The Committee on Public Information and the Four Minute Men: How the United States Sold a European War to American People

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As the sun rose over the countryside in Cantigny, France, cries of battle and the sound of artillery fire could be heard, and the stench of death permeated the air. It was here that many American soldiers first witnessed the atrocity of what was being called the Great War. Despite the fact that it took more than a year from the declaration of war for Americans to participate in a major offensive, the Great War was already making an impact domestically. Since the war began in 1914, US government officials urged Americans to remain neutral, but this changed when the United States formally entered World War I in April 1917. It was imperative that Americans demonstrate a united home front. To educate the public on the war and to maintain support for it, Woodrow Wilson and the American government created the Committee on Public Information. With notable writer and reporter George Creel as its chairman, this committee launched a massive propaganda campaign. Through speeches, pamphlets, and cartoons, as well as heavy press censorship, Creel and his men revolutionized the way information was distributed and received.[1]

[1] For more information on America in World War I, see Jennifer D. Keene, "Americans Respond: Perspectives on the Global War, 1914–1917," *Geschichte Und Gesellschaft* 40, no. 2 (2014): 266-86; David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). For a narrative on the US Army 1st Division and the attack on Cantigny, see Matthew J. Davenport, *First over There: The Attack on Cantigny, America's First Battle of World War I* (New York: Macmillan, 2015). For articles on The Committee on Public Information, see Nick Fischer, "The Committee on Public Information and the Birth of US State Propaganda," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 35, no. 1 (2016): 51-78; Stephen Vaughn, "First Amendment Liberties and the Committee on Public Information," *The American Journal of Legal History* 23, no. 2 (1979): 95-119, doi:10.2307/845226; Peter Buitenhuis, "The Selling of the Great War," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 7, no. 2 (1976): 139-150; Lisa Mastrangelo, "World War I, Public Intellectuals, and the Four Minute Men: Convergent Ideals of Public Speaking and Civic Participation," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12, NO. 4 (2009): 607-633. To examine the committee's propaganda campaign, see *Government War Advertising*: *Report of the Division of Advertising, Committee on Public Information*; George T. Blakely, *Historians on the Homefront: American Propagandists for the Great War* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky; Washington DC: The Committee, 1918); "Exposing the 'Age of Lies': The Propaganda Menace as Portrayed in American Magazines in the Aftermath of World War I," *Journal of American Culture* 12, NO. 1(1989): 35-40. For examples of the committee's written propaganda, see *Official Bulletin: Committee on Public Information* (Washington DC: Committee on Public Information, 1917). For examples of visual propaganda released by the committee, a good place to start is Wesley G. Balla, "Selling War to Americans: Poster Art of World War I," *Historical New Hampshire* 70, NO. 2 (2017): 95-99.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the world was a bubbling cauldron of progress. It was the age of the nation-state, the industrial revolution was in full swing, and new technologies were constantly being invented. One prominent new nation-state was Germany, unified in 1871. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck created the Triple Alliance to protect the newly formed Germany from external threats.[2] He furthered Germany's friendly relations through a secret treaty with Russia that promised neutrality in future wars. Threatened by Germany, Great Britain allied with France and by association, Russia, to form the Triple Entente in direct opposition to the Triple Alliance. This effectively divided Europe into two military camps. Germany continued to challenge existing powers by creating a massive naval force that threatened Britain's navy. Despite the military buildup, the cause of the Great War can be overarchingly attributed to the series of international crises, such as the Russo-Japanese War and the Balkan Crises. However, the assassination of archduke Franz Ferdinand served as the tipping point.[3] In the weeks following the assassination, alliances would be tested, and Austria officially declared war on Serbia on July 28th, 1914. By August, most of Europe was embroiled in war.

During this turmoil overseas, America remained relatively quiet, at least regarding foreign policy. President Woodrow Wilson called for the American people to remain "neutral in

[2] This Alliance was first a double alliance when Germany allied herself with Austria-Hungary in 1879 and then, according to Mombauer, became a *de facto* triple alliance when Italy joined in 1882. Annika Mombauer, *The Origins of the First World War: Controversies and Consensus* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013).

[3] It is worth noting here that the assassination did not immediately lead to war, and many of the countries involved tried to bring about a peaceful solution before war was finally declared at the end of July. According to Mombauer, the Archduke had not enjoyed universal support, leading some to be secretly pleased by his assassination, while others saw it as a reason for immediate war with Serbia. Modern historians have discussed the likelihood that Germany was willing to engage in war and pressured the Austro-Hungarian crown to do so. On July 23rd, an ultimatum was delivered to Serbia that was intended to be unacceptable, and the Serbians shocked everyone by being willing to accept it. This led to a series of peace conferences being proposed by Britain, however these were rejected by Germany and Austria-Hungary. Britain's desire to avoid crisis until her ally France was immediately threatened also contributed to the lack of peace talks. However, as Britain's intention to support France came out, Germany suddenly decided that war was no longer a risk she was willing to take. By this point, it was too late; Austria declared war on Serbia and the conflict truly began.

fact, as well as in name."[4] However, the American attitude towards the war was anything but. From the beginning, Americans saw the war as a result of German imperialism and expansion, and American newspapers had given the general public insight as to what was happening in Germany.[5] Most Americans favored the British and French as the defenders of democracy against the imperialist evils of Germany and Austria-Hungary. However, at this point in the war, many Americans were also somewhat skeptical of the atrocities being described by British and Belgian propaganda. Further, they believed German citizens the victims of a terrible autocratic regime that was poisoning their minds. This did not change their attitudes towards Germany overall, but led to anti-German sentiment domestically and accusations of German espionage on American soil.[6]

Despite the fact that American sympathies leaned towards the Allied Powers, most citizens did not want to see the country directly involved in the war. American leaders believed remaining neutral would allow the warring countries to see the United States as an 'arbiter of good faith,'[7] and more importantly continue to trade freely between all nations regardless of their position in the war. However, complete and total neutrality could no longer be maintained when a German U-Boat sank the British ship *Lusitania* in 1915, with nearly twelve hundred people losing their lives. Wilson sent several harsh messages to Germany regarding the sinking, and while many Americans shared Wilson's sentiments, they were still not fully ready to go to war over this incident. Instead, they had been awakened to the possibility of actually going to war.[8]

[4] Michael S. Neiberg, "Blinking Eyes Began to Open: Legacies from America's Road to the Great War, 1914–1917." *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 4 (2014): 801.
[5] Neiberg notes that Americans admired the Germans for their culture and history but feared them for their militaristic ideals.
[6] Becky Little, "When German Immigrants Were America's Undesirables," May 11, 2018, https://www.history.com/news/anti-german-sentiment-wwi.
[7] Neiberg, "Blinking Eyes Began to Open," 804.
[8] Neiberg describes this change in the American public's attitude as "Blinking eyes that began to open"

The nation as a whole began to quietly prepare for this possibility. Camps were opened to train young men as officers, and Wilson and his administration sought to increase the power and size of the US Army and Navy. As international tensions continued to rise, Germany became more desperate and vicious, and the American people became less certain that their overseas interests would be protected. America had no choice but to declare war on Germany on April 6th, 1917.[9]

The American government needed a way to garner public support for this war; this was of particular importance to President Woodrow Wilson who had won his reelection campaign largely on the fact that he had upheld the nation's isolationist policies through his first campaign and "kept the nation out of war."[10] Wilson had won only a narrow victory using this slogan, and as he was now doing exactly the opposite of keeping his nation out of war, it was imperative that he create a way to amass this public support. On April 13th, 1917, he created the Committee on Public Information (CPI).[11] An alternative to the British method of strict wartime censorship, the CPI was an organization designed as a partnership between military censorship and the mainstream media.[12]

George Creel, a career journalist with prominent progressive ideals, was selected as chairman of the CPI and served as a dominant head of the committee from its creation to its dissolution. A fervent supporter of Wilson, Creel believed the 'unprovoked' German war advances had placed the allies "in the finer position of standing for civilization, humanity, and international law."[13] He saw the committee as an organization that was "called into existence to

[9] "World War I Declarations: Topics in Chronicling America: Introduction," Research Guides (Library of Congress), https://guides.loc.gov/chronicling-america-wwi-declarations.
[10] Frank Freidel and Hugh Sidey, "Woodrow Wilson," Whitehouse.gov, 2006, https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/woodrow-wilson/ .
[11] Nick Fischer, "The Committee on Public Information and the Birth of US State Propaganda," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 35, no. 1 (2016): 55.
[12] The creation of this committee cannot solely be attributed to Wilson, but to both him and a team of advisors.
[13] George Creel, *The War, The World, and Wilson* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920), 121.

make this fight for the 'verdict of mankind,' the voice created to plead the justice of America's cause before the jury of Public Opinion."[14] He claimed he never saw the committee as a propaganda organization, as he stated in his book.[15] Although the committee's public purpose was to distribute information about the war to the public, it did have a far more important role behind the scenes. The Committee held immense censorship power, including the ability to edit newspapers, and restrict information through its support of radio and cable agencies. In his article "The Committee on Public Information and the Birth of US State Propaganda," Nick Fischer notes that the committee "possessed unprecedented resources for a government propaganda organization."[16] Although the work of Committee on Public Information was not the first government propaganda campaign, it is likely one of the most powerful the United States has ever seen.

Many saw the Committee on Public Information as an organization devoted to providing propaganda to the American people and one ready to censor any anti-war or anti-committee sentiments. However, in *How We Advertised America,* Creel was adamant that this was not its purpose. He devoted an entire section of the book to the fact that he was always opposed to a censorship law, and that the committee needed to get its power from the patriotic spirit of the American people. He suggested if newspapers were to voluntarily censor their own material, then freedom of the press could be protected while continuing to communicate the necessity of the war to the American people. He also suggested that censorship was done to protect things such as the location of troops overseas or transportation of troops and supplies. Creel then noted that any American with sense would understand why this form of censorship was necessary

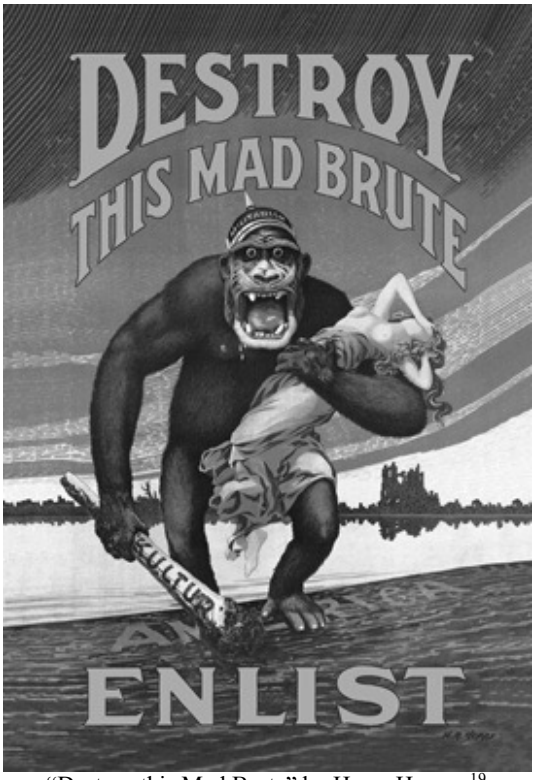
[14] George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920), 4.
[15] Creel, *How We Advertised America,* 4.
[16] Fischer, "The Committee on Public Information," 57.

during the war, and why America's proposed form of censorship worked better than the strict European laws. Throughout this section of the book, Creel continued to affirm that censorship was necessary, but that it always remained voluntary, and that the committee had no power to punish those who did not comply with this "voluntary" campaign. He expressed outrage that he was considered a censor and assured the reader the committee was not the terrible censor many believed it to be.[17]

Although the committee was part of the massive censorship campaign going on across the country, censorship was not its only job. While Americans may not have believed the stories of overseas atrocities before the United States entered the war, the committee believed it was necessary to stir their emotions and make these atrocities somewhat believable in order to gain public support. There were many ways to accomplish this, but the Division of Pictorial Publicity was particularly active in this mission. Artists created posters that played to people's fears, biases, and even racial prejudices. The enemy was often portrayed as a hairy beast, less than human in his carnal desires, while the allies and American citizens were usually portrayed as white, fair-skinned, blue-eyed individuals. These racist portrayals were not just committee sponsored. An independent artist named Harry Ryle Hopps created a famous poster bearing the slogan, "DESTROY THIS MAD BRUTE." It shows a large ape who is meant to represent a German soldier carrying a young maiden representing America, the allies, and the victims of German aggression in one arm and holding a club with the other. The only indication that this is meant to represent a man and not merely a ferocious beast is the German helmet on his head.[18] Besides the racially charged symbolism, this poster is also intended to spark fear. Upon closer

[17] Creel, *How We Advertised America,* 16-27.
[18] Clayton Funk, "Popular Culture, Art Education, and the Committee on Public Information During World War I, 1915-1919." *Visual Arts Research* 37, no. 1 (2011): 73-74.

examination, one can see that the background of the image shows a destroyed landscape, and the beach the brute has just walked onto is meant to represent American soil. This imagery likely represents a German destruction of Europe, with the brute having "crossed the ocean" to arrive in America. This is particularly poignant because the war had been fought exclusively overseas up to this point. Although fighting would never truly happen on American soil during World War I, there is no doubt that this was still a fear in the minds of the public, a fear that propagandists were likely willing to exploit to drum up support.

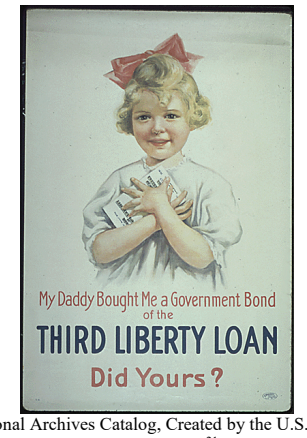


"Destroy this Mad Brute" by Harry Hopper[19]

[19] Clayton Funk, "Popular Culture, Art Education, and the Committee on Public Information During World War I, 1915-1919." *Visual Arts Research* 37, no. 1 (2011): 74.

Not all posters were racially charged. A good number appealed to America's sense of patriotism instead. Many of these patriotic posters were aimed at getting Americans to register for the draft, or if they were not young men, helping in other ways such as buying liberty bonds. One of these posters reads, "Gee, I wish I were a man, I'd join the Navy. Be a man and do it, United States Navy recruiting station" This poster suggests that not only was joining the navy a manly and respectable thing to do, but also that it was such a desirable and important position that even women would enlist if they could. It appealed to America's sense of national pride and may have even promoted the idea that trying to dodge the draft was a cowardly and unmanly thing. Another poster depicts a young girl cradling a piece of paper with the caption "My daddy bought me a government bond of the third liberty loan. Did yours?" Both of these posters appeal to the American sense of patriotism by detailing how citizens could help the war effort even if they were not males of fighting age. They emphasize home front support and encouraging fellow citizens to engage in various support methods besides simply joining the military.

National Archives Catalog, Created by the U.S. Food Administration[20]



National Archives Catalog, Created by the U.S. Food Administration[21]

[20] U. S. Food Administration, *Gee!! I wish I were a man I'd Join the Navy.* United States, ca. 1917. Photograph. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/512494
[21] U. S. Food Administration, *My Daddy Bought me a Government Bond of the Third Liberty Loan.* United States, ca. 1917. Photograph. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/512633

One of the most iconic propaganda posters from World War I was created by James Montgomery Flagg. A large image of "Uncle Sam" was depicted encouraging young men to join the Army. Bright colors are used, and Uncle Sam is pointing directly at the audience. A smaller line of text under the "I WANT YOU" slogan directs men to the nearest recruiting station. This poster appealed to patriotism using striking red, white, and blue colors. The man wearing them, Uncle Sam, had by this time been used as a patriotic symbol for nearly a hundred years prior.[22] Having a relatively well-known figure on a poster such as this would communicate to Americans that Uncle Sam himself was calling on American men to join the army. The caption of the poster being stylized in all capital letters would also draw the eye, and Uncle Sam's dramatic pose would draw attention to both the image and its message.

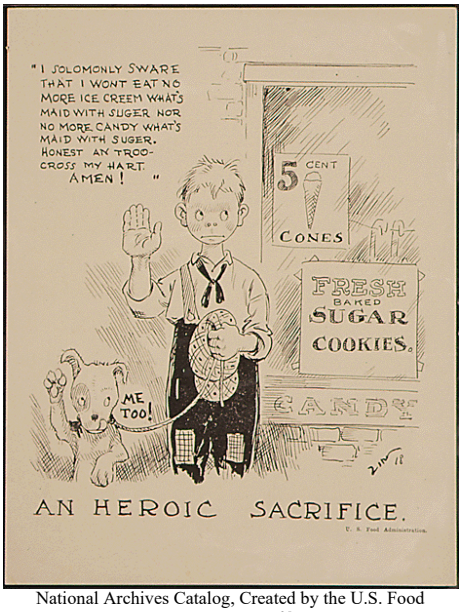
Library of Congress, created by James Montgomery Flagg[23]

[22] "Uncle Sam." Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. Accessed November 22, 2020. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Uncle-Sam

[23] James Montgomery Flagg, Artist. *I want you for U.S. Army: nearest recruiting station / James Montgomery Flagg.* United States, ca. 1917. Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/96507165/.

As with the Uncle Sam poster, a very common way that the propaganda posters appealed to patriotism was by featuring the American flag. Many, such as this poster encouraging Americans to grow their own vegetables, featured young beautiful women draped in the colors of the flag. This imagery conveyed that liberty herself was working to contribute to the war effort. Further, encouraging Americans to grow their own food and cut back on certain foods such as sugar, as depicted in this poster of a little boy promising to not eat candy made with sugar gave them a way to contribute to the war effort that did not involve spending money or sending men to fight. With such a wide variety of ways to contribute to the war effort conceived for such a wide variety of citizens of all ages, genders, and even financial means, the committee had left little room for excuses to not support the war.

National Archives Catalog, Created by the U.S. Food Administration[24]



National Archives Catalog, Created by the U.S. Food Administration[25]

[24] U. S. Food Administration, *Sow the Seeds of Victory!.* United States, ca. 1917. Photograph. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/512498
[25] U. S. Food Administration, *A Heroic Sacrifice.* United States, ca. 1917. Photograph. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/512512

Along with hundreds of others, these images were designed to appeal to Americans much as the speeches, newspapers, and other written works were, but they could potentially reach an even larger audience, as even the illiterate might have been able to understand the meaning of some posters. The committee sought to incite patriotism by suggesting that Americans might be unpatriotic if they did not participate in the programs advertised in the posters and imagery. They placed emphasis on emotional appeal. However, much like many other aspects of both the committee and the effort to sell the war itself, these posters were far from perfect. Although the Committee on Public Information did not overarchingly support the publishing of atrocity imagery, the director of the division of pictorial publicity believed in the power of these images. Creel was against them, but despite his objections, many of these types of posters were published by organizations outside of the committee. Due to the sheer amount of imagery being produced, it was likely that the general public would not be able to tell the difference between what was published by the committee and what was not. While the committee was opposed to the publication of bloody carnage, it did support the consistent racial and gender stereotypes that permeated much of the published material. Unfortunately, these stereotypes were still very prominent amongst the general public at this time, so these cartoons were not often negatively received.[26] The massive amounts of propaganda posters and images produced by both the committee and independent organizations truly helped to bring the images of war and home front support to the American public. These images played a crucial role in selling the war, and some remain immortalized in public memory today. Wartime imagery continues to play a major role in the selling of today's wars, but the selling of the world wars using this art was perhaps one of the most extensive visual propaganda campaigns to date.

[26] Funk, "Popular Culture, Art Education, and the Committee on Public Information," 67-73.

The Committee on Public Information possessed immense media power both domestically and internationally. It consisted of fourteen separate departments designed to produce various types of media including essays and cartoons,[27] and it worked with over two hundred thousand organizations ranging from newspapers to Young Men's Christian Association branches.[28] One important branch was the Four Minute Men. In early 1917, a group of Chicago businessmen headed by Donald Ryerson created the group in order to speak at Chicago theaters to educate the public on military training. When Ryerson met Creel later in the year, he convinced him to develop a nationwide program for these Four Minute Men. The program grew exponentially, from 2,500 members in July 1917 to 40,000 in September 1918. These men gave speeches in every state, and even in many territories.[29] The movement was so widespread that even President Wilson gave a speech specifically written to be four minutes long.

However, as popular as the program was, it was not without its flaws. The speakers were urged to follow their scripts closely, deliver their speeches in a lively and animated manner, and to ignore questions from the audience. This allowed the speakers to distribute the information the committee wanted the public to hear, and not leave young men who representing the propaganda campaign at the mercy of the public's tough questions. The men were also cautioned to avoid using clichés, encouraged instead to use new phrasing and appeal to people on all levels of wartime assistance, from something as simple as buying a bond all the way up to signing up for the draft. Guidelines were distributed to the members of the organization advising the men on

[27] In *How We Advertised America,* Creel states that the committee conveyed its messages using printed word, spoken word, motion picture, telegraph, cable, wireless, poster, and sign-board. He also details the role of each committee on pages 7-9.
[28] Fischer, "The Committee on Public Information," 58.
[29] Alaska and Hawaii had not yet received statehood at this time and were considered territories. The Four Minute Men also spoke in other territories such as American Samoa, Guam, and Puerto Rico.

how to best give their speeches and the content they should include.[30] One Four Minute Man guideline advised fifteen seconds worth of opening words and remarks, another fifteen seconds of final appeal, and forty five seconds to describe what the speech was trying to sell.[31] The speakers were provided with these guidelines in the form of bulletins distributed by the committee. Each bulletin contained a careful outline of the issue at hand, providing a detailed structure for the speech. In her article, "World War I, Public Intellectuals, and the Four Minute Men," Lisa Mastrangelo examines these guidelines and notes how they expanded the range of who could deliver these speeches, as they could be useful to a wide variety of speakers, from those with no formal training to those with formal training that they had let lapse.[32]

The primary intention of the Four Minute Men was to explain the meaning of the war and why America was fighting. But this were obscured by the fact that earlier speeches were meant to urge the public to support their country's cause over all others, while men were later instructed to direct their speeches at the fears of the public.[33] Speeches were given vivid titles such as, "The Danger to Democracy," or "The Danger to America." Emphasis was placed on appealing to people's sense of self-preservation. One Los Angeles speaker spoke of starving children in Belgium and France.[34] Surely American citizens did not want their own children to suffer this fate! However, it was likely that the speech would have made them think that this could happen should enemy forces reach America. The speaker then called upon the words of president Wilson to stress to the public that it was every man, woman, and child's duty to make the world safe for democracy. He called upon the American people to send food to Europe and to show that

[30] Lisa Mastrangelo, "World War I, Public Intellectuals, and the Four Minute Men: Convergent Ideals of Public Speaking and Civic Participation." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 12 (4): 607-33.
[31] In this particular case the thing being "sold" is a war bond.
[32] Mastrangelo, "World War I, Public Intellectuals," 615.
[33] "Ibid," 615.
[34] Guy M. Bishop, "Strong Voices and 100 Per Cent Patriotism": The Four-Minute Men of Los Angeles County, 1917-1918." *Southern California Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (1995): 199-200.

America's form of democracy was the proper form of governing for the world, as opposed to the methods of Germany and Austria-Hungary. However, the committee continued to stress absolute credibility even while playing to these fears. This was due to the fact that factual information was held in the highest regard while planning these speeches.[35]

Despite the secrets they kept, the Four Minute Men were an incredibly successful branch of the Committee on Public Information. Their speeches were able to reach people from a wide variety of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. They could reach large audiences because they were given in places such as theaters, and later churches. Another reason for the program's success was the speakers were chosen for a variety of reasons, particularly their standing in the community. In some areas such as Los Angeles and Washington DC upper class, middle-aged, white men were usually chosen. These men ranged from government employees to bankers.[36] However, there was considerable diversity in other places, such as those with large immigrant populations. They gave their speeches in more than ten different languages, and men were recruited from a variety of backgrounds. Another example from a more diverse set of speakers was full-blooded Sioux men giving speeches to their tribes.[37] All these factors meant the men were coming into these speeches with a great deal of respect from their audience, and it was more likely their speech would be listened to, and even taken as the truth.[38]

The Four Minute Men, much like many other branches of the committee, had incredibly far reach. Their speeches were given throughout the United States. The great success of this branch would not have been possible without these ideal combinations of factors that proved a recipe for success: where they gave the speeches, why they gave the speeches, and how they

[35] Mastrangelo, "World War I, Public Intellectuals," 615.
[36] Bishop, "Strong Voices and 100 Per Cent Patriotism": 201.
[37] Mastrangelo, "World War I, Public Intellectuals," 615.
[38] "Ibid," 610.

gave the speeches. Due to the fact that the speeches were given throughout the country they could have potentially reached almost all American citizens. The fact that the speakers were passionate about the material would have translated into their mannerisms and tone as they spoke, lending them credibility.[39] Speaking with excitement and animation would have helped to rally the crowd to the cause and get them excited about helping the war effort. The work of the Four Minute Men was truly ingenious. The rhetoric they used heightened emotions and created hysteria and "what ifs" that spurred the public into action. The movement was largely composed of volunteers, and this created the perfect culture for men to sell the war to their family, friends, and peers.[40]

Historian Stephen Vaughn argues that almost every First Amendment liberty was infringed upon over the course of the war. He notes that despite Creel's books written on the subject of propaganda and censorship, the general public thought the committee was in charge of censorship.[41] However, Vaughn observes that the degree to which the United States was to censor was a hotly debated topic within the government. Creel's message does have a ring of truth to it; he did indeed argue for a more voluntary type of censorship than many of his peers. However, Vaughn mentions that while Creel argued for lesser censorship, he was still a member of the censorship board, as well as an advisory board that oversaw government censorship. He also believes that Creel was more involved in censorship than he admitted, and his oppositions to the practice might have been better received if he stayed off these boards. Vaughn furthers his argument by discussing how Creel's role in censorship and the distribution of propaganda

[39] Bishop, "Strong Voices and 100 Per Cent Patriotism": 207.
[40] "Ibid," 206-207.
[41] The question of whether or not the CPI was in charge of censorship is still debated today due to numerous accounts claiming that it was, and accounts such as Creel's asserting that it was not.

furthered and deepened as the war continued, and how he was given increasing amounts of power to silence dissenters.[42]

Despite Creel's early objections, the Committee on Public Information became an influential censorship organization during the war, and its funding by the government and support of censorship by Wilson allowed these practices to continue and to flourish. While some of the material censored was done so practically, other material included dissenting opinions regarding the committee and America's role in the war itself. To be unpatriotic was equated to savagery,[43] pacifism became a dangerous idea, and as the war continued, there was a growing idea of Germany as the absolute evil that led to continued censorship and suppression.[44] Further, an allied defeat equating to the death of not only millions but of democracy, as well as the idea that only a democracy could protect democracy began to prevail.[45] Throughout the war, the committee held an ideal that free speech could not be absolute during wartime, and that suppression of dangerous ideas was necessary for the war effort.[46] Through its censorship and propaganda campaigns, it communicated these ideals to the American people.

One question that many still ask today is, "was the Committee on Public Information truly the evil organization of censorship many made it out to be?" The answer will never be a simple yes or no. According to Creel and many of his contemporaries, it was not. However, according to Vaughn and many other scholars, it absolutely was. This topic has been debated for over a century and will perhaps continue to be debated for a century more. However, much like

[42] Stephen Vaughn, "First Amendment Liberties and the Committee on Public Information," *The American Journal of Legal History* 23, no. 2 (1979): 95-119.
[43] Funk, "Popular Culture, Art Education, and the Committee on Public Information," 76.
[44] According to Vaughn, Creel attempted to keep pro-German and pro-Bolshevik out of the country because he perceived it as dangerous. He also kept an eye on material leaving the country and attempted to block anything that could be perceived as useful to the enemy.
[45] Bishop, "Strong Voices and 100 Per Cent Patriotism": 119-201.
[46] Vaughn, "First Amendment Liberties," 119.

many other aspects of the American government, one can conclude that the American ideas regarding censorship were far less severe than many of their enemies and even their allies. Despite the backlash the committee would eventually face, it seemed to use its power to support and educate rather than oppress and destroy during the war, and while it may have withheld information from the public, its members truly believed it was necessary at the time. Levels of censorship that may have been necessary in 1918 could be drastically different than the level required in modern times. Further, with the centennial of its dissolution passed, there are few if any surviving members of the committee's inner circle, so modern historians may never know its true intentions.

Regardless of the ongoing debate of the committee's role in censorship, and the extent to which it was practiced, it is safe to say that the Committee on Public Information was extremely successful in their mission of "Selling the War" to the American people. The phrase "selling the war" can have many different meanings. In his article "The Selling of the Great War," Peter Buitenhuis argues the selling of the war was largely based on the propaganda itself. Like many other writers, he details the types of propaganda used, and how each was perceived.[47] It seems to be a general conclusion that the war would not have been sold as well as it was if not for the massive scale of the campaign. Almost no industry remained untouched; there was a way to appeal to patriotism anywhere if one looked hard enough. Had this campaign not been so widespread, one wonders if public support would have eventually been as fervent as it was. However, as successful as the committee was in spreading its message during the war, the aftermath of its dissolution would have lasting effects. For one, Wilson's progressive vision of a peaceful democratic America was all but ruined. Further the distrust the committee created once

[47] Peter Buitenhuis, "The Selling of the Great War," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 7, no. 2 (1976): 139-150.

many of its actions came to the attention of the public, as well as the hysteria many branches such as the four minute men created would last long after the committee was disbanded, and feed into later issues such as the fervent anti-communism attitudes that permeated the rest of twentieth century.[48] The Committee on Public Information will likely always remain a black spot in American government to some, a high point of American democracy to others. However, most seem to agree that its primary mission was a success. The unprecedented amount of information distributed to the public, utilization of new technologies, and a membership strengthened by their dedication to the war effort allowed the Committee on Public Information to successfully sell the war and revolutionize propaganda for the future.

[48] Peter Buitenhuis, "The Selling of the Great War," 150.

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Creel, George. *How We Advertised America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920).

- This book is a personal account by Creel that details the committee itself and how it was organized, as well as how Creel perceived the committee, its mission, and his role in the selling of the war.

Creel, George. *The War, The World, and Wilson* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920).

- This is another personal account by Creel that is less about the committee and the war, and more about president Wilson and Creel's experiences with and perception of him. Creel also discusses and analyzes Wilson's actions before, during, and after World War I.

Flagg, Montgomery James. Artist. *I want you for U.S. Army: nearest recruiting station / James Montgomery Flagg.*

United States, ca. 1917. Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/96507165/.

- This image depicts Uncle Sam dressed in patriotic clothing pointing at the reader and calling him to join the United States Army.

Government War Advertising: *Report of the Division of Advertising, Committee on Public Information*.

- This primary source details the activities of the Division of Advertising during the war effort. It is an official committee document.

Official Bulletin: Committee on Public Information (Washington DC: Committee on Public Information, 1917).

- This document is an official bulletin released by the Committee on Public Information that provides information about the war effort to the public about things such as the current conditions overseas, the effort on the home front, and how Americans could support the war effort.

U. S. Food Administration, *A Heroic Sacrifice.* United States, ca. 1917. Photograph. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/512512

- This poster shows a scrappy young boy and his dog promising not to eat candy made with sugar in order to conserve it for the war effort. This showed that children, even poor scrappy children could provide support for the war effort.

U. S. Food Administration, *Gee!! I wish I were a man I'd Join the Navy.* United States, ca. 1917. Photograph. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/512494.

- This poster shows a woman saying she wishes she were a man, so she could join the United States Navy. The poster shows that it was a manly duty to join the Navy, and that young girls thought so highly of it that they wished they could enlist, encouraging their male counterparts to do so.

U. S. Food Administration, *My Daddy Bought me a Government Bond of the Third Liberty Loan.* United States, ca. 1917. Photograph. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/512633

- This poster shows a young girl holding a liberty bond. It encouraged parents to buy binds as gifts for their children and showed that children were happy to receive them. This showed how young children could support the war effort by asking for these bonds.

U. S. Food Administration, *Sow the Seeds of Victory!.* United States, ca. 1917. Photograph. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/512498

- This poster shows a young woman dressed in patriotic clothing sowing seeds in a garden. It proclaims that Americans growing their own food is sowing the seeds of victory, giving yet another way to sell the war effort.

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- This article is a collection of posters from the propaganda campaigns of World War I, along with analysis by the author of these posters.

Bishop, M. Guy. "Strong Voices and 100 Per Cent Patriotism": The Four-Minute Men of Los Angeles County, 1917-1918." *Southern California Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (1995): 199-214.

- This article details the four minute men of Los Angeles, CA and discusses the makeup of the group, the content they provided, and the author's analysis of this content as well as provides a partial roster of these men.

Blakely, T. George. *Historians on the Homefront: American Propagandists for the Great War* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky; Washington DC: The Committee, 1918)

- This article analyzes propaganda during WWI and how it was used and created by trained historians. It details different mediums such was oral communication and pamphlets.

Buitenhuis, Peter. "The Selling of the Great War," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 7, no. 2 (1976): 139-150.

- This paper gives a history of America in the war leading up to the creation of the CPI. It discusses how the war was "sold" by the committee, and the author provides analysis on the different methods of selling including posters and the four minute men.

Davenport, J. Matthew. *First over There: The Attack on Cantigny, America's First Battle of World War I* (New York: Macmillan, 2015).

- This book tells the story of the battle of Cantigny, America's first major offensive in the war. It briefly discusses some events leading up to the battle, and then goes into more specific detail regarding the fighting itself.

"Exposing the 'Age of Lies': The Propaganda Menace as Portrayed in American Magazines in the Aftermath of World War I," *Journal of American Culture* 12, NO. 1(1989): 35-40.

- This article discusses the reactions to the CPI's propaganda campaign and how American magazines demonized the committee. It aims to discuss how many Americans saw propaganda as evil government control and how the committee was unfavorably viewed in the years directly following the war.

Fischer, Nick. "The Committee on Public Information and the Birth of US State Propaganda," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 35, no. 1 (2016): 51-78.

- This article details the propaganda aspect of the committee, as well as how American wartime propaganda had evolved up to that point. Fischer discusses the different aspects of the propaganda and how it was used during the war, as well touching on how it evolved after the war.

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- This is a short article on Woodrow Wilson and his presidency, and what he did during his time in office. It makes mention of his policies, the war, and specifically his reelection and subsequent bringing of the country into WWI.

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- This article details pictorial propaganda created by the committee and independent artists during the war, as well as analysis of the racist and sexists undertones many of these posters employed in order to appeal to the public. It includes the DESTROY THIS MAD BRUTE poster.

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