

The use of Norman Rockwell's *Four Essential Human Freedoms* by the United States Government during the Second World War

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Aim of the project: To harness the popularity of Norman Rockwell's *Four Essential Human Freedoms* painting series in order to generate public support for United States participation in the Second World War and promote the purchase of war bonds by U.S. citizens.

Context: On January 6, 1941, just eleven months prior to the United States' decision to enter into the Second World War, President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered his State of the Union address to the 77th U.S. Congress. This speech outlined Roosevelt's vision for "a world founded on four essential human freedoms": the freedom of speech and expression; the freedom of worship; the freedom from want; and the freedom from fear. As such, the speech has gone down in history as the *Four Freedoms Speech*.

Inspired by Roosevelt's address, American artist-illustrator Norman Rockwell painted a series of four paintings entitled *Four Essential Human Freedoms*, more commonly known as the *Four Freedoms*. These four paintings, each representing one of the four freedoms highlighted by Roosevelt, were published in 1943 in a series of issues of *The Saturday Evening Post*. The covers were accompanied by essays discussing each freedom in the *Post*. The editions proved extremely popular and *The Post* received more than 25,000 requests from readers for colour reproductions for framing.

Realising the popularity of the paintings, the United States Department of the Treasury approached *The Saturday Evening Post* and asked for permission to use Rockwell's four pieces in the Second War Bond Drive- a touring exhibition of American art centralised around Rockwell's four vignettes. The War Bond Drives were aimed at encouraging U.S. citizens to buy war bonds and to inspire greater support amongst the public for any U.S. involvement in the Second World War. In 1943, under the Office of War Information, the paintings got another lease of life as War Bond Posters.

Program Activity: Norman Rockwell's *Four Freedoms* were individually published as the covers of *The Saturday Evening Post* between February 20th and March 13th 1943. The popularity of the four pieces of work was clear to see with the four covers of *The Post* appearing in shop window fronts across the country shortly after their publication. At the time of their publication, the United States Department of Treasury was in the process of launching the Second War Bonds Drive- a public diplomacy campaign lead by government agencies in cooperation with non-government entities such as the War Advertising Council.

Recognising the appeal and popularity of the *Four Freedoms*, the Treasury Department approached Rockwell and *The Post* to ask for permission to use the four paintings as part of the 1943 war bond drive. The United States government sought to piggy-back onto the universal appeal and messages of Rockwell's images and incorporate them into their campaign.

Once permission was granted, the Treasury Department decided to use the four paintings as part of touring exhibition designed to encourage U.S. citizens to purchase bonds. The exhibition toured 40 cities and was seen by 1.2 million people across the United States. It centred on the *Four Freedoms* paintings and Rockwell himself spoke and signed prints at opening nights. The tour offered attendees a commemorative folder for those who purchased War Bonds at the drive exhibition. Each folder featured one of Rockwell's *Freedoms* as the front cover. The tour raised \$132 million for the war effort through the sale of War Bonds.

The use of the *Four Freedoms* by the U.S. government did not stop with the tour. The United States Office of War Information (OWI) created by Roosevelt on June 13th 1942 (an attempt at streamlining wartime information services) recognised the impact of Rockwell's four paintings. The OWI began producing War Bond posters using these images in an attempt to reach a greater audience than could not be reached via the original touring exhibition. The posters for *Freedom of Speech* and *Freedom of Worship* had the words "Save Freedom of Speech" and "Save Freedom of Worship" written along the top of a reproduction of their respective art piece. The words "Buy War Bonds" appeared at the bottom of these posters. The *Freedom from Want* and *Freedom from Fear* poster had the text "Ours... to fight for" above the Rockwell depictions with the name of the particular freedom written across the bottom of the poster. An additional lithograph poster featuring all four images was created with the "Ours... to fight for" theme. The Government Printing Office was responsible for the production of the *Freedom* posters and printed 2.5 million sets for dissemination throughout the country.

The explicit aim of the use of Rockwell's paintings was to generate bond sales; however, there was also a second aim: to generate public support more generally for the U.S. war effort. The U.S. government worried that complacency towards the war was beginning to replace the initial fear which had acted as a catalyst for social cohesion. Nearly two years had passed since the first, and last, attack on American soil- Pearl Harbor. By coupling the simplistic, yet universal, sentiments of the pictures with a call for direction action, the U.S. government successfully dovetailed the *Four Freedoms* into their overall wartime propaganda efforts.

Analysis: Overall, the Second War Bond Drive raised \$18 billion- \$5 billion over the government goal for the Drive. It would be difficult to ascertain exactly how much Rockwell's paintings raised, or to what extent they formed public sentiment; however, it is evident that, as the centrepiece of the 1943 tour and as a major focus of OWI poster efforts, the Rockwell images certainly facilitated and boosted much of this fund raising and public support.

The use of Rockwell's *Four Freedoms* by the U.S. government illustrates the potential successes of incorporating existing popular culture images into larger public diplomacy strategies. By using the *Four Freedoms* the U.S. government tapped into existing public approval for the paintings and successfully associated them with the war effort.

This example highlights the need to select art with underlying themes that dovetail with the overarching aims of a strategy. In this case, Rockwell's art represented the universal themes of family, simplicity, fear of loss of normal life and, of course, freedom. These vignettes did not drip with flags and emblems, yet they were patriotic from their inception and provided a rallying point for 'American values'. They presented a 'ready-made' cultural reference point and were relevant to the audience: a key in any public diplomacy strategy.

Their choice of artist was also important (despite the fact the government reportedly rejected his offer to create paintings on this theme before they were published in *The Post*). In general, Rockwell's themes centralised around the 'century of common man' and his art was often seen as 'middle-brow'. The popularity of his art could be attributed to the perceived accessibility to the general public who were the main targets of this campaign. As an American artist, the audience could also feel pride in the art as truly 'American works'.

The longevity, proliferation and ubiquitous nature of the Rockwell images and propaganda posters in popular culture today stand testament to the decision of the U.S. government to monopolise on the popularity of the *Four Freedoms* and utilise them in their wartime public diplomacy strategy.

Learning Points: Using popular cultural reference points from home-grown sources can provide an effective rallying point if the themes present in that piece of work compliment a planned public diplomacy campaign.

Images which focus on sentimentality and simplicity can be effective in persuading an audience to act in a certain way. They do not require a lot of time or high levels of literacy on the part of the audience and are easily disseminated.

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