#40- World War I: The Home Front

Bellringer: What is propaganda? How do you think it was utilized during World War I?

**Background:** Why It Matters Before the war, the federal government played a minor role in the daily lives of most Americans. But during World War I, the government assumed new powers. It regulated industrial and agricultural production, worked to shape public opinion, and established a new military draft. While war required sacrifice, it also brought new economic opportunities and many Americans migrated to other parts of the country in search of these opportunities. The war permanently changed Americans’ relationship with their government.

**Focus Question:** How did the war affect Americans at home?

**Doc A**
1. Describe the image in detail.

2. What is the purpose of this image/what is it trying to convince the audience to do or believe? Explain how you can tell.

**Doc B**
1. Describe the image in detail.

2. What is the purpose of this image/what is it trying to convince the audience to do or believe? Explain how you can tell.

**Doc C**
1. Describe the image in detail.

2. What is the purpose of this image/what is it trying to convince the audience to do or believe? Explain how you can tell.
Doc D
1. Describe the image in detail.

2. What is the purpose of this image/what is it trying to convince the audience to do or believe? Explain how you can tell.

Doc E
1. Describe the image in detail.

2. What is the purpose of this image/what is it trying to convince the audience to do or believe? Explain how you can tell.

Doc F
1. Describe the image in detail.

2. What is the purpose of this image/what is it trying to convince the audience to do or believe? Explain how you can tell.

Focus Question: How did the war affect Americans at home?

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America Mobilizes for War

War affects many things, but its greatest impact is on the lives of ordinary people. People fight, sacrifice, and sometimes die in war. People work to produce the food that soldiers eat and the guns that soldiers fire. People shape the information that others receive about the war. War may be the result of conflicts between nations, but it touches the lives of millions of individuals.

Building an Army When the United States entered World War I, the United States Army was only a fraction of the size of European armies. To build the army, President Wilson encouraged Americans to volunteer for service and pushed Congress to pass the Selective Service Act. The act, which Congress passed in May 1917, authorized a draft of young men for military service in Europe. On the first day of its enactment, June 5, 1917, more than 9.6 million Americans registered for the draft and were assigned a number. The government held a “great national lottery” in July to decide the order in which the first draftees would be called into service. Blindfolded, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker pulled number 258 out of a jar. The group of men assigned that number became the very first draftees.

Over the course of the war, more than 24 million Americans registered for the draft. Of these, about 2.8 million were actually drafted into the armed forces. Including volunteers, the total number of American men in uniform during World War I reached nearly 4.8 million. More than 4 million of these were sent to help the Allies in France.

Doc A- How does this poster show the shift from Neutrality to joining the war?
Constructing a War Economy While the Selective Service Commission raised an army, President Wilson worked to shift the national economy from peacetime to wartime production. This process proved slow and frustrating. First, the Council of National Defense, which was formed in August 1916, created an array of new federal administrative agencies to oversee different phases of the war effort. Individual agencies regulated food production, coal and petroleum distribution, and railway use. In practical terms, this meant that the government determined what crops farmers grew, what products industries produced, and how supplies moved around on the nation’s trains.

Problems and administrative overlap soon led to the creation of the War Industries Board (WIB). The WIB eventually became independent of the Council of National Defense. Headed by Bernard Baruch (buh ROOK), an influential Wall Street investment broker who reported directly to the President, the WIB regulated all industries engaged in the war effort. Baruch’s agency determined what products industries would make, where those products went, and how much they would cost. The system of free enterprise was curtailed to fulfill the nation’s acute need for war materials. Americans realized that they had to cooperate rather than compete in order to defeat the Central Powers.

What Baruch did for industry, future U.S. President Herbert Hoover achieved for agriculture. As head of the Food Administration, he set prices high for wheat and other foodstuffs to encourage farmers to increase production. He also asked Americans to conserve food as a patriotic gesture. If the American people ate less, then more food could be shipped to American and other Allied soldier fighting the war overseas. To this end, Hoover instituted wheatless Monday and Wednesdays, meatless Tuesdays, and porkless Thursdays and Saturdays.

Doc B- What does this image mean by saying “Food is Ammunition”?
Shaping Public Opinion  Hoover’s efforts would have been fruitless if the American people did not believe in supporting the war. Most Americans did not understand the reasons for the war in 1914, and many questioned why the United States became involved in 1917. It was the job of the Committee on Public Information (CPI) to educate the public about the causes and nature of the war. The CPI had to convince Americans that the war effort was a just cause.

Wilson appointed George Creel as the director of the CPI. A former journalist and a passionate admirer of American institutions, Creel combined education and a widespread advertising campaign to “sell America.” The CPI distributed 75 million pamphlets and 6,000 press releases, and it assembled an army of 75,000 speakers who gave lectures and brief speeches on America’s war aims and the nature of the enemy. In addition, the CPI designed, printed, and distributed millions of posters that dramatized the needs of America and its allies. The CPI also stressed the cruelty and wickedness of the enemy, particularly Germany, which in some cases aggravated resentment toward German Americans. Still, using these methods, Creel and the CPI earned widespread support for the American war effort.

Doc C- How are Germans represented in this image?

Doc D- What tragic event does this poster represent?
Women Embrace New Opportunities
Before the war, some American women campaigned for women’s suffrage. They won the vote in several western states and still hoped to gain the franchise nationally. Many feared that the war would draw attention away from their efforts. In fact, the war gave women new chances and won them the right to vote.

As men entered the armed forces, many women moved into the workforce for the first time. Women filled jobs that were vacated by men who had gone to fight. They worked in munitions factories, on the railroads, as telegraph operators and trolley conductors, and in other jobs that were previously open only to men. Others labored on farms. Some joined the Red Cross or the American Women's Hospital Service and went overseas. They worked as doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers, and clerks. Thousands enlisted when the Army Corps of Nurses was created in 1918. Women proved that they could succeed in any type of job, regardless of difficulty or risk.

By their efforts and sacrifices during the war, women convinced President Wilson to support their suffrage demands. He contended that granting the vote to women was “vital to winning the war.” If women could do the work of men, they certainly deserved the same voting privileges as men. Finally, in 1919, Congress passed the Nineteenth Amendment giving the vote to women. The required two thirds of states ratified the amendment in the summer of 1920, a victory more than 70 years in the making.
African Americans Follow Opportunity North

The war similarly presented new opportunities to African Americans. From the outset, most African American leaders supported the war. “If this is our country, then this is our war,” wrote African American leader W.E.B. Du Bois. He viewed the struggle as an excellent opportunity to show all Americans the loyalty and patriotism of African Americans. Thousands of them enlisted or were drafted into the army and sailed for the battlefields of France. On the battlefield, they fought in segregated units under the command of white officers. Altogether, 367,000 African Americans served in the military. Hundreds died for their country.

Meanwhile, a great movement of African Americans from the rural South to the industrial North was taking place. This movement to the “Land of Hope,” as many African Americans referred to the North at that time, is called the Great Migration. African Americans left their homes in the South for many reasons. Some hoped to escape the violent racism of the South. Others desired better jobs and a chance for economic advancement, which wartime industry in the North offered. Still others dreamed of a better future for their children. Between 1910 and 1920, more than 1.2 million African Americans moved to the North. Some whites in the South tried to get blacks to stay in the region of their birth, using methods that ranged from persuasion to violence. Meanwhile, African Americans who already lived in the North encouraged migration. Newspapers in the North, such as the Chicago Defender, an African American newspaper that was widely read in the South, pushed home this point:

“I beg you, my brother, to leave the benighted land... Get out of the South... Come north then, all you folks, both good and bad.... The Defender says come.” —Chicago Defender

Doc F- How does this poster present the role of African Americans in World War I?


African Americans moved to Chicago, as the Defender encouraged, where they found work in meatpacking plants. They migrated to Detroit, where they obtained jobs in auto factories. They traveled to smaller industrial towns in the Midwest and to the giant cities of the Northeast. Millions eventually made the exodus, and although they did not entirely escape discrimination, many did forge better futures. The Great Migration was one of the most important episodes in African American history.