



# The Propaganda Wars:

Comics and the War Effort



# The Origins

---

The isolationist stance taken by the United States during the early months of World War II was quickly dissolved after two years. After the events that took place on December 7, 1941, the principal concern was war financing. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. was the key to solving this financial problem. In the fall of 1940, Morgenthau reviled his national defense bond program. With the help of political scientist, Peter Odegard, the Treasury introduced Series E notes that would be deemed “defense bonds”.

The purchasing of war bonds was essential to the victory that would follow in 1945. Over the course of the war, 85 million Americans bought bonds totaling approximately \$185.7 billion.. The War Advertising Council utilized popular art and culture to promote the National Defense Savings Program. At first, the United States government was reluctant to engage in the use of propaganda as a way to persuade citizens to purchase war bonds. With pressure beaming down from the media as well as the business

sector, the government finally gave in. In 1942, President Roosevelt developed The Office of War Information. This creation sparked the use of widespread propaganda, which appeared in many forms. The use of leaflets, posters, books, movies, and advertising were all common. Comic books in particular were indispensable to the war effort. Their effectiveness, combined with popularity, boosted the overall sale of war bonds over the course of World War II.

# U.S. Propaganda

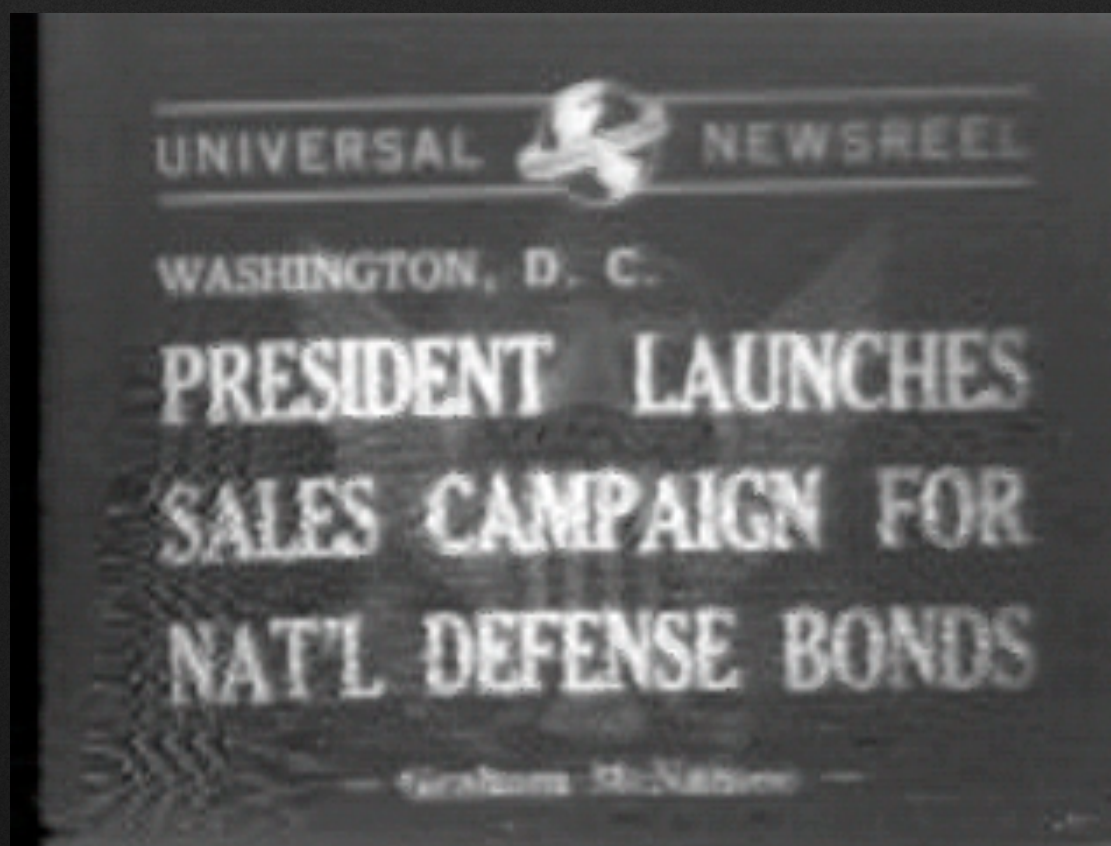
---

Following the 1942 creation of the OWI, propaganda in the United States was seen in all aspects of life. Over the span of the preceding three years, citizens of the U.S. were accustomed to propaganda throughout their day-to-day lives.

The use of radio was most common among propaganda tactics. This tactic could reach millions, making it the fore runner for governmental propagating. President Roosevelt's fire side chats provide an example of how effective radio propaganda was. This effectiveness not only led to an informed popular, but also persuaded citizens to rally behind those that were fighting for their freedom. The success of this shortwave communication resulted in a rise in war bond sales and patriotism. Another tactic came in the form of propaganda leaflets. The U.S. had a special squadron of B-17 bombers dedicated to dropping leaflets in the United States as well as on foreign soils. The leaflets were effective at relaying small portions of information to those without access to radios or any other

communicative resources. Leaflets gave way to an increase in citizen awareness resulting in further sales of war bonds. Posters, as well as advertising, were highly successful forms of propaganda. Accompanying radio at top was the use of posters. Over the course of the war, over 200,000 different poster designs were printed. The OWI Bureau of Graphics was in charge of creation and distribution of the posters. The message of these posters remained positive and often pertained to the purchasing of war bonds. The posters called out citizens to support their country often reading, "money raised was not lost." This source of propaganda was highly important in raising finances on the home front. Advertising was also a way in which propaganda took form. Companies across the U.S.

used commercial ads to urge citizens to buy war bonds. Hollywood played a major role in the overall feeling of America at the time of World War II. Movies hitting theaters brought forth plots that depicted soldiers of the Axis powers as the main antagonists. These movies also included ads that promoted national support and purchasing of Series E bonds. Many times the government waived filmmakers draft status so they could continue producing films. The overall war effort was increased through various forms of propaganda. This increase is directly related with the victory that the U.S. later provided in 1945.

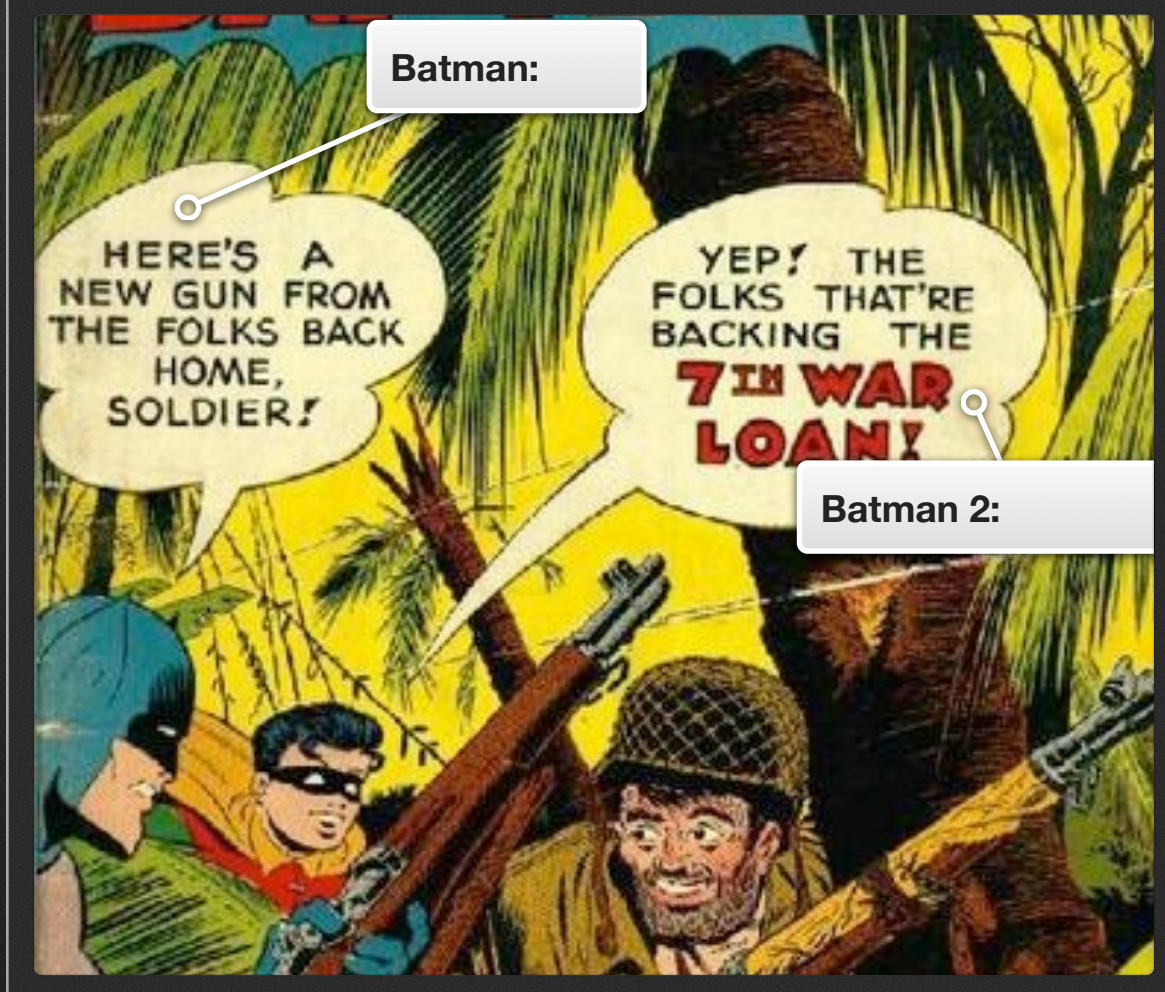


### **GALLERY 2.1 FDR Buys First "War Bond"**

**On the 5th of January in 1941, President Roosevelt asks fellow Americans to join him in the purchasing of War Bonds. In hopes to secure victory at home and on foreign soils.**

# Comic Book Propaganda

INTERACTIVE 3.1 Batman #15 Comic - 1943 ("The Truth About Wartime Propaganda in Comics")



The World War II propaganda think-tank capitalized when it came to the comic book industry. With comics in their “Golden Age”, their use as a source of propaganda was highly effective. Publishers, such as Marvel and D.C. Comics, were essential to the sale of governmental war bonds.

The effort to win the war went hand in hand with comics. The main focus of comics during this period was to sell war bonds. Most, if not all, comics used their Superheroes to prove their patriotism during World War II. Covers of comics

during this time usually had graphics urging customers to invest in war bonds. Comic books went the extra mile when supporting the propaganda movement. Publishers often transformed Superheroes to fit the ideal patriotic character.

Earlier editions of Batman comics shed light on the fact that Batman never used guns or killed. In a 1943 Batman comic, he is seen as supplying guns to American soldiers and supporting the 7th war loan. Superman was also transformed into a patriotic Superhero willing to do anything to defend his country. Superman appeared in numerous D.C. Comics over the span of World War II. The cover of a Superman comic, Number 58, reads, "Superman says you can slap a Jap with War Bonds and Stamps!". Another comic throwing its support behind the 7th war loan reads, "And it isn't Superman who's doing this - it's the American people!". Other covers show Superman fighting German and Japanese soldiers. D.C. comics also used Batman in their crusade to persuade Americans to purchase war bonds. One cover of a Batman comic, Number 18, shows Batman and his sidekick Robin blowing up a firecracker in the faces of the Axis leaders. The cover reads, "Insure the 4th of July, buy War Bonds and Stamps!". Other comics included Batman as well as Superman. The cover of a D.C. winter issue depicts Superman, Batman, and Robin as selling war bonds at a news stand. The sign above them reads, "Sink the JapNazis with War Bonds and Stamps." Other publishers participated in comic

book propaganda as well. Superheroes such as the Green Hornet, Spy Smasher, Captain Marvel, Cat Man, and the Black Terror were used to fight against American enemies. The U.S. Government also joined in with the creation of their own comic books. In 1943, the United States was in dire need of plane fuel. By this time, workers stationed at oil refineries were becoming bogged down in their work. The Government's Petroleum Administration for War designed comics to inspire the workers. The first comic, "Comin' in on a Wing and a Prayer" was a huge success, and forced the PAW to create "Under-Cover War". These comics proved to the workers how important their job was, and put the refineries back on track.

The covers of these comics always boasted lines supporting the buying and selling of war bonds. The aim of this form of propaganda was directly related to the sale of war bonds. The key to winning the war was for all Americans to pitch in and do their part. The availability of war bonds was the way in which all could participate.

# Captain America

INTERACTIVE 4.1 The First Captain America Comic.  
("Propaganda In American Comics of WWII")



Captain America embodied the use of comic books as propaganda during the second world war. His character was tailor made to support the overall war effort. A now famous Superhero was originally created to increase war bond sales.

The comic book Superhero, Captain America, is the perfect example when proving how important comics were to the war effort. Put into creation in 1941 by Timely Comics, the later Marvel Comics, Captain America became the face of World War II comic propaganda. The

main character, Steve Rogers, is a frail young man that wishes to enlist but is turned away. He is noticed by a U.S. Army General that gives him the chance to participate in a Super-Soldier project codenamed Rebirth. Steve Rogers participates in the experiment and is trans-

formed into a soldier with Superhero powers. Rogers is now at the peak of human perfection, and aids the United States in the war effort. Captain America sports a costume with the American flag, and carries a shield that is bulletproof and used as a weapon. Many covers of Captain America comics show the Superhero going toe to toe with Nazi soldiers and Hitler himself. The first and second editions of Captain America show him fighting Hitler. This created widespread support for the war effort and for the Captain America comics. The covers of Captain America fighting against Hitler stirred U.S. support to end the war, increasing the sale of war bonds.

Fighting for the United States at this time was viewed as the upmost heroic deed. Though a fiction story, the creation of Captain America brought forth the idea that all citizens were capable of supporting those abroad. The addition of Timely Comic's Captain America was essential to the sale of comic books as well as war bonds. Captain America's transformation was relatable to the American population. Citizens realized that as regular citizens they could contribute to the war effort just as Captain America had. The purchasing of war bonds was a way in which all citizens could help, and the

use of Captain America was essential to this.



# Victory

---

The Allied victory of the deadliest conflict in world history came on September 2, 1945, six years and a day from its start. An estimated 50 to 70 million deaths resulted from World War II, nearly 2.5% of the world population. American casualties tallied at the staggering number of 418,500. Without the support of American people, the number could have been drastically increased.

The American people played a major role in the victory of World War II. The effort they gave to bring the U.S. through has gained them the title of the “Greatest Generation”. Propaganda, both independent and governmental, was at the center of this effort. The creation of propaganda was essential to war financing. Without the tactics that propaganda brought to the table, the United States

would not have had enough support to fight the war on such a large scale. Comic books as a form of propaganda were highly successful and created interest in the war effort. The transformation that many comics underwent to support the war embodies how the nation felt at this time. U.S. citizens put forth all they had to ensure that evil was defeated in the European and Pacific theaters. The way in which comics changed to meet the needs of war bond sales proves that they were essential to war financing. Comic book publishers did all they could to create a situation that paraded the purchasing of war bonds as the right thing to do. Comics, with their stunning graphics and Superhero characters, created a patriotic zeitgeist that led to the eventual victory of World War II.

# Citation

---

Adams, Harold, and Jimmy McHugh. *Comin' in on a Wing and a Prayer*. Washington D.C.: Petroleum Administration For War, 1943. Print.

Heide, Robert, and John Gilman. *Home Front America: Popular Culture of the World War II Era*. Chronicle Books Llc, 1995. Print.

Kimble, James J. *Mobilizing the home front: war bonds and domestic propaganda*. Dallas: Texas A&M University Press, 2006. Print.

Laurie, Clayton. *The Propaganda Warriors*. University of Kansas Press, 1996. Print.

"Michener Art Museum Pairs Famed American Illustrators Rockwell and Hargens for Fall Exhibitions in New Hope." The James A. Michener Art Museum 08 Aug. 2007. Press release.

"President Buys First Bond, 1941/05/01" Archive.org. n.p. Universal News Reels, n.d. Web. 8 Nov. 2012. <[http://archive.org/details/1941-05-01\\_President\\_Buys\\_First\\_Bond](http://archive.org/details/1941-05-01_President_Buys_First_Bond)>

"Propaganda In American Comics of WWII" uFunk. n.p. , n.d. Web. 6 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.ufunk.net/en/insolite/propaganda-in-american-comics-of-wwii/>>

Rupp, Leila. *Mobilizing Women for War*. Princeton Univ Pr, 1978. Print.

Rhodes, Anthony. *Propaganda: The art of persuasion: World War II*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1976. Print.

*Saturday Evening Post* 20 Mar. 1943: Vol. 215. Issue 38. pg. 4. Print.

Sommerville, Donald. *The Complete Illustrated History of World War Two: An Authoritative Account of the Deadliest Conflict in Human History with Analysis of Decisive Encounters and Landmark Engagements*. Lorenz Books, 2008. Print.

Thomas, Christopher. *A Thousand Words: Themes and Trends in Home Front Posters*. Texas A&M University, 2003 - 2005. Print.

"The Truth About Wartime Propaganda in Comics" Inspiration Feed. n.p. , 24 Feb. 2012. Web. 9 Nov. 2012. <<http://inspirationfeed.com/articles/design-articles/the-truth-about-wartime-propaganda-in-comics/>>

*Undercover War*. Washington D.C.: Petroleum Administration For War, 1943. Print.

Winkler, Allen. *The Politics of Propaganda: Office of War Information, 1942-1945*. Yale University Press, 1978. Print.

# OWI

The Office of War Information.

---

## Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

---

**Index**

Find Term

# PAW

The Government's Petroleum Administration for War.

---

## **Related Glossary Terms**

Drag related terms here

# Propaganda

The particular doctrines or principles propagated by an organization.

---

## **Related Glossary Terms**

Drag related terms here