-PA-230)

A woman--someone who could resemble the viewer's neighbor, sister, wife, or daughter--was shown on a "wanted" poster as an unwitting murderess. The viewer was to conclude that this woman's careless talk resulted in the death of American soldiers.

At least one viewer voiced objection to the choice of a female model. A letter from a resident of Hawaii to the Office of War Information reads, in part, "American women who are knitting, rolling bandages, working long hours at war jobs and then carrying on with 'women's work' at home--in short, taking over the countless drab duties to which no salary and no glory are attached, resent these unwarranted and presumptuous accusations which have no basis in fact, but from the time-worn gags of newspaper funny men."

To More Posters



... Because Somebody Talked!

by Wesley, 1943

Printed by the Government Printing Office for the Office of War Information
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-44-PA-227A)



Wanted! For Murder

by Victor Keppler, 1944

NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-208-PMP-91)

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Last updated: October 24, 1997

Powers of Persuasion

How can any one of us here at home sleep peacefully tonight, unless we're sure in our hearts that we have done *our* part?

--*Who Died?*

Treasury Department motion picture

He Knew the Meaning of Sacrifice

The average American on the homefront suffered relatively small material shortages during the war. This situation created official concern that after the initial shock of Pearl Harbor began to wear off, Americans would become complacent about their responsibility to the war effort. As a result, government propagandists took pains to remind civilian America of the suffering and sacrifices that were being made by its armed forces overseas. Many posters thus delivered a strong dose of guilt that encouraged Americans at home to accept the small material deprivations of wartime.



You Talk of Sacrifice . . .
Produced by Winchester
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-179-WP-1386)



Have You Really Tried to Save

Gas

by Getting Into a Car Club?

By Harold Von Schmidt, 1944

Printed by the Government

Printing Office

NARA Still Picture Branch

(NWDNS-200(S)-PSC-16)



Miles of Hell to Tokyo!

By Amos Sewell, 1945

Printed by the Government Printing Office

for the War Manpower Commission

NARA Civil Reference Branch (208-PMP-45)

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URL: <http://www.nara.gov/exhall/powers/sacrific.html>

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Last updated: October 24, 1997

Powers of Persuasion

War posters that are symbolic do not attract a great deal of attention, and they fail to arouse enthusiasm. Often, they are misunderstood by those who see them.

How to Make Posters That Will Help Win The War
Office of Facts and Figures, 1942

Stamp 'Em Out!

The Government tried to identify the most effective poster style. One government-commissioned study concluded that the best posters were those that made a direct, emotional appeal and presented realistic pictures in photographic detail. The study found that symbolic or humorous posters attracted less attention, made a less favorable impression, and did not inspire enthusiasm. Nevertheless, many symbolic and humorous posters were judged to be outstanding in national poster competitions during the war.



Stamp 'Em Out

Produced by RCA Manufacturing Company, Inc.

NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-44-PA-1795)





Crack the Axis

by Charles Allen

Pastel and gouache on illustration board

NARA Still Picture Branch

(NWDNS-208-B-5-12)

More Production

by Zudor

Printed by the Government Printing Office

for the War Production Board

NARA Still Picture Branch

(NWDNS-208-PMP-129)

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