

# Sounds & Scenes of the Home Front

## Messaging in American Media During World War I

**Audience:** *high school-level students*

**Duration:** *1-3 class periods, with additional take-home project*

### Background

While America's involvement in World War I was relatively brief – a mere 19 months of the four total years – it triggered numerous significant economic, social, and political developments for the country. But these developments did not occur by chance. Art and media had a significant role in shaping the American involvement and perception of the war, and the years leading up to and during the American intervention were marked by an influx of recruitment posters, wartime songs, and other forms of propaganda to get the population involved in the war effort.<sup>1</sup> Many of these messages and the mediums through which they were delivered were strategically and methodically orchestrated – evidenced by President Woodrow Wilson's establishment of the Committee on Public Information – and many of the methods can still be seen today in modern advertising and political campaigns.

### Summary & Objectives

The project has been structured into three "inquiries," each of which is intended to last an entire class period, followed by an independent project for students to complete outside of class time. It will involve examining different forms of media, ranging from posters to annotated music to sound recordings, from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, specifically the 1910s and early 1920s. The primary goal is for students to assess how these different forms of media presented messages related to patriotism and nationalism to promote ideas about a shared American identity within a culturally diverse United States during the First World War. Ultimately, the aim is for students to develop the skills to identify and assess targeted messaging and be able to apply those skills to any time period.

#### **Inquiry #1: Messaging Through Visual Art**

*Asks students to assess two recruitment posters, both with messages about women's role in the war effort, to consider factors such as images and language in visual art.*

#### **Learning outcomes:**

- Understand best practices for analyzing visual primary sources
- Develop preliminary understanding of propaganda
- Place visual material within historical context

<b>Inquiry #2: Messaging Through Music</b>	<p><i>Students work in groups to analyze one of five WWI-era songs, both in its written and recorded form, to understand how music contributed to war discourse</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>Learning outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Understand best practices for analyzing music as primary source</li> <li>● discern how music can be used as messaging tool, compare different messages</li> <li>● Continue developing understanding of propaganda</li> </ul>
<b>Inquiry #3: Messaging Through Speech</b>	<p><i>Asks students to independently and collectively analyze recorded speeches from WWI, then give informal presentations about how these speakers convey specific messaging</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>Learning outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Understand best practices for analyzing recorded speeches as primary sources</li> <li>● Discern how specific language, speaking techniques convey specific messages/feeling</li> <li>● Continue developing understanding of patriotism, nationalism, propaganda</li> </ul>
<b>Reflective Project: Making Connections</b>	<p><i>Asks students to draw parallels between one or more of the sources analyzed in the inquiries and a piece of media from their personal life.</i></p>

## Recommended Uses

This project caters to high school-level students in a History or Social Studies class studying World War or early 20th-century American/world History. It could also be suitable for an English or literacy course due to its focus on language and rhetoric techniques. It is designed to teach students about American involvement in World War I, how patriotism and national pride were promoted during this time, and the role that media, language, and technology played in conveying specific messages

## Essential Questions

*How was America's view of World War I shaped by media?*

This quandary can further be broken down into two sub-questions that can be applied to any and all sources used in the inquiries:

*What do these sources say about how Americans should think and behave?*

*What do these sources say about how Americans should feel about the war effort?*

## Primary Sources

Specific sources from the Library of Congress' digital collections have been selected for use in each of the three inquiries comprising this project. They are listed and linked within each activity, and teachers will want to ensure students can individually access these materials, particularly the audio recordings. Specific questions about these sources have been listed as guides for students' analysis, but teachers are also encouraged to refer to the [teacher's guides for primary source analysis](#) for further examination considerations. These guides are also been linked within each of the inquiry instructions.

## Additional Resources

1. [‘Echoes of the Great War’](#) exhibit
2. [‘World War I: The Great War in Song’](#) blog post from ‘Timeless’ blog
3. [‘American Artists View the Great War’](#) exhibit
4. [World War I-topic collections](#)
5. [Teacher’s Guides and Analysis Tools](#) for primary sources

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1. Osterberg, G. (2016, July 21). World War I: Time to Recall What This War Was About | Timeless. The Library of Congress. <https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2016/07/world-war-i-time-to-recall-what-this-war-was-about/>