Political Cartoons and Extended Text: Untapped Potential

For centuries, metaphors have been used a means of psychological warfare and manipulation. By reframing issues in a particular context, competing factions have allured the masses to their favor. In today’s society, metaphors and reframing are used extensively in politics and advertising to appeal to audiences and to enable the people to see particular issues in a desired light. For instance, while proponents of free, international trade view the situation through the lenses of an investment opportunity, those who believe that other nations are unfairly trading with the United States would contextualize it as theft. Metaphoric criticism, which analyzes the artifact based on the tenor (subject) and vehicles (mechanism for viewing the subject), recognizes the distinct implications that metaphors have. By reframing issues, the rhetor effectively changes reality for the audience and distorts future decisions. That being said, the field of rhetoric has exhaustively analyzed such effects on pictures and words (separately). While a distinct dichotomy exists between visual and textual representations in the field of rhetoric, the National Association of Manufacturers’ (NAM) posters may give scholars a reason to defy these typical boundaries. These propaganda posters, which were released during World War I to rally American labor behind the wartime effort, worked extremely well. Unlike modern day advertisements, the NAM posters contained several diverse elements: political cartoons (which
incorporate words into the pictures), patriotic colors, and full-length, detailed sentences. Both the pictures and the captions underneath employed numerous metaphors to place the American worker in patriotic state of mind. The success of the NAM’s posters raises the question: How can a combination of extended text and visual metaphors be used as tool of persuasion and ideological reframing? In an era where short slogans and simplistic pictures are championed, perhaps NAM’s posters suggest that “more is better” if metaphors and reframing can be incorporated. The National Association of American Manufacturer’s ability to successfully merge metaphor-laden political cartoons and sentences together in its World War I posters shows a departure from the field of rhetoric’s typical word and picture dichotomy.

While the significance to the field of rhetoric may be marginal at best, the real life implications are far larger in scope. To contextualize these implications, the historical foundations of NAM must be addressed. NAM’s posters were released during World War I; the organization itself described the posters such: “six series of posters, three of which are illustrated and the last series are published in colors—red, white, and blue—urging industrial team teamwork upon the wage-payer, the wage-earner, the consumer and the community.” (Page 218) In comparison to the amount of information available about NAM in the 1920s, World War II, and onward, there are significantly less publications documenting NAM’s activity during World War I. NAM’s own web page omits discussing its World War I impact; the website details its inception and then immediately begins describing its contributions to World War II, a self-proclaimed time of immense importance in American society. No institution gains prominence overnight; the missing link between NAM’s creation at the turn of the twentieth century and the 1920s is World War I. Thus, its campaigns (like the poster campaign), gave NAM the platform and leverage it needed to become a recognizable face in American labor. According to
Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Annual Convention, a report that was read to the Committee on Industrial Conservation on May, 22, 1918, NAM’s Manager of the Industrial Department, Michael J. Hickey, informed the committee that “approximately one million, four hundred thousand [of the posters] have been spread across the country… requests are pouring in [for them] everyday.” (Hickey 1918, Page 218) Hickey also noted that the posters had been “displayed in shops, factories, stores, railroad stations, and other places where they will reach the eye of those to whom they would most directly appeal.” (Hickey 1918, Page 218) NAM had a direct effect on American society; the successfulness of its attempt to reframe the international conflict as domestic issue can be seen through the decrease in the number of strikes, the increase in American productivity, and the overall positive supply of wartime weaponry. If words and pictures can change the entire meaning of war and wartime production for American labor, then perhaps there is something that can—and should—be learned from NAM’s effective strategy.

During World War I, NAM worked as a rallying, propaganda machine for the American government and as an arbitrator between the employer and employee. Although NAM is considered an ally of big business and anti-unionism today, all parties (unions, businesses, government, etc.) agreed to a “ceasefire” in an effort to prepare for the war. While all of the aforementioned parties were in agreement, not all of them extended their support to the American workers. Laborers were the variables in the equation; since American citizens are governed first and foremost by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, they were still free to express their discontent for wages and working conditions. Although the war continued overseas, these issues were still prominent at home. Thus, NAM worked in various capacities to quell the unhappy and strike-inducing sentiments. According to Hickey, “We have vigorously urged all wage-payers to be generous in the treatment of their employees and to get into closer human
contact with them, so as to remove once and for all the minute seeds of discontent which grow for the harvests of industrial unrest.” (Hickey 1918, Page 215) On the side of the laborer, Hickey commented: “Next, the campaign has turned to the wage-earner and urged him to help the employer and show that he has a kindly human feeling by going half the distance required to meet him on the middle ground of friendship and cooperation.” (Hickey 1918, Page 215) The NAM posters were directed towards the latter goal. These posters served as war propaganda and a stark reminder for workers to remain loyal and patriotic. With the exception of Poster #2, all of the posters contain patriotic coloring, a political cartoon, a “catchy” slogan, and detailed, lengthy caption. Nine of the thirteen posters feature a small, blue bird, obscured to the side, with a comedic speech bubble. Recurring themes include: American industry “serving” in the war, cooperation between the employer and the employee, and a sense of urgency. On Poster #2, “Proclamation For Industrial Peace”, NAM builds its credibility and legitimacy by including the signatures of prominent leaders, including Robert Lansing, the United States Secretary of State.

NAM’s World War I posters are best explained and deconstructed through metaphoric criticism, a form of rhetorical analysis developed by Kenneth Burke and George Lakoff. Metaphor criticism is rooted in the concept of metaphor; the term “metaphor” dates back to Aristotle, who described it as “the transference of a name from the object to which it has a natural application.” (Foss 2009) During its early use, metaphors were simply considered a stylistic tool. However, metaphors have deviated significantly from its origins. Today, they are seen as a powerful mechanism for describing the world and persuading others; scholars Kenneth Burke and George Lakoff developed metaphoric criticism as a mechanism to analyze the presence and quality of tenors and vehicles within an artifact. In particular, Burke found that metaphors can reveal information about perspectives and worldviews while Lakoff expounded
upon this idea within the boundaries of cognitive science. However, according to Isabel Negro Alousque, a professor and author of *Visual Metaphor and Metonymy in French Political Cartoons*, these rhetoricians have not uncovered the entirety of the field: “Although Lakoff and Johnson claim that the occurrence of metaphor is not confined to language, the bulk of investigations have discussed verbal metaphor. Nonetheless, if metaphors are ‘primarily a matter of thought and action’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5), then they should be present not only in language, but also in other sign systems.” (Alousque 2013, Page 366) In *Rhetorical Criticism*, Sonja K. Foss outlines the four step procedure needed to apply metaphoric criticism to a body of work: selecting an artifact, analyzing the artifact (isolating and sorting the metaphors), formulating the research question, and writing the essay. (Foss 2009) Unlike the early metaphor of Aristotle and Cicero, the metaphors of metaphoric criticism contain many different facets and uses. Most notably, metaphors can be utilized as frames: they direct and center the audience’s attention to a particular perspective and often evoke a response. The idea of “reframing”, replacing an existing frame, is crucial to understanding the NAM posters. Reframing includes five steps: stop repeating their words, go to another frame, build a new frame, break it down into new pieces, and remember that framing is a continuous action. (Foss 2009)

When analyzing NAM’s posters through the lenses of metaphoric criticism, the vast amount of vehicles embedded within the posters becomes apparent. The strategies and themes used between the extended text and the political cartoons in the posters differ significantly. It is worth noting that the poster is essentially divided in half: the upper portion is the picture (cartoon) and the lower fifty percent of the poster contains the text. That being said, although the sentences are lengthy—some even contain statistics—the message is more fundamental and basic than the political cartoons. The main metaphor in the sentences is the simple comparison to
physically being in the war. NAM appeals to the workers’ primitive sense of bravery and desire to be a part of something larger and more heroic than themselves. Poster #1 describes “a full day’s work in the munitions shop, mine, mill, or shipyard [as] equivalent to taking a German trench”; similarly, Poster #4 claims “United action… is the heaviest shot our Democracy can fire” while Poster #7 bluntly calls upon the workers to “Aim straight to ‘Kan the Kaiser’”. These metaphors relayed the overall goal of building American patriotism. Additionally, the frames are not driven by fear tactics; the language is extremely uplifting and positive. Repeated phrases include “success in war”, “strong”, and “industrial prosperity”. The extended text brings an energy to the masses that mere slogans or catchphrases cannot. The themes of mutual cooperation, togetherness, and patriotism that are woven into the sentences are concepts that deeply resonate with the workers. A slogan does not have the capacity to capture all of these elements effectively.

The political cartoons expanded upon the basic message in the extended text by using higher level metaphors to psychologically engage with the laborers. On the surface, the political cartoons were undoubtedly more creative and detailed than the sentences. Fundamentally, every individual is different: some are more visual while others retain information from reading. By incorporating both medias, NAM was able to appeal to both audiences. The political cartoons continued the metaphor of comparing workers to soldiers; this can be seen in Posters #1, 3, 4, 7, 9, and 11. These posters pictorially demonstrate American industry on the battleground so that the workers can visualize how they fit into the U.S. military equation. Furthermore, it highlights how they are a necessary component for victory. Additionally, three posters (#4, 6, and 7) show a balance between the wage earner and wage payer. Although this was likely untrue, it is important to keep in mind where these posters were displayed: on the manufacturing floor. Whether the
employer and employee were truly equal is irrelevant; for NAM, it was all about perception, increasing productivity, and reducing disruptions. If the workers felt equal, then the posters served their purpose. The most effective metaphor occurs in four posters (#3, 5, 6, and 8): NAM points to an ostensible enemy. The political cartoons reach further than the extended text by directing the American workers’ ill will away from employers. The cartoons call for American workers to not only detest the German adversaries and “agitators”, but also that which makes them unproductive. Poster #8 illustrates the factors that decrease production in “the hand that threatens”. In this metaphorical hand, it is strife, excessive taxes, unwise laws, disloyalty, and agitation that physically attack the “heart” of American industry. These factors are not caused by labor alone; by spreading the blame across many parties, NAM is establishing solidarity with the workers and proving that they can be trusted.

NAM’s use of metaphors in its posters served a very specific purpose: to rally American labor for war, the organization was attempting to dismount the union’s existing frames. According to Hagley, a Smithsonian Institute Affiliate:

“The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) played a powerful role in big business’s crusade for authority in American life. NAM embarked on a wide-ranging campaign to promote free enterprise. This campaign involved a sustained deployment of visual-based propaganda in the workplace and public spaces, and was informed by the belief that habitual exposure to emotion-laden messaging could have a ‘constructive’ effect on viewers’ dispositions. For decades, the unions built their popularity among the working class American people by appealing to their sense of self-worth… NAM’s records, held at the Hagley Library, offer abundant insight into the organization’s visual propaganda campaign. Its main propaganda agency, the National Industrial Information
Council (NIIC), was largely responsible for orchestrating its publicity… NIIC circulated 2 million copies of cartoons.” (Gray, no publication date)

This psychological warfare was necessary given the unions’ work throughout the previous decades. Early unions such as the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor called for substantial wage increases and better working conditions; union activity increased sharply because members were convinced that they truly deserved more than what they were receiving. On the most fundamental level, it was a mentality that asked, “what can you do for me?” NAM’s posters, and the World War I effort at large, called for a vastly different perception. Although President John F. Kennedy would not be elected for another half century, his concept of “ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country” was precisely the message, or frame, that NAM was attempting to create. As stated previously, the concept of reframing was very important to the propaganda promoting organization; the union had a frame for American workers that had existed for decades. In perfect order, the NAM deconstructed their argument by adhering to all five steps of reframing: it no longer used union terms, sought the “patriotic” perspective, created a new frame in which American labor’s cooperation would equate to palpable victories, broke the message down into separate posters, and placed these posters in almost every factory in the United States. At the core, NAM was engaging in psychological manipulation. Knowing that a change in ideology takes time and patience, NAM was diligent in “planting the seeds” for American nationalism. This plan was articulated by Hickey at the Committee on Industrial Conservation: “In March 1916, President Pope sent out a call to all our members urging them to lend their aid in a campaign to re-focus the industrial perspective of the American people… While a vast amount of work has been done and many of the principal industries covered for the first time, as this report proceeds it will be evident that we
have merely planted the seed, and that the entire field requires most continuous, persistent and systematic cultivation.” (Hickey 1918, Page 211) These tactics are very noteworthy and should not be overlooked. In 1985, former KGB Officer Yuri Bezmenov warned the public of the Soviet Union’s use of “ideological subversion”: a four stage process which socially engineers a generation into believing a specific agenda. Manipulation of all forms should be scrutinized, whether it is under the cover of communism or “American pride”.

A deeper understanding of the NAM posters not only explores a niche within the field of rhetoric, but also identifies a component of history that has yet to be uncovered. As stated previously, there is little research available concerning NAM’s influence during World War I; this analysis highlights the importance for the academic community to re-evaluate the notion that NAM did not have a crucial role in shaping American nationalism. In regards to the field of rhetoric, examining political cartoons with extended text provides more insight into this specific niche. According to Isabel Negro Alousque, a professor in the Department of English at the Complutense University of Madrid, “Although the research focus has been on verbal metaphor, other types of metaphor such as pictorial metaphor (i.e. metaphor occurring in pictures) and multimodal metaphor (i.e. metaphor occurring in diverse modes)… has attracted less attention, and its presence in specialized genres has not been considered.” (Alousque 2013, Page 366) Alousque specifically references political cartoons as an untapped field worth considering: “there has been relatively little research into political cartoons”; she furthered these ideas in her own research into French political cartoons. (Alousque 2013, Page 367) As this niche field gains recognition, the NAM posters may have a profound contribution moving forward.

The NAM posters come from a time that has been obscured from history. Their significance has been overlooked by the academic community; likewise, the field of rhetoric has
yet to examine the techniques used by NAM in its World War I poster campaign. Given that nearly a century has passed since the creation of these posters, the question remains: are these theories, concepts, and ideas still relevant today? Hasn’t the world changed—have NAM’s propaganda tactics become outdated? While these are valid questions, this intervening organization tapped into an innate part of the human brain. It utilized psychological warfare, a tactic that is still widely used today. In modern times, many institutions use the element of fear to mobilize the masses for their causes. Perhaps NAM stumbled upon a better solution.
References


National Association of Manufacturers World War I Posters #5190 G. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library.
Rachel Chiu  
ILRLR 3055  

The National Association of Manufacturers Posters 1918  
Kheel Center (Collection # 5190G)  
Pictures were taken from the Kheel Center on 4/29/16.

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#1  
A full day's work in the munitions shop, mine, mill or shipyard is equivalent to taking a German trench. The blue overalls of the mechanic covers the same sort of Americanism as is clothed in the khaki in the trenches and in the working clothes of the captains of industry.

#2  
Proclamation for Industrial Peace

Reciting the steps which resulted in the creation of a National War Labor Board, to relieve for the period of the war, a method of labor conciliatory, employers and employees, and mentioning the members of that Board appointed by the Secretary of Labor in a proclamation calling for industrial peace, on April 8, 1918, President Wilson said:

"Now, therefore, I, Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States of America, do hereby approve and affirm the said appointments and make due proclamation thereof and of the following for the information and guidance of all concerned:

THE POWERS, FUNCTIONS AND DUTIES OF THE NATIONAL WAR LABOR BOARD SHALL BE TO SETTLE BY MEDIATION AND CONCILIATION CONTROVERSIES ARISING BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS IN PRODUCTIONS NECESSARY FOR THE EFFECTIVE CONDUCT OF THE WAR, OR IN OTHER FIELDS OF NATIONAL ACTIVITY, DELAYS AND OBSTRUCTIONS IN WHICH MIGHT, IN THE OPINION OF THE NATIONAL BOARD, AFFECT DETERMINATELY SUCH PRODUCTION: TO PROVIDE, BY DIRECT APPOINTMENT OR OTHERWISE, FOR COMMITTEES OR BOARDS TO SIT IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE COUNTRY WHERE CONCERNS ARE ARISE AND SECURE SETTLEMENTS BY LOCAL MEDIATION AND CONCILIATION, AND TO SUMMON PARTIES TO CONTROVERSIES FOR HEARING AND ACTION BY THE NATIONAL BOARD IN EVENT OF FAILURE TO SECURE SETTLEMENT BY MEDIATION AND CONCILIATION.

The principles to be observed and the methods to be followed by the national board in exercising such powers and functions and performing such duties shall be those specified in the said report of the War Labor Conference Board dated March 29, 1916, a complete copy of which is hereunto appended.

The National Board shall refuse to take cognizance of controversy between employers and workers in any field of industrial or other activity where there is by agreement or Federal law a method of settlement which has not been invoked.

And I do hereby urge upon all employers and employees within the United States the necessity of utilizing the means and methods thus provided for the adjustment of all industrial disputes and request that during the pendency of mediation or arbitration through the said means and methods there shall be no discontinuance of industrial operations which would result in curtailment of the production of war necessities.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done in the District of Columbia this eighth day of April in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and eighteen, of the independence of the United States one hundred and sixty-second.

The President: ROBERT LANSING, Secretary of State.
 WHICH BRIDGE DO YOU WANT?

American labor can either build a bridge of ships to help Pershing's army or it can permit enemy agitators to stretch the hyphen of disloyalty as a bridge to aid our enemies. Co-operation and vigorous effort will save the lives of Our Boys and bring us the right kind of Peace.

WE BELIEVE AMERICAN WAGE-EARNERS AND WAGE PAYERS ARE LOYAL. LET US PROVE IT BY WORKING TOGETHER FOR AMERICA!

THE SHOT THAT WILL WIN THE WAR

United action by America's industrial partners will shorten and win this struggle for human freedom. It is the heaviest shot our Democracy can fire at wage-earners' and wage-payers' common foe — Autocracy.

EVERY LOYAL WORKER AND EMPLOYER CAN RIDE TO VICTORY UNDER THE EAGLE'S WINGS WITH UNCLE SAM
In the first seven months after America's entrance into this war for human freedom, enemy agitators in our midst caused 283,462 workers to lose 6,285,519 days of production. Our war industries were heavily handicapped by this unpatriotic strife.

LET US ALL PULL TOGETHER TO WIN THE WAR QUICKLY

DR. UNCLE SAM is now in charge of our industrial troubles. He has prescribed a Victory Tonic called Co-operation. It will bring better feeling among our wage-earners and wage-payers and will cure strife. Quack remedies, known as legislative ether, spirits of discontent and agitator's acid, almost killed the patients. They are poisons, not remedies.

CO-OPERATION WILL WIN THE WAR!
The watchword on the turret should inspire the crew that man the guns. Only by united action in America’s war industries can we crush out disloyal and treasonable efforts to obstruct. We must stand together, work harder, produce more and aim straight to

“KAN THE KAISER”

More than 32,000 American industrial plants have been placed at the disposal of the government to win this war. Their effectiveness must not be hampered by enemy agitators who cause bad feeling between wage-earners and wage payers. Every community is interested in promoting industrial prosperity.
The smoke of America's factory stacks is a signal of our workers' and employers' loyalty. It means more guns, more ships, and more food.

Our industries are the third and main supporting line of defense—our base of supplies. Without them, the Army and Navy would be helpless. As good patriots let us strive to keep our industries strong.
UNITED AMERICAN INDUSTRY MUST BACK UP THE BOYS “OVER THERE”

Wage-earners and wage-payers are industrial patriots with a mutual interest in Democracy. They must work shoulder to shoulder to provide our fighting men and our Allies with the many things they need — and need without delay.

TEAM WORK WILL WIN THE WAR!

Every loyal worker is a soldier in a uniform of overalls. Every loyal employer is an officer in our industrial army. Co-operation is the harness by which our muscle, brain and money will DRIVE AMERICA TO VICTORY!
America Needs Its Man Power

Sticking to your job will help to shorten the war and pave the way for a prosperous peace. The demand for supplies for Our Boys "Over there" is so great that every bit of man power we possess is needed. If you can't enlist, get a job and hold on to it.

It's your way to help "Lick the Kaiser"