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Propaganda With the World at War

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Introduction: Purpose and motivation

As the world was swept into war for the second time during the twentieth century, countries across the globe turned to propaganda to increase support for the war and commitment to victory. Drawing upon propagandist films and posters from major Allied and Axis countries, several themes emerge, such as hatred for the enemy, provided a boost in civilian morale, and encouraged women's participation in the workforce. Patriotism materialized through these films and posters, but it is through the savvy world leaders that it stuck. This new wave of world leaders (Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Adolf Hitler) were not like any before them, a group of men who were media-savvy, outspoken, influential, and effective public speakers. Through the use of media and public speeches, these leaders pulled their respective countries from the depths of despair to war powers, which saw civilians and soldiers alike rallying for the cause. This paper examines the effect of propaganda on civilians, both before the war, and during.

Materials and Methods

To look at the effectiveness of print propaganda and the power of speech, I used several sources. For the printed propaganda, I looked at several different archives, including ones compiled by Northwestern University and Calvin College. Northwestern University has compiled an archive on United States World War II Posters, while Calvin College has assembled a German Propaganda Archive. This German Propaganda Archive includes countless speeches and written by Nazi leaders such Adolf Hitler, Joseph Goebbels, and others. Speeches and transcripts of Fireside Chats given by President Franklin D. Roosevelt were provided by The American Presidency Project, an archive maintained by the University of California, Santa Barbara.

The Emergence of the Radio

Through my research, I found that the radio became a powerful and unifying force during World War II. The radio was an invention like none other before it, utilized by all countries and leaders of World War II combatants.

- At an August 1933 speech, Nazi propagandist minister Joseph Goebbels stated, "The radio will be for the twentieth century what the press was for the nineteenth century. With the appropriate change, one can apply Napoleon's phrase to our age, speaking of the radio as the eighth great power."
- President Franklin D. Roosevelt utilized the radio to facilitate intimate and direct communication between the President and the citizens of the United States.

Conclusions and Implications

After looking at numerous different types of propaganda, print, media, and speech, I have come to the conclusion that speech is the most powerful form of propaganda available. I believe that this opinion is supported by the success of three prominent world leaders during the World War II era, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Adolf Hitler. These men took countries that were in the depths of despair post-World War I, and turned them into the most powerful countries during the war. They utilized the power of speech to spur civilians to action, restore ideological beliefs, and discredit enemies.

Literature Cited

Calvin College, “German Propaganda Archive.” http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/.

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