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Obscure Figure

7:47 AM, December 7, 1941. This was a perfect, beautiful day in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii at the time. Mostly every soldier was sound asleep. The hospitals were vacant of soldiers and full of cheerful nurses. 7:48 AM, December 7, 1941, the first air attack by the Japanese begins on Pearl Harbor. Peace turns to chaos; calmness of soldiers turns to fear; the cheerful nurses are now turned frantic because they know what is about to come. According to a report issued by the Congress's Senate Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, over 2,400 Americans were killed in this one surprise attack (64). Operation Z, as declared by the Japanese Imperial General Headquarters, is what finally launched the United States of America into World War II. This war would result in what most historians agree upon, around 50 million deaths. Allies were pitted against the Axis for the purpose of destroying the Nazi's Third Reich. After America was attacked in Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, essentially every American was up in arms about the matter and was one hundred percent ready to go to war with the Axis. Our consumerist country made a complete conversion into becoming a war production country. Factories intended for toys, car parts, or anything, you name it, turned into factories for making tanks, planes, bullets, boats, and anything had to do with the war effort. Every American chipped in to the war effort. Many even donated their metal scraps to scrap yards so more resources were available for production. Women were also an integral part of the war effort. While men were drafted to war and were in training, women took the responsibility of building the tools necessary to defeat the Axis.

Not all were convinced though that this was the best path for America to embark upon. We were risking a lot and many lives for a cause that we did not have much to do with. The government, however, thought differently. They wanted every single American possible to be for the war-effort with not one in opposition. One of the most famous ways to persuade a body throughout history is through the use of propaganda. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines propaganda as, “the spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person.” This is exactly what the American bureaucracy intended to do. Starting in 1942, the Office of War Information was established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The most clever psychologists, artists, and marketers were employed to create works of “art” to be viewed for all to see and hear all over America in newspapers, on shop windows, on the radio, in movies, and in the mail. The propaganda ranged from not disseminating troop information, not having sex with prostitutes, donating scraps to make more bombs, and buying war bonds to save the war. It targeted every audience including children, young teens, adults, and the elderly. Most of the time, these propaganda were designed to instill fear into the American public. They did this through, for example, the use of demonic depictions of Nazis and Japanese soldiers terrorizing the land of the United States. These “artists” knew exactly how to get inside the mind of an American. This penetration of the mind was successfully executed through clever use of the means of persuasion. One piece of propaganda really stood out to me and just struck me to the ground (see fig. 1). This work was done by Lawrence B. Smith in 1942 for the Government Printing Office for the U.S. This work is a successful piece of propaganda because in one poster, it exemplifies an excellent use of rhetoric used to persuade the American public through the use of rhetorical situation and the three means of persuasion (Ethos, Pathos, and Logos) as well.

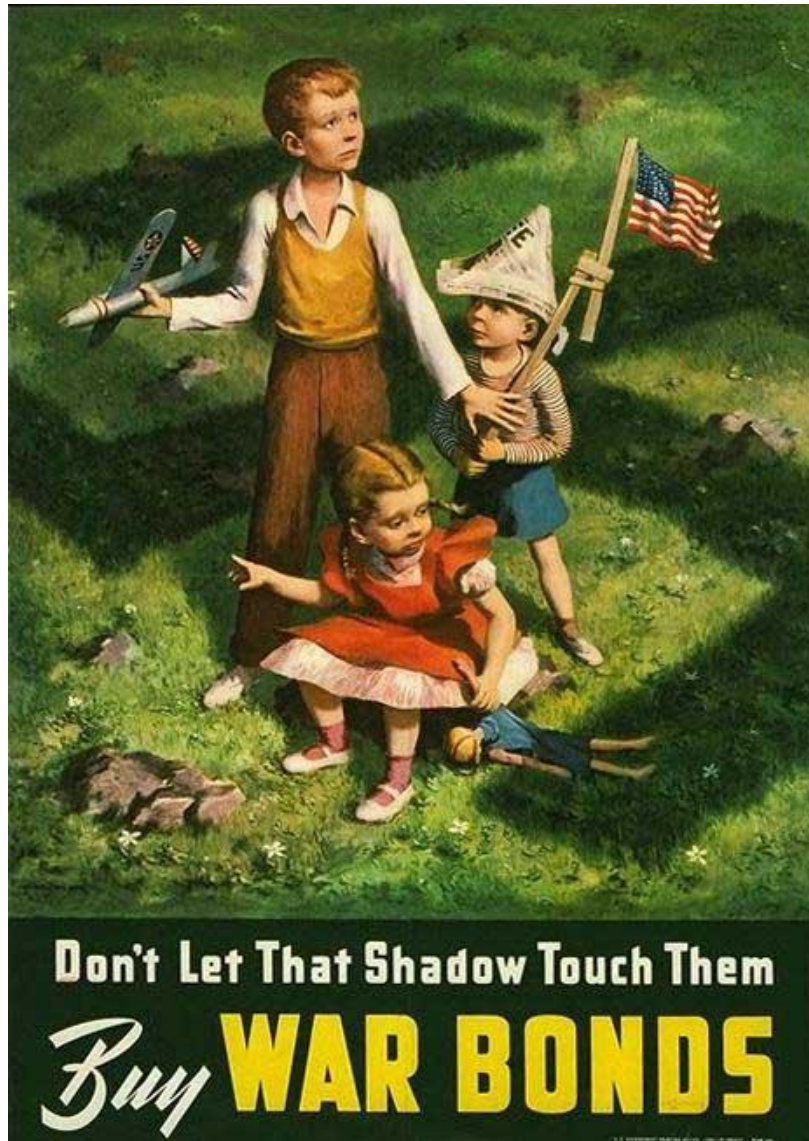


Fig. 1. *Don't Let That Shadow Touch Them* by Lawrence B. Smith, 1942.

Let's first examine what we see here. At first sight, there is nothing too abstract about this picture. But for some reason it just automatically captivates us. How in the world does something inorganic have the ability to put us into a state of such peril so easily? At the most primal level, that was the job of the artist and in this case, the job of Lawrence Smith. The first thing that catches your eye is the children. All three of these kids appear to be your typical American kid; one with the country's flag, one with a toy plane, and one with a doll. But these children are not

so typical and in fact, atypical. They are children of war. War is terrifying to children and Smith makes sure that we see that in their face. For identification purposes, let's give these three children names. The older boy is Big Billy while the younger is Little Tommy, and the girl, Little Sally. This picture seems to be frozen in time as each character is stuck in motions that are not complete. Little Sally is looking off to the distance away from her brothers. We can see that she just looked aside in a quick motion because her hair is still swaying in the air from what could only be a quick movement. Did you notice that her doll was face down in the grass? A doll was a girl's toy of choice and she would never want to damage it under any circumstance. But the fear of what about to come has haunted her so much that the doll is now in that position. Little Tommy is wearing a red and white striped shirt with blue pants. We have a very patriotic boy here. With his homemade flag pole and underneath his newspaper hat, we too, can still see the fear in his face. Tommy looks to his brother for hope and a way out of this fear. But there is an underlying problem here, Big Billy, in all of his grandeur and maturity, is at a stand still holding his little brother Tommy back. As with all of the other children, he does not know what is going on in this former green pasture of bliss and naivety.

This brings us to what our eye moves its focus onto next. That is, what every American identifies with Nazi Germany, the swastika casting a shadow onto the pasture from above the children in the sky. The swastika was the official emblem of the Nazi party and was on the flag during the Third Reich led by Adolph Hitler. Fear was touched upon in the last paragraph but I did not point out what the root of this fear was. It is easy to see that this shadow is where all this fear is sprouting from. The Nazis was a force to be reckoned with and every American knew this including the children. The sheer thought of a Nazi invasion in the States sent shivers down the spines of young children. More importantly, these spine shivers were experienced by the parents.

If America were to be invaded, the lives of these parent's children would be threatened and possibly changed forever. That is why this piece of propaganda provides the parents with a surefire way out. The cop out to this dilemma is in big, bold, yellow letters; "WAR BONDS". And right next to it, the word "Buy" in neat, cursive writing. If you just stare at this picture you can clearly see WAR BONDS without even focusing on it.

Why would any government in its right mind want to scare their constituents? There is a perfectly sound reason for this and it could be said in one word; "purpose." The purpose of the United States in its propaganda campaigns was simple. It was to effectively scare the living hell out of the Americans. By doing so, the government profited heavily when people would buy bonds in order to protect the country. The basis of a bond is pretty simple. When you buy a bond, you are essentially giving the United States Treasury a loan that they will pay back to you over time with interest. This gave loads of money to the treasury that would in other circumstances be impossible to obtain unless more money was to be printed; but that would just cause inflation and no one wants that. The audience of this piece is strongly directed at anyone able to buy a bond. More specifically, the target audience could be narrowed down to the average American parent. This is where Ethos, Pathos, and Logos come into play. World renowned Greek philosopher Aristotle saw that the means of persuasion in a text could be subdivided into three categories. The first, Ethos, is the ethical appeal. If we respect someone's views and morals, we are more likely to accept something they as opposed to someone who makes bad decisions. Pathos is the appeal to emotions. If a text is able to really reach deep down into one's emotions and make them feel something for the text, then the presenter of the text can easily persuade agreement to the argument being presented. Logos is the logical appeal that the presenter brings to the text. Basically, if you want someone to be with you on a point you are trying to make, one

of the best ways is to present a logically sound argument. If an argument is sound, some people have no reason to disagree with it. These three means are an excellent ways to persuade the receiver of text.

The ethos of this piece of propaganda is very easy to understand. The true author of this image is the United States Office of War Information because in reality they commissioned Lawrence Smith to create the image. We live in the glorious country known as the United States of America. We all pay our taxes; well, most of us. We all believe in the greater good of our country and that we have the ability to be number one at everything we set our minds to. As citizens of the country, we are brought up to trust in what the government does. This trust can be backed up by the fact that we are provided gratis with public schools, hospitals, transportation, and security. This gives us reason to believe that we should fully and wholly trust our government. With trust comes persuasion. In this piece of propaganda, it tells us “Don’t Let That Shadow Touch Them. Buy WAR BONDS.” At first we know this is a poster created by the government so we already have that preconceived notion of trust. If the image is telling us to buy war bonds in order to protect our precious from the Nazis, then we will because we trust what the government is saying to us. Why would they want to deceive us?

Pathos is what really drives this image into a successful use of rhetoric. As explained prior to this, there is so much to this picture that we can see illustrated in the picture. The three children in this picture are in utter fear for the safety of their lives. We see this through the fear in all of their faces. Each child has no one to look here; there is no parenting figure and all we can see is the impending doom of the Nazi regime approaching. This strikes emotion in any American today and in 1942. One automatically becomes empathetic for the children. We can feel the despair of the children and not one thing makes us happy about the situation. In order to

mend these torn feelings of the children, bonds must be bought. That is exactly what happened back in World War II. The propaganda was socially engineered, using emotion as the tool, to persuade the average American or parent into buying bonds.

The message in this illustration is pure logic which comes from the logos appeal being used. “Don’t let that shadow touch them.” This is the first part of a logical argument, also known as the premise. The shadow is that of the Nazis expressed through the swastika casting a shadow. Any logical person agrees with this and does not want to let the shadow touch them being the children. The conclusion is then presented; “Buy WAR BONDS.” This presents a logical situation to the receiving audience: If you want to protect the children from the Nazis, then buy war bonds. Displayed here is a simple if-then conditional statement and a sound argument that is hard to reject because it is so concrete and straight to the point.

The visual rhetoric Smith employs in this frightening piece of propaganda is of the highest tier. Without analysis, anyone can be sucked into this piece and be influenced to act upon its proposal. The audience is universal in terms of Americans. It expresses such vivid emotion that makes us want to do something for the poor children. And with that emotion then comes the logic which gives us the way to solve the problem. Every aspect, from audience, context, purpose, ethos, pathos, and logos, is carried out without a hitch. I am confident in saying that this here is a successful use of propaganda and surely convinced many Americans back in 1942 to buy war bonds from the treasury and support the war effort.

Works Cited

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