POWER OF PERSPECTIVES:
American Propaganda Posters and Cartoons on the Second World War

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2020
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Introduction

History can be captured in several ways. Textbooks, films and pictures may give account of historical events from multiple points of view. Different modes of representation offer different perspectives. Visual representation may help understanding particular historical events better complementing the textual world. My thesis focuses on the visual representation of history and analyzes posters and cartoons to demonstrate how the Second World War was perceived in the United States of America. Several posters and cartoons were produced during this period capturing different aspects of the nation’s life at wartime. Posters provide an insight into the propaganda campaign designed by the government to communicate Americans’ duty in the global conflict. Through propaganda, narratives can be built that help create a consensus among citizens.¹ Since propaganda usually operates by a narrative that is convincing or acceptable for a larger group of people, it has the power to influence people’s beliefs. During the Second World War, a narrative was needed that helped persuade citizens to support the war effort. The war propaganda built narratives that encouraged the creation of a total war, while the disadvantages of the total warfare were not emphasized, therefore, people many times were not able to take into consideration all of the long-term consequences of involvement in the war either in the combat lines, or at home.² The American government designed a campaign to encourage men to enlist, women to work and the entire nation to support the war effort. Posters applied different themes in order to recruit soldiers. The country designed propaganda in a way to project a glorious image of the war and a heroic

narrative was created. While propaganda posters operated with the narrative of patriotism and encouraged the American presence in the war, cartoons many times offered different perspectives.

In general, cartoons are entertaining since they apply humor to criticize or highlight particular characteristics. “To be most effective, a cartoon must have three characteristics: sparkling wit, a basic element of fact, and a didactic or editorial purpose.” A cartoon should include smart humor that somehow mirrors the current situation and carries an opinion. If the cartoon is structured well enough, the message is clear, funny and even satirical at the same time. This satirical tone allows cartoonists to reflect on the contemporary social and political issues in a critical manner, while making a strong point. Also, cartoons carry an immediate reaction to a particular event. Just as a photograph, cartoons can grab a moment that reflects the present opinion of the artist. This way, certain situations are captured as people experienced them in their own time. The juxtaposition of propaganda posters and wartime cartoons can offer a broader picture about the Second World War and its effects on the United States. Just as cartoons in general, wartime cartoons in particular were many times satirical and applied a special black humor to characterize the effects of the war. Although there were cartoons made for political purposes, several works depicted these years from the American citizens’ point of view. While on media forums enlisting was encouraged, not much art can be found about the life of soldiers. However, one infantryman captured combat life in a very special way. Bill Mauldin made several cartoons during the war. Since he was a soldier himself, he could depict life on the front authentically. Throughout his art, the destructive side of the war can be explored which was captured with a distinct humor that made soldiers laugh. Mauldin’s cartoons capture soldiers’ life on the front with humor while they also

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present the devastating nature of the war. Besides Mauldin’s works, several other cartoons were made to depict Americans’ lives at the home front as well. These graphics demonstrated social problems in the era and showed how common people’s life changed due to the global conflict. Despite the positive messages conveyed by propaganda, the war had devastating effects on the country. The war meant an emotional and financial burden that could not be neglected. While people tried to meet the expectations of their country, they many times had to face loss, grief and depression. Cartoons captured this way of life in a humorous and transparent way. Propaganda posters and cartoons produced during the period of the Second World War in juxtaposition offer a ground for a comprehensive analysis in which the American way of life during the war can be understood from different perspectives. While propaganda posters presented the governmental message, aimed at reshaping the country according to the war circumstances and identified victory as America’s main purpose, cartoons often highlighted the negative effects of the war on America and its citizens by satirizing the wartime lifestyle and often showing its absurdity in a humorous tone.
I. Propaganda Posters – Recruiting Soldiers and Army Workers

American posters that were made during the Second World War can be considered as the most important tools to communicate the government’s message. After entering the war, the US started the propaganda campaign and posters became recurrent elements of the American presence in the conflict. These posters became so well-known that even later generations got familiar with particular posters or figures such as Uncle Sam or Rosie the Riveter. America made a great effort to redesign media platforms to broadcast Americans’ new responsibilities effectively in order to win the war. The government launched a strategic campaign to recruit men for the US army and encourage the home front to support the war effort. Several artists were commissioned to design visuals that convey the narrative. 4 The key institution in that sense was the Office of War Information since it commissioned the production of posters and motion pictures to raise public awareness of the war and people’s duty in it. The propaganda agency was formed by an executive order and under the instructions of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1942. It produced several media to communicate the government’s ideology. 5 A considerable number of these posters were designed to recruit soldiers in the army. The government relied on and appealed to the patriotic feelings of Americans and strongly implied that enlisting is the patriotic duty of men.6

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6 Horne “These World War II Propaganda Posters.”
Fighting on the front featured the heroic narrative, in which a true man proves his loyalty to the country by taking an active role at the front.

Several posters were made to embody the ideology. In Figure 1, the poster “Strong in the Strength of the Lord” was designed by David Stone Martin. He was an art director at the Office of War Information and also worked for *Life* magazine. This particular poster draws on the narrative of heroism to motivate people to enlist. The caption clearly expresses the central governmental message that winning the war is the main purpose of the USA. The use of the “we” pronoun suggests that fighting for victory is men’s collective aim and duty. Moreover, by mentioning God the war is raised to a higher level. The concept of God appears, therefore a bloody event is transformed into a virtuous mission. The war is presented as a good war approved by a higher force. In other words, the propaganda this way provided justification for violence. Also, the poster appeals to the concept of masculinity since men’s arms appear as muscular and strong, which clearly indicates that the war needs strong male soldiers. The position of arms even implies that this war is rather unifying and motivating than destructive and deathly. The propaganda campaign often employed the concept of masculinity and implied that men can prove their manliness by taking part in the global conflict.

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The propaganda campaign employed another narrative as well to increase the effect of posters. In some cases a religious tone appeared on the posters besides the depiction of masculinity and patriotism. The poster in Figure 1 duly demonstrates this. The quote on the poster mentions the Lord and it has a clearly religious tone. In this context, the war appears as a duty that is supported by the church, thus sanctioned by God too, therefore, it is becomes a religious mission besides a patriotic duty. Appeals to American civil religion were used as a tool of persuasion to increase the number of enlisting soldiers. To present combat service in a more persuasive way, propaganda posters appealed to people’s sense of religion as well as their love of their country. This way, patriotism appeared as part of a religious narrative—and vice versa—that probably became even more convincing for people who were ready to protect their home country. Also, by giving a religious tone to the posters the war did not just become more acceptable, but more noble too. References to God and the divine nature of war in posters that were addressed to future soldiers probably washed away their worries. The religious connotations made it possible to depict the war as a mission supported by God. Civil religion served two purposes. On the one hand, it strengthened the Americans’ religious patriotism, therefore, they were more willing the join the army. On the other hand, the war became more presentable to the public since combat duty appeared as a responsibility given and approved by God. The religious references and the narrative of masculinity encouraged men to enlist that proved their loyalty to their country and competence as men.
One of the most famous characters appearing on propaganda posters is Uncle Sam. Although the poster featuring the character was not exactly made for the Second World War, the image became a recurrent one to recruit soldiers. The figure is most commonly associated with businessman Samuel Wilson who stamped “U.S.” on the barrels of beef transported into the country during the War of 1812. The modern form of Uncle Sam, that is present in cartoons and posters, can be thanked to cartoonists. Sir John Tenniel and John Leech helped to design the figure as a whiskered man wearing a tall hat and striped pants. Political cartoonist Thomas Nast was the one who made the figure of Uncle Sam more characteristic from the 1870s. By 1900, Uncle Sam was ready to be a national symbol and it was used in both world wars to advocate patriotic recruitment messages. The poster itself is simple and the message is clear. Uncle Sam became a symbol of patriotism. All the colors appearing refer to the American flag since the same colors can be found on it as well. Even stars can be found on Sam’s hat, similarly with reference to the national symbol. The central figure is determined and serious, but not threatening, rather encouraging. The caption and the posture both clearly emphasize the importance of enlisting. Sam pointing at the audience suggests that they are the chosen ones who can support the war effort by accepting this honorable duty. Indeed, the composition of the poster creates a narrative in which the target audience, American men, can feel special and respected to be trusted with such a responsibility. Uncle Sam clearly reflects one popular mode of persuasion during the Second World War. The government created a campaign in order to reorganize the country to serve

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the purposes of the war. For the victory, mobilization of men was essential so propaganda posters appeared everywhere presenting the importance of enlisting. The propaganda targeted patriotism and presented soldiers as national heroes. “The posters made use of national symbols, and they often focused on the role each individual played in the collective war effort. The posters also promoted a sense of heroism through the portrayal of strong individuals and the messages of doing one’s part for the good of the country.”9 The government emphasized that every member of it is responsible for making an effort that helps the country towards victory. War was presented as an opportunity to protect the nation and become heroes. The aim was to convince individuals to change their life in a way to support the American war effort. Although by looking back it can be argued that soldiers’ lives were far from heroic, the propaganda had a strong persuasive power that transformed a bloody conflict into a heroic mission.

Propaganda did not only target men, but also encouraged women to join the army and help at the warfront. Posters tried to encourage women to mobilize themselves and make an effort to help the Allies win the war. Not much later that the US joined the war, the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps was formed to support women in the army. Later on, several similar establishments came to existence such as the United States Naval Reserve, the United States Coast Guard (USCG) Women's Reserve, and the Women Airforce Service Pilots. By 1944, a considerably high number of women entered the

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army, with over 100,000 female personnel in the US army. As the country started to reshape women’s place in society, propaganda posters also changed to communicate the need for women at the front. The poster of the WAAC used similar modes of persuasion as other propaganda posters to recruit women. Patriotism was a central notion as it can be seen in the poster in Figure 3. The American flag in the background expresses the importance of the nation. The poster appealed to women’s sense of nationalism to involve them as active participants in the war effort; as well as their sense of patriotism to express the need for women citizens as army workers. In the middle of the poster, a woman appears in an army uniform. Placing a woman in a uniform in front of the national flag captures the fact that women as American citizens were also considered as active agents of the collective effort to support the war. The caption “This Is My War Too” strengthens this idea since it clearly states that women have a place in the army and are free to take this responsibility. The fact that the country even recruited women as nurses, translators and technicians suggests that the USA wished to win the war at all costs. Even though women did not serve in combat, many of them joined the army and helped the country to succeed. Women’s active presence in the war effort brought revolutionary changes during the era of the Second World War. Active participation for women was barely encouraged before, with a few exceptions, so the war meant an opportunity to belie stereotypes and change rigid gender roles. Without the help of women, total war could not be created in America.

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II. Home Front Propaganda – New Economic and Social Structure

Propaganda did not only aim at recruiting soldiers, but also targeted those who could not or were not allowed to enlist. On the home front, the target audience were mainly women. The propaganda message promoted radically different responsibilities toward women as before. Throughout the history of the USA, mainly the separate spheres ideology defined gender roles. There were a few exceptions, such as during the 1920s when women had more freedom and opportunity and of course in the present days we can talk about gender equality, but American society was strongly patriarchic for a long time. Men were the ones who built careers and decided on political issues. Women had to fulfill domestic roles such as cooking, cleaning and raising children. They were not given the opportunity to take part in the country’s political life, work or define themselves outside the domestic sphere. However, during the war, previously rigid gender roles had changed, and women were to take a more active role in order to keep the country running. The wartime propaganda campaign, therefore, was designed to define not just men’s, but also women’s (new) responsibilities. “Posters, radio programs, magazine articles, and advertisements showed women in overalls with greasy hands during these years for the first time. Through these media, the Office of War Information (OWI) and other agencies urged women to come out of their kitchens and move into the factories. They also communicated the need for women as nurses and as careful consumers.”11 For the first time, there was a campaign that encouraged women to step out of their homes and work. Of course, it is part of the truth that the country needed women because men were far away from America and women had to undertake the jobs they left behind. Still, it meant a radical change in the American social structure.

11 Ibid.
The Second World War propaganda campaign needed to be designed effectively to mobilize women so several posters were made to propagate women’s new place in society. The most famous poster is probably Rosie the Riveter. Her figure became the symbol of working women even after the war. Rosie’s propaganda poster appearance was created in 1942 by J. Howard Miller. He made a poster for Westinghouse Electric Corporation and added the proverbial headline “We Can Do It!” Rosie possesses masculine characteristics in the poster, for example, she shows her muscles. She also has a man-like body shape and a strict facial expression. Women were usually not captured as strong and pugnacious, they were rather pictured as the fragile ones. The caption also rewrites traditional gender roles since it clearly states that women are capable of doing physical jobs. The propaganda went against the previously communicated gender roles under war circumstances. Because of the desperate need for new labor force, the propaganda encouraged society to accept women as workers. The government designed a campaign in which the central idea was that women are needed as significant contributors to the economy. Propaganda products communicated the idea of patriotism, similarly to propaganda posters addressing future soldiers. The posters emphasized the importance of accepting the new responsibilities of women. Also, propaganda manipulated women appealing to their emotions. It appealed to their feelings such as loss and desire. In exchange for taking an active part in the war effort, the sooner arrival of soldiers was promised. In

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addition, women’s active participation was claimed to affect the earlier ending of the war, and logically this meant less deaths as well.

Several women started to work in factories to help the country provide military supplies. Also, women fulfilled jobs that men did before, for example women worked as firefighters. “Between 1940 and 1945, the percentage of the U.S. female workforce increased from 27 percent to nearly 37 percent, and by 1945 nearly one out of every four married women worked outside the home.”\textsuperscript{13} As this data demonstrates, wartime propaganda seems to have worked successfully. Many women entered the labor force during the war. Without them, the country could not have been able to provide the necessary supplies which were essential in the war. Women’s participation was crucial in order to be successful on the front and keep the country running. Many women realized that they were capable of working as much and as hard as men. This notwithstanding, the emancipation of women did not happen during or after the war, they had to wait decades for equality.

Besides mobilizing women, the country’s consumption was also reorganized according to the circumstances. Since the most significant goal was to win the war, the US needed to restrict supplies on the home front. Citizens needed to be more conscious of their consumer habits. Americans had to reduce gas usage and food consumption. The government warned Americans that frugality, recycling and consumer consciousness were crucial to support the war effort.\textsuperscript{14} Several posters were made to inform citizens to take an active role at home and support the war effort. Actually, the whole country’s economy was restructured to a great extent to support the

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
world-wide conflict and motivated everybody at an individual level to be an active agent in it. Frugality characterized the country during the war, which meant a simpler way of life. Consumer consciousness had never been as significant a concern as it was during the war.\textsuperscript{15} Figure 5 duly represents this aspect of wartime propaganda. Here, there is a parallel between soldiers and Americans on the home front. In the background, GIs carry their equipment, while in the center a woman is carrying her parcels with groceries. It refers to the fact that everyone should carry their equipment with strength and not choose an easier option. In this case, the easier way to carry home the groceries would be going by car or public transportation. However, due to the war circumstances people need to save on gas and barely use vehicles. It also suggests that if soldiers are able to carry their gear, it is the responsibility of people at home to carry their own as well. The poster clearly defines that not only the army can lead the country towards victory, but the home front’s effort is needed as well. The propaganda convinced people that by simplifying their lifestyle they could support soldiers fighting oversees. Citizens gave up on the opulent way of living and lived a simple life. Different aspects of life needed to be reorganized in order to reduce mass production in America, while military supplies became the most important items of the production. People gave up on luxury to support the global conflict and help provide the army with goods and services needed in the war.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Figure 5}
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\textsuperscript{15} Witkowski, “World War II Poster Campaigns,” p. 69.
III. Life at the Front - Bill Mauldin’s Cartoons

As it was demonstrated above, the USA made a great effort to create a propaganda that succeeds in reshaping the country in order to gain victory in a world-wide conflict. Several citizens enlisted, women started to work and the country produced mainly military supplies. Propaganda products rarely shed light on the perspectives of soldiers, therefore, the perspectives of actual participants can give a greater understanding of the nature of the Second World War. Although the US created several methods to make war posters convincing, the war could not be always identified with heroism and masculinity. Men who decided to enlist and serve their country had to face unbelievable conditions. “Those in the infantry – in the Army and Marines – endured hardships and horrors for which no training could ever have prepared them.”\(^{16}\) Soldiers many times lived in foxholes and faced death day by day. Lot of them could not even imagine how hard it was to process psychologically the wartime events. Propaganda posters did not highlight the negative effects of combat duty in order not to discourage citizens from military service. However, there was a man serving in the army during the war who had the creative desire to depict military life from the other point of view. Bill Mauldin made cartoons to represent life on the front. He created the characters of Joe and Willie to demonstrate the hardships of GIs. Although the war was brutal and the circumstances were hard for soldiers, Mauldin found a way to represent the absurdity of military service with a touch of humor. He became popular especially among soldiers since he was one of them and he could make his fellows laugh.\(^{17}\) According to Israel Knox, Mauldin was a great cartoonist because of his simplicity and his characters that can be identified with the artist himself.


Mauldin’s cartoons, this way, were authentic artistic representations, since he reflected on his own and his fellows’ first-hand war experiences through the eyes of Joe and Willie.18

Analyzing Mauldin’s cartoons, one can get an insight into war conditions from a different perspective than the one propaganda posters captured. While posters conveyed the bright side of the American presence in the conflict, Mauldin tried to reflect on the war as it was. As depicted in his art, the Second World War was rather devastating than heroic and only humor meant a way out of the struggle. The cartoon in Figure 6 captures the absurd nature of the situation. Soldiers’ lives were in constant danger. The possibility of death was always there. In the caption, it is said that one soldier saved the other’s life. Cooperation was unavoidable to stay alive during the deathly conflict. Soldiers had to find a way to live together in order to survive and remain sane. Willie is thankful for his fellow for his help. He offers his gratitude by giving his last pair of dry socks to Joe. The image reveals not only the terrors of the war, but also reflects on the extremely hard living conditions of soldiers. Considering soldiers’ living conditions, everyday gestures, such as giving a pair of dry socks to a friend, can lift the spirit of soldiers and motivate them to hold on. When such pressure is there, paradoxically smaller things can mean

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the greatest relief. Such everyday gestures might seem unimportant, however on the front these acts might save a soldier’s soul from dying.

In addition, wartime propaganda also reinforced and strengthened the traditional notions of masculinity and heroism. While women’s role in society was completely reshaped, men’s traditional role was strengthened during the war. Posters often depicted them as muscular, active and ambitious. Just as before the war, males were the active agents in society. They were the breadwinners, the decision-makers and the mentally stable ones. However, the conditions of war often seemed to be unbearable even for the strongest persons. Men struggled to meet expectations while experiencing horrific events. Mauldin did not try to deny the fact that soldiers went through rough times. He depicted their sufferings with a melancholic tone, but at the same time in a humorous way. The cartoon in Figure 7 reflects on the hardships men experienced. Several everyday activities were denied from soldiers during their military service. For them, activities taken for granted were not always available. When they had to fight or execute a military task, they had to give up their needs and desires. “The infantry was the workhouse of the military, not only faced with battling the enemy but also often asked to do physical labor at the front line transporting the food, clothing, weapons and medicine needed to win the war. They experienced the war no one else did.”

Figure 7

19 PBS “Life in the Infantry.”
global conflict from the closest distance that clearly meant a heavy burden on their shoulders. Men’s freedom of action had been lost on the military front. They needed to execute military tasks even if it meant that they could not stand up for hours or even days. In addition to the fact that the circumstances were far from comfortable, soldiers experienced horrific events such as terrible wounds or dying fellows. Meanwhile, their task was to battle the enemy and stay strong. Experiencing bloody events and seeing dead bodies day by day were not easy for humans to process. This cartoon depicts wartime conditions with a depressing tone, but also applies black humor. The mixture of the two modes of capturing clearly reflects on the absurd nature of the front life and war circumstances.

In Figure 8, another cartoon of Mauldin’s captures a soldier who has been offered a medal for his service, however he is not enthusiastic about the acknowledgement since this is clearly not what he needs. Mauldin presents different feelings in his drawing as compared with the ones the previously mentioned propaganda posters do. This cartoon denies the fact the soldier actually felt heroic during their service. The cartoon satirizes the narrative of heroism often used to describe the military life, however this ideas seemed to collapse for those who actually served in the military. While soldiers were being told that they were actual heroes serving their beloved home country, they experienced terrible events day by day. Under inhumane living conditions, deep down soldiers often could not identify with the governmental ideology. The soldier’s reaction in this
poster clearly reflects on this. The medal strengthens the idea of heroism and suggests that GIs should be proud of themselves. In contrast, the soldier is not enthusiastic about receiving another medal, he would rather ask for medicine to ease his pain. Soldiers were often in great pain while serving in the military. Their everyday life did not seem heroic to them, because the war had destructive effects on the human body and mind. Soldiers went through hard times when being a hero did not seem possible. GIs needed to face how absurd the war situation and military life could get. The appearance of Mauldin’s characters also mirrors that soldiers might not have felt like national heroes. “In fact, the first thing you notice about Mauldin’s cartoons is the characters’ postures. Unlike the handsome, smiling GIs seen in movies or on posters for war bonds, Willie and Joe […] were slumped over with drooping shoulders and weary looks on their unshaven mugs.”

The posture of Willie and Joe reflects that instead of a determined and masculine appearance, they were rather tired and careless. Their appearance was not made to be heroic or overly masculine. Mauldin’s characters reflects on the fact that soldiers were actually dirty and exhausted. Military life was described differently by propaganda posters which did not reflect the life that soldiers really experienced at the front. Most people saw censored pictures of the army, where the brutalities were intentionally missing. However, Mauldin was not afraid of drawing soldiers’ life the way it really was. He succeeded in making his fellows laugh and presenting another perspective of the war. “Devoid of the propagandizing of Hollywood or the rose-tinted glasses of nostalgia, Mauldin’s cartoons provide a glimpse at the true realities of the war and its human cost. They also happen –despite, or maybe because of that– to be very funny.” Since he was also a soldier, he could capture military life from the GIs’ point of view. Although Mauldin’s cartoons offered a

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20 Jaissle, “Up Front.”
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
sarcastic and, in a way, humorous depiction of the war, he managed to show its violence, brutality and emotionally destructive nature as well.

Mauldin’s cartoons were very different from propaganda posters in terms of their design as well. While posters were colorful, encouraging and promising, Mauldin’s cartoons were black and white, surprising and full of black humor. “What Mauldin is telling us here is true, and the modesty of his claim is commendable. But there is more to it; there is more to humor than blowing off steam or the momentary relief from strained nerves or the pleasure of a giggle.”\(^{23}\) Mauldin captured the war from the soldiers’ perspective and found a way to depict it in a special humorous way. His works did not aim at receiving others’ pity, only showed the nature of the war without any embellishment. As several veterans noted, the lives of infantrymen were more than challenging. They had to perform mental and physical work extremely well under terrible circumstances.\(^{24}\) Military service also had long-term effects on the human mind. Soldiers did not expect these kinds of experiences to become unprocessed traumatic events. It made the situation even harder that combat experience counted as a taboo topic so men did not have the opportunity to talk about it. “The fact that veterans' hospitals were full of men with serious mental health problems went undiscussed. The movies of the 50s and 60s did not depict the reality of war.”\(^{25}\) Not only men, but other members of the society who took part in the war many times had to face serious consequences. War experiences became traumatic events that were not treated properly. People were advised to keep their struggles for themselves and wartime stories were not welcomed in public discussions. The American war experience often caused deaths or serious mental problems

\(^{24}\) PBS “Life in the Infantry.”
that undermined the idea of heroism and the sense of mission.Combat experiences did not match the image that the American propaganda projected about the war. Soldiers’ stories often challenged the idea of heroism and highlighted the negative effects of combat duty that many times had not been communicated for the public.

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IV. Life on the Home Front – Depicted in Cartoons

As life at the front was a recurrent theme of cartoons, several artists drew about life on the home front in America during the Second World War. Cartoons many times captured the everyday life of Americans in a satirical tone and often emphasized social problems. While the propaganda campaign tried to highlight the positive aspects of the war, cartoons were more critical of them. During this period, the country mainly concentrated on the war and the responsibilities in connection with it. The social structure changed and citizens’ role in life was also accommodated to the war. Other issues such as mental problems did not get much spotlight. Notwithstanding the image wartime propaganda conveyed, people on the home front often experienced uncertainty and anxiety. Citizens had to deal with feelings such as loss and fear. Many people had no idea how the war would affect their lives. The country was reorganized relatively fast after entering the war, and the long-term consequences were not always taken into consideration.

The cartoon in Figure 9 signifies emptiness caused by the war. American citizens reorganized their lifestyle to support the war effort, but the wartime experiences changed them permanently. They supported their nation and helped the country win, however this effort resulted in irreversible changes. The cartoon in Figure 9 captures a family during or after the war. The two adult characters’ facial expressions reflect sadness and emptiness. While they are trying to fulfill their responsibilities in life, they are struggling to process wartime events. It seems that the family’s morning routine is depicted in the cartoon. They
stick to their everyday life habits while they have to deal with the burdensome experiences of the global conflict. The cartoon emphasizes that people struggled with several kinds of mental problems caused by the war experience, however making this struggle visible or talk about it were not encouraged. Americans tried to go on with their life, but still the feeling of emptiness and the unprocessed trauma meant recurrent problems. “Several consistent health effects emerged. Veterans most frequently reported problems with concentration, sleep disturbance, nightmares, flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, and emotional distress. Many reported actively avoiding reminders of the event.”

Soldiers arriving home basically experienced shellshock after the war, which made it hard to live a sane life. Not only men, but also women suffered from traumatic experiences. War time nurses probably produced the same traumatic symptoms as GIs such as flashbacks, nightmares and anxiety. Also, women who supported the home front experienced challenges in terms of processing the effects of the war. They had to accommodate to the new economic situation as the new breadwinners, while many lost family members which meant an emotional hardship. It is important to note that during war time talking about these hardships was considered a taboo. Combat experiences or home front struggles were not acceptable topics in public discussions. This way, Americans experienced several different kinds of traumas as a result of the war, yet there was no opportunity to talk about it and process it properly.

Economically speaking, the Second World War often claimed to affect America in a beneficial way. During the war, the country’s GNP got higher and the employment rate increased. Another positive effect of the war was economic prosperity which meant a way out of the Great Depression. Total war had affected changes in the economic structure as well as employment.

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patterns, however not permanent ones. New roles, such as men being soldiers while women being workers, were only present during the war. People many times worried how the economic structure will be organized after the war. 28 Also, the life of Americans citizens completely changed because of the war effort. Despite the fact that the war had positive effects on the economy, cartoonists often concentrated on the living standards during the war. Because of the war the economic structure needed to be changed and citizens had to reduce their consuming to the minimum. It meant serious transformations concerning people’s lifestyles. Americans gave up on their comfortable way of living and lived a plain life in order to support the war effort. For the common people, it meant sacrifices as they could barely get enough non-military goods. During the global conflict, the country’s economy focused on producing the necessary military supplies, while the production of other products were significantly reduced. The question that how long this economic situation could be sustainable caused anxiety. This concern is expressed in the cartoon in Figure 10. It satirically emphasizes the fact the USA concentrated on products needed in the war and often neglected non-war supplies. The cartoon satirizes the government’s decisions on the economy. It implies the hardships people had to face that meant a complete change of the American way of life. Basic goods and services, such as food and travelling, were limited.

Although the Second World War is often seen as an era of prosperity, there were serious problems concerning living conditions. Americans had to give up on their comfortable way of life and struggle to live a sustainable life under extreme restrictions concerning food, gas, and clothing.\textsuperscript{29} It also caused uncertainty that people did not know what to expect after the war. Because the country’s production centered on producing military supplies it was questionable whether the economy will successfully transform back to produce other supplies needed in everyday life. The cartoon also reflects on this in a satirical tone. The description held by the character explains how to convert a tank into a washing machine. It clearly mocks the fact the country mainly produced military supplies, however the production needed to be switched back to other goods such as domestic machines or cars. Luckily, America managed to transform the economy and create better living conditions after the war. The 1950s is considered the era of prosperity when the economy managed to take an advantage of the global conflict, thus stabilizing the economic situation. “The Employment Act of 1946 stated as government policy ‘to promote maximum employment, production, and purchasing power.’ The United States also recognized during the post-war period the need to restructure international monetary arrangements, […] institutions designed to ensure an open, capitalist international economy.” \textsuperscript{30} However, the common feeling of uncertainty is understandable since people struggled to get goods and services they needed during the war. They experienced relatively poor living conditions while they saw that the government mainly focused on military goods while neglecting other sectors of the economy. In the war situation, it was hard to tell how the country’s economic situation will change in the postwar period. Despite the

\textsuperscript{29} Higgs "Wartime Prosperity?" p. 53.
uncertain period experienced during the global conflict, America managed to create general welfare and stable economic situation. After all, the United States’ postwar economic situation can be considered as a positive outcome of the war.
Conclusion

The Second World War can be depicted from very different perspectives. The different ways Americans perceived the war offer different attitudes toward the global conflict. By analyzing the differences, a complex picture is presented about the war. In my thesis, I focused on two kinds of visual representations, propaganda posters and cartoons, which captured the same war from different perspectives. Propaganda posters employed narratives to emphasize the bright side of the global conflict in order to recruit soldiers and win the war. The successful recruitment of soldiers could not have been possible without a convincing propaganda campaign. Most importantly, the campaign appealed to men’s sense of masculinity and patriotism. The posters’ message mainly was that a man can prove his masculinity and loyalty to the American country by doing combat duty. Also, a religious tone appeared sometimes in addition to the narratives of heroism. The religious connotations made posters more persuasive. This religious tone allowed posters to depict the war as a duty approved by God, therefore, it appealed to Americans’ religious love toward their country. Moreover, posters also targeted women to apply for a job in the army. They were not allowed to go to the front, but they fulfilled important roles and they worked as nurses, translators or technicians. Recruiting women for army jobs meant a radical change. It reflects on the fact the America wished to win the war at all costs, even if it meant the creation of a total war situation in the country.

In contrast to the positive message communicated by the propaganda posters, there were cartoons that presented the military life in a radically different way. Bill Mauldin was a soldier who drew several cartoons to capture his experiences as a soldier. While propaganda posters were colorful and the characters on these posters appeared as strong and heroic ones, Mauldin’s cartoons were black and white and the characters on them were presented as tired and dirty. Mauldin
depicted the military life authentically and with a touch of black humor. Soldiers had to live under terrible circumstances while they needed to face death day by day. Military life had serious consequences such as mental and physical illnesses. Despite the difficult living conditions, Mauldin managed to produce cartoons with a touch of black humor and in a satirical tone. His special way of capturing the war experience as a soldier often made his fellows laugh that meant an escape from the brutalities of the combat service. Even though he depicted the war in a humorous way, he also managed to highlight its completely absurd nature and totally destructive side. Propaganda posters and Mauldin’s cartoons in juxtaposition prove how complex the depiction of the Second World War was, offering different perspectives. Posters intentionally did not want to highlight the disadvantages of military service, instead the propaganda campaign employed the narratives of masculinity, patriotism and religion to persuade Americans to enlist. Mauldin’s cartoons contradicted these ideas. His works depicted combat duty as a horrible and inhumane life, to which the ideas of heroism and masculinity were not applicable. Furthermore, propaganda posters did not only target future soldiers and army workers, but also communicated the responsibilities to those who stayed home. In this case, the target audience were mainly women. The most important task was to restructure the economy since men left their previous jobs and became soldiers. The government communicated radically new roles for women. For a long time, with a few exceptions, the separate spheres ideology defined gender roles in America. However, under the circumstances of the war women were asked to be active agents in society. Several posters were made that emphasized the need for women as workers. The posters also highlighted their ability to fulfill even hard physical jobs. With the new workforce, America was able to produce the essential military supplies and goods. Without working women, victory could not have been possible. Besides propaganda posters, several cartoons were made about the home front life. These cartoons also depicted the nation’s life differently during the war. The war meant emotional problems for several
citizens and soldiers who came home. People struggled with traumatic experiences. However, negative war experiences were considered as taboo topics at that time. Therefore, people had to deal with their problems by themselves while they had to fulfill their new responsibilities. Also, changes in the economy meant hardships. The country’s consumption needed to be reduced to the minimum which meant saving on gas, public transportation and food to be able to produce the proper amount of military supplies. This frugality changed the American lifestyle. Cartoons often satirized the living standards during the war. People gave up on their previous good living conditions and lived a relatively poor life to support the war effort. Basic goods were produced in a strictly limited amount. The country mainly concentrated on the production of military goods, while other sectors of the economy became neglected. Again, cartoons highlighted different aspects of the global conflict than posters. While propaganda posters encouraged Americans to reorganize completely their lifestyles to support the war effort and help the country win sooner, cartoons emphasized problematic issues caused by the new economic and social structure. The different perspectives and narratives applied by the posters and cartoons shed light on the complex, often contradictory nature of the Second World War. While the propaganda posters tried to highlight the positive aspects of the global conflict and presented the war as a mission of Americans, cartoons depicted the destructive side of the war that had serious consequences such as economic struggles and the mental and physical problems.
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