



# PERSUASION

This exhibition was made possible, in part, with support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant for Collaborative Undergraduate Research in the Humanities at Allegheny College.

# P E R S U A S I O N

Front Cover: Figueroa, José Manuel. *Huracán*, 1958  
Image courtesy of the collection of Kenneth Pinnow



Exhibitions and other programs are supported in part by Pennsylvania Partners in the Arts (PPA), the regional arts funding partnership of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency. State government funding comes through an annual appropriation by Pennsylvania's General Assembly and from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. PPA is administered in this region by the Arts Council of Erie.

## INTRODUCTION

Darren Lee Miller, Gallery Director and Curator

This exhibition offers a survey of government-sponsored efforts at persuasion in the twentieth century through the use of graphic art. Collaborations between government organizations and artists produced not simply promotional pictures, but what could be described as a form of “high art;” beautifully striking imagery combined with sharp, succinct messages for maximum emotional impact and creation of normative values and a common visual language. American war posters idealized and glorified the war effort to secure the public’s support for its military engagements. The photographs of the FSA/OWI were used as evidence, swaying Congress to vote for New Deal Programs. And the posters of DIVEDCO sought to advertise the benefits of education and government reforms in Puerto Rico. Alternatively, these attempts at ideological unification through the graphic arts were often subverted in satirical political cartoons. Whether it be during economic crisis, war, efforts of public education, or elections, governments and politicians rely on visual communication in order to spread awareness of key issues and to sway public opinion toward majoritarian support. In other words, propaganda is just another form of advertising.

In the run-up-to and during the two world wars, the U.S. government used posters to stimulate civilian backing and bolster national identity. These posters used heroic depictions of men and women serving their country or dramatic images of untimely death to rally citizens to buy war bonds, stay on the job, and support the troops. Bold fonts above images of strong machinery, soldiers, and factory

workers told us that Allied victory would be easily achieved by hard work, or subverted by negligence. There was an underlying eeriness seen in posters depicting dead soldiers that shed light on the side of the war not otherwise seen. In this way, there was a stylistic divide between persuasive techniques. On one side, there was a message of positivism, praising citizen resilience and military strength, while the other acknowledged the underlying anxiety of mortality. Caricatures of enemies and exaggerated representations of soldiers showing conviction in the face of hardship gave the public something to which it could aspire. Some posters depicted not a fallen enemy, but fallen Allied soldiers, reminding us to whom we were responsible. And while the war posters showed the government’s agendas, they also offered a glance into American popular culture during that time.



Lange, Dorothea. *Toward Los Angeles, California*, 1937

Image courtesy of the collections of Allegheny College and the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

The Farm Security Administration (FSA) was created in 1937 by Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s administration to assist farmers whose properties were being foreclosed upon. Years of drought and economic contraction forced many to abandon their farms and migrate westward in search of

employment. The ensuing social upheaval was seen as a potential danger to the stability of our young nation, especially in light of rising Communist and Fascist movements in Europe, where an intractable economic malaise had taken hold after the stock market crash of 1929. The Historical Section of the FSA was charged with collecting photographic documents that would demonstrate the need for federal intervention in private markets, specifically in the form of economic assistance to impoverished farmers. FSA photographers were provided with detailed shooting scripts, and the images were used in a variety of guises and contexts, from readymade “news” stories (written, layout out, and provided to newspapers), to magazine articles, books and pamphlets, evidence on the floor of the senate, and later on the walls of art galleries.

Founded in 1949 by Puerto Rico’s popular governor Luis Muños Marín, and staffed with many of the key players in from the FSA, The Division of Community Education (DIVEDCO) was charged with holding free public workshops and events -- including the screening of didactic films -- to foster participative, democratic solutions to some of the island’s socio-economic problems. From raising awareness about public health and hygiene, to promoting literacy, from encouraging open-minded inclusion and tolerance, to making workers aware of their inalienable rights in the face of tyrannical bosses, the films of DIVEDCO criticized unproductive traditional practices while also identifying and celebrating the unique Puerto Rican-ness of the culture. Most of the artists were trained as painters, and they found ways to translate hand drawn visuals to the serigraphic method (screenprinting on

paper). Some images used flat fields of contrasting colors, blocky shapes, and bold, modern typefaces, while others showed hand-drawn text, detailed line work, and carefully rendered forms.

The posters advertised Puerto Rico’s ideally-imagined future self to its own people while simultaneously celebrating the rich cultural heritage from which the new, modern Puerto Rico would be born. Like the photographs of the FSA/OWI, the posters of DIVEDCO mixed traditional and modernist styles, iconic images, and affective emotional content to not only convey meaning, but also to inculcate a normative point of view. This was the goal, anyway, but one which sometimes ran at odds with the nationalist aspirations of the artists, many of whom advocated for the country’s autonomy and independence from American rule.

All of the works included in this exhibition were made to shape public opinion. Whether the works led individuals toward a singular, shared worldview in line with a government’s agenda, or if they resulted instead in public rejection of an agenda, the propagandistic elements in these works influenced ideas simply through their creation and presentation. By learning how to read the interplay between the visual organization of images by artists and the institutional needs of the patron, we can begin to see how the relationships between normative values, democratic processes, authoritarian sureties, and emotional affect are still with us today. This exhibition offers a space for us to consider the various ways, big and small, in which we are persuaded to believe what we believe, and close readings of images as texts may help us all to ask critical questions in the current post-truth era.

## WAR POSTERS FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF ALLEGHENY COLLEGE

Richard Schindler, Ph.D., Art History, assistance from  
M. Greg Singer, 2015, and Jonathan Yee, 2017

Public opinion and common morale have always been used as military tools to strategically promote a normative ideology that supports militaristic activity, dating back to the times of Roman conquest.<sup>1</sup> Propaganda, by promoting a normative ideology, has become an essential tool used for winning ideological wars. However, the American public has been trained to be wary of the propagandist. Judgments are valued if they are based on quantitative assessment rather than assumed subjectivity: “Most of us have been indoctrinated with the ideal which is said to guide the investigator in the fields of science, namely, to follow truth patiently, dispassionately, wherever it leads, without references to its practical consequences.”<sup>2</sup> The job of the war poster, then, is to inform public opinion, either by appealing to the people’s base emotions, or by presenting facts and information in order to inform viewers rather than manipulate them. The latter was a tactic more commonly used in World War I along with more representational artistic styles. The images and accompanying text had to be succinct and vital, grabbing a passing viewer’s attention and holding it long enough to deliver the necessary emotive impact.

The government turned to commercial artists and advertisers during this time. Shortly after the creation of the Committee of Public Information (or Creel Committee, as it came to be called, after its chairman, George Creel) in 1917, Charles Dana Gibson, whose illustrations were featured

commonly in publications such as *Life Magazine* and *Colliers* volunteered to coordinate the artists who would be designing posters for the government during the war. Other artists, such as J.C. Leyendecker, already famous for his advertisements for Cream of Wheat and Arrow Shirts contributed, as well as fine artists and printmakers such as Joseph Pennell. The images from this war were direct and simple, with simple messages and clear agendas with each poster, such as, “Buy Liberty Bonds,” or, “Eat Less Wheat, Meat, Sugar, and Fats to Save For the Army and Our Allies.” Each poster’s message was uncomplicated and largely factual, using imagery that was familiar to the public. Gibson transformed his “Gibson Girls,” satirical personifications of femininity, into ambulance drivers and Goddesses of Liberty helping the soldiers in France.<sup>3</sup> James Montgomery Flagg’s Uncle Sam poster became an icon for posters throughout both world wars.<sup>4</sup>

Paul Fussell, in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, points out, “If truth is the main casualty in war, ambiguity is another.” Just as war encourages a “habit of simple distinction, simplification, and opposition,”<sup>5</sup> war posters provide a visual language that engages each citizen with simple, memorable, and distinctive images, coupled with razor-sharp words that exhort, encourage, plead, and demand action. The government understood the ways graphic design could create a normative view of society and the how it can inform and mold certain aspects of culture. The job of the war poster was to promote the image of war as right and just, deemphasizing its actual horrors. By visually analyzing two posters: “U.S.A. Bonds: Third Liberty Loan” (1917) by J.C. Leyendecker and “Let’s Give Him

Enough and On Time” (1942) by Norman Rockwell, this essay will seek to give a small sample of the persuasive power war posters had on the American people during the World Wars, and how the graphic elements of these posters helped create a normative and almost glorifying attitude of war.

The United States targeted its campaigns towards the personal responsibility and the patriotism of the citizens. One of the tactics used in both World Wars to provide funds for the war while securing commitment and approval for the war effort was the selling of war bonds; an investment vehicle that is a loan to the government paid by the citizens of the country who are repaid later with interest. During World War I, the then current Secretary of Treasury William Gibbs McAdoo came up with the war bond program known as the Liberty Loan, which had a total of four issues. With the help of the country’s greatest illustrators, the Liberty Loan campaign created propaganda that encouraged citizens to show their patriotism by investing in government bonds.<sup>6</sup>

One of the most famous images emerged during the third liberty loan issue: J.C. Leyendecker’s depiction of a boy scout handing a sword to Lady Liberty. The poster’s intent is to employ the image of a Boy Scout to sell war bonds, and encourage the public to buy the bonds from scouts going door-to-door as part of the campaign to fund the war effort. Although the Boy Scouts sold masses of bonds in the two previous loan campaigns, the third campaign’s goal was to ensure the commitment of the American people to the war cause. With this in mind, the scouts were not allowed to accept any corporate donations or solicit from companies but

instead encouraged to seek out people who had not yet bought bonds.<sup>7</sup> By depicting Liberty as a powerful American warrior and the Boy Scout as her willing ally, the poster reinforces the idea of the war as righteous and worth fighting for.



Leyendecker, J.C. *U.S.A. Bonds. Third Liberty Loan Campaign. Boy Scouts of America, 1917*  
Image courtesy of the Dehne collection of Allegheny College

In “U.S.A. Bonds. Third Liberty Loan Campaign. Boy Scouts of America,” (1917) Leyendecker illustrates a young Boy Scout kneeling as he lifts a sword with its blade inscribed with the words, “Be Prepared” to a goddess, identified as either Lady Liberty herself or as Columbia, the continent’s matron goddess. She is draped in an American flag and holds a large gold shield with the Great Seal of the United States on the front. Both figures are placed on a pedestal, “Weapons for Liberty” is inscribed on the front. Although it is a poster for war bonds, no urgent or demanding text decorates the poster, reflecting the main cause of the campaign: to invite people to help their country out of their own volition. Likewise, as the goddess looks out into the distance, there is no worry or urgency on her face. Already holding a shield implies that the freedom of America has been protected since the war began and remains intact, with no threat able to disarm her. But armed only with a shield, she cannot go on the offensive. With the help of the scout, and by extension the help of American people, she is supplied with sufficient armament for combat. The scout has already done his part, his “good turn daily:” supporting the war effort, thereby protecting American freedom.

In this way the scouting organization’s wholesome image was used to reinforce the righteousness of the war effort. By normalizing the image of the Boy Scout as a perpetuator of American freedom, citizens were more likely to support the cause. Yet the proto-military aspects of the youth organization are implied within the image. The origin of Scouting was in training young men in combat skills and adaptive thinking before they

entered war zones.<sup>8</sup> Just as the sword’s inscription implies, the scout is prepared. Engraved upon the blade of the sword are the words of the Scout Motto, serving as a reminder to boy scouts and general viewers that being prepared is the best offense. The scout is in full uniform, even sporting a coiled rope and a satchel. No firearms, munitions, or any modern weaponry are in sight. Even the background, reminiscent of a sky on a fair afternoon, is free from bombing planes or dark ominous clouds. Only the medieval weaponry of the sword and shield appear, historical symbols of glory, honor, and justice wrested through violent effort.

However, not all posters had such hyperbolic glorifications of war. Many posters used shockingly realistic imagery in order to frighten the American people and harshly remind them what was at stake if they were to lose the war. In a poster from World War II: “Let’s give him Enough and On Time” by Norman Rockwell, the harshness of war is made frighteningly tangible thanks to Rockwell’s stark realistic style. Commissioned in 1942 by the U.S. Army Ordnance Corps after the battles of Bataan and Corregidor, this poster reflects the uncertainty and harshly deflated American spirit felt by the country after those two hard losses.<sup>9</sup> The dark imagery serves as a grim reminder for the American public to ensure steady munitions production so as not to hamstring the efforts of Allied troops.

A soldier in a tattered uniform crouches over a Browning M1917 machine gun,<sup>10</sup> his hands clutching the grip and his finger pulling the trigger, firing at an unseen enemy. Despite the machine gun’s stationary position, the soldier appears to be backed into a corner, literally by the enemy closing

in on him, and figuratively by the cramped borders of the poster's visual plane. Though the soldier is firing at the enemy, his posture suggests that he is also using the gun as a makeshift barrier to hide from returning fire. Despite his unfavorable circumstances, the soldier is poised for battle, concentrating at his task at hand: deterring the enemy. However, he is unaware of his depleted ammunition supplies; the shells of bullets piling on his feet and the empty ammunition tape winding beside them. The only ones aware of it are the viewers: the American people, especially those working in the ammunition factories.

Though the poster depicts the use of a weapon with a fast firing speed and links it to the suggestion that the scene is taking place during a stressful time in combat, the image does not embody action, but an almost meditative tranquility. Steam rises from the gun's water box but has an eerie, misty quality to it. A single bullet shell hangs suspended in mid-air. The lighting on the soldier is dramatic, yet oddly bright and staged. Unlike in Rockwell's previous works, where his figures are often in humorous action,<sup>11</sup> this poster takes the common idea of the perilous, electrifying act of being on the battlefield and distills it into a single moment; frozen, stagnant, in the uncertain darkness of war, leaving viewers to wonder: "What will happen next," and, "What can I do to help?"

The only element that breaks from this grim reality is the bottom third of the poster, a bright yellow backdrop with the words: "Let's Give Him Enough and On Time" written in bright red, cursive script. The script acts as a firm but gentle nudge to remind workers in munitions factories where their

production goes. The message is still made dire because of the bright red color, reminding one of urgency and blood.

Despite this grim imagery, Rockwell manages to depict an individual who does not draw pity to himself, but rather inspires others. The poster depicts a man, vulnerable and exposed, down to his last bullet, and although his face is hidden, his sense of determination is tangible in his posture. What he lacks in ammunition he makes up for in spirit. He is not glorified, but is depicted in the most mortal and human way possible: a man risking his life for his country and his people. His anonymity makes it so that it could be anyone, letting viewers impose their own identities on him, whether it be a friend or family member in the war, or the ideals of justice and heroism.

These are two examples of the way that Americans citizen warriors were depicted in propaganda during two world wars of the twentieth century. This appeal for support from the government sparked innovations in graphic design and advertising, and brought together the nation's greatest artists and designers of the times. The propaganda produced during both world wars can be viewed as one of the largest collaborative artistic efforts in recent memory, involving aspiring artists through contests and juries, as well as already well-established illustrators and printmakers.

Leyendecker's Boy Scout and Rockwell's soldier mirror Dorothea Lange's farmers and Walker Evans' churches, creating a strong body of works that are fundamentally American. Together, these images work to inspire Americans not through fear and hate of the enemy, but through patriotism and



Rockwell, Norman. *Let's Give Him Enough and On Time*, 1942  
Image courtesy of the Dehne collection of Allegheny College

love of country to support the war effort through means provided by the government: Liberty Loans, enlistment, rationing, etc. They provide an image of a nation maintaining pride and dignity through trying times. In contrast to the FSA/OWI photographs, however, the posters have no pretension

of being unmanipulated documentations of real events. They reflect instead the unambiguous core of the nation's ideologies: this idea of patriotic duty, that all citizens are responsible for each other and that everyone from the soldiers on the front lines to the workers on the factory lines play an equal role in the outcome of the war.

## CITATIONS AND CONTENT NOTES

1. George Creel, "Propaganda And Morale," *American Journal of Sociology* (1941), 47, no. 3. p. 340.
2. "War Information Series" (Washington, D.C.: Committee on Public Relations February, 1918), No. 12, pp. 3-4.
3. George Vogt, "When Posters Went to War: How America's Best Commercial Artists Helped Win World War I," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 2001, 44. Accessed July 29, 2014.
4. Flag's poster was itself based on a British poster that depicted Lord Kitchener. Other artists imitated the same poster as well, including John Bull in his 1915 poster, "Who's absent? Is it you?"
5. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 79.
6. Lawrence D. Schuffman, "The Liberty Loan Bond," *Financial History* 2007, 18. Accessed July 31, 2014, [http://www.moaf.org/exhibits/checks\\_balances/woodrow-wilson/materials/LibertyBonds.pdf](http://www.moaf.org/exhibits/checks_balances/woodrow-wilson/materials/LibertyBonds.pdf)
7. T.P. McDermott. "USA's Boy Scout and World War I Liberty Loan Bonds." *SOSSI Journal*. (2002): 70. Accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.sossi.org/journal/scouts-ww1-liberty-bonds.pdf>
8. "B, Lessons from the Varsity of Life. Chapter IX." 2002.
9. "Stand-To! - U.S. Army." 2009. Accessed July 30, 2014, <http://www.army.mil/standto/archive/2007/05/24/>
10. "WWII Weapons - Browning Machine Guns." 2008. Accessed July 28, 2014, <http://users.skynet.be/jeeper/browning.html>
11. "Neither Simple Nor Innocent - Johns Hopkins Magazine." 2014. Accessed July 28, 2014 <<http://pages.jh.edu/~jhum-ag/0407web/rockwell.html>>

## OTHER WORKS CONSULTED

- "About Norman Rockwell." Norman Rockwell Museum. <http://www.nrm.org/about-2/about-norman-rockwell/> (accessed July 28, 2014).
- Baden-Powell, Robert. "Chapter X: Life Number Two - The Boy Scouts and Girl Guides." In *Lessons from the Varsity of Life*. London: Stevens Publishing, 1992. 137-157.
- Creel, George. "Propaganda And Morale." *American Journal of Sociology* 47, no. 3 (1941): 340-351.
- McDermott, T.P. "USA's Boy Scouts and World War I: Liberty Loan Bonds." *SOSSI Journal* May/June (2002): 68-73. <http://www.sossi.org/journal/scouts-ww1-liberty-bonds.pdf> (accessed July 31, 2014).
- Schuffman, Lawrence D. "The Liberty Loan Bond: 2007 Marks the 90th Anniversary of the First War Bond of the 20th Century." *Financial History*, Spring 2007. [http://www.moaf.org/exhibits/checks\\_balances/woodrow-wilson/materials/LibertyBonds.pdf](http://www.moaf.org/exhibits/checks_balances/woodrow-wilson/materials/LibertyBonds.pdf) (accessed July 31, 2014).
- U.S. Army. "STAND TO!" Stand-To! <http://www.army.mil/standto/archive/2007/05/24/> (accessed July 28, 2014).
- Vogt, George. "When Posters Went to War: How America's Best Commercial Artists Helped Win World War I." *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 84, no. 2 (2001): 38-47. [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org) (accessed July 29, 2014).
- "WWII Weapons - Browning Machine Guns." *WWII Weapons - Browning Machine Guns*. <http://users.skynet.be/jeeper/browning.html> (accessed August 8, 2014).

# FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION AND OFFICE OF WAR ADMINISTRATION PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF ALLEGHENY COLLEGE

Darren Lee Miller, M.F.A., Photography

From 1935 – 1944, Roy Emerson Stryker headed a group of government-sponsored photographers documenting rural life in the United States of America. Working in the Historical Section of the Farm Security Administration (originally the Resettlement Administration 1935-37, and then later the Office of War Information, 1942-44), Stryker assembled a team of over forty skilled photographers, creating a repository of over a hundred thousand images.<sup>1</sup> The most famous images were created by a small core of photographers: Jack Delano, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Arthur Rothstein and Ben Shahn.<sup>2</sup> It was the work of this group that brought the power of still imagery to the attention of decision-makers in government. Stryker's role as administrator was to use the images as persuasive publicity for President Roosevelt's economic team, to generate public support for the New Deal, (Lesy 9-12). Later recontextualization of the photographs, in books and gallery exhibitions like this one, worked to blur the lines between high and low art, state-sponsored speech, and the aesthetic voices of individual image makers.

The Farm Security Administration (FSA) was one of a number of depression-era economic relief programs invented by the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Originally created as the successor to the Resettlement Administration (RA) in 1937 under the Department of Agriculture, this

federal bureaucracy sought to ease the plight of drought-stricken farm workers by offering a number of incentives for soil conservation and resettlement away from desertified areas (Hagen ii). Headed by Columbia University economics professor Rexford Tugwell,<sup>3</sup> the agency and its programs were staunchly opposed by Republicans who accused Tugwell of "importing leftist, academic theories into the President's inner circle," (Curtis 9). The photographic arm of the agency was named the Historical Section. Tugwell called upon his former student, Roy Stryker, to collect visual documents of rural poverty. The purpose of the image repository was not only to record the ravages of the dust bowl (as the Texas-Oklahoma-Dakota drought was known), but also to provide visual materials for the education of the American public and their elected leaders, (Stryker and Wood 7). In other words, Tugwell and other members of Roosevelt's administration sought to build support for the idea that government intervention – instead of traditional reliance on free markets – could alleviate agrarian poverty and thus bring an end to the Great Depression.

Roy Stryker "used photographs to convey to his students the connections between economic theory and world reality" while teaching at Columbia University, (Plattner 7). The economic theories to which one subscribes are largely a matter of education and class. Stryker described himself as a "New Dealer, the son of a populist," (15) and so his politics are revealed to us. In the mid 1920's, while they were still both at Columbia, Stryker worked with Tugwell to co-author a textbook titled, *American Economic Life and the Means of its Improvement*. Stryker's contribution to the book was not in

the body of the text, but in choosing, designing, and captioning illustrative images, (Curtis 6-7).

Stryker used text with photographs in ways that often made the images subordinate to the words. He recontextualized photographs to suit the illustrative needs of the book. In this way, Stryker exercised a great deal of control over how the chosen photographs were ultimately understood. In Figure 1 (last page of this booklet), we can see how Stryker later used images by his FSA photographers to construct ready-made news stories, pamphlets, brochures, and posters that either stressed the need for new legislation or touted the successes of existing federal relief programs.

All of the FSA images can be thought of as straight photography (i.e. not manipulated), but to what extent were the images framed, composed, and contextualized to support a certain political view? What do we make of cases where the photographer has done most of the ideological finessing instead of Roy Stryker? If images are presented through a particular political lens, does that necessarily make them propagandistic? What do the iconic images from the FSA signify to us? Let's begin to explore these questions by examining one of the most famous of all the FSA photographs, *Migrant Mother* by Dorothea Lange. According to the Library of Congress American Memory website, Lange shot five images of the stranded woman and her children before getting back into her car and continuing down the road. Included are the famous frame and two outtakes. First, I want to look closely at the famous image, the left-most frame on the next page. A woman sits facing the camera, flanked by two children. They cleave to their mother and look away

so that we see their backs. An infant's head rests near the woman's left breast. The mother is looking into the distance and the fingertips of her right hand are barely touching the corner of her mouth. Her face is a bit gaunt, deep lines run across her forehead and the corners of her mouth are turned slightly down. She looks worried. Because the view is tightly cropped, one does not get a clear indication of location or circumstance. All that is clear is a feeling of uncertainty. In her notes, Lange observes that the family was near starving.

Nipomo, Calif. Mar. 1936. Migrant agricultural worker's family. Seven hungry children. Mother aged 32, the father is a native Californian. Destitute in a pea pickers' camp, because of the failure of the early pea crop. These people had just sold their tent in order to buy food. Most of the 2,500 people in this camp were destitute, (Library of Congress American Memory website).

The outtakes provide answers to some questions and raise others. They are under a tarp, but we wonder if it is where they live. In the middle image, we clearly see the faces of a child and the infant. In the right-most image, we see four children, one of them a teenager. Lange records seven children in the caption, but we only see four. Outtakes show that Lange playfully experimented with variations in composition – including long shots, close-up shots, and images of the children grinning – but the well-known image on the left is the most powerful and communicative photograph. The face and arm of the mother are luminous, and she is flanked by the tousled, sun-streaked hair, and wrinkled clothes



Lange, Dorothea. *Destitute pea pickers in California. Mother of seven children. Age thirty-two. Nipomo, California, Mar. 1936*  
Image courtesy of the collections of Allegheny College and the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

worn her cowering children. We are brought in and out of the frame by her distant gaze and the arch-like shape formed by the arrangement of the three figures, like the arrangement of a triptych altarpiece or a stained glass window. It may take the viewer a moment to notice the swaddled infant, cradled in its mother's arm. Formally, the composition evokes the Christian religious icon, Madonna and Child, the perennial depiction of baby Jesus in his mother's arms. It could be that knowledge of the Madonna/Child trope was operating on at least a subconscious level when Lange took the photo, and if one were engaged in a photography project aimed at helping the poor, it would be difficult to pass up as powerful and as multifaceted a signifier as Mary.

Lange's outtakes clearly show premeditation, including stage directing the shoot. Carefully posing young children and an infant in a picture with their mother must have been as heart wrenching as it was challenging. Just as important, though,

were prevailing mores. Having seven children was not typical among middle- and upper class families at the time. In *Mind's Eyes, Mind's Truth*, author James Curtis notes that:

Family size had declined in twentieth-century America. [...] Among business and professional elites, groups that exerted the strongest influence on public policy decisions, the ideal family contained no more than three children, (52).

If the woman is thirty-two and her oldest child is an adolescent, then the mother was a very young bride. Without revealing that the woman had been a teen mother who may have been pregnant almost every year, viewers could, perhaps, withhold judgment. By omitting such unseemly details, *Migrant Mother* was presented as an ordinary woman who had fallen prey to extraordinary hardship. The woman in the picture is an icon whose meaning we

are meant to understand without explanation. She represented everyone the government was trying to help. To some, she may have even been a reminder of Christian ideals like generosity and mercy.

Migrant Mother remained nameless by design, not oversight. Stryker had his photographers follow contemporary social science techniques in captioning their images. Subjects photographed, like citizens interviewed, remained anonymous, (Curtis 49).

Contrast this with popular political images of “welfare queens” in the 1980’s and 90’s, women who were portrayed to be free riding, gaming the system. It’s no mistake that those mothers were understood to be black and urban. Recent Republican successes in undermining the social safety net created by Roosevelt Democrats and their successors relies upon demonizing inner-city women who, we are told, feel entitled to that which they neither earn nor deserve. Regardless of the fact that those receiving public assistance in the USA are just as likely to be rural and white (United States Census Bureau), the contemporary faces publicized by right-wing partisans are people of color and those who are otherwise “un-American.”

Roy Stryker hired photographers for their skill in creating beautiful, compellingly persuasive pictures. The information conveyed by the images sought to influence people to vote in favor of New Deal programs. The images conveyed potent emotions, but the meanings were shaped by context and distribution. FSA photographers were provided detailed “shooting scripts,” written by Stryker himself, explaining desirable subjects and themes (see fig. 2,

inside back cover). Attempting to draw the viewer’s attention to political ideas while failing to acknowledge that such an attempt is propaganda would be in keeping with the goals of any regime attempting to control public perception; but, the goal of the New Deal was not Socialism, but a continuation and solidification of the existing form of American Capitalism.

Charity is an argument for the preservation of wealth, and reformist documentary (like the appeal for free and compulsory education) represented an argument within a class about the need to give a little in order to mollify the dangerous classes below, (Rosler 304).

This is why Roosevelt, the old-money grandson of an industrialist, would work to keep the economic structure of Capitalism intact by enacting the reforms and programs of the New Deal. Ruxford Tugwell, Roy Stryker, and Franklin Roosevelt all believed that if the disparity between farm and nonfarm income could be reduced, then farmers would, with their newfound affluence, go shopping. “Everyone would have money to spend, the factories would run again, the farm economy would be the new engine of growth. Happy Days,” (Lesy 11). FSA photographs idealized poverty, as is suggested by the title of the FSA/OWI retrospective book co-authored by Stryker, *In This Proud Land*. People and places looked poor but not beaten. The photos showed that the wholesome goodness of the American way of life would triumph over hardship. While at the FSA, Roy Stryker traded in the currency of hope.

In Walker Evans' image, Roadside stand near Birmingham, Alabama, we see two boys playfully showing-off watermelons at a food stand that advertises fresh caught fish. Full baskets of eggs, melons, and other fresh produce are spread-out in front of the store. The people in the image, despite living in the nadir of the depression, look well fed and happy. The fecundity in the image reminds us that, even though many had fallen upon hard times, the nation still possessed great wealth. Both of these images were taken prior to the Office of War Information years (Evans left the FSA long before), but the feeling in the images foretells the persuasive strategies of Stryker's OWI team.

With the advent of World War II, the Historical Division was transferred to the Office of War Information (OWI) and Stryker's task as a propagandist changed. Instead of focusing on rural poverty, Stryker sent his photographers to take pictures of America's urban industrial might and wholesome rural idylls. In Jack Delano's images we see the soaring, vaulted ceilings of a Chicago's grand Union Station, decorated with model bombers, shafts of reverent light framing the buzzing pedestrian traffic below. A tap dance class in Ames, Iowa shows disciplined rigor, evoking images of cadets marching. We see a nation at peace but ramping up for war. Collectively, the OWI images functioned to build public morale in the face of the Second World War in a generation, to convince Americans that they were on the right side of history, and to reinforce the concept of the United States of America as a shining exception among the world's nations.

Shortly after the war ended Jack Delano, together with his wife Irene and their colleague Edwin

Roskam, carried this utopian vision forward when they were appointed to lead the graphics unit of the Division of Community Education, the Puerto Rican government's program of visual inculcation. And although DIVEDCO's task was uniquely Puerto Rican, its mission and methods were born from the prior work of the FSA/OWI.

## CONTENT NOTES

1. Some of the authors I've cited say there were 150,000 images while other sources claim ¼ million. The one thing upon which they all agree is that roughly 75,000 negatives were punched-through by Stryker as he destroyed images he thought were "no good."
2. I have left out many important names because I want to focus strictly on images of two things: rural poverty and American industrial might.
3. And later, he was the last federally appointed governor of Puerto Rico from 1941-46.

## WORKS CITED

Bendavid-Val, Leah. *Propaganda & Dreams*. Zurich: Edition Stemmler, 1999. Print.

Curtis, James. *Mind's Eye, Mind's Truth* (FSA Photography Reconsidered). Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991. Print.

Hagen, Charles. *American Photographers of the Depression*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985. Print.

Haig, Akmajian. *The Years of Bitterness and Pride*. Farm Security Administration, FSA Photographs 1935-1943. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975. Print.

Lesy, Michael. *Long Time Coming: A Photographic Portrait of America, 1935-1943*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002. Print.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. *American Memory*. America from the Great Depression to WWII, Black-and-White Photographs from the FSA-OWI, 1935-1945. Web. 31 Jul. 2013. <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fahome.html>>

(The website listed above is also the source of all high resolution downloads used to print the photographs in this exhibition and some of the figures in this essay)

Plattner, Steve W. *Roy Stryker: U.S.A., 1943-1950*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983. Print.

Rosler, Martha. 3 Works: 1. *The Restoration of High Culture in Chile*; 2. *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*; 3. *in, around, and afterthoughts* (on documentary photography). Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2006. Print.

SCALA, Florence/ART RESOURCE, N.Y., 2006. Web. 6 Aug. 2013. <<http://www.scalararchives.com>>

Stryker, Roy, and Nancy Wood. *In This Proud Land 1935-1943, as seen in the FSA photographs*. New York: New York Graphic Society, 1975. Print.

United States Census Bureau, 21.3 Percent of U.S. Population Participates in Government Assistance Programs Each Month. Washington, D.C., May 28, 2015. Web. 14 Sep. 2016. <<http://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-97.html>>

University of New Mexico Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, *The American Image, The Photographs of John Collier Jr.* Web. 6 Aug. 2013. <<http://americanimage.unm.edu>>

## POSTERS OF THE DIVISION OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION FROM THE COLLECTION OF KENNETH PINNOW

Kenneth Pinnow, Ph.D., History

The posters in this section of the exhibition are part of the broader story of the modern state and its use of art to mobilize and shape the citizenry. Specifically, they are the product of governmental programs that were aimed at developing Puerto Rico economically and defining it culturally within the framework of American capitalism and political dominance. The result was a contradictory “developmentalist utopia” that delineated a distinct Puerto Rican culture around certain values, practices, and populations that were simultaneously being undermined by the government’s own modernizing agenda.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the posters in this exhibition are a product of the tensions surrounding Puerto Rican identity and reinforce the fact that states frequently speak with multiple—indeed conflicting—voices to their public. They also remind us that the state can be the catalyst for making high quality art even if this was not the original or primary intention.

The origins of the Division of Community Education (División de Educación de la Comunidad, or DIVEDCO) are closely tied to changes in Puerto Rico’s relationship to the United States. In 1948, Puerto Ricans elected their first governor—Luis Muñoz Marín—following the United States’ takeover of their island in 1898. While negotiating a degree of autonomy that was formalized in the “free association” or commonwealth status that continues to this day, Muñoz Marín promoted an industrial economy through incentives for American corpora-

tions and sought to uplift and integrate the mostly rural population through instruction.<sup>2</sup>

In 1949, as part of these aspirations, Muñoz Marín introduced the bill to the Puerto Rican Senate that established the Division of Community Education. The law’s preamble warned against the civic “unemployment” of the community and saw the “tool of basic education” as the means by which the community would become self-conscious and self-empowered. Ideally, “problems of health, education, co-operation, [and] social life [would be solved] through the action of the community itself.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, DIVEDCO was from the outset envisioned as a vehicle for transforming relationships and self-identities with the goal of creating a more active, unified, and autonomous citizenry that was aware of its rights and responsibilities.

DIVEDCO’s methods were rooted in the New Deal and individuals whose work is represented elsewhere in this exhibition. Its nucleus had been created a few years earlier by several veterans of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Farm Security Administration (FSA), which had been started by the last non-Puerto Rican appointed governor of the island, Rexford Guy Tugwell. Edwin Roskam, together with Jack and Irene Delano, established an educational film and graphics unit in the Department of Recreation and Parks (1946). The Delanos then went on to become leading figures in DIVEDCO during its first years of existence, bringing with them important artistic techniques and the experience of using visual media as a way to both spread information and promote agendas.<sup>4</sup>

While sharing the form of New Deal projects, the work and substance of DIVEDCO reflect-



Diaz, Juan. *El Puente*, 1951-52  
Image courtesy of the collection of Kenneth Pinnow

ed the particularities of Puerto Rico and broader trends within Latin American art and politics.

Most of the writers, filmmakers, and graphic artists within DIVEDCO were nationalists who aspired to independence for Puerto Rico and believed that art could be a tool for promoting a democratic citizenry and resisting cultural assimilation within the United States. Although their politics went beyond the official position of the Muñoz Marín administration, they were given relative autonomy and quickly made DIVEDCO a vibrant center of artistic experimentation and training.<sup>5</sup>

The posters in this exhibition were produced by DIVEDCO's Graphics Unit. In addition to promoting films, the unit's artists created two commemorative Christmas posters each year as well as posters advertising important cultural events. They formed part of the larger Production Division that produced over 100 films and 40 booklets before DIVEDCO's closure in 1989. Organized around selected themes, these materials were delivered to rural communities by field staff and promoted participatory democracy by dramatizing social problems and then giving people the knowledge and tools to solve them as a community. This approach included the encouragement of certain principles (personal hygiene, economic cooperation, and human dignity), criticism of harmful practices and traditions (bossism, exploitation, and sexism), and the identification of values or cultural forms that were thought to characterize Puerto Rican-ness (*puertorriqueñidad*).<sup>6</sup>

Despite the didactic and ephemeral nature of posters, particularly given the harsh tropical climate, DIVEDCO transcended the divide between mass culture and high art.<sup>7</sup> The source of Puerto Rico's rich graphic arts tradition, it became a collec-

tive center for developing and perfecting the techniques of silk-screening. Irene Delano had learned these during her time with the WPA's Federal Arts Project and selected the serigraphic method for its versatility and low costs. The artists and their apprentices in DIVEDCO made the posters by hand, although to speed up production and meet demand Jack Delano constructed a conveyor belt that would pass the posters under infrared lights for faster drying times.<sup>8</sup>

Artistically, the posters of DIVEDCO reflect their creators' training as painters, the art of the New Deal, and the social realism of Mexico. Lorenzo Homar, as exemplified in "Una voz en la montaña" ("A Voice in the Mountain," 1951), attempted to produce a painterly effect in his early posters through the use of a silkscreen pencil. His creative deployment of hand-made lettering also became a hallmark of the Graphic Unit's productions.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, the flat lines, angular shapes, and use of color in Rafael Tufiño's first poster "Pedacito de tierra" ("A Small Piece of Land," 1951) show the influence of Irene Delano and her training at the WPA.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the use of linocuts and woodcut printing techniques in the DIVEDCO pamphlets and the attempt to duplicate this effect in posters—José M. Figueroa's "Huracan" ("Hurricane," 1958, see this booklet's cover)—reflect the artists' close relationship with Mexican art. Finally, we see examples of more abstract styles in the posters of José Meléndez Contreras—"Intolerancia" ("Intolerance," 1967)—and Eduardo Vera Cortés—"El puente" ("The Bridge," 1965-8).<sup>11</sup>

The content and form of the posters suggest their didactic purpose. Many posters included blank

spaces where the field agents could write in the specific times and locations of the film screenings or community activities sponsored by DIVEDCO. Moreover, the artists selected images that would best represent the content or message of the movies. Some posters, such as Homar's "Modesta" (1955) or Tufiño's "El cacique" ("The Boss," 1960), used familiar human types who communicated both positive and negative traits. Others, however, reflected the artists' attempts to convey key ideas in a broader visual language. For example, Carlos Osorio's poster for "Juan sin seso" ("Juan has no Brains," 1960) is highly suggestive of the film's warning about the dangers of falling prey to modern advertising. The central figure raises his hand to imply his complete loss of critical thought while the barely visible advertisements embedded in the background imply the ubiquity and nefariousness of subliminal marketing techniques.

DIVEDCO's posters, together with its pamphlets and films, were simultaneously helping to define and affirm an "iconography of the autochthonous."<sup>12</sup> Their creators sought recognizable images or cultural forms that expressed idealized visions of the people. Thus, native musical instruments (the cuatro and güiro), religious festivals (the public serenades of Christmastime or the veneration of the Three Kings), and folk art (the woodcarvings of saints or santos) were elevated to the status of cultural icons that exhibited Puerto Rican distinctiveness. Notable in this respect are Rafael Tufiño's Christmas poster "Felicidades 1967," which depicted the saint carver Don Zoilo Cajigas and built on a similar poster for the film "El santero" ("The Carver of Saints"), and Carlos Raquel Rivera's "Nenén de la

ruta mora” (“Boy of the Moorish Way,” 1956), which advertised a movie that featured carnival celebrations among the island’s African descendants.

Ironically, the DIVEDCO project was documenting the erosion of the very world that it was seeking to create and preserve. Its idealization of the rural community overlooked the steady migration of individuals to the city or to the United States mainland. Its espousal of agricultural or economic cooperatives—Carlos Raquel Rivera’s “El yugo” (“The Yoke,” 1960) and Antonio Maldonado’s “El de los cabos blancos” (“One Lucky Horse,” 1955)—was at odds with the with the government’s overall message of modernization within American capitalism. Thus, the posters of the Division of Community Education encapsulate the contradictions of Puerto Rican culture and politics and suggest the tensions between the transformational aspirations of artists and the state.

## CITATIONS

1. Antonio Lauria-Perricelli, “Images and Contradictions: DIVEDCO’s Portrayal of Puerto Rican Life,” *CENTRO Journal* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1990-1991), 94-5.
2. Cati Marsh Kennerley, “Cultural Negotiations: Puerto Rican Intellectuals in a State-Sponsored Community Education Project, 1948-1968,” *Harvard Educational Review* 73, no. 3 (2003), 155-7.
3. Un programa de educacion de la comunidad en Puerto Rico/Community Education in Puerto Rico (New York: RCA International Division, n.d.), 1.
4. Shifra Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States* (Chicago, 1994), 418-21.
5. Marsh Kennerley, “Cultural Negotiations,” 161-3.
6. Lauria-Perricelli, “Images and Contradictions,” 93-6.
7. Approximately 7,000 copies of each poster per film were made for distribution across Puerto Rico. Goldman, *Dimensions*, 424.
8. Goldman, *Dimensions*, 424-25; and Teresa Eckmann, “The Latin American Poster: Image, Message, and Means,” in *Latin American Posters: Public Aesthetics and Mass Politics*, ed. Russ Davidson (New Mexico, 2006), 39-41.
9. Lorenzo Homar: *Abrapalabra. La letra mágica* (Carteles 1951-1999) (San Juan, 1999), 198-9; and Goldman, *Dimensions*, 425.
10. Rafael Tufiño: *Pintor del pueblo/Painter of the People* (San Juan, 2003), 209-10.
11. Teresa Tió, *El cartel en Puerto Rico* (Naucaupan de Juárez, 2003).
12. This phrase is borrowed and recontextualized from Dara E. Goldman’s, “Virtual Islands: The Reterritorialization of Puerto Rican Spatiality in Cyberspace,” in *Hispanic Review* Vol. 72, No. 3 (Philadelphia 2004), 375-400.

[illegible]

Fig. 1. An example of a ready-made news story from the FSA, printed in *The New York Times Magazine*, January 10, 1937. Image courtesy of the collections of Allegheny College and the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

From R. E. Stryker  
To Russell Lee,  
Arthur Rothstein,  
in particular

FSA  
February 19, 1942

- I. Production of foods-fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry, eggs, milk and milk products, miscellaneous products.
  - a. Packaging and processing of above
  - b. Picking, hauling, sorting, preparing, drying, canning packaging, loading for shipping
  - c. Field operations -planting; cultivation, sowing
  - d. Dramatic pictures of fields, show "pattern" of the country; get feeling of the productive earth, boundless acres.
  - e. Warehouses filled with food, raw and processed, cans boxes, bags, etc.
- II. Poultry--large-scale operations  
Hatching, shipping chicks  
Get a few pictures "cute" of little chicks  
Real close-ups  
Eggs--get "pictorial" shots of eggs in baskets, in piles, in crates (get pattern pictures for posters)  
Dressed poultry  
Chickens in pens and yards  
Feeding operations
- III. General farming -- get pictures of representative small farms (California -- Texas) General farming, buildings, farmer & family, farmer at work.
- IV. Small town under war conditions  
Select a small town some distance from large cities and make a camera study of how this town looks under war conditions.  
Civilian Defense Activities  
Meetings of all kinds--Red Cross  
Farm groups, etc.  
Look for a town near an Army Camp  
Signs--stores, filling stations, etc.  
Selective Service  
Registration of new age groups  
Home gardens, Civilian Defense Activities  
Schools, More neighborliness (Any evidence of this?)
- V. Auto and auto tire rationing. A civilian population gets off rubber tires. (Many things should be photographed now before disappearance of marked decline. Old tires piles  
Used car lots. Especially when enormous number of cars are stored.
- Signs--any sign which suggests rubber (or other commodity) shortage, rationing, etc. Horse-drawn vehicles, Blacksmith shops, harness shops, buggies, delivery wagons, hors drays (for trucks), bicycles. (What will happen to roadside hamburger stand?)  
Watch for closed filling stations or eat joints.
- VI. The highway  
Watch for any signs which indicate a country at war. "Man at Work" pictures. We are still short of these pictures. These should include:  
highway building - big stuff, e.g., in the Rocky Mts. of major highways.  
Repair and maintenance.  
Emphasize the men.
- VII. (for R. Lee) Mining, California, Arizona, New Mexico  
Get pictures showing increased activities among prospective and small operating outfits.  
Mercury--near San Jose, California. Cement, Kaiser's cement plant near San Jose, California.  
(See Jack Tolan. Also Sat. Eve. Post article on Kaiser.)  
Miners--faces & miners at work
- VIII. The land  
The long shots for a "feel" of the country  
Details
- IX. People - we must have at once:  
Pictures of men, women and children who appear as if they really believed in the U.S. Get people with a little spirit. Too many in our file now paint the U.S. as an old person's home and that just about everyone is too old to work and too malnourished to care much what happens. (Don't misunderstand the above. FSA is still interested in the lower income groups and we want to continue to photograph this group.)  
We particularly need young men and women who work in our factories, the young men who build our bridges, roads, dams and large factories.  
Housewives in their kitchen or in the yard picking flowers.  
More contented-looking old couples--woman sewing, man reading; sitting on porch; working in garden; sitting in park; coming from church; at picnics, at meetings.

Fig. 2. An example of a "Shooting Script" from Roy Stryker, February 19, 1942.

Reproduced with permission from the University of New Mexico Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, *The American Image, The Photographs of John Collier Jr.*



ALLEGHENY COLLEGE



Doane Hall of Art  
Box 23, 520 North Main Street  
Meadville, PA 16335-3902

ph: 814.332.4365  
fax: 814.332.6238

[www.allegHENY.edu/artgalleries](http://www.allegHENY.edu/artgalleries)

