

A Matter of Persuasion:
The American Government's Use of Psychological Warfare During World War II

When most people think of the weaponry that is used in warfare, they immediately think of violent weapons such as guns, tanks, or grenades, but rarely do they consider the non-violent weapon that is often used by militaries and governments. This weapon, known as psychological warfare, is defined as, "...the use of propaganda against an enemy...to demoralize the enemy, to break his will to fight or resist, and sometimes to render him favourably disposed to one's position. Propaganda is also used to strengthen the resolve of allies or resistance fighters."¹ Under this definition, psychological warfare involves propaganda tactics that are aimed at both enemies and supporters, and that primarily seek to manipulate their emotions in order to influence their attitudes and actions. Governments and militaries have used psychological warfare for hundreds of years to gain support from allies and weaken enemies during wars as a non-violent form of combat, but this weapon of persuasion had never before been used on both supporters and enemies on such a widespread scale as it was during World War II.

By using multiple methods of communication such as radio, film, posters, and leaflets, the United States government was able to disseminate propaganda to American soldiers and civilians, as well as to Germans in Europe. These widespread campaigns were carefully calculated by government agencies to completely surround the intended audiences with targeted messages that drew on their emotions with the hope of influencing their attitudes and actions. In its campaigns aimed towards Americans, the United States government targeted the people's different fears as well as their sense of patriotism. The propaganda that was directed at Germans also focused on fear, but put more effort into invalidating and countering the Nazi propaganda that had already been instilled in soldiers and civilians for years. Due to its use of multiple methods of communication and new technologies, the American government was able to

¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Psychological Warfare," accessed November 17, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/481682/psychological-warfare>.

successfully use psychological warfare as a means of persuasion to gain support for the war from American soldiers and civilians, and as a weapon against the Germans during World War II.

Psychological Persuasion on the American Homefront

The American government used psychological persuasion tactics during the war as a means to gain support from soldiers and civilians on its domestic front. The government's use of psychological propaganda during World War II, however, did not have a very strong beginning. Other countries around the world had already begun using propaganda campaigns and "[w]hen war broke out in Europe on September 1, 1939, the United States was the only major power without a propaganda agency."² While President Franklin D. Roosevelt was trying to convince Americans to support the United States' intervention into the war through his public speeches and fireside chats, he faced much opposition from isolationists who were still recovering from the extreme losses of the First World War and the lingering effects of the Great Depression. World War I was one of the deadliest conflicts before World War II and resulted in significant losses for American troops. These losses made many Americans wary of entering into another war that could have similar devastating results. The Great Depression also made many Americans hesitant to support the war effort because they felt it was more important to focus on improving and stabilizing the American economy rather than interfering in the war.

The isolationist attitudes of many Americans held great influence in determining the role of America in the war. Without public support, Roosevelt would not have been able to gather the resources necessary to fight a second world war. In 1942, the writer and assistant director of the Office of War Information at the time, Archibald Macleish, noted the importance of public

² Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1990), 49.

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support for the war in a speech where he said, “[t]he principal battle ground of this war is not the South Pacific. It is not the Middle East....It is American opinion.”³ Without the backing of the Americans on the homefront who would help fund the war or the support of the soldiers who would fight the war, the United States would not have been successful in World War II.

Beginning to realize the potential power of propaganda in gaining public support for the war, Roosevelt began to seek more information on the use of propaganda by European countries. He appointed a committee in November 1938 to study “affirmative propaganda” and was told that to in order to convince Americans to fight in the war, the United States “...needed to counter foreign propaganda....”⁴ Despite this recommendation, Roosevelt did not take immediate action towards creating propaganda agencies. He was reluctant to start large propaganda campaigns or create propaganda agencies out of fear that “[t]oo much blatant propaganda could well trigger a backlash that would undermine rather than advance his policy....”⁵ Roosevelt also believed that if he was too forceful in his stance on the war, he would not be reelected for a third term in the 1940 presidential election.⁶ Roosevelt continued to receive reports and recommendations from other committees and members of his administration that informed him of the importance of propaganda agencies. He began to create smaller information offices that he had hoped would serve as a suitable response to the growing need for improved national morale and counterpropaganda measures. None of these offices, however, lasted very long due to public confusion, lack of clear goals, and internal disputes. It was only when Roosevelt consolidated

³ Gerd Horten, *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda During World War II* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2003) accessed November 17, 2014, ProQuest ebrary, 52.

⁴ Clayton D. Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors: America's Crusade Against Nazi Germany* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 49.

⁵ Koppes and Black, *Hollywood*, 50.

⁶ Ibid.

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multiple offices into one agency that he began to see a stabilized and stronger output of propaganda on the homefront.

The consolidated agency that was created by an executive order by Roosevelt in June 1942 was the Office of War Information (OWI). The agency had both a domestic and an overseas branch. Its director, former CBS radio commentator Elmer Davis, chose to have the agency work under a policy of “propaganda with fact.”⁷ By including factual information in its propaganda, the agency was able to inform Americans of government actions and policies while at the same time presenting the information in ways that would influence public opinion and generate support for the war. After its establishment, OWI became the primary source of government-funded domestic propaganda during the war. Journalist Gardner Cowles Jr. was the director of the Domestic Branch of OWI and responsible for both news information and the propaganda that was released by the agency. The OWI’s primary means of creating and distributing propaganda domestically during the war “...involved managing the commercial channels of American mass communication through its War Advertising Council and its Motion Picture Branch...”⁸ Through its War Advertising Council, OWI was able to create and distribute propaganda posters; through its Radio Division it was able to develop radio programs; and through its Bureau of Motion Pictures it was able to influence the distribution and content of films.

One of OWI’s methods for creating and distributing propaganda during World War II was through posters. A propaganda analyst for OWI, O.W. Reigal, claimed, “[t]he function of the war poster is to make coherent and acceptable a basically incoherent and irrational ordeal of

⁷ Nicholas J. Cull, David Culbert, and David Welch, *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia, 1500 to the Present* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 284.

⁸ *Ibid.*

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killing, suffering, and destruction that violate every accepted principle of morality and decent living.”⁹ These posters, and the messages they displayed, were categorized into two groups: positive morale boosting posters that were aimed at gaining support for the war, and darker cautionary posters that served as warnings against the actions and policies of the Axis powers. In both categories, the posters used personal wording, images and colors to manipulate the emotions of the American public.

The positive posters encouraged Americans to support the war by buying war bonds, working in war-related jobs, and consuming fewer resources such as gas and food. These posters featured images “...of fists, muscles, tools, and artillery [to] convey American strength.”¹⁰ They also used “[p]atriotic colors of red, white, and blue predominate as national symbols and heroes appeal to patriotism.”¹¹ The OWI’s posters that were aimed at encouraging women to take up war jobs demonstrate these visual methods. In a “Basic Program Plan for Womanpower,” the OWI articulated its goals for the posters: “These jobs will have to be glorified as a patriotic war service if American women are to be persuaded to take them and stick to them. Their importance to a nation engaged in total war must be convincingly presented.”¹² One such poster (see Figure 1) depicts a smiling woman in front of a bright yellow background working with a piece of machinery. The model in the poster is telling women “I’ve found the job where I fit best!” and

⁹ "Propaganda Posters at a Glance," The National WWII Museum, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://www.nationalww2museum.org/learn/education/for-students/ww2-history/at-a-glance/propaganda-posters.html>.

¹⁰ "Powers of Persuasion," National Archives and Records Administration, accessed November 18, 2014, http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers_of_persuasion/powers_of_persuasion_home.html.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.



Figure 1. Poster created and distributed by OWI showing the brightly colored, glamorous and positive images encouraging American civilians to join the war effort. Roeppe, George, "'I've Found the Job Where I Fit Best!'" : Find Your War Job in Industry, Agriculture, Business," 1943. Reproduced from Northwestern University Library, <https://images.northwestern.edu/multiresimages/inu:dil-41913a91-037f-494b-9113-06004a8a98fb> (accessed November 29, 2014).



Figure 2. Poster created and distributed by OWI showing the dark colors, negative imagery, and accusatory language used to persuade American soldiers and civilians of the negative consequences that would take place if they did not follow the messages conveyed in poster propaganda. Siebel, "Someone Talked!" 1942. Reproduced from Northwestern University Library, <https://images.northwestern.edu/multiresimages/inu:dil-d0d57738-47a0-451b-87fc-02f533f369eb> (accessed November 29, 2014).

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below is written, "Find your war job."¹³ This poster made the idea of work appealing through its use of bright inviting colors, exciting language, and through the attractiveness and apparent happiness of the model. It used these images, as well as personalized language that refers directly to the "you" who is looking at the poster, to tell women that they could work and at the same time remain happy and feminine.

OWI's darker and more cautionary posters used many of these same methods in communicating its messages to the public. These posters, however, did not look to improve American morale. Instead, "[t]hese posters confront the viewer with the frightening stakes of the war and its human cost. Dark, earthen colors appear in portrayals of imperiled citizens, as well as dead and wounded soldiers."¹⁴ They attempted to communicate the necessity of the war and, at the same time, act as counterpropaganda to the propaganda campaigns of the Axis powers. One of the most common messages in these posters was that Americans should be careful when they talk about the war, so that no sensitive information would reach the enemy. A poster that depicts this message (see Figure 2) shows a drowning sailor pointing at the viewer accusingly with the message "Someone talked!" printed around him.¹⁵ This image of a sailor pointing directly at the viewer gave civilians a sense of accountability for their actions as well as a feeling of personal involvement in the outcome of the war. The poster's depiction of a soldier drowning was also used to show civilians the grave consequences that could occur if they didn't obey the messages being conveyed through poster propaganda.

¹³ George Roepp, "'I've Found the Job Where I Fit Best!'" : Find Your War Job in Industry, Agriculture, Business," 1943, World War II Poster Collection at Northwestern University Library, accessed November 18, 2014, <https://images.northwestern.edu/multiresimages/inu:dil-41913a91-037f-494b-9113-06004a8a98fb>.

¹⁴ "Powers of Persuasion."

¹⁵ Siebel, "Someone Talked!" 1942, World War II Poster Collection at Northwestern University Library, accessed November 18, 2014, <https://images.northwestern.edu/multiresimages/inu:dil-d0d57738-47a0-451b-87fc-02f533f369eb>.

Radio was another method used by OWI to create and circulate government propaganda. Unlike war posters, radio had not been a widely used method of spreading propaganda during the First World War thus making it a modern addition to the propaganda campaigns of World War II. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was primarily responsible for the growth of radio as a tool to spread information and ideas to the American public during the war. He made his first informal speech, or “fireside chat,” (see Figure 3) on March 12, 1933, just after his first election and, “[f]rom March 1933 to June 1944, Roosevelt addressed the American people in some 30 speeches broadcast via radio.”¹⁶ His speeches were influential in shaping public opinion about a variety of social and political issues, including World War II. Roosevelt used multiple methods to engage listeners and make them feel personally connected to him and his messages. He would “...use the simplest possible language, concrete examples and analogies in the fireside chats, so as to be clearly understood by the largest number of Americans. He began many of the nighttime chats with the greeting “My friends,” and referred to himself as “I” and the American people as “you” as if addressing his listeners directly and personally.”¹⁷ These methods had an especially large impact during the 1930s and 40s when radio was the primary source of household entertainment, and could be found in almost every home in America. Radio allowed the government to communicate more often, and more directly, with the American public.

The government-sponsored radio programs broadcasted during the war transmitted many of the same messages that had been depicted by war posters, and also used similar language. Similar to the methods in poster propaganda, “[o]ne of the dramatic approaches used by radio writers during World War II was the “you-technique,” which made listeners feel as if they were

¹⁶ History.com Staff, "The Fireside Chats," History.com, 2010, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.history.com/topics/fireside-chats>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

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partaking in the action.”¹⁸ This technique, along with the fact that most listeners were listening from their own homes, served to create a personal connection between listeners and the information that was being transmitted to them.

The messages that were broadcast through these radio programs attempted to demonize the Nazis and their actions, while promoting American military action and civilian support for the war. These messages were transmitted frequently in one of the “most successful and long-running radio propaganda series,” *You Can’t Do Business with Hitler* (see Figure 4).¹⁹ The radio program was written by Douglass Miller and was based on his experiences and observations working as a commercial attaché for the American Embassy in Berlin for 15 years before the war.²⁰ The program was sponsored by the Office of Emergency Management, which merged with OWI in June 1942. *You Can’t Do Business with Hitler* ran from April 1942 until March 1943, broadcasting a total of 56 episodes on over 720 radio stations.²¹ This radio program tried to persuade Americans of the importance of winning the war by describing various aspects of the future that awaited them if they lost the war to the Germans.

The titles of each broadcast reflected various aspects of American life that the program warned would be destroyed by Nazi policies such as religion, law, and education. These titles included: “No God for Poland,” “Trial by Terror,” “Women versus Hitlerism,” and “Education in the New Order.”²² These programs discussed various German policies and actions, presenting the information in such a way that it both informed and cautioned the audience. For example, in the program’s fifth episode titled “Mass Murder,” Miller told listeners about the inaccuracy of the reports given by Germans on the murders they were committing, and the systematic mass

¹⁸ Horten, *Radio Goes to War*, 52.

¹⁹ Horten, *Radio Goes to War*, 56.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Horten, *Radio Goes to War*, 56-57.

²² Horten, *Radio Goes to War*, 57.

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murders that he believed were actually occurring. The episode began with recordings from various European radio stations recounting the numbers of people killed by German forces throughout Europe as reported by the German government. Miller then said, "It is wrong for us to assume that these reports of executions and depopulation are isolated acts of terror to quell rebellion...I claim that these executions are a result of the Nazi's deliberate and fundamental policy of exterminating racial groups."²³ The rest of the program featured dramatizations of events in which there were mass murders and situations that revealed Nazi policies. After each dramatization, Miller returned and asked listeners if they wanted proof of the validity of the dramatizations. He then referenced newspaper reports, Hitler's speeches, which were translated and read on air by an actor, and passages from Hitler's autobiography *Mein Kampf*.²⁴ Through a combination of dramatization and factual evidence, *You Can't Do Business with Hitler* was able to inform the American public of German actions and policies, persuading them to see Germany as the enemy.

To defend their claims, the program used a great deal of factual information regarding the social, political and economic changes that had occurred in Germany since the rise of Hitler. The show's creators purposefully limited their use of emotional manipulation. They feared that if they used blatant propaganda messages, as they had during World War I, then listeners would sense that they were being manipulated and the show's efforts would backfire with listeners becoming reluctant to support the war. It was due to these concerns that the program relied heavily on factual information because "[i]f they wanted to cry wolf again, American propagandists had to make sure they had documentation on which to base their

²³ Douglass Miller and Elwood Hoffman, "You Can't Do Business with Hitler," Internet Archive, 1942, accessed December 6, 2014, https://archive.org/details/OTRR_You_Cant_Do_Business_With_Hitler_Singles.

²⁴ Ibid.



Figure 3. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt during a fireside chat on September 6, 1936. Harris & Ewing, “FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] FIRESIDE CHAT,” 1936. Reproduced from Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/hec2013015588/> (accessed December 05, 2014).



Figure 4. Standing from left to right, radio actors Abrasha Robofsky, Colonel Charles Ferris, John Flynn, and Robert Pollard rehearsing for the radio program *You Can't Do Business With Hitler*. This program ran from April 1942 until March 1943, broadcasting a total of 56 episodes on over 720 radio stations. Liberman, Howard, ““You Can't Do Business With Hitler.” Rehearsing for the radio show “You Can't Do Business With Hitler” are (left to right) Abrasha Robofsky, Colonel Charles Ferris, John Flynn, and Robert Pollard. This series of programs is written and produced by the radio section of the Office of War Information (OWI),” 1942. Reproduced from Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/oem2002008665/PP/> (accessed December 05, 2014).

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charges.”²⁵ By negatively presenting information on the Nazis and their policies, contrasting their actions to American ideals of democracy, and then applying these ideals to an aspect of everyday life, this program was used to persuade listeners that the Germans were the enemy, inform listeners of the high stakes involved in the war, and relate these messages to them in a way that would make them feel personally affected by the outcome of the war.

Recounting possible future scenarios for listeners in a docudrama style, radio programs like *You Can't Do Business with Hitler* were not only able to inform Americans of Germany's actions and policies during the war, but they were also able to get the American audiences emotionally invested in these programs and the information that they broadcasted. This practice of presenting information in a dramatic style effectively convinced many Americans of the importance of the war, and why they needed to support the war effort.

Along with radio, OWI used motion pictures as a means to disseminate propaganda to the American public through the Bureau of Motion Pictures. The bureau's relationship with Hollywood film studios was important in influencing the material being produced in feature films. Lowell Mellett, the coordinator of government films, appointed the newspaper publisher Nelson Poynter as the head of the bureau in April 1942. At the time of its establishment, the bureau was a part of the Office of Government Reports, one of the agencies consolidated into OWI.²⁶ Mellett was expected to use the bureau to “[oversee] the government's war-related films...[and] to establish liaison with Hollywood and insure that the studios implemented their pledge to help the war effort.”²⁷ While this relationship did impact the content of some films produced during the war, it was not as fruitful as the government had hoped.

²⁵ Horten, *Radio Goes to War*, 58.

²⁶ Koppes and Black, *Hollywood*, 56-58.

²⁷ Koppes and Black, *Hollywood*, 56.

Hollywood film studios had already been producing films about the war with patriotic themes and anti-German messages long before the Bureau of Motion Pictures was created. Recognizing this, the government was reluctant to make any attempts to completely censor and control the content being produced in films, instead “OWI preferred to convert Hollywood....”²⁸ If the government had attempted to completely censor and control film content, they feared that they would lose the support of the film industry and they would no longer be as willing to cooperate in the war effort. In the effort to persuade Hollywood to spread their messages in their films, OWI released a Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry in June 1942 with a list of seven questions it requested that filmmakers take into consideration. The questions included: “Will this picture help win the war?”; “If it is an ‘escape’ picture, will it harm the war effort by creating a false picture of America, her allies, or the world we live in?”; and “Does the picture tell the truth or will the young people of today have reason to say they were misled by propaganda?”²⁹ These questions showed OWI’s concern that the power of motion pictures as a means of spreading propaganda would not be used to its full potential. They also showed OWI’s concern that films would present information that was either not entirely factual or that was clearly propaganda – a trait they feared would incite public distrust of both the government and the film industry, and cause the government to lose support for the war.

OWI did not wield a great deal of influence over the feature films produced by Hollywood during the war, but many Hollywood studios sent them their scripts before film production without prompting from the government agency. These studios, most of which had already been producing propaganda films to support the war effort without government involvement, sought OWI’s input on their scripts in the hopes that they would provide them with

²⁸ Koppes and Black, *Hollywood*, 63.

²⁹ Koppes and Black, *Hollywood*, 66-67.

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any notes or suggestions that would help make the films more patriotic and thus better contribute to the war effort. OWI would often only provide the studios with notes on the scripts or reviews of the films that told them if the film content coincided with OWI's goals. If a film portrayed the war in any way, however, OWI had more power to censor certain images within it, such as those of dead soldiers, if they believed they would hurt the war effort. There were also times when OWI exercised its power, and did attempt to make dramatic changes to film scripts.

One example of this occurred during the production of the film *So Proudly We Hail* in 1943. Produced by Paramount and starring Claudette Colbert, Paulette Goddard and Veronica Lake, the film looks at the experiences of three military nurses who are caught in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor after being shipped out to the Philippines.³⁰ The head of the Motion Picture Bureau, Nelson Poynter, was very interested in this film "since it made a serious attempt to deal with the issues and highlighted the neglected role of women at war."³¹ Throughout the production of the film, Poynter made numerous suggestions and even rewrote entire monologues in the film so that they would better exemplify OWI's goals. In addition to his changes to the dialogue, Poynter insisted "that the U.S. be seen as part of an allied team, rather than the single best hope for the world."³² He also demanded that the film "temper the more blatant anti-Asian aspects of the script," and observed "that the portrayal of women was often derogatory."³³ While Paramount implemented many of these suggestions, the studio rejected Poynter's revisions to the film dialogue. They did not believe the agency had the authority to make these revisions and ultimately considered them to be unnecessary and unwanted. The production of *So Proudly We Hail* shows the difficulty OWI had in completely gaining control over film content, but also the

³⁰ Koppes and Black, *Hollywood*, 99.

³¹ Koppes and Black, *Hollywood*, 100.

³² Rob Nixon, "So Proudly We Hail," Turner Classic Movies, accessed December 8, 2014, <http://www.tcm.com/this-month/article/86514|0/So-Proudly-We-Hail.html>.

³³ *Ibid.*

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willingness of movie studios to submit their work for OWI's review and work with the organization out of their own desire to help the war effort.

Even though OWI couldn't completely control the content of feature films produced by Hollywood, they did have total control over the newsreels and documentaries that they produced independently. Newsreels were single-reel films (approximately 10 minutes long) featuring a compilation of news stories. They were often run before feature films, with new ones being released in theaters once or twice per week. Newsreels were extremely popular at this time, and during the war approximately "[f]ifty million Americans watched newsreels every week in one of 14,000 theatres" around the country.³⁴ Knowing that this was a source of information for many Americans, and because newsreels dealt directly with war-related information, all of the content was heavily monitored and censored by the government. This was done to prevent the enemy from obtaining any information they felt would put government or military operations at risk, and to prevent American civilians from seeing any visual images that would "threaten domestic unity."³⁵ These threatening visual images largely concerned dead or wounded American soldiers. It was felt that the American public would not support sending soldiers to war if they had to face the reality of war and the death that came as a result. The government did not permit any images of dead soldiers to be distributed in any way for twenty-one months after Pearl Harbor. The first of these images was shown to the American public when LIFE magazine published a photo in their September 20, 1943 issue of dead American soldiers on a beach in New Guinea.³⁶

³⁴ "The War: At Home: Communication," PBS, September 2007, accessed December 6, 2014, http://www.pbs.org/thewar/at_home_communication_news_censorship.htm.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

The most significant documentary film series produced by the OWI during the war was Frank Capra's *Why We Fight*. This was a seven-part docudrama series produced between 1942 and 1945 that aimed to "...explain the issues of the war to conscripted soldiers who had grown up in the era of the interwar peace movement."³⁷ The series documented the origins of the war, and the beliefs of the Axis powers, in order to inform soldiers why they were fighting and what they were going to be fighting for. The films portrayed Nazi Germany as the clear enemy and America as the hero. The series strove to win support from soldiers and civilians by depicting the evils of Nazi Germany. In his memoir *Name Above the Title*, Capra claimed that he had difficulty deciding how to approach these films, but he decided that the best way to go about creating the series was to make his film out of the propaganda films created by the Axis powers. He claimed, "[I]et the *enemy* prove to our soldiers the enormity of his cause – and the justness of ours."³⁸ Using footage from propaganda films such as Germany's *Triumph of the Will*, factual information regarding the events leading up to the war, and dramatic audio and visual elements that played on the viewer's emotions, the *Why We Fight* series serves as an important example of the propaganda produced through collaboration between the government and Hollywood during the war.

While the series was primarily aimed at soldiers, after the first segment, *Prelude to War*, was awarded the Oscar for best documentary in 1942, it was given a commercial release in May 1943. The release of *Prelude to War* was a box office failure. Even though audiences were able to see it for free, the hour-long running time of the documentary (making it too long for a documentary short and too short for a feature film), the poor timing of its release (long after the

³⁷ Cull, Culbert and Welch, *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion*, 426.

³⁸ Frank Capra, *The Name Above the Title: An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1971), 331.

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war had already begun), and its obvious use of propaganda turned people away.³⁹ After the failure of *Prelude to War*, “[o]nly an edited version of *The Battle of Russia* (1943) and the last in the series, *War Comes to America* (1945), were released to civilian theaters.”⁴⁰ The commercial failure of the series did not detract from its success among the civilians and soldiers who did see it. All seven segments of the documentary series continued to be shown to soldiers throughout the war, and its unique documentary style made it a memorable and powerful example of how film was used to mobilize the support of the American people during the war.

America’s Use of Psychological Warfare Against Germany

While the American government was using psychological propaganda to rally the support of Americans on the homefront, it was also using psychological tactics as a means of waging war against the Germans. The United States had been conducting psychological warfare operations against Germany since the beginning of World War II through leaflets and radio broadcasts.⁴¹ Leaflet operations were large propaganda campaigns where planes would drop bombs filled with leaflets over enemy troops. These leaflets were aimed at gaining the trust of enemy soldiers, and instilling fear within them in order to convince them to surrender. At the beginning of the war, radio operations were performed primarily through OWI and its broadcasting station, Voice of America. These programs had consistent but limited airtime at the beginning of the war, but

³⁹ Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (Columbia University Press, 1999), accessed November 29, 2014, http://books.google.com/books?id=mYP3wLofK2AC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_atb#v=onepage&q&f=false, 79.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ OWI, in particular, had been conducting leaflet operations since the summer of 1942. PWD/SHAEF, *The Psychological Warfare Division, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force: An Account of Its Operations in the Western European Campaign, 1944-1945* (www.psywar.org, 2007), accessed November 18, 2014, www.books.google.com/books?id=fiy8-kkK-moC., 17.

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grew in number as the war progressed. While these operations had been occurring for some time, the establishment of the Psychological Warfare Division of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (PWD/SHAEF) in 1943 marked a change in how American agencies conducted psychological warfare operations in Germany.

PWD was important because it was the first agency to unite agents from American and British government agencies. The structure of the organization reflected this collaboration as “the Chief of PWD was assisted by four deputies, one representing each of the four civilian agencies which contributed personnel to PWD, namely, OWI, OSS [Office of Strategic Services], PID [Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office], and MOI [Ministry of Information].”⁴² The personnel from OWI and OSS served as the American representatives, and those from PID and MOI as the British representatives. The joint operation allowed PWD to conduct larger operations that coordinated with the efforts of other agencies to result in more successful and effective propaganda campaigns.

PWD’s psychological warfare operations were conducted similarly to the propaganda campaigns aimed towards the American public. When PWD first began its operations, it “restricted itself primarily to bringing news to the German soldiers in order to establish an eventual belief in the authenticity of what [it] said.”⁴³ This is very similar to the “propaganda with fact” that was conducted by OWI in its homefront propaganda. PWD realized that without a measure of trust in the content of the propaganda distributed by PWD, the Germans would have no reason to believe PWD’s later, more overt, messages that tried to persuade them to surrender. This basis in truth was characteristic of “white propaganda,” which mandated that all propaganda that was released had to identify its origins as being from Allied forces. It also “prohibited

⁴² PWD/SHAEF, *The Psychological Warfare Division*, 15.

⁴³ PWD/SHAEF, *The Psychological Warfare Division*, 23.

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deviation from the truth in statements that could be verified by the German audience.”⁴⁴ While they also used “black propaganda,” or subversive tactics using false information, white propaganda was the primary form of psychological warfare used by United States government agencies during the war in their overseas propaganda campaigns. Knowing that the Germans had been surrounded by Nazi propaganda for years before being exposed to Allied propaganda campaigns, PWD decided that the best way to combat the propaganda instilled by the Nazis was to gain the trust of the Germans through the use of reliable information. It was only after this trust was established that PWD could gradually shift the messages in their propaganda to further play on the emotions of the German soldiers, and, in effect, become more manipulative and persuasive.

During the war, PWD primarily used leaflets and radio broadcasts to circulate its propaganda to the Germans. Leaflets were generally 5x8 inch sheets of paper with messages written in German and, occasionally, images printed on them. Since these leaflets were produced by PWD, their origins were clearly stated and for the most part “[their] approach was objective and [their] content factual.”⁴⁵ The leaflets aimed to approach German soldiers in a straightforward manner that “spoke ‘plain soldier-to-soldier language’ and that appealed to enemy martial honor.”⁴⁶ This language was influential in getting the German soldiers to read the leaflets, and believe the contents within them to be truthful.

One of the most successful leaflets produced by PWD was the “Safe Conduct Pass,” (see Figure 5) which informed German soldiers of the rights they would be guaranteed under the Geneva Convention if they surrendered, and provided tips on how to surrender safely. The

⁴⁴ Daniel Lerner, *Sykewar: Psychological Warfare Against Germany, D-Day to VE-Day* (New York: George W. Stewart, 1949), 27.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors*, 219.

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majority of the leaflet, like most leaflets aimed at German soldiers, was written in German. There was a section on the front of the leaflet printed in English of a signed message from the Supreme Allied Commander, General Eisenhower, for American soldiers to notify them that the German soldier carrying the leaflet was surrendering.⁴⁷ The “Safe Conduct Pass” was widely used by Germans near the end of the war, as Allied victory became more apparent and more Germans began to surrender. German soldiers valued the leaflet because it served as an official guarantee of humane treatment for them once they surrendered.

There were many other leaflets produced by PWD that tried to convince German soldiers to surrender. For example, one leaflet titled “No Joke” (see Figure 6) also included information on the provisions that surrendering German soldiers would receive, but the leaflet also used more persuasive language than the “Safe Conduct Pass”. The leaflet began by expressing sympathy for the plight of the German soldiers recognizing that while it is not easy to be a prisoner of war, it was better than being dead. It also mentioned that 850,000 German soldiers had already surrendered.⁴⁸ This leaflet recognized the difficult decisions being faced by German soldiers, and by including information on the provisions that they would be guaranteed, it not only drew on the needs and desires of the German soldiers, but it also countered Nazi propaganda that had told German soldiers that if they surrendered they would be killed immediately.

Another leaflet titled “The Invasion” (see Figure 7) used information regarding Allied military plans to convince German soldiers to surrender. This two-sided leaflet had a map of Germany on the front with arrows signifying approaching American, British, and Russian troops pointing towards various places in Germany. It then had text beneath the map warning soldiers

⁴⁷ Diary of Vernon Goetz, February 4, 1945, Insert 32, Goucher College Archives.

⁴⁸ Diary of Vernon Goetz, January 2, 1945, Insert 17b, Goucher College Archives.



Figure 5. A Safe Conduct Pass front (image on left) and back (image on right). This was the most successful leaflet distributed by PWD/SHAEF during the war. It was dropped between September 1944 and March 1945. The front of the leaflet told both German soldiers and American soldiers that the person carrying the leaflet was surrendering and was to be treated as dictated by the Geneva Convention. The back of the leaflet told German soldiers the rights that they were guaranteed under the Geneva Convention. Diary of Vernon Goetz, February 4, 1945, Insert 32, Goucher College Archives.

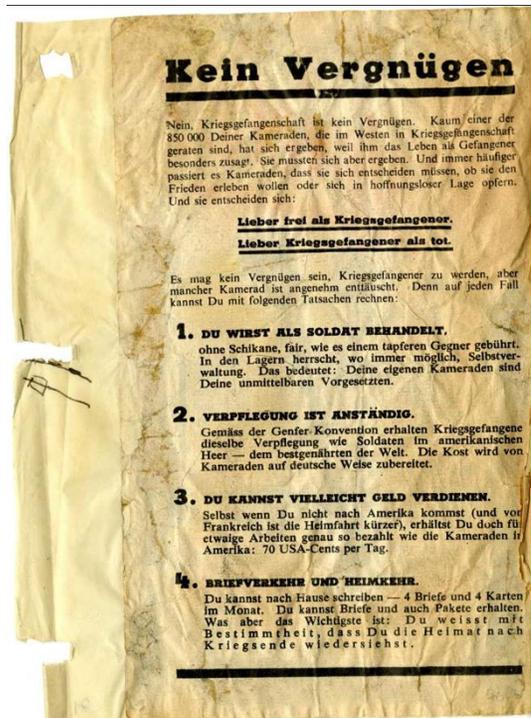


Figure 6. A leaflet entitled “No Joke” intended to persuade German soldiers to surrender. Like the Safe Conduct Pass, this leaflet detailed the rights that would have been guaranteed to surrendering German soldiers. It tells the soldiers that it is better to be free than a captive of war but that it is better to be a captive of war than dead. This leaflet was first printed by PWD/SHAEF on January 5, 1945 and dropped on German troops, between January 11 and January 24, 1945. Diary of Vernon Goetz, Tuesday, January 2, 1945, Insert 17b, Goucher College Archives.

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that Germany's defeat was imminent and that they had to live for Germany's future. The back of the leaflet contained information on planned Allied actions and another warning that the German soldiers should surrender for the sake of Germany's future.⁴⁹ The inclusion of factual information regarding previous and future Allied military action shows the implementation of white propaganda by PWD. While the other two leaflets tried to appeal to the needs of the German soldiers, this leaflet made more of an effort to instill fear within them and attempt to weaken their morale by making a German defeat appear inevitable.

Leaflets played such a large part in psychological warfare that "[b]y late September 1944 over 800 million leaflets had been distributed by PWD."⁵⁰ These large leaflet drops were possible because of the invention of the Monroe Leaflet Bomb by Major James Monroe, a member of PWD. The leaflet bomb was "a cylinder composed of laminated paper that held some eighty thousand leaflets. When the bomb was a thousand feet above the ground, it opened automatically."⁵¹ These inventions, along with the production cooperation between British and American agencies, were the key factors in the success of the leaflet operations.

PWD's radio division was another important part of the Allied propaganda campaigns against Germany. During the war, PWD operated the radio program "Voice of SHAEF" which was broadcasted on radio stations around the world such as OWI's Voice of America and American Broadcasting Station in Europe. "Voice of SHAEF" presented reliable war news relating to both Allied and German actions. As it did with leaflets, PWD often coordinated its broadcasts with those of other Allied countries in planned propaganda campaigns. The most notable example of this occurred when the "PWD Radio Section also planned, coordinated, and assisted in the execution of the large scale D-Day broadcasts which announced the invasion of

⁴⁹ Diary of Vernon Goetz, February 9, 1945, Insert 34, Goucher College Archives.

⁵⁰ Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors*, 221.

⁵¹ Cull, Culbert and Welch, *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion*, 228.

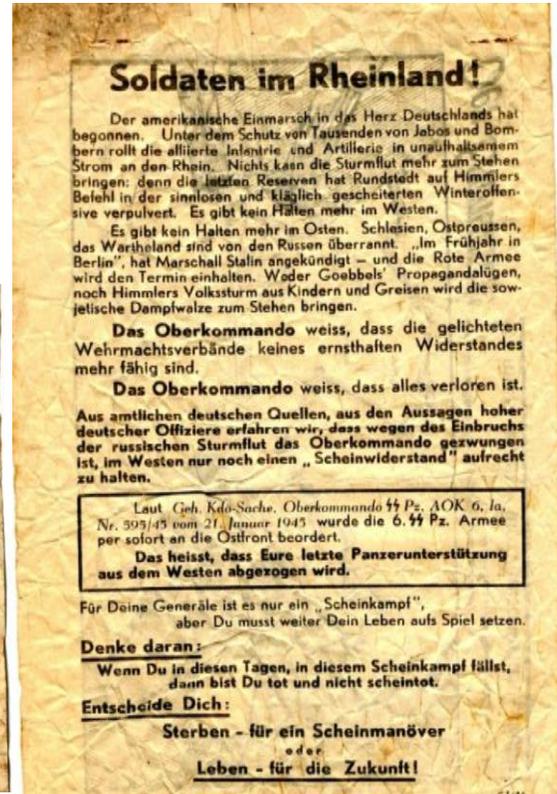
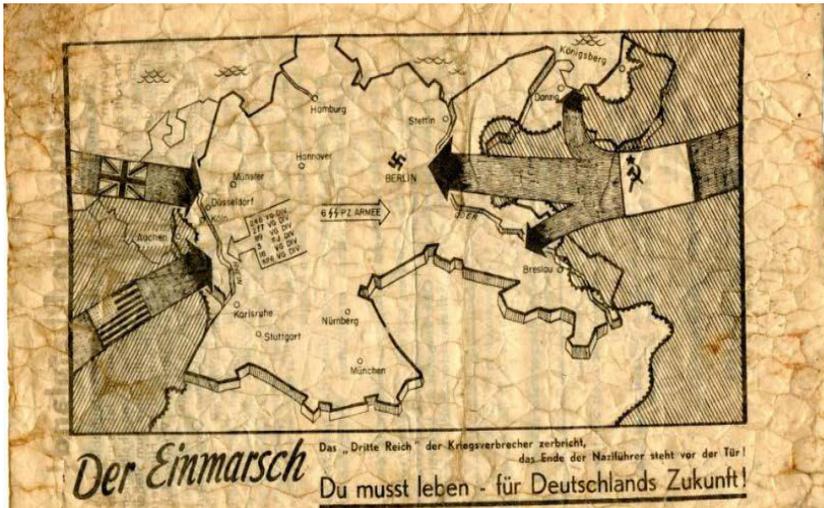


Figure 7. This leaflet was created by PWD/SHAEF. It was disseminated by artillery shell by the First U.S. Army between October 1944 and May 1945. The front of the leaflet (image on left) shows a map of Germany and depicts Russian, British, and American military advances into. The back of the leaflet (image on right) warns German soldiers of the upcoming attacks and urges them to live for the future and surrender. Diary of Vernon Goetz, Friday, February 9, 1945, Insert 34, Goucher College Archives.



Figure 8. A photograph showing German soldiers surrendering in Brittany, France in 1944 carrying the “Safe Conduct” leaflets that were produced by PWD/SHAEF. "Psychological Warfare," 1944. Reproduced from What-When-How, <http://what-when-how.com/propaganda-and-mass-persuasion/psychological-warfare/> (accessed November 14, 2014).

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Normandy to the people of enemy and enemy-occupied countries.”⁵² These coordinated mass media broadcasts made sure that every German knew of Allied actions against Germany, in the hopes that they would create a sense of fear and uncertainty in the Germans that would help end the war more quickly. Another important operation for the Radio Section of PWD was the capture of the Radio Luxembourg transmitter. The transmitter was “one of the most important pre-war transmitters in all of Europe” and it “fell to the Allies in the Autumn of 1944.”⁵³ After its capture, Radio Luxembourg began to be used by Allied forces for broadcasting seventeen hours a day.⁵⁴ This was a significant operation and success for PWD because it allowed PWD to broadcast the “Voice of SHAEF” more often, and to a wider audience of German soldiers and civilians, thus strengthening its propaganda campaigns.

Radio programs were broadcast to both German soldiers and civilians, but in each case they contained different messages. The radio broadcasts aimed at civilians served to “prepare the German population, before the fact, to accept the authority of Military Government under the Supreme Commander [General Dwight D. Eisenhower].”⁵⁵ They had hoped with these broadcasts that German civilians would be more compliant and willing to accept American military control. On March 4, 1945 in Auw, Germany, American First Sergeant Vernon Goetz wrote in his diary about a similar warning issued by the American Army: “We have urged the German Civilians (by radio and leaflets) to remain in their homes. If they leave home for a supposed sanctuary in East Germany, they will only run into death.”⁵⁶ This warning was very similar to another that was broadcasted in a radio message by SHAEF just a few weeks later on March 17. The message was aimed at the inhabitants in all of the towns located in two areas of

⁵² PWD/SHAEF, *The Psychological Warfare Division*, 35.

⁵³ PWD/SHAEF, *The Psychological Warfare Division*, 39.

⁵⁴ Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors*, 224.

⁵⁵ Lerner, *Sykewar*, 178.

⁵⁶ Diary of Vernon Goetz, March 4, 1945, Goucher College Archives.

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Germany that the Allies were planning to bomb. SHAEF claimed that they did not want to kill any German civilians, and warned them that they should leave as soon as possible. They are further warned that “from now on, no shelter or refuge within the...districts can be considered safe...Act now! Out of the danger zones! Out of the war!”⁵⁷ This message, and the efforts recorded by Goetz, reflect PWD/SHAEF’s efforts to both keep German civilians informed of their actions, thereby fostering a sense of trust and honesty that they felt would promote cooperation, and to instill fear within the civilians at the same time so as to weaken national morale, support for the third Reich, and any resistance efforts.

The messages in the radio broadcasts that were aimed at German soldiers also served as warnings for future military actions, but at the same time attempted to convince them to surrender. Keeping in line with the PWD’s use of white propaganda, the broadcasts would begin with a brief mention of who was going to be sharing the information before recounting recent Allied and German political and military actions. “Voice of SHAEF” presented this information in a way that emphasized “Nazi war guilt, broken promises, political, military, and economic mistakes, and criminal excesses.”⁵⁸ By presenting this information in a negative light to both German soldiers and civilians, the Allies hoped to persuade them that the German government was not as truthful as they had believed, and that their defeat was inevitable. One “Voice of SHAEF” broadcast from 1945 reflected this efforts by listing recent events that had occurred within the German government and military, indicating the growing weakness of the German forces. The speaker began by noting, “[t]his broadcast is meant to tell you the facts, nothing but bare facts.”⁵⁹ He then went on to relay the negative events that had occurred within the German military including, “[y]ou know that your situation was so bad that they had to pool the 1056 and

⁵⁷ Lerner, *Sykewar*, 427-428.

⁵⁸ Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors*, 212.

⁵⁹ Lerner, *Sykewar*, 437.

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1055 Regiments into one single regiment,” and “[y]ou also know that your Division Commander had a nervous breakdown and was replaced by Oberst Karow.”⁶⁰ By introducing each new event with the phrase “you know,” the radio announcer was trying to connect directly with the Germans, and by relaying information he knew they were aware of, he enforced their awareness of the bleak nature of their situation. These broadcasts, like those aimed at German civilians, attempted to use facts to gain the trust of the soldiers and use their presentation of these facts to weaken their morale and instill fear within them in the hopes that these tactics would weaken the German forces.

Measuring the Success of American Psychological Warfare

In determining the success of the American psychological propaganda campaigns that were aimed at both Americans on the homefront and Germans overseas, it is important to take into account the nature of psychological warfare. Psychological warfare is not a weapon that is meant to yield immediate results. According to General Robert A. McClure, the director of PWD/SHAEF, “[e]xcept on the rarest occasions and under ideal circumstances, [propaganda] can never start or reverse a trend - it can only accelerate or retard one.”⁶¹ In the case of the United States’ use of psychological warfare against the Germans, the government realized that their efforts would not result in a sudden victory, but, instead, would aid in weakening German forces thus giving Allied forces a better chance to defeat them.

Propaganda, when used as a form of psychological warfare, was successful during the war because of the methodology used by the United States government in its formation and distribution. It was important for propaganda operations, both in the United States and overseas,

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors*, 231.

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to be consistent. Propaganda materials had to be consistently produced and distributed throughout the war, and had to display consistent messages. Through consistency, people were more likely to trust the messages being spread by the government and the messages became more embedded in their psyche. People were also more likely to trust the government's propaganda because it primarily used reliable information. When using propaganda to weaken the Germans, the American government did not see much success until closer to the end of the war, after their messages had been broadcasted for a few years and the German soldiers had begun to see the prospect of German defeat as more of a possibility. These successes occurred because the government chose to broadcast factual information on a constant basis over a long period of time to combat the Nazi propaganda that had already been instilled in the Germans.

The forms of media used by the government to disseminate propaganda were also important in determining the success of American psychological warfare campaigns. To gain support from the American homefront the government used radio broadcasts, films, and posters. To weaken the German forces, the government primarily used radio broadcasts and leaflets to spread its propaganda. In both instances, the government tried to use all forms of media available to surround their target audiences on all sides. Since the American public and the Germans were being constantly and completely surrounded by the American government's propaganda, it was impossible not to see the government's messages, and, therefore, more difficult to resist the propaganda.

The language used in the government's propaganda was also important because it was used as a way to engage each target audience. For both the American public and the Germans, propaganda referred to them as "you," trying to speak directly to each listener, reader, or viewer. When reaching out to German soldiers, the government used direct and straightforward language

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to make the soldiers feel as though the information being broadcast to them was coming from other soldiers who understood their difficulties and wanted to help them. When reaching out to the American public, the government's use of "you" in referring to its audience was especially important because it made the public feel personally invested in the war effort, and personally affected by the outcome of the war.

All of these methods were important factors in the success of the American government's psychological warfare campaigns. While it can be difficult to measure the exact success rate of the government's propaganda campaigns, some ways of measuring their success include looking at the number of war bonds sold to Americans and how many German soldiers were carrying American propaganda leaflets with them when they surrendered. For example, after Roosevelt bought the first war bond in May 1941, the government "sold a total of \$185.7 billion of securities" and "[b]y the end of World War II, over 85 million Americans had invested in War Bonds, a number unmatched by any other country."⁶² This shows an incredible amount of support by the American people for the war effort, a level of support that was greatly influenced by the large amounts of propaganda produced by the government encouraging Americans to buy war bonds.

The government's efforts against German soldiers were also effective according to a study completed by SHAEF concluding that "over 90 percent of POWs had at least seen leaflets of various sorts and that 75 percent were in some way affected by them."⁶³ Another study conducted by the U.S. First Army "found that 70 percent of the POWs interrogated between October 1943 and August 1944 were aware of strategic and tactical leaflets and that 40 percent

⁶² "Brief History of World War Two Advertising Campaigns War Loans and Bonds," Duke Digital Collections, accessed December 7, 2014, <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess/guide/wwii/bonds-loans/>.

⁶³ Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors*, 231.

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had copies when captured” (see Figure 8).⁶⁴ These figures show that while not all German soldiers who surrendered used leaflets, most German soldiers were aware of the leaflets and their contents. While it is difficult to calculate precisely how effective American propaganda was against Germans, the use of leaflets by many German soldiers to surrender, and the strong level of awareness the soldiers had for the existence and content of the leaflets suggest that the American psychological warfare campaigns against Germans were successful in influencing their actions and attitudes at the end of the war.

Conclusion

The American government’s campaign to influence the attitudes and actions of its own people and those of its enemies was a critical factor in the success of the American war effort in World War II. At home, the American government’s propaganda campaigns to manipulate American public opinion were successful because they used reliable information as the basis of their messages, they kept the messages in their propaganda constant, and they reached out to Americans using a variety of methods. Posters were effective because they drew directly on the emotions of the public in a very simple and powerful way. Radio was effective because it was a major source of entertainment for people at the time, and through their programs the government was able to reach the public in the comfort of their own homes - a place where many people had yet to be exposed to propaganda on such a high level. Films were so effective as a medium for spreading propaganda because audiences have their guard down in a movie theater, and, as Senator Gerald P. Nye claimed, “[w]hen you go to the movies, you go there to be entertained....And then the picture starts....Before you know where you are you have actually

⁶⁴ Ibid.

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listened to a speech designed to make you believe that Hitler is going to get you.”⁶⁵ Like radio, films were not immediately expected to be the source of propaganda, especially if it was an escapist film that was not publicized as being war related.

Each method of communication effectively produced psychological propaganda because it targeted the emotions of its American audiences, and influenced their attitudes and actions. People were told that their actions would protect their families, their friends, their nation, and themselves if they followed the messages being spread in the government’s propaganda. By telling people that everything they loved was at risk, propaganda campaigns drew on the fear that many Americans felt during the war, exacerbated it, and used it to promote anti-German and pro-American attitudes that led to increased resources for the war effort. By combining the power of posters, radio, and film to completely surround people with media, and often spreading their emotionally charged messages through unexpected media outlets, the government was able to shape American thinking and thereby mobilize American support for the war.

Against Germany, the American government used many of the same persuasive methods it had used on the homefront. Using factual propaganda, the government was able to generate a sense of trust in both target audiences. The government also used a variety of resources such as leaflets, radio programs, and film to not only spread its messages to as many people as possible, but to also make sure that each audience was constantly surrounded by its messages. All of its propaganda, even that which was completely factual, was designed in a way that skillfully manipulated the emotions of each audience, and made them feel personally connected to the messages being relayed in the propaganda. The use of all of these methods at once was influential in determining the success of the American government’s psychological warfare campaigns during World War II.

⁶⁵ Koppes and Black, *Hollywood*, 40.

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These findings show that the American government's efforts to gain support for the war from the American homefront, and to weaken the Germans overseas, through the use of psychological warfare were largely successful. These efforts were not directly responsible for ending the war, but they were responsible for expanding the resources of the American government and military, which allowed them to build a better offensive force, and for weakening German morale, which led to the surrender of numerous German soldiers. The success of America's psychological warfare campaigns during World War II shows the power of propaganda as a non-violent weapon.

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