

Propaganda on the American Homefront: The Driving Force of Mobilization

Jonathan Serrano

The use of many propaganda filled mediums had the capacity to mobilize the American home front during World War II. The use of propaganda resulted in Americans mobilizing to purchase war bonds, salvage war materials, ration food and other commodities, the planting of victory gardens, and the pursuit of defense jobs to aid the war effort. Propaganda took on many forms such as posters, booklets, war bonds, and films which were easily accessible to most of the public. The use of propaganda had the ability to influence women and children in the mobilization of the home front. There were of course monetary and other factors which influenced the pursuit of jobs that aided the war effort. The availability of well-paying jobs was a prominent force behind the mobilization of not only women and children, but the administration and the release of propaganda throughout the country played an effective role in mobilization.

Historians debate the motivations for Americans to mobilize. The most recurring argument is that the reason for mobilization has been attributed to economic opportunities on the home front. Americans had just come out of the Great Depression, where there was little economic opportunity. Coming out of the Great Depression to an availability of jobs during the war, the American people seized the chance to take high paying defense jobs. Denise Kiernan, author of *The Girls of Atomic City: The Untold Story of the Women Who Helped Win World War II*, interviewed women who worked in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, in a facility that refined uranium for the atomic bombs that were dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Many of these women left behind their families and lives in the pursuit of this economic opportunity which they did not have prior. Kiernan establishes that the availability of jobs along with the high wages being offered, enticed women from all walks of life to pursue war time jobs. Allan M. Winkler, former History professor and author of *Home Front U.S.A.: America During World War II*, argues that

the economic aspect was a key driving force of mobilization. Winkler discusses the mobilization of industry in partnership with the American government. The mobilization of industry for the war effort created the high paying jobs that many people pursued. Winkler discusses the foundation upon which war time jobs were created, and how women were pursuing these jobs due to the financial freedom it offered as most men were out on the front. Karen Tucker Anderson, a history professor at the University of Arizona and author of *Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers during World War II*, argues that black women on the American home front mobilized due to the prospect of higher wages than what they received working domestic jobs. Black women were for the most part restricted to domestic work, but many black women began to obtain defense jobs during the war due to a shortage of white laborers. Black women endured horrid working conditions, but they put up with such conditions due to the wages they were receiving, although lower than their white counterparts. Mobilization is largely argued to be due to the economic opportunities that arose due to the war, but propaganda plays a role in mobilization.

Propagandists used their artwork to spread the message of mobilization by targeting Americans in general and groups of women and children. Propagandists and their work played a role that pushed the mobilization of the home front to paid labor in defense jobs, volunteering in scarp drives and the purchasing of war bonds. Rachel Moloshok, an editor and associate manager at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, argues in her journal article, *Saving for Victory!* that the use of propaganda mediums such as posters were crucial for selling the war. The use of posters advertised the purchase of war bonds, a medium that was easily spread across the United States. Moloshok states how the exposure to propaganda aimed to keep the idea of purchasing

war bonds in people's minds. Mathew Bernstein discusses in his book, *Walter Wagner, Hollywood Independent*, how Walter Wagner produced war time films for the United States government. Walter Wagner's films were oriented toward propaganda, but Wagner did not see it as propaganda, but simply as a patriotic service. The film industry was a fertile area for propaganda, and the way Wagner viewed his films demonstrates how the films themselves were meant to entice the patriotic side of Americans to contribute in any way possible to the war effort. In the journal article *IT'S ENTERTAINMENT AND IT WILL SELL BONDS!* by Kathryn Cramer Brownell, she discusses how J.E. Morton, an autoworker and father to an American soldier during the war began to show films produced by the Office of War Information in his hometown of Muskegon, Michigan. Brownell recalls the story of J.E. Morton's endeavor, and explores how the sale of war bonds steadily rose when he began showing these films to people in Muskegon, Michigan. Brownell credits the use of these films supplied by the Office of War Information to the growing sales of war bonds in the area.

In the journal article, *The "Womanpower" Campaign: Advertising and Recruitment Propaganda during World War II* by English and Women's Studies professor Maureen Honey, she discusses how posters depicted ordinary homemakers as the backbone of the workforce. Women were depicted building ships, planes, and other weapons of war as their contribution to the war effort. Honey also discusses the burden placed on women as they were expected to take on two jobs, that of a homemaker and war plant worker. The use of propaganda and its depiction of women placed the responsibilities of playing two roles on the home front on them. Propaganda was issued through a variety of mediums, and the far reaching effects of the issuance of propaganda is often overlooked when compared to high wages as a significant factor in

mobilization. Propogandists effectively conveyed messages through their work which aided with the mobilization of the American home front to engage in many war time activities, such as the purchase of war bonds.

The use of propoganda on the American home front was a widely utilized tool to drive the sale of war bonds. By the end of World War II, more than 85 million Americans purchased war bonds which effectively raised over 180,000,000 dollars for the war effort.ⁱ Americans were influenced by the bombardment of propoganda that the United States government churned out. Posters were an effective delivery method because they were straight to the point and the featured imagery emphasized the message that was being communicated to the public. A poster created by Newell Convers Wyeth depicts Uncle Sam holding the United States flag, and leading American troops into battle with “BUY WAR BONDS” under the image.ⁱⁱ The message being conveyed is that through purchasing war bonds they were funding the American war machine for victory. United States Propogandists instilled the idea through their work that although one is not fighting on the front, they can still support the troops through the purchase of war bonds. In a propoganda poster by Thomas Hart Benson, a United States soldier is in combat and behind him are two American workers supporting him by grabbing his shoulder with the phrase “BUY WAR BONDS” underneath the artwork.ⁱⁱⁱ This strong imagery here presents the American worker on the home front as the back bone to the armed forces, that through the purchase of war bonds they too are contributing to the war effort. Another propoganda poster by George Picken depicts a large naval ship being constructed with the phrase, “Bonds Build Ships--BUY MORE BONDS.”^{iv} This propoganda piece furthers the notion that purchasing war bonds is an effective way for one to support the war and do their part because the action of buying war bonds is

associated with the construction of weapons. Norman Rockwell brought another aspect of buying war bonds besides just supporting the war effort. Norman Rockwell created a piece that depicted people praying and above the image it stated, “SAVE FREEDOM OF WORSHIP” and underneath it stated, “BUY WAR BONDS”.^v This poster would resonate with religious Americans because this propaganda piece conveyed the message that purchasing war bonds helped fund the war to protect an individual’s right to their religion.

Another form of propaganda was the sale of defense stamp booklets. Defense stamp booklets were small booklets that an individual would fill up with stamps of a certain value and trade in for a war bond. On these defense stamp booklets, there were images of what the war bond funded for the military and what it could potentially fund for the individual later. For example, there were images of planes and ships that depicted what was being currently funded as well as images of a college graduate. The image of the college graduate on the defense bond sells the idea that the purchase of a war bond is an investment in a college education for either themselves or their children. These types of images helped sell bonds with the idea of an investment in one’s self or children, which made these booklets an essential form of propaganda to convince people to continue purchasing war bonds for the expected return of the investment.^{vi}

Although posters and booklets were an effective delivery method, another effective form of bringing attention to war bonds were war loan drives. War loan drives often featured celebrities of the time which would bring a great deal of attention to the purchasing of war bonds. Celebrities had power to influence the public, and this form of propaganda used the star power garnered by celebrities to fulfill the agenda of purchasing war bonds.^{vii} The use of popular

culture was an extremely effective method for dispersing propaganda. Many comic books became focused on the war as comic book heroes participated in the ongoing conflict. Some comic book heroes were depicted fighting on the front to destroy fascism. There were comic books that emphasized the importance of purchasing war bonds, like the comic books, “*Blondie*” and “*Bringing Up Father*.”^{viii} Movies were another tool for the disbursement of propaganda as Americans attended the movies in record numbers.^{ix} Films became war oriented just like comic books and many Americans would go see films as a primary source of entertainment. Approximately more than 90,000,000 people attended the theater each week with the cost of admissions increasing about 33 percent.^x This staggering number of individuals attending films each week made the film industry a significant forefront for the disbursement of propaganda.

Propaganda also aided in the salvaging of war materials on the American home front as it mobilized the masses to do their part in war salvage drives. The salvaging of war materials on the home front aided war production, albeit on a small scale. The majority volunteers in war salvage drives were young children. Children searched trash cans, garages, and other places where people discarded junk to find salvageable materials such as old tires, screws, bedsprings, and engine blocks.^{xi} Children felt an enthusiastic and patriotic sense to serve their country, and the best way to serve at a young age was through salvaging war materials for the Allies.^{xii} This patriotic sense of duty was produced by American propaganda. Posters were plastered throughout the United States that advocated for the salvaging of war materials. One poster read, “Save scrap for victory! Save metals, save paper, save rubber, save rags,”^{xiii} which was a message that stated the importance of every salvageable material. Throughout the war, posters were placed across the country that stressed the importance of salvaging war materials. Another

poster stated that salvaging tin cans produced ammunition that could be passed by a citizen to a soldier on the home front.^{xiv} These messages created a strong sense of patriotic duty for the people who were not in the armed forces. Salvaging was a way to serve since many of the people salvaging were children. Media outlets would often publish stories about young children who gathered tremendous amounts of salvageable material. One story that ran in *Time* magazine was about the great contributions of the Boy Scouts who contributed nearly 12,000,000 pounds of aluminum in the entire nation.^{xv} These stories would inspire young children to find salvageable materials and do their part to the best of their ability. The Salvage for Victory Committee put up small posters throughout Minneapolis that stated “WASTE PAPER is as essential as Steel and Gasoline TO FINISH THE WAR!”, and included instructions on salvaging and turning in waste paper.^{xvi}

The messages conveyed through propaganda posters about salvaging echoed loudly to youth groups and home makers. In 1942, children in New York individually salvaged about twenty pounds of wastepaper for the war effort.^{xvii} In 1944, the War Food Administration needed about 1.5 million pounds of milkweed floss to produce parachutes. Many young children in youth organizations like the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts who were motivated by military necessity and by the twenty cents per bushel payment which for the most part was either donated to their schools or used to purchase war bonds.^{xviii} Women did their part when it came to salvaging for the war effort, as many adult women participated in scrap drives alongside children. Homemakers were targeted by propagandists when the government issued booklets that instructed these women how to salvage grease, drippings, solid fats, and used lard from cooking that “presumably contained enough glycerin to manufacture a pound of black powder that could

be used for bullets or shells.”^{xix} This booklet also instructed homemakers where to take their salvaged cooking byproducts and explained what becomes of their salvaged cooking byproducts. The booklet states that these byproducts created the ammunition necessary for naval guns, artillery, and anti-aircraft guns.^{xx} Propaganda greatly influenced young children and women to mobilize and serve on the home front as the impact of propaganda was felt through the work of salvaging war materials throughout the war years. Propagandists stretched their work farther as they utilized it to get people to start rationing.

Propaganda was an effective tool when it came to persuading the American people to keep up their rationing of food and other commodities on the American home front. Propagandists created work to keep people rationing, but another factor for rationing was the limitations placed on the American people by the government through ration books and gas cards. Certain ingredients and commodities became scarce during the war years. People were issued booklets with stamps and coins that gave them their fair share of rationed foods on the home front. A large quantity of food was packaged and made into K-rations and sent to the front for the consumption of those serving in the armed forces. The importance of rationing was conveyed through propaganda filled posters like one that stated, “Do with less so they have enough! RATIONING GIVES YOU YOUR FAIR SHARE,” and this poster featured an American GI enjoying a beverage from his mess kit cup.^{xxi} This poster was used to guilt people into rationing because if those in the armed services were making the ultimate sacrifice, the least people on the home front could do is sacrifice certain foods and ingredients by consuming less or substituting them. A propaganda poster was produced to deter people from engaging in the black market by selling and buying food and commodities without ration stamps which depicted two

people standing in front of a large swastika.^{xxii} This poster created the idea that buying without ration stamps was an offense that aided the Axis Powers because an individual was taking more food and commodities than they were entitled to. Propaganda aided in deterring people from engaging in black market activities as it was deemed as a treasonous act. Food commodities were not the only thing that were asked to be rationed, but also gasoline and tires.

People on the American home front were also urged to ration commodities like gasoline and tires. The United States government pumped out propaganda through posters that urged people to join car clubs and double up to conserve gasoline, which was an essential product for war. One of these posters depicted Adolf Hitler riding in the backseat of what was an essentially empty car and it stated, "HITLER RIDES IN THE EMPTY SEAT--DOUBLE UP...."^{xxiii} This comparison of driving alone being equivalent to riding with Adolf Hitler was used to encourage people to carpool and ration gasoline because they were seen as essentially supporting the Axis Powers if they were negligent and wasted gasoline. Another poster portrayed a car stacked with very jolly people heading to work and it stated, "HELP WIN THE WAR--Squeeze in one more," which was used to promote carpooling and car clubs as a positive and fun experience that will further help in winning the war against the Axis.^{xxiv} The propaganda poster that encouraged people to care for and maintain their tires portrays an American GI replacing a tire on a military vehicle while on the bottom of the poster there is a male figure walking to his destination, and it reads, "HIS NEEDS come FIRST Take care of your TIRES... or you'll walk!"^{xxv} All available rubber and tires were used for the war effort, and this poster urged civilians on the American home front to ration their car usage to avoid the rubber tires from being damaged and worn out. This poster conveys the message that tires cannot and will not be replaced. These propaganda

posters along with government placed mandates, were effective in persuading the American public to ration food and commodities which were very scarce during the war years. The effective use of these posters encouraged people on the American home front to ration scarce commodities. The use of propaganda encouraged people not only to ration, but it also encouraged people to grow their own produce.

Propaganda was very effective to encourage people on the American home front to start their own victory gardens in their homes as approximately 20 million victory gardens were planted, and by 1943 these gardens provided a bit over one-third of all the vegetables grown in the United States.^{xxvi} Victory gardens became extremely popular due to the rationing put in place during the war because they would supply a portion of a household's food.^{xxvii} By the spring of 1945 a Victory Garden Medal was issued to honor General Douglas McArthur, which was used to encourage children to work on their victory gardens.^{xxviii} Sheril Jankovsky Cunning, an American girl living in Long Beach, California during the war stated that planting a victory garden was about getting "caught up in the mesmerizing spirit of patriotism."^{xxix}

The victory garden campaign and the sense of patriotism that was created was due to propaganda. A propaganda poster by the Office of War Information portrays a family planting and harvesting fruits and vegetables from their victory garden with the statement, "PLANT A VICTORY GARDEN--A GARDEN WILL MAKE YOUR RATIONS GO FURTHER."^{xxx} This poster highlights how a victory garden will ease the burden of rationing and give American families easier and plentiful access to fruits and vegetables. Another propaganda piece, this one by commissioned artist Hubert Morley, targets homemakers as he depicts them working hard

harvesting fruits and vegetables from a garden and performing other tasks in a rural farm, and the poster references joining the Women's Land Army.^{xxxii} The Women's Land Army was an organization that encouraged women to work in agriculture to take over jobs that men left behind as they were either drafted or volunteered in the armed forces. Organizations were formed in which people could plant victory gardens in groups or individually, even schools were involved on an organized front to create victory gardens. The use of propaganda persuaded many to create their very own victory gardens along with the appealing feature of obtaining a larger portion of food than what their ration books provided.

The usage of propaganda was one of the most crucial factors which enabled the American children to mobilize and pursue jobs that aided the war effort. Children felt a patriotic duty as many began to drop out of school to obtain defense jobs.^{xxxiii} A propaganda poster by Fred Little Parker that depicts an American general shaking hands with an industrial worker, and the phrase "We're Depending On You! PRODUCE TO WIN"^{xxxiii}. This poster had the capacity to influence many on the home front to seek out defense jobs, and many children did since it became increasingly easy for children to become employed during the war years. Children may have sought out defense jobs due to the promisingly high wages, but primarily to the influences of propaganda. Teenagers dropping out of school became common that enrollment declined from 6,142,000 in 1942 to 5,761,000 in 1943.^{xxxiv} In the following three years after 1942, the United States would lose 1,000,000 students to defense jobs. Children in rural areas were more likely to drop out of school to help out on their family farm. Children were not the only one's targeted by propagandists as women were a major group that constituted a majority of the necessary labor on the home front.

Women were a major group who contributed greatly on the American home front through their labor. Women, like children, mobilized in part due to the pursuit of higher wages as they came out of the Great Depression, but the work of propagandists had an underlying influence for their mobilization. A propaganda poster by Alfred T. Palmer depicts a woman working in an industrial setting as she helps manufacture a war vehicle, and above the image it states, “The more WOMEN at work the sooner we WIN!”^{xxxv}. This depiction of women in the workforce empowered women to seek employment in industries that aided the war effort. Women took on the majority of the workload as men were either drafted or volunteered for the war. Women joined the work force in record numbers, and by the height of the war “there were 19,170,000 women in the labor force.”^{xxxvi} Another piece of propaganda which influences the mobilization of women in the workforce and has become synonymous with World War II is Rosie the Riveter. Rosie the Riveter was created by Norman Rockwell after seeing a poster of women workers that featured 17-year-old, Geraldine Hoff.^{xxxvii} Rosie the Riveter represents the strength and strong work ethic women possess, which furthered the involvement of women in the workforce.

The use of propaganda was one of the most powerful tools at the disposal of the United States government during the war, and the successful execution of propaganda campaigns proved effective in the mobilization of the American home front. Propaganda penetrated all aspects of life, and all the different forms of propaganda reached every American. The influence of propaganda stirred the patriotism and sense of duty to serve in each American from women to children, and many served by doing their part on the home front.

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