

I'm Proud of You Folks Too!: World War II Poster
By Andrew S. Jimenez
2nd Place, Museum of American Architecture and Decorative Arts
1st Place Freshman Category

In the corner of the Museum of American Architecture and Decorative Arts, hangs a somewhat elusive poster which dates back to the World War II era. It is not a central artifact, nor does it possess a plaque; it is just a framed piece steeped in American history. This rectangular, linen-backed poster's measurements are 28 ½ inches high by 40 inches wide, similar to the average poster size of today, but its impact on America is much more influential than that of a mere poster of a band.¹ On it is a Navy soldier shaking a laborer's hand whilst saying the ostensibly simple phrase, "I'm proud of you folks too!" What is the impact that this poster, as well as others similar to it, had on its audience, the American people? What is the meaning behind the poster's illustration and message?

Illustrator Jon Whitcomb was not accustomed to creating World War II propaganda, but rather, propaganda of a different sort. He began practicing for his future career at his alma mater, Ohio State University, by producing illustrations for the school paper; he also acquired a summer job, painting posters for a theater. He had originally intended to go into the writing business but later realized his admiration of art, henceforth switching his major. With his degree in hand, he continued to create advertisements in the form of posters for various studios, but, this time, as a career. Whitcomb relocated to New York in 1934 to undertake more freelance work opportunities. Known for his depictions of beautiful women, he was readily given work from the top magazine providers of that era, such as *Collier's Weekly* and *Good Housekeeping*. Abruptly, Whitcomb was raptured from his comfortable freelance position to the turmoil of World War II

¹ *DP Vintage Posters - I'm Proud of You Folks Too Original American World War Two Homefront Poster*. n.d. 3 January 2013 <<http://www.dpvintageposters.com/cgi-local/detail.cgi?d=5874>>.

where he would be commissioned to be a Lieutenant, Junior Grade in the Navy. He performed various duties, from meager mine-sweeping to something that suited his talent more completely, working for the Public Relations Department in Washington D. C. ²

In 1944, a poster that states, “I’m proud of you folks too!” was released to the public after its mass production, courtesy of the U.S. Government Printing Office.³ Though this poster could be included in a small sub-genre consisting only of Whitcomb-created war propaganda, it is still a part of hundreds of American propaganda posters, all coming from various illustrators and governmental divisions. Panoplies of posters were created, each with a different intentions in mind, ranging from those which focused on conserving food and war-valuables to those which blatantly expressed the desire to have more citizens enlist for war. These images inspired citizens and redirected their war-created angst into something more beneficial. It allowed them to assist in the war effort through work within the boundaries of their nation and even at home; now, people did not have to fight overseas to fight in the war.

However, the United States was not the only government seeking to persuade the public mind with its own war effort.

According to Philip M. Taylor, World War II ‘witnessed the greatest propaganda battle in the history of warfare.’ All the participants employed propaganda on a scale that dwarfed that of other conflicts, including World War I. ⁴

America and Great Britain were already competing against Germany in a physical battle, so why not in propaganda as well?

² Daley Illustrations Art Gallery. n.d. 25 January 2013 <<http://www.daleyillustrationgallery.com/bio.cfm?id=562>>.

³ Hennepin County Library - Posters of World War II. n.d. 29 January 2013 <<http://www.hclib.org/pub/search/WWIIPosters/Action.cfm?subject=Industrial%20mobilization>>.

⁴ Propaganda - World War II - United Media, Information, and Soviet - JRank Articles. n.d. 25 January 2013 <<http://science.jrank.org/pages/10871/Propaganda-World-War-II.html>>.

To decipher the meaning behind this particular poster, the objects in the picture must be examined. The poster illustrates a Navy soldier, who is still in full garb, hardily shaking an elderly factory laborer's hand. There is a young woman, who is also a laborer, excitedly smiling behind the elderly man whilst the greeting is being exchanged. There are no images in the background. However, one can determine that this interaction is taking place in a factory due to a sort of manufacturing equipment in the foreground as well as the man and woman still clad in their work garments.

There are multiple facets to this poster past what one can see by a simple passing glance. It is simple enough to see the red, capitalized and bolded "You Folks" statement, which grabs the attention of all who see it. It is directly speaking to the American people who participate in the war effort, not just the two people which are portrayed within the picture. It also uses the bandwagon technique by making factory labor appear popular and glamorous. This glamor is exemplified in the young woman's appearance; she is neither dirty nor sweaty, and her clothing is immaculate and fashionable, as can be noticed by peering at her watch which is located slightly above her sleeve cuff. She is holding a wrench daintily, symbolizing the fact that she was recently working, yet her hair is perfectly tucked beneath her neat bandana. Also, one should notice that she is fully adorned with makeup: blush, mascara, and lipstick. Another employed technique is that of optimism. The three characters are grinning, leaving this piece with a more jovial undertone. This can be compared with other propaganda pieces of the day that usually use scare tactics, often stating that Tojo and Hitler are pleased with American discord.

Through persuasive propaganda tactics, the United States was able to rally its citizens and ultimately profit from the war through the employment of additional factory workers. It is

difficult, if not completely impossible, to calculate exactly how many people were impacted as a direct result of this poster; but it can be speculated that by the constant bombardment of these advertisements, many Americans must have been even slightly affected. The realization of a bloody, dangerous war was kept aside by this poster; it focuses on Americans becoming one through a collaborative work ethic, one in which all can work together for the beneficence of the world.

Works Cited

- Daley Illustrations Art Gallery*. n.d. 25 January 2013 <<http://www.daleyillustrationgallery.com/bio.cfm?id=562>>.
- DP Vintage Posters - I'm Proud of You Folks Too Original American World War Two Homefront Poster*. n.d. 3 January 2013 <<http://www.dpvintageposters.com/cgi-local/detail.cgi?d=5874>>.
- Hennepin County Library - Posters of World War II*. n.d. 29 January 2013 <<http://www.hclib.org/pub/search/WWIIPosters/Action.cfm?subject=Industrial%20mobilization>>.
- Propaganda - World War II - United Media, Information, and Soviet - JRank Articles*. n.d. 25 January 2013 <<http://science.jrank.org/pages/10871/Propaganda-World-War-II.html>>.