Wartime Art: A Study of Political Propaganda and Individual Expression in American Commercial and Combat Art during World War II

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Abstract
This thesis will explore the mediums and functions of American art during World War II. The purpose of exploring art during World War II is not simply to provide an overview of the multiple media of art produced during the war, but to investigate the role that commercial artwork and combat soldiers' artwork had on the lasting interpretation of the war. Themes addressed are propaganda, the role of posters, comic books, and cartoons along with their influence on American society at the time. Further analysis examines the role of three artists: Howard Brodie, Edward Reep, and Robert N. Blair. Their motivations and contributions to the documentation of World War II will be discussed.

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Propaganda, the art of persuasion and deception, has long been notorious for its ability to manipulate the opinion of the population - the holocaust was a gory testament to the atrocities that this machination is capable of. As early as in the 1930s, information had become a potent weapon in the context of total war, to which US Senator Hiram Warren Johnson had famously addressed: “in war, truth is the first casualty”. The Federal government’s use of propaganda braced Canada in preparation for total war, and contributed to the war effort during World War Two. To illustrate, conscription had always been a dilemma for Mackenzie King, because total war necessitates conscription, which was undoubtedly an undesired outcome.