

POSTERS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR: THE PASSION, PROPAGANDA AND PRINT

Oxford English Dictionary: Propaganda - The systematic dissemination of information, esp. in a biased or misleading way, in order to promote a political cause or point of view.

The First World War redefined the meaning and scope of propaganda. Propaganda was directed; toward allies and neutral countries as a means of influence, and toward the enemy as a weapon. This war was the first in which modern governments targeted the general public with propaganda produced on an industrial scale; firstly, to justify their actions by depicting the enemy as an evil criminal; and secondly, to inflame popular passion and get men to enlist (before conscription). People were not allowed to become despondent; so victories were exaggerated and defeats, if not concealed, minimized, and the stimulus of righteous anger and disgust of the enemy were continuously manoeuvred into the public mind.

At this time there was no internet, no global communication network and no 24 hour news channels. At the start of the war the only form of media was the press, which was subtly but completely government controlled, as were the films that were being made by the end of the war. Britain was the most successful of the war's propagandists employing newspaper owners, editors, writers, poets and eventually filmmakers to spread selected truths and lies. The government used patriotic devices and literary myths, through symbols, motifs, language, psychological and aesthetic devices to create the authentic, varied posters exhibited here. This display unveils the impact the war had on people's lives, the reasons why men signed up to fight and the contributions women made at home.

Following the First World War organised propaganda has become regarded as an essential part of any war effort, increasing in importance throughout the twentieth century. It paved the way for developments in advertising and other features of twentieth century mass society.

On the other hand, following a post-war investigation into the wartime atrocity stories of German cruelty; not one case could be proved. The tragic effect, when the public discovered this falsehood, was a general hesitation in the 1930s and 1940s to believe real atrocity stories that began to come out of Nazi Germany. The lies of the First World War helped to obscure the realities of the Second.

