

World War I Propaganda Posters, 1915-1918

Posters were the communication medium of the First World War. In an age when governments had still not taught most people how to read but increasingly needed their consent or compliance, images often spoke louder than words, but those images had to be *persuasive*.

The American poster from 1917 and the German poster from 1915-1916 (Figures 24.1 and 24.3) implore men to enlist in the army; the Italian poster from 1917 (Figure 24.2) encourages people



Figure 24.1 Recruiting Poster for U.S. Army, 1917.

Source: Library of Congress.



Figure 24.2 Italian Poster for National War Loan, 1917.

Source: Snark/Art Resource, NY.

to buy war bonds. What do you think accounts for the similar graphic style used in these three posters? How effective do you think they were, and why?

Another strategy for promoting loyalty, patriotism, and support for a war that was lasting far longer than anyone had anticipated was to demonize or ridicule the enemy. What feelings does the



Figure 24.3 Recruiting Poster for German Army, 1915-1916.
Source: Library of Congress.

U.S. anti-German poster from 1917-1918 (Figure 24.4) attempt to provoke in viewers, and how does the scene shown achieve this?

Women contributed to the war in various ways. Figure 24.5 asks German women to contribute their gold. Figure 24.6 urges women in London to come to work in the munitions industry. What images of women do these posters portray? Finally, Figure 24.7 asks Americans to support Armenian refugees from the Ottoman Empire in newly proclaimed independent Armenia and Syria. What response is the image of woman and child supposed to evoke?

THINKING HISTORICALLY

When war broke out overseas in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson declared it a European matter that had nothing to do with the United

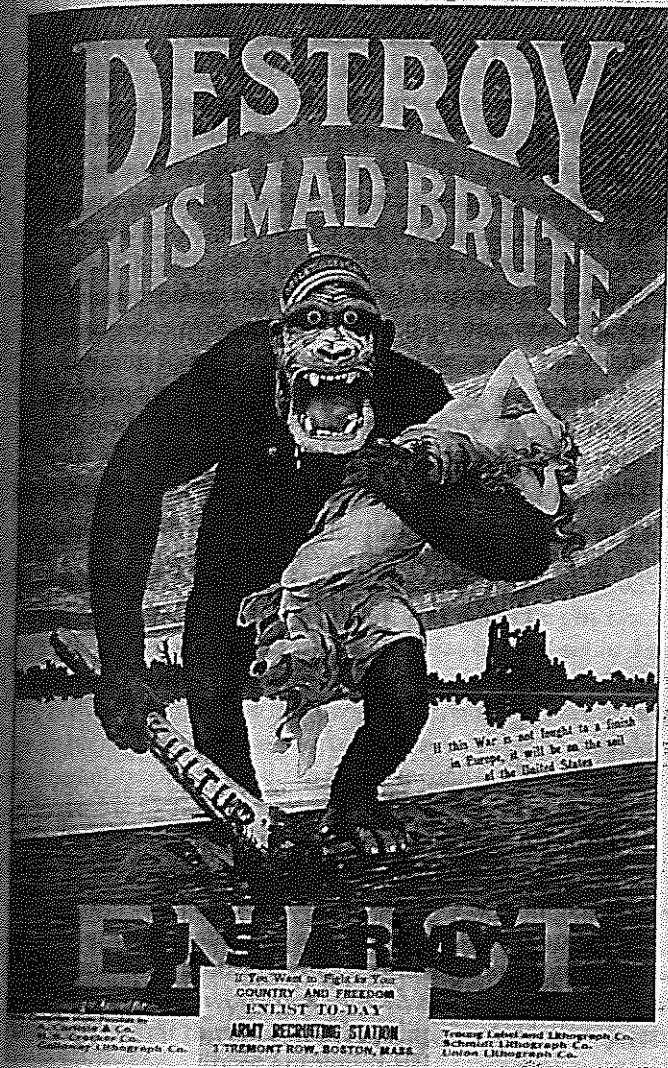


Figure 24.4 Propaganda Poster, United States, 1917-1918.

States, and most Americans agreed. Indeed, the United States did not join the war and throw its crucial weight behind the Allied Powers until April 1917. What role do you think propaganda such as Figure 24.4 played in swaying public opinion? This and the other posters illustrate both sides' efforts to promote and sustain the cause of war. What do they tell you about the causes of the war? What do they tell you about the consequences?



Figure 24.3 Common Appraisal (Warmer) Gold Purchase War

LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL.

WORKS CONDUCTED AT
THE REQUEST OF THE
OFFICE OF MUNITIONS

FREE TRAINING FOR MUNITION WORKERS

WOMEN URGENTLY WANTED
TO TRAIN FOR
FULL TIME EMPLOYMENT

• PARTICULARS AND APPLICATION FORMS FROM THE EDUCATION OFFICER,
• OFFICER, L.C.C. EDUCATION OFFICES, VICTORIA EMBANKMENT, W.C. •

R. BLAIR, EDUCATION OFFICER

Figure 24.6 English Appeal to Women: Munitions Work.
World War Poster Collection (M5536), University of Minnesota Libraries, Archives and
Special Collections, Minneapolis, MN.

YOU CAN'T LET US STARVE

2½ million women and children
now starving to death.

YOUR BIT SAVES A LIFE

Send Money to
ARMENIAN and SYRIAN RELIEF
1 Madison Ave. N.Y. City



Figure 24.7 "Your Bit Saves a Life"
Source: World War Poster Collection (MS336), University of Minnesota Libraries, Archives and Special Collections, Minneapolis, MN.