WORLD WAR II AMERICAN PROPAGANDA: THE ART AND APPEAL BEHIND WOMEN ON THE DOMESTIC FRONT

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Arts, Media, and Communications

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master in Art History and Visual Culture

at

Lindenwood University

By

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ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: World War II American Propaganda: The Art and Appeal Behind Women on the Domestic Front

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While men served their country through military duty during the second World War, women were encouraged to do their part in ways that challenged their traditional roles as the American housewife. Because so many men were off at the front, the United States government had to create new ways to manipulate and persuade American women to join the workforce. Posters and other media featured strong, relatable women and phrases that encouraged women to serve. Propaganda not only suggested how women should act, but also manipulated society's view of women's role in the war efforts. Most people are familiar with iconic figures like *Rosie the Riveter*, but in reality, most WWII propaganda aimed at women was more in keeping with their traditional roles within the domestic sphere. It is the goal of this analysis to provide a further look inside the visual characteristics, messages, and modes of depiction of women within American graphics of the Second World War, specifically media featuring domestic themes and aimed toward housewives.

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Introduction

Bold graphics, vivid imagery, and persuasive messages are just a few examples of the details put into the overall design and creation of propaganda posters. By using specific themes and relatable depictions, the government discovered ways to manipulate society in order to secure public support during a time of conflict. Because a draft had been instituted since WWI, much of the propaganda produced in the United States during the Second World War addressed the need for factory workers and other forms of support on the home front. The new target audience was the American housewife. By creating imagery that was relatable to the female viewer, the government included persuasive and manipulative texts such as "You Can Do It!" or "Of Course, I Can!" These images read like newspaper headlines and were made to capture the attention of the stay-at-home woman.

It is the goal of this analysis to provide a further look inside the visual characteristics, messages, and modes of depiction of women within American war graphics of the Second World War, specifically regarding domestic themes aimed toward housewives. This analysis will explore not only the themes being addressed but also how these themes adapted and developed throughout the war years. Through an exploration of themes and messages, this research will discuss how the portrayal of women within the domestic sphere appealed to the female viewer, as well as the specific roles women played within propaganda during America's involvement in World War II.

Many posters throughout WWII continued to support what Woodrow Wilson emphasized in his Second April address to Congress during WWI. "Americans have no selfish ends to

serve…We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind."[1] This was done by creating graphics that promoted patriotism and American empowerment. Similar themes can be found in WWII posters that project hope onto the American citizen, often specifically the female viewer. With slogans such as "We Can Do It!" and "Of Course I Can!," these messages empowered the female viewer. By displaying women's strength and ability to act in the roles men left behind, propaganda posters promoted a new way in which women could do their part.

Because of the war, women were persuaded by the government to fill the shoes of men in their labor-intensive work. Women in the work force went from traditionally female-dominated positions, such as secretaries or teachers, to taking on the physically challenging jobs men left behind. These included positions in construction, factories, trains, or ships. Women's placement in machinery positions, labor-intensive units, and on factory grounds made the traditional housewife the new breadwinner.

The ideas behind the way women were conveyed not only support their hard work and dedication but also highlight the stress they faced taking on multiple roles. While patriotism continued as a central theme amongst propaganda, other large scale campaigns were launched to promote the selling of war bonds, efficiency in factories as well as reducing rumors about the war. WWII propaganda was crafted to meet the needs of the country during a time of conflict. The ability to shed light on ideas of how to be a better American citizen, offered a new way for the government to promote their messages to the public and in this case, the American woman.

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[1] "From the Army Art Collection: World War I Posters," *On Point* 17, no. 3 (2012): 1, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26363519.

Compelled by the need to recruit women within the labor force, the most well known wartime propaganda idealized the image of the woman war worker as strong, competent, and a hero of the home front.[2] A popular icon of the time that supports this notion is “Rosie the Riveter”(fig. 1). Though this work idealizes the strengths of the American woman at the time, it was specifically aimed towards women already in the labor force. Women needed to fill the shoes of men, but far more women remained in traditional domestic roles. Although posters featuring figures like *Rosie the Riveter* became icons, most of the WWII propaganda was aimed at women within the domestic sphere.

While men were serving their country, women were left on the home front. Reacting to this theme during an interview with *The Reader's Digest* in 1944, Eleanor Roosevelt spoke highly of these American women by stating, “The many thousands of women who are…running their houses quietly and efficiently are contributing more to the war effort than they themselves realize.”[3] This statement reassured the American housewife by supporting her responsibilities as a wife and mother.

The active role of American women played a vital difference in both their numbers and involvement.[4] According to her article *WWII Propaganda: How Images of Women Made the Difference,* Madison S. writes, "...The need for women to work both on the home front and on

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[2] Bilge Yesil, ‘Who said this is a Man's War?’: propaganda, advertising discourse and the representation of war worker women during the Second World War, *Media History,* 10:2, 103-117, DOI: 10.1080/1368880042000254838.

[3] Harrington, 41.

[4] Maddison S, “WWII Propaganda: How Images of Women Made the Difference," Toledo Lucas County Public Library, October 22, 2020, https://www.toledolibrary.org/blog/wwii-propaganda-how-images-of-women-made-the-difference.

the fields, proved to be a dramatic turn of events in the 1940s." The government knew that women were essential to a successful war effort.[5] In response, propaganda was employed by the government that used both persuasive imagery and language to convince women of their wartime value.[6] According to the government, womanhood was linked to victory.[7]

Propaganda is defined as the spreading of ideas, information, or rumors for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person. Posters and other propaganda tools conveyed important messages designed to persuade the viewer to support the war effort. The United States government tightly controlled the messages by choosing what information to produce, they could control and shape Americans' viewpoints. [8] The illustrators used advertising strategies and graphic design techniques to engage the everyday citizen on an emotional level. [9] Posters sold the war.[10]

At this time in particular, one of the target audiences was the American housewife. WWII addressed themes that depicted women in the labor force, while also continuing to include details

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[5] Maddison S, "WWII Propaganda: How Images of Women Made the Difference," Toledo Lucas County Public Library, October 22, 2020, https://www.toledolibrary.org/blog/wwii-propaganda-how-images-of-women-made-the-difference.

[6] Maddison S, "WWII Propaganda: How Images of Women Made the Difference," Toledo Lucas County Public Library, October 22, 2020.

[7] Maddison S, "WWII Propaganda: How Images of Women Made the Difference."

[8] Stephen Badsey, "Propaganda: Media in War Politics," *New Articles RSS*, October 8, 2014, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/propaganda_media_in_war_politics.

[9] Jia-Rui Cook, "The Posters That Sold World War I to the American Public," Smithsonian Institution, July 28, 2014, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/posters-sold-world-war-i-american-public-180952179/.

[10] Jia-Rui Cook, "The Posters That Sold World War I to the American Public."

pertaining to the women at home. With graphics connecting to emotional concerns, the government combined messages that explored women's new role in society. Woman were encouraged women to contribute to the war effort from the domestic front, by doing things such as conserving ration points by canning at home and saving grease for ammunition.

WWII propaganda was built on the lessons learned by WWI. As America faced another time of conflict, messages and imagery were adapted to meet the needs and changes in society at the time. For example, information being promoted was often dependent on the gender of the viewer. The way posters were used to manipulate men differed when compared to those that were made towards women. Men and women each had their own role to play in society, and these posters were adapted to meet the needs of the specific gender. Traditionally, women would stay home and care for their families. Men were the breadwinners at the time who would go to work to support their families. Women were now used in graphics that encouraged them still to stay home, while also filling the shoes men had left behind as part of a collective effort towards victory.

The images of strength and sacrifice seen in WWII differ substantially from depictions of women during WWI. Because a draft was nonexistent at the time of WWI, the government had an obligation to discover creative ways to capture the attention and minds of young men. One way, in particular, was by the use of women within these images. Beautiful, seductive women would be a key asset used to persuade men to enlist. By using a woman as the primary focus on a poster, the government was able to reflect themes of inspiration, passion, and patriotism.

WWI images like, *I Want You for the Navy* (fig. 2), *Gee!! I Wish I Were a Man. I'd Join the Navy* (fig. 3), portrayed women as sex symbols in order to gain the attention of men. Images

of women on posters and postcards provided inspiration for men to honorably step up and do their part. Men needed to be strong and capable of fighting for their country while honoring their families: if they didn't enlist, they would be frowned upon and often considered to be weak, like women.

When looking at these works from WWI, the use of sexually appealing women as enticement to enlist in the military is a primary theme. For example, Howard Christy's image, *I Want You for the Navy* (fig. 2), features a young woman wearing an oversized man's Navy uniform. Her coquettish nature is meant to appeal to the male viewer. With her blonde curls blowing in the wind and her sultry gaze, this work uses seduction in order to manipulate the mind of a young man.

These kinds of enticements were not needed in WWII, but women are needed in other ways. When considering women's role in America during WWII, one must consider the implementation of the draft. On September 16, 1940, the United States instituted the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940. This required all men between the ages of 21 and 45 to register for the draft. Those selected from the draft lottery would then be required to serve at least one year in the armed forces. With this new draft instated within the U.S., encouragement to enlist was not needed, but encouraging the women left behind to contribute to the war effort was paramount. According to Sara Harrington, the construction and compositions of WWII posters invoked symbolic figures such as the housewife that loomed large in American cultural consciousness.[11]

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[11] Sara Harrington, "Women's Work:Domestic Labor in American World War II Posters*," Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America 22*, no. 2 (2003): 44.

American propaganda during WWII highlights consumer culture, contributions to the labor force, and frugality. Terrance Witkowski addresses consumer culture and the ways the government controlled it in his article, “World War Two Poster Campaigns: Preaching Frugality to American Consumers.” Though the government had some luck with controlling America’s spending, citizens seemed reluctant to allow the government to overly tax and regulate aspects of their everyday budgets.[12] Themes such as frugality can be seen throughout posters of WWII, specifically those that depict the American woman. The government needed to control the spending of Americans, and the development of propaganda posters would be the tool to do so. Similar to how women were used to entice men to enlist during WWI, women and home efforts were also used as a way for the government to encourage frugality. One image that supports this theme is *Use it Up-Wear It Out- Make It Do!* (fig. 4).

This poster reflects the popular theme of frugality with a simplistic illustration of a woman and her husband. Shown in a flat, stylized manner , this poster illustrates a woman sewing a hole in her husband's pants while he is fixing the lawnmower. Her hair is perfectly pinned back and she is wearing a yellow dress. Next to her side sits her basket of sewing materials as she completes a typical domestic task. Above them reads the caption in red, "Use it up-Wear it out-Make it do!” Below is a line of supporting text stating, "Our Labor and Our Goods Are Fighting.” This poster not only captures the essence of the housewife and the tasks she traditionally completes, but one can notice her husband is still wearing the pants as she sews them. This poster reflects a strong message while also playing with idea of humor.

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[12] Terrence H. Witkowski, “World War II Poster Campaigns: Preaching Frugality to American Consumers,” *Journal of Advertising* 32, no. 1 (2003):69, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4622151.

Many companies who were producing products for the war needed fabrics for uniforms and other supplies.[13] To make sure enough textiles were available, propaganda posters, like this one, promoted the preservation of clothes which people already owned[14] by mending and sewing up tears rather than buying new items. Women are prominent figures in of this type of poster, because they were usually the ones washing and repairing garments as part of their roles as housewives.[15]

Propaganda imagery was created to be relatable to the women at home. Women were encouraged to fill the shoes of men where needed, but also continue to run their homes and tend to their families. Icons such as Rosie the Riveter became a symbol of female empowerment to later generations, but was not a reality for the majority of American women during WWII. The majority of American women continued to stay at home, and most of the WWII propaganda aimed at them reflected this. With a specific focus on the way women were portrayed and the messages directed at them, this analysis will consider the role of the often overlooked American housewife in WWII propaganda.

Literature Review

Women's roles, in particular at the time of WWII, offered a new sense of strength, hope, and recognition, as they became a target demographic of war propaganda. In addressing important historical posters such as Howard Miller's *We can do it!* (fig. 1), one must consider

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[13] "Rationing Posters," American Women, World War II and Propaganda, December 6, 2010, https://uki16.wordpress.com/rationing-posters/.

[14] "Rationing Posters," American Women, World War II and Propaganda, December 6, 2010, https://uki16.wordpress.com/rationing-posters/.

[15] "Rationing Posters."

how these themes and subjects were developed, and how American propaganda differed from WWI and WWII. Scholars such as Maureen Honey, Sara Harrington, and Nick Fischer have considered these topics and have further explored the visual and ideological differences behind the propaganda of the two World Wars. However, this scholarship focuses mainly on portrayals of women in the WWII labor force - the existing literature regarding images of women within the domestic sphere is minimal.

Though images progressed and adapted themes over time, the posters between WWI and WWII share the common ideas of manipulation and persuasion. According to an article written by Sara Harrington, posters made duringWWII were relatively inexpensive to produce since they could be printed in large amounts and were therefore widely circulated. Large-scale posters, with bold colors, striking compositions, and stark messages were both startling and persuasive to contemporary audiences.[16] Unlike traditional works of art, where meaning is often revealed only after close examination, these messages are designed to be immediately understood by the viewer. [17]

In Sara Harrington's article comparing today's news and broadcasting systems, she states, "Unlike the presentations of today's news organizations, which aim at some measure of objectivity, WWII posters were clearly propagandistic, intended to encourage particular views and perspectives of wartime events."[18] Propaganda at the time was created to manipulate and encourage rather than to simply inform.

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[16] Sara Harrington, "Women's Work:Domestic Labor in American World War II Posters," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America 22*, no. 2 (2003): 42.

[17] Harrington, 42.

[18] Harrington, 42.

Techniques for manipulating the public, often relied on illustrative effects, subjects matters and overall messages. Harrington's article, "Women's Work: Domestic Labor in American World War II Posters," not only focuses on the specifics in imagery behind war graphics of WWII but also addresses how women's images were used to convey a new concept to the viewer. Harrington addresses areas of interest within women in the labor force by discussing posters of the time that encouraged women to acquire jobs previously held by men. This includes themes exploring specific domestic and labor demands women faced as well as their involvement in factory based jobs.

Though Harrington briefly discusses work such as *We Can Do It!* (fig. 1), she also discusses an image that illustrates the direct connection between the housewife and the violence of war: *Pistol Packin' Mama* (fig. 5). Depicted as a simplistic cartoon lacking much detail, a woman frantically strains fats from her frying pan into a can resting on the edge of her sink. When describing this work and the woman in which it portrays, Harrington writes, "The woman's face is a picture of concentration as she throws herself into the task at hand. Yet the flurry of the motion is contrasted with her young daughter's seriousness of purpose."[19] Below sits a young girl reading the newspaper with a headline that reads "Save fats for bullets." The image not only gives clear directions on how to contribute to the war effort from home, but reinforces the importance of transmitting wartime lessons from mother to child.[20] This is just another way that supports traditional gender roles of the time. The caption below reads *Pistol Packin' Mama.*

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[19] Harrington, 43.

[20] Harrington, 43.

Meant to be ironic and funny, the inference is in that filling a can up with grease, this woman is helping fill a shell casting.[21]

This article includes information that pertains to not only the messages of propaganda, but also the images used to convey the story. Posters Harrington discusses include both areas of interest that focus on the labor industry as well as women at home. Harrington reflects in her work how these WWII images reflect the importance of women while also implying that the American housewife has touched the battlefield and that she herself has passed a bullet to a soldier. [22]

In the article, "Who Said This is a Man's War," author Bilge Yesil focuses on the interplay behind wartime propaganda that surrounds the depictions of the war worker women.[23] Yesil provides more focus on traditional gender roles that underline women's proper place in society. By exploring specific views on gender, job titles women held, and women's overall contributions, this article offers ideas behind the way women were viewed within the workforce. Yesil's article focuses on three themes in propaganda and advertising campaigns that portrayed working women's experiences: their role in the war effort depicted as secondary to that of men, their motivation to work characterized as a way to win the approval of men, and their supposed concern with beauty and womanliness.[24]

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[21] Harrington, 43.

[22] Harrington, 43.

[23] Yesil, 'Who said this is a Man's War?'

[24] Yesil, 'Who said this is a Man's War?'

When discussing ideas behind gender roles and women's ways to win the approval of men, Yesil addresses the complications behind propaganda messages that urged women to demonstrate their physical strength and mechanical competence.[25] While being told to be strong, they were also told to be feminine, attractive, and dependent on men, and images of them idealized the notions of domesticity, home and family. When describing the effect of this notion, Yesil states, “As a result, during the war, a complex image of a woman emerged: she was not primarily a worker but just a woman who happened to work; her participation in the labor force was not motivated by self-actualization of self-reliance, but by patriotism, and the desire to win the approval of men; and she had to make sure that despite the arduous war work she was attractive and feminine.”[26]

Yesil's article also explores the theme surrounding beauty and femininity found in WWII propaganda surrounding women and the workforce. As female employment rate rose to its peak between 1943 and 1944, the government propaganda agencies became concerned that women might lose their femininity because they assumed masculine roles. Because of women's new roles in society, the Office of War Information (OWI) and other propaganda agencies struggled to maintain traditional gender boundaries.[27] According to Yesil, the struggles faced by the OWI were a result of the increasing number of women in the workforce, which threatened to confused the prevailing assumptions about femininity.[28] The OWI and other advertising agencies decided

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[25] Yesil, “Who Said This is a Man's War?"

[26] Yesil, “Who Said This is a Man's War?”

[27] Yesil, “Who Said This is a Man's War?"

[28] Yesil, “Who Said This is a Man's War?"

to create imagery that would feature working women as well as women at home. The OWI needed to discover ways to produce images that women could relate to, particularly in terms of the feminine appearance of the featured women, while also persuading them to take on these new tasks. For example, the OWI suggested that media images emphasize that factories and other war-time employers not only encouraged, but also provided, "feminine" interests and comforts to be enjoyed in leisure hours such as dances, dates, and parties.[29]

Yesil explores various examples of ways the media and other advertisement campaigns helped reach the female viewer. Wanting to stress the importance of "woman power" in all shapes and forms, propaganda agencies created ways to depict even home-making as worthwhile and vital contribution to war efforts. For example. when discussing these advertisements at the time, Yesil states, " An ad for Nabisco Shredded Wheat stressed that a woman's first and foremost role was to 'keep my family fit with nutritious foods,' and declared that the home front lay in the 'kitchen of the American homes'" (fig. 6).[30]

Another ad discussed was by Cannon Towels. While featuring a woman in uniform standing against a background of towels, Cannon used ads to salute patriotic women as the "first home guard" and noted that one of the new responsibilities of the American women was to make the family dollar to extra duty…for taxes and war saving bonds (fig. 7).[31]

Other advertising campaigns at the time also helped to maintain traditional gender boundaries. One ad discussed in Yesil's article surrounds around the notion of beauty. A Revlon

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[29] Yesil, "Who Said This is a Man's War?"

[30] Yesil, "Who Said This is a Man's War?"

[31] Yesil, "Who Said This is a Man's War?"

ad was created to tell war-worker women, that only Revlon Nail Enamel could "take the punishment of running a home with one hand and doing war work with the other." [32] Yesil also discusses ads such as one by Jergens that addressed the needs to have soft hands. When referencing this ad Yesil states, "Working women could not afford to have dry hands because marriage, love and romance, which came first, depended on 'adorably' soft, 'enchanting' hands."[33] The need to maintain one's femininity was a popular message conveyed to women by both propaganda materials and popular images in advertisements. In response, Yesil states, "A woman now had multiple roles: she was a worker, a homemaker, a wife, a sweetheart, and at the same time, she needed to maintain her femininity."[34]

According to Yesil, propaganda agencies and advertisers at the time, were careful not to portray domestic tasks as unimportant. With the need to yield the support of all members of society, campaigns such as these, honed in on homemaking activities as invaluable to the war effort. By reinforcing the importance of home-making duties, both propaganda and advertising agencies did not remind women of their traditional workplace, but rather, implored non-working women to join the war effort-if not by labor work, then by planting victory gardens and canning.[35]

In the article "The Working-Class Woman and Recruitment Propaganda during World War II: Class Differences in the Portrayal of War Work," author Maureen Honey writes on how

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[32] Yesil, "Who Said This is a Man's War?" The image is not available digitally.

[33] Yesil, "Who Said This is a Man's War?" The image is not available digitally.

[34] Yesil, "Who Said This is a Man's War?"

[35] Yesil, "Who Said This is a Man's War?"

women were portrayed in propaganda, but also discusses the depiction of women in newspapers. According to the article, this was a time when women were encouraged to enter nontraditional jobs in manufacturing, white-collar work, and service/trade fields. [36] The two notions that seem to draw Honey's attention were how war work challenged restrictive notions of the role women played in public life and why the large employment of women in male fields did not have a greater impact on labor patterns at the time.[37]

Honey's writing looks at the way gender roles were manipulated in specific media outlets such as newspapers and magazines. One magazine included in Honey's article was *True Story.* *True Story* specifically geared itself toward the experiences of working-class female audiences whose concerns at the time were often ignored by other publishers.[38] Recruitment propaganda within these magazines highlights social attitudes towards women's capacity to perform typically male tasks as well as shows how these beliefs were bifurcated by women's class status during the war. [39]

Propaganda at the time with messages about joining the work force, was aimed towards working class women. Honey's article explores the significant difference between two magazine issues at the time which were active participants in government propaganda campaigns. While the more traditional Saturday Evening Post was geared toward the middle class, *True Story*, on

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[36] Maureen Honey, "The Working-Class Woman and Recruitment Propaganda during World War II: Class Differences in the Portrayal of War Work," *Signs* 8, no. 4 (1983): 672, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173689.

[37] Honey, "The Working-Class Woman," 672.

[38] Honey, 674.

[39] Honey, 674.

the other hand, geared itself more to the experiences of a working class female audience.[40] Honey states, "While there are no limits to the conclusions that can be drawn from any case study of this sort, recruitment propaganda in these magazines highlights social attitudes towards female capacity to perform male tests."[41]

The studies that have been addressed within this article, draw conclusions about the media as a whole and gained insight into ways in which the contradictory themes of women as homemakers and women as competent performers of male roles were meshed together during the recruitment campaign.[42] By addressing the differences in these two magazines in terms of propaganda being shown, one can understand how each would adapt their visuals and advertisements in regards to who was reading these articles at the time.

This source offers a comparison between women's labor force within war graphics and advertisements as well as domestic views. Honey reflects on the media themes and subject matter while comparing the depiction of men at war and women at home. By focusing on gender roles in terms of how women were portrayed and who the target audience was at the time, Honey is able to provide the reader with an exploration of women's roles in society. When referring to the way gender is played within these two magazines, Honey states, " The self-confidence and

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[40] Honey, 674.

[41] Honey, 674.

[42] Honey, 673.

authoritative demeanor towards men that are found in *Post* war workers, contrast sharply with the self-abnegating subordination characteristics of their *True Story* counterparts."[43]

While heroines and other women figures noted in *True Story* are described as incapable of making wise decisions upon their desire to participate as an equal in the world of men, the *Post*, uses women in a different way. The heroines found in the *Post* garner male affection through their independent pursuit of excellence.[44] Though this article does not discuss specific imagery of the time, it's important to note how advertising campaigns adapted their stories to meet the needs of the reader and specific gender.

"The Working-Class Woman and Recruitment Propaganda during World War II: Class Differences in the Portrayal of War Work," includes information on various media outlets that were participants of government propaganda. For example, in order to gain the attention of women to contribute to war efforts, both magazines thought of ways to make certain jobs look attractive. In order to do so, both *True Story* and the *Post* published romances in which women who entered the defense industries found fulfillment in performing important work for the nation.[45]

When referring to women's new role in society, Honey states, "As the United States became increasingly involved in the Allied effort to defeat the Axis powers, the editors of mass circulation magazines requested government direction in their treatment of women's new role in

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[43] Honey, 680.

[44] Honey, 680.

[45] Honey, 677.

war economy."[46] One may have forgotten that women not only worked men's jobs but also continued to care for their families. One of the most notable campaigns conducted by the Office of War Information (OWI) was one to help draw women into the labor force. Because of this need, Honey discusses how both *True Story* and *Post,* devoted much space to propaganda that would help encourage women to enter male fields where they were short of workers.[47]

The media as a whole played an important factor during the wars and as previously considered, adapted their stories, persuasive graphics, and visual ideas to specific audiences, trends, and of themes of the time. Posters were a particularly important medium in WWII and it is essential to consider their visual impact when analyzing how they impacted the female viewing audience. Posters were made in a way that attracted the viewer quickly and efficiently.

Sara Harrington notes that WWII posters were made blatant, rather than latent. [48] In order to produce the most striking and visually grasping works, these posters often couple the use of a line of text and a bold image. When explaining the idea behind the overall artistic approach to a poster, Harrington states, " the text translates the image for the viewer, the ad tells the viewer not only what the image means, but how the viewer should feel, think and even act." [49]

Propaganda posters were meant to reach a receptive audience which was in turn meant to be further unified by the poster's message and overall aim. [50] According to Harrington, the overall design, theme, and way they were created reveal specific theories about the subtle

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[46] Honey, 675.

[47] Honey, 677.

[48] Harrington, 42.

[49] Harrington, 42.

[50] Harrington, 42.

psychological effects and utility of propaganda.[51] This continues to support how the portrayal of women development throughout the themes between WWI and WWII. Imagery that was used to persuade the American woman to contribute to the war effort was often based on how one can relate to the viewer. Women were shown with popular hairstyles of the time and perfectly made up because that was the idea of beauty. The emphasis on beauty and womanliness was shown as a popular tool to gain the support of women. Though they may still be completing new tasks, they are still considered as feminine. By showcasing ways in which women can do their part at home, the government managed to create images that connected to the female viewer.

Harrington reveals how WWII posters often used a specific rhetorical devices to demonstrate that, through labor, the American housewife directly affected the war effort. One work Harrington discusses is *Save Your Cans/Help Pass Ammunition* (fig. 8). This simple composition depicts a woman's hand providing cans of tomatoes that are being transformed into ammunition the soldier can use in battle. This illustrates how cans can be recycled as bullets.[52] This image supports this notion and reflects the importance of the housewife's domestic labor.[53] It highlights the direct connection between a woman's domestic activities and the action at war.

As previously mentioned, the most popular theme in the existing literature on women and WWII is their role in the labor force. Articles such as "Shocking Labor Supply" by Claudia Goldin and Claudia Olivetti explore the effect of women's work in the labor industry by including percentages of women within certain age brackets. The number of weeks women

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[51] Harrington, 42.

[52] Harrington, 43.

[53] Harrington, 42.

between the ages of 25 and 34 worked in 1950 compared to those between 35 and 44 during 1960, differs by about 20 weeks. [54] Goldin and Olivetti also consider the difference between married with children and married without. The difference in statistics in terms of married with children and married without in 1950, shows how the ability of women without children were able to take on these jobs easier than those with children. Though this statistic does not show the entire amount of specific jobs women took, it does remind the viewer of the challenges some women may have faced compared to others at the time. Many women had babies and stayed home to care for them.

Considering these statistics in terms of weeks, one must understand the amount of women that did take on these wartime jobs while also tending their homes. Though Rosie may be one of the most well-known images of WWII, in reality, she represents the minority. According to the National WWII museum, nearly 350,000 American women served in uniform, both at home and abroad.[55] This included positions within the Women's Auxiliary Corps, the Navy Women's Reserve, but also positions such as driving trucks and doing clerical work. One of the lesser known roles women played in the wartime effort was provided by the Women's Air-force Service Pilots, or WASPS. More than 100,000 WASPS served during the war, but more than 310,000 women worked in the U.S. aircraft industry in 1943 which made up of about 65 percent of the

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[54] Claudia Goldin, and Claudia Olivetti, "Shocking Labor Supply: A Reassessment of the Role of World War II on Women's Labor Supply," *The American Economic Review* 103, no. 3 (2013): 260.

[55] "History at a Glance: Women in World War II: The National WWII Museum: New Orleans," The National WWII Museum, New Orleans, https://www.nationalww2museum.org.

industry's total workforce.[56] Though these numbers seem high, one must consider the total population of women in the U.S. during 1940. Considering all classes, the U.S. population of women was 131,669,275. With that being said, the amount of women who took on these jobs, were actually a small amount when considering the nation's total female population.

The iconic imagery of Rosie the Riveter is well researched within the existing literature. For example in the article, "Rosie the Riveter," Lorraine Sorrel provides a deeper look into the lives of "Rosies." Sorrel's article summarizes the documentary, *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter,* that follows the real life of Rosies in America. Newsreels, magazines, and photographs document the role changes expected of women during the war.[57] Sorrel's writing looks into how women functioned in the labor force and mentions the popularity of the song "Rosie the Riveter," but does not explicitly discuss the imagery that may have presided women to become "Rosies." [58] The cultural conception of "Rosie" lost relevance once men returned home from war and returned back to their factory and machine based jobs. Sorrel states, " Women, who for years were welders and machinists, returned to low paying cafeteria serving lines, clerical and domestic work if they could find it. Many had babies and stayed at home."[59]

There exists a minimal amount of literature that discusses symbolic figures like the American housewife in WWII propaganda.[60] WWII posters remind us not only of the mood of

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[56] History.com Editors, "American Women in World War II," History.com (A&E Television Networks, March 5, 2010), https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/american-women-in-world-war.

[57] Sorrel, "Rosie the Riveter."

[58] Lorraine Sorrel, "Rosie the Riveter." *Off Our Backs* 11, no. 6 (1981): 25.

[59] Sorrel, "Rosie the Riveter."

[60] Harrington, 43.

the nation but also the nation's actions and beliefs. The way posters were created, relied greatly on the American people and who was viewing the work. As stated in Harrington's article, "The American housewife's responsibility during WWII was to keep the home fires burning."[61] Women needed to continue their everyday work to support their home while also taking on new responsibilities of nontraditional jobs.

Although Rosie the Riveter became a female icon and implied focus on the labor force, most of the WWII propaganda was aimed at women within the domestic sphere. Though Harrington and other scholarly sources provide analyses of portrayals of women in the WWII labor force, the existing literature regarding images of women within the domestic sphere is minimal.

Analysis

How did the portrayal of women in propaganda posters, specifically in the domestic sphere, develop and appeal to the female viewer during WWII? Posters that capture the essence of an American housewife, mother, and breadwinner for her family in this era are often left to be forgotten, while images depicting the woman as factory worker have dominated both the literature and the American consciousness. Posters such as *Rosie the Riveter* (fig.1), support the notion of the hardworking woman but were made specifically for women already working in the factories. Although *Rosie the Riveter* became a feminist icon, most WWII propaganda was aimed at women within the domestic sphere.

Women in WWII not only had to support their own families, but also take action to support their country. Gender roles were challenged as some women were now the breadwinners

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[61] Harrington, 43.

who wore multiple hats in order to serve their country. The most well known propaganda, as discussed, promoted the power and strength of women as they took on manual labor positions. However, earlier images of propaganda use women as a tool in order to persuade the viewer.

During WWI, the government needed to recruit soldiers to fight. In order to gain their assistance in battle, propaganda offered strong messaging and visual imagery that was pleasant yet powerful. Recruitment posters often featured attractive, and sometimes seductive, women to persuade men to enlist.

Created by Howard Chandler Christy in 1917, *Gee! I Wish I Were a Man, I'd Join the Navy* (fig 3), is one of the works that uses the image of a woman for recruitment. This poster depicts a young woman dressed up in slightly oversized Navy attire. The women smirks at the viewer and grasps at the collar of the blue uniform. With blushing cheeks and an alluring glance, this woman illustrates seduction in a subtle way.

When looking at the style in which it was created, this work appears by using expressive brushstrokes that formulate a painterly style. The line work shows movement, so that it appears as if the woman's hair is blowing in the wind. As one's eyes move across the image, the pull of her navy uniform brings the viewer's eyes to the text, which reads "Gee! I wish I were a man, I'd join the Navy!" By using a charismatic and alluring woman in the place of a traditional male sailor, the government was able to grasp the attention of young men. Dressed in what appears to be a male's Navy uniform, this image reads that she herself could join the forces. However, this image suggests less about women serving their country and more about emasculating men who didn't join.

Below the main words, Howard also includes, “Be a Man and do it!” suggesting that women wanted to join the Navy enforced the concept that men needed to be stronger than women. If women wanted to join the Navy like men, then clearly any man who didn’t wasn’t “enough of a man.” In addition, posters such as these are subtly suggestive. Because this woman is shown wearing a men's uniform, it is implied that she had to take off her own clothes first and then take the uniform off the man before she could put it on herself. This implies the sexual availability and desire of women for a man in uniform.

Another image from WWI that reflects similar suggestive and sexual desires of a women is one created in 1917 called, *I Want You… For the Navy* (fig 2). Being another work by Howard Christy, this illustrates a similar figure of a woman dressed in a man's Navy uniform and hat which barely contains her windswept blonde curls. Shown with her hands in her pockets, leaning into her right side, this woman appears to stare at the viewer with a slight look of seduction in her heavy gaze. This poster also suggests that this woman had to take off her own clothes before donning a man’s Navy uniform. With her perfectly flushed cheeks and peach toned lips, this poster captures subtle, suggestive sexual desires.

The depictions of women within WWI posters varied depending on the goal of the organization that commissioned them.[62] Some posters reflected women in distress and seeking help as victims of war. Women were also used to symbolize the American nation and were often used as a tool to show America in distress. By doing so, this would reflect what soldiers at the

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[62] Smithsonian Institution, “Women in World War I -- War Posters,” National Museum of American History (Smithsonian Institution), https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/object-groups/women-in-wwi/war-posters.

time would be fighting for. By symbolizing a woman as American, it reminds the soldiers that she represents their country but also their wives and children.

Another patriotic poster created in 1917 by well known propaganda artist, Howard Chandler Christy, *Fight or Buy Bonds* (fig. 9) was created as a tool to persuade viewers to do their part in the war. Created for the Third Liberty War Bond drive during WWI, this poster shows a women waving the American flag with hundreds of soldiers behind her rushing to battle. Illustrated in a loose and painterly style, this women is in a soft and feminine stance and could represent America herself. She wears a dress that is shown with folds of fabric clinging against her body. Her features appear doll-like, with blushing cheeks, flushed red lips, and sultry eyes that gaze out to the viewer. Her fair skins blends with the lightness in her dress as she appears to be in need of help. As one's eyes move across to the flag blowing in the wind, one can read the large red and blue letters that read, "Fight or buy bonds, Third Liberty Loan."

Though this image may not depict the woman as a victim per se, Christy created this work as way to portray America as if she were a woman. This female personification of America is used to encourage citizens to help with war efforts by either joining the military or purchasing war bonds to help finance the war. Women in American WWI propaganda appeared as seductresses to entice men to enlist but also were used to represent the country for which men were fighting.

According to author Sara Harrington, women were both the subject as well as the audience for visual imagery during WWII.[63] Unlike WWI posters that focused on enlistment,

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[63] Sara Harrington, "Women's Work: Domestic Labor in American World War II Posters," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 22, no. 2 (2003):41, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27949264.

these posters featured persuasive messages that were geared more toward who was home while men were in battle, and how the government could elicit their support. Some propaganda encouraged the typical American housewife to wear the hats of mom, wife, and laborer. This not only challenged established gender roles of the time, but also suggested that women were capable of helping their country, serving their men, and caring for their homes and children, all at the same time.

The participation of women during WWII spread across areas in a variety of different capacities. These included machine and labor jobs, American Red Cross nurses, as well as various home front organizations such as The Women's Land Army Corps.[64] While the representations of American women during WWII are diverse and numerous, the most iconic symbol and representation of women at the time, and the most salient challenge to established gender roles, exists in the visual representation of "Rosie the Riveter."[65] The first image of Rosie the Riveter, who became a celebrated symbol of women in the workforce, was created by Howard Miller in 1943 (fig 1).

Shown as a strong woman flexing her bicep, Rosie illustrates the combination behind strength and beauty found in the American female. Her face illustrates not only her femininity, but also her determination as she takes her part in the labor force. As women were encouraged to take wartime jobs in defense industries at the time, Rosie became a national icon that promoted

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[64] Sara Harrington, "Women's Work: Domestic Labor in American World War II Posters," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 22, no. 2 (2003):41, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27949264.

[65] Harrington, "Women's Work: Domestic Labor in American World War II Posters," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 22, no. 2 (2003):41,

female patriotism. Compared to earlier posters of this time as well as those of WWI, Rosie captures a new essence of the American women.

Though Rosie is considered a strong female icon, authors James A. Kimble and Lester C. Olsen discuss misconceptions about the poster, including who commissioned it and for whom it was made. They state in their article, "A related misconception is that the 'We Can Do It!' poster served to recruit women into the factories."[66] Since this was a product of a Westinghouse committee concerned with labor-management relations, the authors focus on how this message was aimed at workers who were already employed at various Westinghouse factories.[67] According to the article, this poster did not have obvious recruiting appeals. Nothing was specifically noted about joining the factory staff or "doing their part." One had to assume they knew what the slogan "We Can Do It!" meant. They conclude that Miller's poster was created to motivate the female worker already in the factory, rather than to persuade others to join the labor force.

Nevertheless, Howard Miller's *Rosie the Riveter* (fig. 1), captures notions of both power and femininity. Shown wearing a blue collared jumpsuit, a rolled up sleeve showing off her flexed bicep, Rosie is a strong and capable woman. Rosie captures not only the essence of American beauty, but also courage and strength. Her femininity is beautifully illustrated with perfectly shaped brows, peach colored lips, and long lashes. Her determination is made clear with her raised brow. Though mostly hidden under her red polka dot bandana, her pin-curls

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[66] James J. Kimble and Lester C. Olson, "Visual Rhetoric Representing Rosie the Riveter: Myth and Misconception in J. Howard Miller's 'We Can Do It!' Poster," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 9, no. 4 (2006): 545. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41940102.

[67] Kimble and Olson, "Visual Rhetoric Representing Rosie the Riveter: Myth and Misconception in J. Howard Miller's 'We Can Do It!' Poster," 545.

frame her face. She is raising a clenched fist while rolling up her shirt sleeve to reveal her forearm and tensed bicep muscle.[68] Above this powerful and beautiful woman, read the message, “We Can Do It!"-a motivating message for the women working in Westinghouse factories.

While Rosie became a feminist icon in later decades, this work-incentive poster was originally created for the Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company and was briefly displayed within their factories. It was not initially, as it is easy to presume, an image seen by women all over the country. Representing women’s newfound strength and ideas, Rosie the Riveter flexed the newly found muscle of female productivity outside the sphere of their home.[69] However, “Rosies” made up only a small percentage of American women during WWII.

When comparing this iconic work to those like *Gee I Wish I Were a Man, I’d Join the Navy* (fig. 3), one can already notice the differences in how women are conveyed. The woman dressed in Navy attire has a smile on her face and is shown with blushing cheeks, and a smirk. As she asks men to join the navy, she is portrayed as a simple woman with an alluring persona. Rosie, on the other hand, evokes the exact opposite while promoting women as a strong and courageous part of the labor world. Even the way the poster was created reflects a difference in artistic notions. While *Gee! I Wish I Were a Man* (fig. 3) reflects a relaxed and pained image, Rosie however uses bold outlines and vivid colors. Using mostly primarily colors, this poster is eye-catching in a way that attracts the viewer with the use of strong imagery and lifework.

Graphically appealing, *Rosie the Riveter* (fig. 1) uses sharp framing and a bright background to pull the viewer in. With a yellow backdrop showcasing a navy speech bubble and

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[68] Kimble and Olson, “Visual Rhetoric Representing Rosie the Riveter: Myth and Misconception in J. Howard Miller’s ‘We Can Do It!’ Poster,” 545.

[69] Harrington, “Women’s Work: Domestic Labor in American World War II Posters,”41.

bright white letters, it is hard to ignore such a striking composition. The boldness can be seen not just in the way Rosie is depicted, but in how the use of colors and shapes contribute to the message.Though both are depicted graphically different, the messages being conveyed also differ in terms of the wars and messages being sent to the public.

While Rosie implies strength behind women joining the labor force, *Gee! I Wish I Were a Man!* (fig. 3), focuses on male efforts for the war. The differences can be seen simply in the comparison between strength and seduction. Rosie was made for the eyes of the American women: the housewife turned laborer. She is beautiful, but relatable in her denim jumpsuit and pin curls. With loosely fitting navy attire, and an alluring smile, Christy's was made to entice the male viewer.

Rosie's visual representation of the American woman played true to her war efforts but did not support the concerns of working housewife. Rosie's beauty found in the evidence of her perfected brows and lifted lashes supports the traditional gender norms of the American housewife. Her strength and power are shown through her flexed bicep and her femininity is brought to attention by her beauty. Though one can see no evidence of a wedding ring nor any notion of having a child, she is still created as a relatable image to the American female. According to Sherrie Kossoudji and Laura Dresser in their article "Working Class Rosies," the patriotic supply theory assumes that women who were drawn into industrial labor during WWII identified themselves as housewives.[70]

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[70] Sherrie A. Kossoudji and Laura J. Dresser, "Working Class Rosies: Women Industrial Workers during World War II," *The Journal of Economic History* 52, no. 2 (1992): 432. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2123119.

One may not consider Rosie to be a housewife at the time, but regardless of her status, Rosie's efforts towards war campaigns allowed women to experience new careers and take on new and non-traditional jobs. One can see the stereotypes fall as the government mobilized 18 million women to take over the traditional male jobs at the time. The idea that women can still be showcasing femininity while taking on machine-based jobs is noted through posters such as these. Rosie provides a deeper understanding of women's empowerment while also addressing the beauty and grace behind it.

Since Rosie's portrayal in the early 1940s, other propaganda posters at the time, continued to include images of women that reflected them as both feminine and strong. Rosie became an image to strive for and the government continued to use women empowerment and beauty to create posters that illustrate women's new role. One work, in particular, illustrating the new career done by the American housewife is the poster, *Do the Job He Left Behind* (fig. 10). This poster reflects a similar image as Rosie the Riveter, where a woman is shown wearing a red bandana around her hair, perfectly done makeup, and dressed in a blue jumpsuit. She is shown in a machine-based role using a mechanical tool. To the right of the woman, it reads, "Do the Job HE Left Behind." Her face appears relaxed and poised while she offers her service to her country.

Unlike the painted style or stylized graphics previously mentioned, this poster looks more like a photograph than a painting or print. It was more relatable to the viewer because it portrays a real woman at the time. This work conveys how women can contribute as patriots themselves - a message reinforced but the red, white, and blue color scheme. By illustrating a woman in this way, it reinforces traditional gender roles through the beauty and femininity that she is depicting.

Themes such as these across the country paid tribute to the American woman. The poster *Women in the War; We Can't Win Without Them* (fig. 11) is an example of these wartime efforts while also depicting the essence of nobility found in female workers. Created in 1942 by the War Empowerment Commission, *Women in the War* (fig. 11) was one of the most widely distributed images of women laboring in war production. Among the many agencies created over WWII, President Franklin Roosevelt formed this Commission agency in April of 1942 to oversee war labor issues in the military, industrial, and civilian sectors. [71]

In June of 1942, the Office of War Information was formed to help manage the flow of news and propaganda about the war to the public.[72] These two agencies quickly came together in June of 1943, when the labor shortage was most acute, to work together in a concerted campaign that targeted employers to specifically hire women to become "production soldiers."[73] This poster exemplifies this role as part of the "production soldiers" theme by conveying a traditional housewife actively participating in a new role of a hard-working woman.

Women in War (fig. 11) depicts a black and white photo of a woman riveting a weapon. Dressed in overalls and hair in curls, this woman is shown taking part in a new task that calls for a new idea of strength and determination. No longer making meals for her husband, this poster conveys a woman actively participating in wartime efforts as she puts to use her newfound skills to work. Surrounding her is a cream colored background with contrasting blue and red blocks of

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[71] Emily Yellin, Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front during World War II (New York: Free Press, 2005), 44.

[72] Yellin, Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front during World War II: 44-45.

[73] Yellin, 45.

colors. A bright blue surrounds her and her tools with blue font to her right that reads, “Women in War.” As one’s eyes move across the composition, one sees across the bottom bold red rectangles that surround the words, “ We can’t win without them.” Though one cannot see her face as we can in Rosie the Riveter’s poster, one can still notice her strength as she uses her muscles to commit to this new skill.

“Our Mother’s War: American Women at Home and at the Front during World War II” includes imagery like this and discusses the differences in themes found in women and propaganda. Author Emily Yelin writes about these campaigns while addressing how women’s portrayal in these images not only evoked strength but also included the femininity they carried as well. When looking at the poster, *Women in the War* (fig. 11), one can notice the way the woman is dressed. She is not shown wearing a worker’s jumpsuit, but rather, a dress with an apron on top. Her hair is perfectly curled as she completes her labor. This image reminds the viewer that one can still be feminine when completing labor intensive jobs. Yelin writes, “The campaigns glamorized war work, always showing that women could maintain their femininity and still be useful.”[74]

Another example surrounding this theme of labor while also contributing to the domestic sphere is called *Soldiers Without Guns* (fig. 12). Created by artist Adolph Treidler in 1944, this work was published by the Government Printing Office to contribute to propaganda spread during WWII, which assisted in encouraging women to join the workforce. This poster illustrates three women who work for war efforts in a variety of different ways. All are shown in uniforms conveying different roles they are involved in at this time. One is shown as an office worker,

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[74] Yellin, 46.

another as a welder, and the third as a factory worker. At this time, WWII required all of the dedication and hard work of every American citizen to contribute to war efforts in order to have enough recourses to successfully compete in the war. *Soldiers Without Guns* (fig. 12) supports this theme by depicting three noble, but serious female workers on the job.[75]

Campaigns such as this glamorized war work, always showing that women could maintain their femininity while still proving to be useful.[76] This work provides us with a deeper understanding of the importance of WWII propaganda, as it was made to help encourage women to enter the workforce and assist in their own way while their husbands were the ones physically fighting. One can notice in this image of three women the strength conveyed behind their poised expressions. Shown in red, white, and blue attire, patriotism grasps the imagery found in the use of this American color scheme. This poster values the themes surrounding the importance of women in the war while also reminding the viewer of their strengths and the new role of the American housewife. This soon led to the recurring theme of the importance of women. Women quickly assisted and became key figures who worked on the home front in order to help with war efforts.

This image refers back to a painted style and portrays women that relate to an illustration rather than a photograph. One can notice the loose connection to primary colors while also making note of the woman on the right's attire, which is similar to Rosie the Riveter's. They all appear with soft skin and stoic expressions. Propaganda was the recurring tool used to help influence public opinion, and in this case, influence women to take part and join the workforce.

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[75] Yellin, 46.

[76] Yellin, 46.

Themes that are surrounded the labor work in terms of machines and weapons are simply expressed in images discussed such as *Women in War* (fig. 11). Women's hard work was addressed and their strengths were valued in propaganda artwork. Yelin reminds the reader that yes, these images impacted the roles of women while conveying them as mechanical soldiers, but one must not forget the domestic roles still held by the majority of women.[77] These posters that have been discussed changed the conversation surrounding women in the workforce. Women who traditionally at the time were humble, happy housewives were now taking roles as a new independent working woman who was proud to do their part as American citizens.

Themes such as strength and femininity seem to go hand in hand in women's portrayal in WWII propaganda while also addressing the newfound role the American housewife has now taken part in. As previously discussed, these works symbolize not only the war efforts women have contributed throughout this period, but also express their beauty and grace. Though Rosie and other images discussed reflect a sense of female empowerment, they were made to persuade women to temporarily fill in for men who were away at war. The subjective notions it carried to promote women's strength, was the government's way to employ women in the labor force. Although images like Rosie are more commonly straightforward at the time, other works reflect Women's roles and contributions in a variety of ways. Women didn't just commit to labor jobs, but they also had to continue to meet the daily needs of their home and family.

According to their article, *Visual Rhetoric Representing Rosie the Riveter: Myth and the Misconception in K. Howard Miller's "We Can Do It!"Poster,* authors James Kimble and Lester

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[77] Yellin, 46.

Olsen describe the iconic Rosie the Riveter figure as a modern American legend.[78] They state, "According to this legend, during World War II women in the United States turned manpower into women's power as housewives across the nation took manufacturing jobs building bombers, ships, tanks, and the munitions they would fire."[79] By 1945, 1 out of every 4 women worked outside the home. [80] This included women in more than 200 non-combatant jobs that include roles such as truck drivers, nurses, electricians and administration. There were also more than 100,000 women within Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WACs).[81] Though the numbers were higher than previous years, the vast majority of women did not work outside the home and were therefore the target audience for domestic themed propaganda. Women were an essential tool on the path to victory .

Themes of propaganda include patriotism, consumer culture, and contributions to the labor force. The recurring theme of frugality also went hand in hand in works that are combined with the domestic work of the stay-at-home mom. This conveys ways in which one can save

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[78] James J. Kimble and Lester C. Olson, "Visual Rhetoric Representing Rosie the Riveter: Myth and Misconception in J. Howard Miller's 'We Can Do It!' Poster," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 9, no. 4 (2006): 533. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41940102.

[79] Kimble and Olsen, "Visual Rhetoric Representing Rosie the Riveter: Myth and Misconception in J. Howard Miller's 'We Can Do It!' Poster," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 9, no. 4 (2006): 533.

[80] History.com Editors, "American Women in World War II," History.com (A&E Television Networks, March 5, 2010), https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/american-women-in-world-war.

[81] History.com Editors, "American Women in World War II," History.com (A&E Television Networks, March 5, 2010).

money during the war. One work that supports this theme of women and the domestic side is called *Of Course I Can!* (fig. 13).

Created by artist Dick Williams in 1944, this work was part of the United States War Food Administrations' campaign. Unlike the strength and power evoked in works previously discussed, this poster illustrates a woman struggling to juggle an armful of canned food items. This poster was made to suggest that this woman can jar and preserve her own food at home to save her ration points. She is shown in an apron and perfectly pinned curls, with wide eyes and blushing cheeks. She looks bubbly, but somewhat confused (fig. 13).

Unlike the realism used in posters such as *Do the job HE Left Behind* (fig. 10), this poster depicts the woman in a more traditional, illustrative fashion. The illustrator chose not to use bold or patriotic colors, but rather a muted array of yellows, greens, and reds. She is shown with dark brown hair pinned back in curls and peach colored skin. Her cheeks project a strong sense of blushing as she juggles her canned items in hand. She wears a yellow checkered dress with an embroidered white apron on top. Though it does not appear as stylized and strong as Rosie, this woman captures the relatability and softness of feminine beauty - she is a stereotypical housewife of the time.

The government also encouraged Americans to start victory gardens to conserve resources and save money. Open lots, rooftops, and backyards were made resplendent with bountiful growths of broccoli, spinach, beets, etc., to substitute for commercial crops diverted to troops overseas during the war. These gardens were strongly encouraged starting in WWI as part of the at-home efforts but became even more popular during WWII when rationing was more strict.

According to a *New York Times* article from July 15, 2020, The National Victory Garden Program, created by the War Food Administration in 1941, got early and strong support from corporations[82] as a way of relieving pressure on the canning industry that was needed to preserve food for soldiers. The government hired artists to produce an appealing propaganda poster campaign that showcased canning as a way of demonstrating support and patriotism. *Of Course I Can* (fig. 13) correlates with the theme of resourcefulness in the caption: "I'm as patriotic as can be-and ration points don't worry me!"

Propaganda posters such as *Of Course I Can* (fig. 13), illustrated a typical and relatable American woman. The poster emphasizes frugality and sits squarely in the domestic sphere. Posters such as these were used as a rhetorical tool, bringing together the public around the common need to support the armed forces. In order to play their role as patriotic Americans, women were able to contribute by putting in extra work at home, such as canning and preserving.

Traditionally, the American housewife was not encouraged to partake in machine-based careers, she was made to stay at home. *Of Course I Can* (fig. 13) embodies the relatable female who cleans her home and cares for her family. The daily struggle of balancing home-based tasks can be reflected in her struggle to carry canned items. This work in particular not only promotes the theme of frugality but also gives us a better understanding of the traditional American housewife of the time. Compared to Rosie the Riveter's strength and pride, this work captures the traditional concepts of femininity, and thus, traditional gender norms. She wears a full face of makeup and is perfectly put together, evoking an essence of traditional female beauty. While

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[82] Jennifer Steinhauer, "Victory Gardens Were More about Solidarity than Survival," *New York Times*, July 15, 2020.

Rosie is depicted as a strong woman who takes on jobs usually made for men, this woman is shown doe-eyed and dressed in traditional female attire, meeting needs at home.

Imagery was made relatable women or in some cases, the entire family at home. Created in 1943 by artist Alfred Parker, *We'll Have Lots To Eat This Winter Won't We Mother?* (fig. 14), illustrates a recurring theme: conservation and canning. As previously mentioned, many foods such as coffee, tea, butter, meat and frozen vegetables, were rationed during WWII. Americans at the time were encouraged to plant Victory gardens in order to help provide food for their family and neighbors. By canning the vegetables they get, one would help do their part by conserving food and not producing waste.

This poster illustrates a mother and daughter with matching blonde hair pinned back with red bows and matching red dresses with white aprons. Similar to *Of Course I Can! (*fig. 13), this poster reflects the traditional gender norms of the American housewife and her daughter. The ideal housewife was put together while she completed chores and tasks at home. This also brings into focus the mother's task of caring for her children. Though she has a family to tend to, she can also contribute to the war efforts and share those tasks with her children. The little girl is smiling with rose colored cheeks as she looks at her mother with pride as they can their vegetables. They seem to have a sense of accomplishment as they do their part for the war. Behind them are rows of rainbow colored canned items they have already produced. Above them reads, "We'll have lots to eat this winter, won't we mother?" As one's eyes move across words above them and down the image, one then reads in red bold font at the bottom of the composition, "Grow your own, can your own." This work supports the theme of preservation as it depicts a contribution a woman can complete with her family at home. This task is both

relatable and relatively easy, which would make viewers more likely to contribute to war efforts in this way.

Posters of this time shared common themes of frugality and preservation, and to this end were specifically created to appeal to the American housewife. Buying war bonds and stamps were other ways that women could contribute to the war effort from home. In 1942, U.S. Treasury officials worked to secure public ownership of the national debt by encouraging voluntary purchases of war savings bonds and stamps. Funds that were collected were then used for any and all war expenses such as manufacturing, food, medical supplies, artillery, and more. By 1945, the government had conducted seven successful war bond drives which helped raise a total of 61 billion dollars. Posters played a key role in helping to persuade people to buy bonds.

Some war bond propaganda images targeted families and wives at home directly. American illustrator Alfred Parker, created *Even a Little Can Help a lot-Now!* in 1942 (fig. 15). It involved similar compositional aspects as *We'll Have Lots To Eat This Winter Won't We Mother?* (fig. 14), and used the same mother-daughter pair. Created on a grey-blue background, this poster illustrates a mother and daughter sharing their interest in buying U.S. war bonds and stamps. Both mother and daughter share the same bright blonde colored hair. Their hair is curled and perfectly pinned back with a red and white striped bow on top. They both appear to be wearing similar attire of dark blue jumpers with white shirts underneath. One can notice the small detail of red trim around the sleeves of their shirts that match the red in their bows. The mother is shown with perfectly shaped brows, rose colored cheeks and bright red lips. As they crouch on the floor looking through their newly purchased stamps, one can notice the green military hat that lays next to the daughter. This is a reminder that while father is fighting in

battle, mother and daughter are doing their share in the war effort by purchasing U.S. war bonds and stamps. Across the top of the poster reads, “ Even a little help can help alot-Now!”

Posters encouraging canning and the purchase of war bonds often featured domestic scenes. Another popular, although less overtly domestic, theme in WWII propaganda featured the victory garden, In the poster *For a Happy, Healthy Job-Join the Women's Land Army* (fig. 16), a woman stands in the field of crops. She is wearing khaki trousers with yellow boots up to her knees. Hair perfectly curled, she wear a green headband tied in an elegant bow. Holding a farming tool, she looks back with a sense of accomplishment on her face. Around her it reads, "For a happy healthy job, join the women's land army!” This poster suggests that the WLA offered a healthy outdoor lifestyle. While this woman is technically doing a job outside of the home, her activities (growing and tending to food crops) still connects her with traditional domestic roles.

The Women's Land Army was established to help support the labor shortage that American farmers had faced in 1942. Established in 1943, the Women’s Land Army recruited and trained women to work on farms that were left unattended. Though most of these women had never worked on a farm, they were soon trained to complete tasks such as plowing fields, planting crops and harvesting. These women were referred to as “farmerettes.” They were paid equally to male farm laborers and were protected by an eight hour work day.[83] The Land Army farmerettes became wartime icons.

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[83] Smithsonian Magazine, “Before Rosie the Riveter, Farmerettes Went to Work,” Smithsonian.com (Smithsonian Institution, May 28, 2009), https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/before-rosie-the-riveter-farmerettes-went-to-work-141638628/.

Created in 1945, *Harvest War Crops* (fig. 17) was sponsored by the Women's Land Army to encourage women to work the fields. *Harvest War Crops* captures the image of a woman who is picking fresh peaches off a tree. She is shown with brown, curled and pinned back hair, wearing a smile as she picks a peach. Her beautifully tanned skin and bright shirt contrast with the bright blue sky behind her. She wears a dark yellow polo shirt that reads "WLA" on the left side of her chest-the uniform of the Women's Land Army. She carries a brown satchel across her chest to carry her freshly picked fruit as she completes her job on the fields. Although she is technically working outside of the home, the procurement of food connects her to her traditional role as the nurturer of her family.

While these posters illustrate jobs women can complete on the home front, women were often taking on multiple roles. Even in times of war, women were still required to maintain the smooth organization of their home and often their families. Sara Harrington discusses these demands in her article, "Women's Work: Domestic Labor in American World War II Posters." [84] When focusing on how the government planned themes and information for propaganda posters, Harrington states, "Some World War II posters used specific rhetorical devices to demonstrate that through her labor the American housewife directly affected the war effort"[85] While most posters discussed involved women or a woman shown perfectly put together while contributing to her country, others don't show women specifically, but rather suggest domestically in other ways.

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[84] Sara Harrington, "Women's Work: Domestic Labor in American World War II Posters,"42.

[85] Sara Harrington, "Women's Work: Domestic Labor in American World War II Posters,"42.

The American Fat Salvage Committee was created by the government to urge housewives to save their excess fat rendered from cooking and donate it to the army. This material helped make explosives needed for battle. Cooking fats specifically contributed to the making of glycerine, which was an ingredient for explosives. Created by the artist Henry Koerner, *Save Waste Fats for Explosives, 1943* (fig. 18) illustrates a familiar theme of frugality while depicting the direct connection between the war and the domestic labor of a housewife.

This work features a darker tone with a blast of red, yellow, and orange in the center. One's eyes move across the yellow words that read, "Save waste fats for explosives," and are then directed towards the center section that illustrates an explosion with missiles flying toward the viewer. One can see at the top a woman's hand holding a frying pan. Her polished and perfectly trimmed fingernails highlight her femininity while her bare hand holds a cast iron pan full of grease. She pours the blazing hot grease towards the bottom of the composition where one can see it melting and exploding amidst flames and mortar shells. At the time, handing over cooking fats to the government as part of one's patriotic duty. Works such as these offer a direct connection between domestic tasks and the war effort. The scale of the housewife's contribution is emphasized by the bold wording and harsh graphics of the bombs created below.

Created in 1944, *I'm Out to Lick Runaway Prices* (fig. 19) illustrates not just one task a woman can do but multiple tasks she can partake in while on the home front. This poster depicts a woman dressed as a traditional American housewife. Appearing angry or determined, she is centered in this poster, clenching her right fist, with her eyes staring directly at the viewer. She stands before a white background and surrounded only by bold lettering. Her hair is dark brown, styled in large, perfect curls that are pinned back away from her face. She has fair skin with

perfectly shaped brows, bold red lips and blushing cheeks, and much like other women featured in posters from this era, she seems perfectly put together.

As one's eyes move across the poster, one notices the black block surrounding the lettering at the top. In yellow font it reads, "I'm out to lick runaway prices." This poster was issued by the Office of Economic Stabilization to help promote a healthy and stable American economy throughout WWII. At the bottom in the same font style reads, " Let's all hold the 7-key plan to hold prices down." Each step helps spell the word "Victory." This poster not only captures the traditional housewife, but includes the 7 key steps one can do in order to do their part. This includes buying war bonds, paying taxes, saving, reducing debts and buying only essential items while following ration rules. Many of these tasks are related to a woman's work within the domestic space, therefor giving women direct, concrete ways to support her country during the wary.

Heres How to Headway Runaway Prices (fig. 20), created in 1944 by the OWI, illustrates the same message and list of tasks a women can contribute to in order to do her part in the war. Similar to *I'm Out to Lick Runaway Prices* (fig. 19), this poster depicts a woman in the center who carries an arms full of various grocery items. Compared to the woman in the previous OWI poster, who's apron clearly identifies her as occupying a domestics space, the woman in *Heres How to Headway Runaway Prices* is more stylishly attired. She is perfectly put together with fashionable curls under her brown hat. It appears as if a feather hangs in the front of her hat, which matches her leather gloves Her groceries depict the colors of the rainbow. Her skin is peach toned with sculpted brows and blushing cheeks. She wears a large smile of perfectly straight, white teeth, surrounded by glamorous red lips.

This image clearly outlines what an American citizen, or in this case, a housewife, can do to support the war efforts while at home. The composition prominently features her ration book, sending a message that even seemingly well-to-do women followed the rules when it came to food purchases. Though the messages of these two posters reflect the same information, the women shown are depicted in different ways. Each poster was created to be relatable to a different type of American housewife. While one appears and "talks" more like a working class women, the other appears to reflect more of a middle/upper class persona.

Similar to others, this poster supports the traditional gender norms of women and housewives at the time, striving for order and always seen with makeup and polished hair, no matter if they were wearing an apron at home or if they were out shopping for groceries. A woman on the domestic front juggled multiple tasks, but she did it with strength and femininity. Though some appear more direct than others, the use of bold graphics and strong connections between the housewife and war efforts provided contemporary female viewers with a powerfully persuasive statements on how they could contribute to their country.

Conclusion

While the current body of research on the depiction of women in WWII propaganda focuses primarily on women in the labor force, a great deal of propaganda was aimed toward housewives and emphasized their roles within the domestic sphere. Propaganda persuaded and sometimes manipulated the public, but it also reflected the ways that women could realistically contribute to the war effort while maintaining traditional gender roles. These images reflect women's hard work while also capturing the true essence of their support for their country and family.

Well-known posters like *We Can Do It!* (fig. 1), feature women in labor-intensive jobs, taking on roles that men had left while enlisting to fight in WWII. These images are empowering but represented relatively few women compared to those who remained at home. Women were contributed to other war efforts outside of factories.[86] More than six million women entered wartime jobs in factories, three million women volunteered with the Red Cross, and over two hundred thousand served in the military.[87] Women's auxiliary branches were also created for every branch of the military. This includes Women's Army Corps, Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, and Women Air force Service Pilots.[88] These women were, however, only 37 percent of the women living in the United States at the time.

The majority of WWII posters that featured women conveyed them as stereotypical housewives who juggled multiple duties to run a smooth household. These images often reflected themes of frugality and resourcefulness, encouraging women to save fats for ammunition and can food to save money and waste. While many maintain traditional gender roles, WWII posters were quite different from those featuring women in WWI. WWI posters such as *Gee I wish I were a Man* (fig. 3), used sex appeal and notions of masculine strength and protectiveness to encourage men to enlist. Women were used as a tool to gain support rather than portrayed as an asset to the war effort.

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[86] "Research Starters: Women in World War II: The National WWII Museum: New Orleans," The National WWII Museum | New Orleans, https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/research-starters-women-world-war-ii.

[87] "Research Starters: Women in World War II: The National WWII Museum: New Orleans," The National WWII Museum | New Orleans.

[88] "Research Starters: Women in World War II: The National WWII Museum: New Orleans."

The domestic sphere of propaganda not only brings to focus the hard work of the American housewife, but a different kind of strength and hard work then that seen in labor force-themed imagery. These posters capture women in their everyday lives, acquiring new ways of saving money and reusing waste. Their beauty, and thus their traditional femininity, is reflected as perfection amidst their hard work.

While images like Rosie have turned into feminist icons today the strength and power behind such images were not noted right away. But, by depicting women working in factories perfectly made up and conventionally beautiful, these images also support traditional beliefs about gender.

When the war ended, propaganda began to encourage women to leave the labor force and give jobs back to the men who were returning home. This emphasizes that Rosie was a tool for manipulation, not government support of a change in traditional gender roles. However, the majority of women, with their new found economic and social independence, wanted to keep these jobs and continue to work new non-traditional roles in society.[89] The heroes of WWII were not only those who enrolled in machine-based jobs, but the mothers and wives who worked harder at home in order to provide for their everyday lives. From canning to saving fat to growing victory gardens, women on the home-front contributed to the success of the American military, their family *and* their country.

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[89] "Research Starters: Women in World War II: The National WWII Museum: New Orleans."

Illustrations

Figure 1. Miller, J. Howard. *We Can Do It!* 1942, 22 in x 17 in, photolithograph.

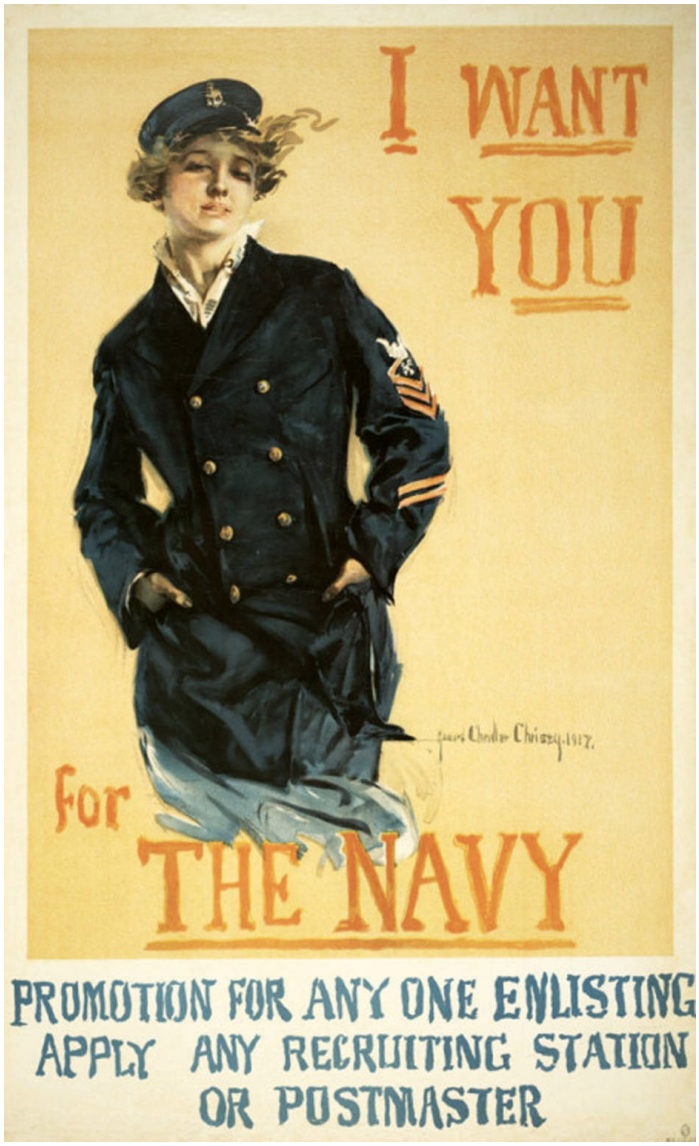

Figure 2. Howard Chandler Christy, *I Want You for the Navy.* 1917, 105 x 68 cm, print.

Figure 3. Howard Chandler Christy, Gee!! I wish I were a man, I'd join the Navy Be a man and do it - United States Navy recruiting station / / Howard Chandler Christy. United States, 1917, lithograph, 105 x 68 cm.

Figure 4. Unknown, *Use it up-Wear it out-Make it do!*, Office of War Information, 1943.

Figure 5. Unknown, Pistol Packin' Mama, Records of the Office of Government Reports, Record Group 208, Courtesy National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, n.d.

Figure 6. Nabisco Shredded Wheat, advertisement, *Good Housekeeping* July 1942.

Figure 7. Cannon Towels, advertisement, *Good Housekeeping* August 1942.

Figure 8. McClelland Barclay, *Save Your Cans/Help Pass the Ammunition*, 1943.

Figure 9. Howard Chandler Christy, *Fight or Buy Bonds,* 1917, 76 cm x 51cm.

Figure 10. Harris, R. G., Robert George, *Do the Job HE left behind,* United States, 1943, 28 x 18.25 in.

Figure 11. Artist unknown, *Women in the War; We Can't Win Without Them!* United States, 1940-1949, 40.56 x 28.15in.

Figure 12. Adolph Treidler, *Soldiers Without Guns,* U.S. Government Printing Office, 1944, 75 cm x 54 cm.

Figure 13. Dick Williams, *Of course I can! I'm patriotic as can be -- And ration points won't worry me!* 1944, United States War Food Administration.

Figure 14. Albert Parker, *We'll Have Lots to Eat This Winter, Won't We Mother?* United States Government Printing Office, 1943.

Figure 15. Albert Parker, *Even a Little Can Help A lot-Now!* U.S. Government Printing Office, 1942.

Figure 16. Clive Upton, *For a Healthy, Happy Job-Join the Women's Land Army,* 1941.

Figure 17. Unknown, *Harvest War Crops,* War Food Administration, 1945.

Figure 18. Henry Koerner, *Save Waste Fats for Explosives,* Office of War Information poster, no. 63. 1943. 28 x 20.

Figure 19. Unknown, *I'm Out to Lick Runaway Prices-Let's All Follow the 7-Key Plan to Hold Prices Down,* United States Office of Economic Stabilization, 1944.

Figure 20. Unknown, *Here's How to Head off Runaway Prices,* Office of War Information, 1944.

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