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Franklin & Marshall

“But now as I study that row upon row of wind-blown engravings I feel satisfaction, deep down in my star-spangled heart, for I know how art put on khaki and went into action”
-Wallace Irwin, “Thoughts Inspired by a War-time Billboard"
WWI Posters: An Introduction

To today’s generation, posters are typically of rock bands or movie stars, meant to be adhered to bedroom walls with tape. Posters are occasionally used for advertising purposes, but the poster as an instrument of propaganda is practically nonexistent.

The poster originated in the 1890s, quickly becoming an essential part of advertising, as it could reach hundreds of people and could be understood at a glance. George Theofiles writes, “In an age when radio was a concept spoken of only by what the populace felt were half-witted morons and the newspaper a medium for the literate minority, the poster continually emerged as the most important single means of mass communication.”

Thus, as a simple but effective means of communication, the poster became a prominent tool for propaganda. The Committee of Public Information was created within a week of the U.S. declaration of war with Germany. Director George Creel and artist Charles Dana Gibson formed the Division of Pictorial Publicity of the Committee of Public Information. They recruited many of America’s most famous commercial and fine artists for the Division, all of whom volunteered their labor. The Division received requests from different departments in Washington, which were then passed on to a few of the artists. The designs would then be taken to Washington for approval. During the

Purchasing Reproductions:

Facsimiles of many notable World War I posters, including those shown here, can be purchased through the Library of Congress or National Archives. After going to the site provided, type in the poster you wish to find, and click the link “Obtaining a Copy”. It will provide purchasing information. Prices vary according to size of poster.

http://loc.gov/shop/
http://archives.gov/publications/posters/ww1.html

Additional resources:

American Institute for Conservation of Art and Historic Works—online directory of professional conservators:

http://www.conservation-us.org

Poster Conservation, Linen Backing and Restoration Services:

http://www.posterconservation.com

The book How we Advertised America..., a 1920 history of the poster effort written by George Creel, Chairman of the Committee on Public Information, is available at:

http://www.archive.org
Research Possibilities and Resources

Many research possibilities exist for the individual interested in American history, art, and media. To aid your research, a number of resources are available.

Resource Guide

General Information on WWI posters, artists and values:

- Borkan, Gary A. World War I Posters.
- Theofiles, George. American Posters of World War I.

For determining current values:

- Miscellaneous Man, George Theofiles, proprietor
  http://www.miscman.com
- Rare Antique Posters, Gary Borkan, proprietor
  http://www.rare-posters.com

How to care for your poster:

- The Northeast Document Conservation Center
  http://www.nedcc.org
- Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts
  http://www.ccaha.org

existence of the Division of Pictorial Publicity, from April 1917 to November 1918, it submitted 700 poster designs to 58 government departments. The Division was not limited to posters, and also produced hundreds of advertisements, cartoons, and banners.

This rare poster (currently not in our collection), by James Montgomery Flagg, is likely the most famous poster, WWI or otherwise. The artist used himself as the model for Uncle Sam.
The Franklin & Marshall Collection

With over 130 posters, the WWI Poster Collection represents a wide variety of images used for propaganda purposes during the First World War. As illustrator and artist Joseph Pennell observed, “When the United States wished to make public its wants, whether of men or money, it was found that art—as the European countries had found—was the best medium.”

Posters, with the directness of their appeal, were a natural choice. As a medium of persuasion, the posters used easily grasped and, indeed, stereotyped images to sway the public. After news of the alleged German atrocities in Belgium reached the U.S., the image of the ‘Hun’ was repeatedly employed to arouse public animosity against the enemy.

The Wilson government’s Division of Pictorial Publicity employed over 300 of the most prominent illustrators of the time to help with the propaganda efforts. Among them were artists such as C.B. Falls, E.H. Blashfield, Joseph Pennell, Howard Chandler Christy, Joseph Leyendecker, Jessie Willcox Smith, and L.N. Britton. Our collection includes posters by these and other famous artists. These posters cover a variety of themes—from the role of women to liberty loan drives, and from resource conservation to the Red Cross. Many of the poster artists were also prominent magazine illustrators, etchers, lithographers, and writers. Joseph Pennell, for instance, was noted for architectural drawings and his cover illustrations for Harper’s Magazine.

John E. Sheridan (1880-1948)
This poster depicts a patriotic iron worker doing his share for the war effort, echoing the soldier’s fight overseas.

Gil Spear
This is one of 12 posters commissioned by the Y.M.C.A./Y.W.C.A. Both organizations sought to provide comfort and support for the troops, both at home and “over there”.

Cushman Parker (1881-1927)
Parker was an illustrator and portrait artist. This poster was commissioned by the U.S. Food Administration, one of several urging Americans to conserve eggs, meat, and wheat. The conserved food went overseas to help feed the Allies.

P.G. Morgan
The Red Cross was one of the largest commissioners of posters, requesting 100 hundred posters. The Red Cross raised over $300 million for relief efforts, and by Armistice Day, membership in the American Red Cross reached thirty million, nearly a third of the entire population.
Charles Buckles Falls (1874–1959)
Falls, an illustrator and portrait artist, created this poster urging citizens to donate books for soldiers. This is one of seven posters commissioned by the American Library Association.

F. Strothmann (1879–1958)
Strothmann was an illustrator and portrait artist. This image of a barbaric, bloody Hun is visually moving, and is one of several depicting a Hun encroaching upon U.S. soil.

Ellsworth Young (1866–1952)
Young was a newspaper illustrator and a landscape painter. This poster was produced after news of alleged German atrocities in Belgium reached America.

Edward Penfield (1866–1925)
Penfield was one of America’s greatest poster illustrators in the 1890s, as well as a magazine illustrator and muralist. His war posters are scarce and highly prized.

Homefront

Currently, the largest theme in our collection is bond drives, with other themes such as conservation, volunteerism, and recruitment represented. In its entirety, the College’s poster collection represents a multifaceted view of American society during wartime.

The complete inventory can be found online at:
http://library.fandm.edu/archives/spcoll/worldwarposters.php
**Collection Highlights**

**Recruitment**

**Charles Dana Gibson (1867-1944)**

Gibson was famed for his renderings of high society girls, known as “Gibson Girls.” During the war he was chairman of the Division of Pictorial Publicity, but actually designed very few posters.

**Kenyon Cox (1856-1919)**

Cox was best known for his work as a muralist. His work includes the frieze for the Appellate Court in New York and decorations for the Capitol at Saint Paul, Minnesota. Cox also authored four books about art.

**James Montgomery Flagg (1877-1960)**

Flagg began his art career at a young age, selling his first ink drawing at 12. He was a very successful commercial and fine artist, both before and after the war. Best known for his Uncle Sam posters, he also designed several other very great posters.

**Joseph Christian Leyendecker (1874-1951)**

Leyendecker was a prolific magazine artist, producing over 320 images for *The Saturday Evening Post* during his 40 year association with them. Also working in advertising, one of his most famous is the “Arrow Collar Man”, which turned Arrow into the largest collar/shirt manufacturer in America.

**Bonds and Loans**

**Carl W. Drepperd (1898 – 1956)**

Drepperd wrote books about American antiques and a book about American clocks and clockmakers. This poster is of particular interest to Lancaster Countians.

**Joseph Christian Leyendecker (1874-1951)**

This poster features a Boy Scout with a sword and Miss Liberty with a shield. The Boy Scouts of America commissioned just three poster designs.

**Joseph Pennell (1874-1927)**

This poster became so famous that Pennell wrote a book about its production. Its theme of New York under attack eerily echoes the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center.

**Henry Patrick Raleigh (1880-1944)**

Raleigh was an etcher, illustrator, lithographer, and painter. This poster is one of many that used the stereotyped image of the Hun.