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### U.S. Rhetoric in WWII

In any war, rhetoric is the primary tool used by a countries' government to unite its inhabitants against the opposing foe. Rhetoric can achieve this because it is, "the use of symbolic action by human beings to share ideas, enabling them to work together and make decisions" (Palczewski, Ice, and Fritch 6). Symbolic action is at the heart of rhetoric and is "an expressive human action and the rhetorical mobilization of symbols to act in the world" (6). Rhetoric is therefore produced by symbolic action which uses verbal and visual symbols to persuade people to act and perhaps make changes in society. Visual symbols, "are symbols such as pictures, images, objects, and actions" (6). Verbal symbols are, "symbols found in language whether spoken or written" (6). Rhetoric during WWII used many visual and verbal symbols in its production of war posters with the aim of persuading the home front to support the war. In the particular poster, I will be analyzing the role visual and verbal symbols had in persuading women to invest in war bonds.

The reasons for the production of this poster can be explained through Lloyd Bitzer's theory on rhetoric as being situational. Bitzer believes rhetoric is situational in that it presents a, "complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed (203). The exigence is an, "imperfection marked

by urgency” (203). In other words, the exigence is a problem within the society that is waiting to be addressed within a social context by a rhetor. This rhetor falls into the modern sense of the term, “anyone or any institution that uses symbolic action” (10). In this analysis the rhetor is the War Department due to the fact that they produced the poster as a result of the exigence, the war. The poster brings up another component of the rhetorical situation, constraints. Constraints are, “persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision”(206). Another way of thinking about constraints is that they are anything that impacts the way the rhetoric is received. The poster itself was an object that offered little rhetorical constraints in creating it. It could be mass produced and delivered to each small town in the U.S. so the message could be taken in visually and verbally.

Visual and Verbal symbols are key in all forms of symbolic action. In the poster the visual symbols are represented by the image of a Japanese soldier and an American woman. The verbal symbols are represented by the statements, “KEEP THIS HORROR FROM your HOME” and “INVEST 10% IN WAR BONDS” (Posters from World War II). These symbols are only effective when they are aimed at the right rhetorical audience or, “those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse” (179). In other words, the members of a rhetorical audience are the ones who are most likely to carry out change. For this artifact the rhetorical audience would be women since they were the ones holding the fort down at home while the men were away fighting. The visual symbols hint at this with the victim of the poster being the frightened American woman who is held hostage by the Japanese soldier. These visual symbols are meant to evoke pathos in the audience which means, “That which leads the audience to feel emotion” (12). Fear is the primary emotional response that would be expected from women viewing the poster. The Japanese soldier is dehumanized and is portrayed as having razor sharp teeth while

the woman appears terrified. The pathos is key in linking the audience with the symbolic action by drawing out an emotional response from them that will motivate them to act on the message of the symbolic action.

The verbal symbols offer a solution that will ease the fear of the women. The poster suggests that the best way to keep women from finding themselves in this predicament is to invest in war bonds. This call for a collective investment into war bonds is a prime example of the demand for civic engagement. Civic engagement is, “peoples participation in individual or collective action to develop solutions to social, economic, and political challenges” (13). Another way to put it is it’s people within a society that take an active part in trying to make a change based on what the symbolic action is calling for. Women would have been in an advantageous position to take part in civic engagement since they couldn’t fight overseas. They also would have been able to invest in war bonds due to their growing role in the workforce. For example, in 1944, thirty-five percent of women in the U.S. were in the workforce compared to twenty-seven percent in 1940(Martial Status of Women). This meant women had more access to money as well as purchasing power. Women’s role in civic engagement was crucial to winning the war; this new role in society could only be explained by women leaving the private sphere of their homes and entering the public sphere.

Habermas defines the public sphere as, “ a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed and that is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public”(238). Therefore, a public sphere isn’t actually a physical location, but a virtual space in which people’s opinions are circulated in order to discuss or evoke change. Women gained the right to vote in 1919 and as a result this gave them the chance to actually discuss political and national issues due to their ability to create change. Also

the mere fact that they were out in the workforce gave them the chance to openly discuss matters publicly rather than being constricted to the home. So it makes sense that the War Department would create a poster that would try to unite women to support the war through bonds. They needed women to be publically speaking for the war. Posters like this achieved this as many organizations were set up by women in the public domain. For example, The Junior Woman's Club of Whiteville sold \$99,345.55 in war bonds that kept the production of fighter aircraft such as the hellcat secured(Biser 1).

The verbal and visual symbols also play a big role in forming the concept of the second persona which is, “to whom the rhetor speaks, the implied audience for whom a rhetor constructs symbolic actions”(189). This can be explained as the rhetor creating visual or verbal symbols that are specifically meant for a targeted audience. Since the rhetor in this example is the War Department, they would have had to think about who would be viewing the poster before they created it. Once they got a good idea that women would be playing a big role on the home front, they created the right visual and verbal symbols to persuade them. One of the ways they achieved this is through identity or , “the physical and or behavioral attributes that make a person recognizable as a member of a group”(158). Visually, the audience of women would be able to identify with the woman in the poster because of her sex as well as her race. The racial aspect is key because it further creates an “us versus them” mentality to the point where the rhetorical audience would never be able to identify with the Japanese soldier.

Another rhetorical concept that can be touched upon in the poster is goodwill. Goodwill is when a rhetor has, “the quality of being motivated by the audience's best interests, as putting the needs of the audience ahead of the rhetor's own interest”(154). Goodwill is represented by the verbal symbols in the poster. The Department portrays itself as an entity that will use the

citizen's investment in war bonds to protect them by "Backing up Our Battle skies". Protection would be of primary importance to the women reading the poster and if the rhetor can ensure this through their investment, then the rhetoric would be successful.

In conclusion, women were essential to sustaining and winning the war through their investments in war bonds. The propaganda at work during this time used many rhetorical devices to achieve this. The posters themselves touched on women's fears by using visual and verbal symbols to stimulate their pathos to make them invest in war bonds. The posters also made them feel attached to a shared community and culture in America by using these visual and verbal symbols through identity. The Japanese soldier was depicted as the other, while the woman was shown as being the average white American woman. Finally, the poster was driven by an exigence that required a response or solution to overcome the huge deficits in funding the war.

Works Cited

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