

# The main themes of propaganda used in the second world war by us

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



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## **Introduction**

In 1939, global tension was high. When war broke out between Germany and Poland, many countries from around the world began to take sides, forming two opposing powers with dozens of nations behind each. Leading the Allied Powers was US President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Heading the conflicting Axis Powers was Dictator Adolf Hitler of Nazi Germany. With the coming of war, each nation had its own adverse effects from the war in both foreign and domestic affairs. As a result, governments and other social organizations utilized the art of propaganda to communicate with its citizens and navigate them through the politics of these effects.

Propaganda used in the Second World War was different than it had been before. It addressed many different issues, and in some ways advertised or promotes war rather than discouraging it. This new wave of propaganda changed the face of the future of political art, influencing the creation of new, non-pacifistic media. Of the propaganda issued by the United States, common themes include raising money for war efforts, especially through

the purchase of war bonds and stamps, and the discouragement or outlaw of discussing military plans, as well as racism observable from a contemporary standpoint. Fundraising and Reservation From an economic perspective, the US was primarily focused on saving and raising money to support American troops stationed in foreign lands. Of the poster propaganda centered around militant funding, some encouraged citizens to save gasoline by carpooling in car-sharing clubs, but most were concerned with encouraging American citizens to purchase war bonds and stamps in order to raise money for war efforts. Citizens were encouraged through these posters to sympathize with the soldiers and want to provide for and help them. The money earned from these campaigns were used to pay for transportation, injury care, food supply, and weapon use. Propaganda marketed these purchases as investments in the security of the futures and safeties of American families and soldiers. This emphasis on security is another common theme throughout economic propaganda. Private producers such as individual artists created political art pieces as well.

Artist Norman Rockwell illustrated a series of four paintings that represented different domestic freedoms that Americans “ take for granted, ’ such as freedom of speech and religion and the ability to start families and have access to food and shelter. Pieces like this may have also contributed to an increase in citizen participation in war efforts with the use of pathos, pushing those citizens to purchase war bonds and/or stamps or donate to the armies. While Americans were encouraged to sympathize, they were also encouraged to hold a merciless stance toward enemies. Other propaganda

posters depict images like Axis Power officials with captions like “ Stamp ‘ em out!” Another series of posters with all the same caption, “ Keep ‘ em firing, ” acts as persuasion to fuel the growing need for war funds so that Americans could continue to progress in the war offensively.

## **Outlaw of the Discussion of Militant Strategies**

US propaganda was also focused on the theme of the prohibition of sharing secret information regarding military plans. Soldiers or other citizens who knew of future plans were strictly discouraged by poster propaganda from discussing them with anyone. Americans were afraid that German, Japanese, or Italian spies lived among them, so any discussion of future plans was a very sensitive topic. If spies were to obtain delicate information, it could spoil the moves soldiers made and cause harm to them, and therefore also harm the US’s aggressive progress in the war. The outlaw was intended to prevent Axis spies from eavesdropping into conversations or even posing as American allies to extract said sensitive information. The idea was that if no one but those directly involved were to know of such plans, then the enemies would be caught off guard once invaded by American troops, and therefore be easier to overwhelm. One poster depicted a caricature of Hitler looking surprised with the caption “ Silence means surprise. ” Another shows a male soldier talking with a woman on a park bench, with a man illustrated to represent Hitler next to them, his ear enlarged to show he is eavesdropping. It is captioned “ Loose talk can cost lives”.

## **Racism and Stereotypes**

In American history, civil liberties have occasionally been suspended to accommodate special situations; one of these special situations is World War II. Through the propaganda messages as discussed previously in this report, an underlying, racist principle is observable against those of Japanese descent. In American propaganda, Japanese are often portrayed as monsters or rat-like creatures. Such portrayals certainly played a part in the public's perspective toward the Japanese and Japanese Americans living in the US. During the Second World War, racial profiling of Americans of Japanese descent occurred. In December 1941, the Japanese military bombed a US military base in Hawaii called Pearl Harbor. After the bombing, federal officials were put under Executive Order 9066 by President Franklin D Roosevelt to usher Japanese Americans into internment camps. Japanese Americans from all along the Southwest and West Coasts of the United States were given days notice to leave their lives behind and report to the camps. These camps have before been compared to Jewish concentration camps established in Europe by Nazis; however, many disagree with these comparisons and argue that the Japanese internment camps were not used to torture or abuse citizens, but rather to gather them into one area as an attempt to prevent the carrying out of whatever speculations other Americans made about Japanese Americans. It was a popular fear of other Americans that Japanese Americans were secretly spies for homeland Japan and posed as a threat to national security.

This action was instigated by the Pearl Harbor bombing but was exaggerated and magnified by propaganda. In many propaganda posters, like the ones provided by John Boyd in his Houston Chronicle article, images of monstrous figures are illustrated to represent Japanese persons. They often depict those persons to have exaggeratedly small eyes, ash-colored skin, long fang-like teeth, and glasses. One example even displays a drawing of a rat with a Japanese army helmet on.

## **Influence on the Present Day**

World War II propaganda opened new doors and shed light on new topics that had never been explored before. Post war, propaganda began to evolve into a new form of attack that did not use weapons, but human emotion and the social mob mentality to assail enemies. It convinced citizens to support the war by glorifying its effects and the US's role in the war. Today, new forms of propaganda like political cartoons, politically-gearred traditional style art, and their popular circulation within social media follow the implication of pro-war messages that launched during World War II. The Second World War acted as an introduction into spreading hatred with art. As a society, we allow hatred to spread through artistic media like propaganda, because it is now common enough to be normal. Fixing this would delay the spread of false promise, racism, hierarchical mentalities, and other forms of the endorsement of war. To do this, we must educate others on the effects of these hateful media. Because it is so normal now, people turn a blind eye to it. Educating society and helping people to realize the true messages behind hostile art pieces will aide in the obstruction of its spread.