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**The Marketing of World
War II in the US, 1939–1946**
A Business History of the US
Government and the Media
and Entertainment Industries

Albert N. Greco

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For Elaine

Preface

The published literature on the years 1939–1946 is staggering. There are superb analyses of Franklin D. Roosevelt as the Commander-in-Chief as well as riveting studies of the major land (e.g., D-Day), sea (e.g., the Battle of Midway), and air battles (notably the 8th Air Force in Europe and Custis LeMay’s bombardment of Japan). The US home front has been the subject of major historical books and articles; and many of these books presented excellent “macro” histories about large cities (e.g., New York City) or the transformation of a domestic industry into a major war machine (e.g., the automobile industry Detroit was converted to produce heavy bombers).

However, I thought it would be useful to analyze the impact of the marketing of World War II and the relationship between the Roosevelt Administration and the vast media and entertainment industries (i.e., radio; newspapers; magazines; motion picture films, documentaries, and newsreels; books; and music) on the people in an average small town. According to statistical analyses from the US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, in 1940 the “center of population” was “located in Haddon Township, Sullivan County, Indiana.”¹

The Census Bureau defined an urban area as “made up for the most part of cities and other incorporated places having 2500 inhabitants or more... The rural population is by no means identical with the farm population, that is the population living on farms...”² So, in 1940 using Census’ data, the US population was 132,164,569. Of that total, urban areas accounted for 74,423,702 million (56.31%); and small rural (non-farm) towns and communities in this nation totaled 57,245,773 million (43.31%).³ In 1940, the population of New Jersey was 4,160,165. Of that total, 3,394,773 (81.6%) was urban, and 765,392 (18.4%) was rural.⁴

Census reported that, in 1940, there were 16,752 cities and towns. Of that amount, 3464 (20.68%) were classified as urban; and 1422 (41.05%) had a population between 2500 and 5000, the remaining urban areas had a population more than 5000. And 13,284 (79.32%) were listed as rural-nonfarm towns and communities, with 3205 (24.12%) recorded a population between 1000 to 2500; and 10,083 (75.88%) had a population under 1000.⁵ So, of the 16,752 urban and rural-nonfarm communities in the US in 1940, 10,075 (60.15%) had a population under 1000.

After some research, I selected Bay Head, New Jersey to determine the impact of the Government’s work with the media and entertainment industries on average American citizens. This small town was nestled on a small barrier island; and, on its East was the Atlantic Ocean, and on the West Barnegat Bay and Point Pleasant Boro, NJ. On the North was Point Pleasant Beach; and Mantoloking was just to the South. In 1940, Bay Head’s population was 499.

During the early days of war, many in Bay Head worried about their safety, German submarines had attacked and sunk an oil tanker just a few miles offshore Bay Head near the town of Manasquan (about 4.4 miles from Bay Head). More than three dozen men from Bay Head served in the military during the war, and one died in combat. Many women worked with the Red Cross; older men too old to serve in the military and young boys in high school volunteered for the Civilian Defense. These residents patrolled the town’s board walk every night, working with armed Coast Guard sailors on horseback (who were accompanied by a watch dog), looking for submarines, saboteurs launched from a

German sub, or the floating tell-tale remnants of war (e.g., during the war, these volunteers found floating or on the shore Chase & Sanborn coffee cans, life preservers; clothing etc.) from sunk US or Allied ships. In 1944 a storm destroyed the town's board walk, which was never replaced; so, during the last months of the war, these volunteers patrolled on the town's two miles beach.

During the war, dozens of men worked in the local boat manufacturing factory building more than 1000 lifeboats for the US military. Local school children participated in paper and metal drives. Adults gave blood and donated clothing for the war effort.

These were difficult years for this small town, but their resilience during rationing, price and wage controls, blackouts, air raid sirens, and constant concerns about the well-being of their young men at war enabled them to get through an unsettling war. Bay Head was typical of the countless thousands of small towns across America during the war; and during those years, they coped with rationing, wage and price controls; and shortages of clothing and footwear; and many sent their sons, brothers, uncles, and friends to war.

During those turbulent years, all gave some. And some gave all.

Bronx, USA

Albert N. Greco

Notes

1. US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. US Summary; 9. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-1/33973538v1ch02.pdf>. All numbers rounded off and may not always equal 100%.
2. Ibid., 10.
3. Ibid., 18–19.
4. Ibid., 14.
5. Ibid., 25. Also see Marcello, Ronald E. 2014. "Small Town America in World War II: War Stories from Wrightsville, Pennsylvania." *Oral History Review* 41 (2, Summer/Fall): 387–388; Goodwin, Doris Kearns. 1995. *No Ordinary Time: Franklin D. Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt the Home Front in World War II*, 44–384. New York: Simon & Schuster. Goodwin,

in her book that won the Pulitzer prize for history, remarked that, in 1940, the vast majority of all Americans lived in small towns; and that, until the war, most Americans tended to live in or near these small towns that formed a firm bedrock of community and democracy.

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I want to thank the support of Marcus Ballenger, Sam Stocker, and the superb staff at Palgrave Macmillan in the US and abroad for their tremendous assistance in the development and publication of this book.

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Introduction

World War II was a turning point in the history of the US. During the war (often called the war between 1941 and 1945 and even to today), the US defeated enemies in both the European and Pacific Theaters of Operations, had a nuclear arsenal, and air and naval armadas unrivaled in the history of warfare. In 1945, it helped create a series of international monetary, financial, and diplomatic organizations. By September 2, 1945, when Japan signed the instrument of surrender on the deck of the USS. Missouri in Tokyo harbor, the US was unquestionably the strongest and richest nation in the world; in 1947, this nation controlled over 70% of all of the gold in the world.

However, this book is a business history not a military history of World War II. This book describes the complex and often contentious “double helix” relationships between various US departments, offices, agencies, and the very independent media and entertainment industries (i.e., radio; newspapers; magazines; books; and Hollywood and popular songs) during a period of great uncertainty and fear between December 7, 1941 and September 2, 1945.

In addition, the book evaluates the impact of the war on the US home front. Now the US faced entrenched, well equipped enemies in both the Europe and the Pacific. After December 7, 1941, the entire apparatus of the US Government was mobilized to “market” the war to Americans who were incredulous and horrified about the attack at Pearl Harbor. Americans wanted immediate, accurate, and detailed information from the US Government and the nation’s media and entertainment companies about the recent military disasters at Pearl Harbor and in the Philippines. This meant that Americans had to understand and accept: (1) the complete mobilization of the US economy; (2) severe wartime rationing; (3) the disruption of families with 16.5 million men and women drafted or enlisted in the military forces of the nation; (4) the impact of massive US military casualties: the US sustained 407,316 military deaths; and 617,278 members of the military were wounded; (5) the staggering cost to wage war in Europe and the Pacific: the war cost the US Government \$296 billion in 1945 dollars; and +\$4.22 trillion in inflation adjusted 2020 dollars; (6) and an intense marketing push to encourage Americans to buy US war bonds; convincing Americans to pay high US income taxes (e.g., Internal Revenue Service tax law revisions increased the numbers of those paying some income taxes from 7% of the US population in 1940 to 64% by 1944); and justifying the need to have significantly higher I.R.S. tax rates (reaching up to 94% for income over \$200,000 in 1944 or slightly more than \$2.92 million in 2020 dollars); (7) severe wartime rationing of consumer goods (e.g., meat; sugar; butter; coffee; shoes; etc.); (8) “stringent” but “voluntary” US Government censorship policies; (9) major concerns about sabotage on the docks and in war plants and anti-war propaganda; (10) the internment of Japanese-American citizens; and (11) segregation in the US military and in American communities.

Generating support for the war placed a heavy burden on every US Government department and agency. The US Government (e.g., the Office of War Information, OWI; the Office of Censorship; etc.) had to work with the diverse media industries (e.g., advertising agencies; trade associations; radio; book publishers; newspapers; magazines) and the entertainment industries (e.g., radio; the Hollywood studios; recorded music industry; live entertainment; etc.) to “market” support for the war

to every American. This was, clearly, the largest, and most successful marketing campaign in the history of the US; and these efforts were, at best, a very difficult undertaking.

Compounding the impact of war on every segment of American society was the lingering deep-seated and pervasive fear of another depression after the end of the war. In essence, Americans wondered how the nation could handle: the demobilization of +16.5 million Americans; and the stark reminder that far too many veterans would require major medical treatment after they returned.

Marketing as an academic discipline was relatively new; the *Journal of Marketing* was only created in 1936; so many of the well-established marketing principles and theories of today (e.g., the 4Ps, product, price, placement, and promotion; Michael E. Porter's "Five Forces;" Alfred D. Chandler's views of the need for strategies and structures; and Ted Levitt's "marketing myopia") did not emerge until decades after the end of the war.

However, the Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) administration was well acquainted with the time-tested procedures and theories related to advertising and the handling of public opinion; after all, FDR won major presidential elections in 1932, 1936, 1940, and 1944; and he was elected Governor of New York before he became president. And the FDR war administration was filled with former executives from the advertising world and various entertainment formats (e.g., radio; newspapers).

This book also addresses the policies and procedures crafted to influence public opinion by addressing the efforts of the Government working with the diverse and often prickly media and entertainment industries in what was, clearly, a case of do or die.

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