

Food Will Win the War, 1917

Introduction

When most people think of wartime food rationing, they often think of World War II. However, civilians were encouraged to do their part for the war effort during World War I as well. This colorful poster by artist Charles E. Chambers was issued by the United States Food Administration to encourage voluntary food conservation. “Food Will Win the War” was the name of the campaign initiated by the newly appointed head of the agency, Herbert Hoover. Food was necessary not only to feed America’s growing Army, but to help relieve famine in Europe, in part to prevent the overthrow of European governments and the spread of communism. On April 25, 1919, Hoover wrote: “Of course, the prime objective of the United States in undertaking the fight against famine in Europe is to save the lives of starving people. The secondary object, however, and of hardly less importance, [is] to defeat Anarchy, which is the handmaiden of Hunger.” (<http://www.hoover.org/publications/hoover-digest/article/6135>)

This poster calls on immigrants to do their part in the war effort. It depicts recent immigrants standing near a sailing ship with the Statue of Liberty and a rainbow stretched across the New York City skyline in the background. The text reads:

You came here seeking Freedom.
You must now help preserve it.
Wheat is needed by the allies.
Waste nothing.

Though this poster focuses on the conservation of wheat, other food categories such as corn, barley, meat, and vegetables were no less important. In order to effectively reach immigrant populations, the poster was also produced in such languages as Yiddish, Italian, Spanish, and Hungarian. Using the incentives of price and patriotism, the United States was successful in its mission to feed the Allies.

Questions for Discussion

Read the introduction and carefully examine the print. Then apply your knowledge of American history to answer the following questions:

1. Why did the United States Food Administration print and distribute this poster?
2. Explain an emotional reaction the artist hoped would convince the viewer to voluntarily conserve food.
3. Why was the poster produced in multiple languages?
4. Why did the artist include in the picture the Statue of Liberty, the skyline of New York City, and the rainbow?

Food Will Win the War, 1917

Image



United States Food Administration. Food Will Win the War, ca. 1917. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09522)