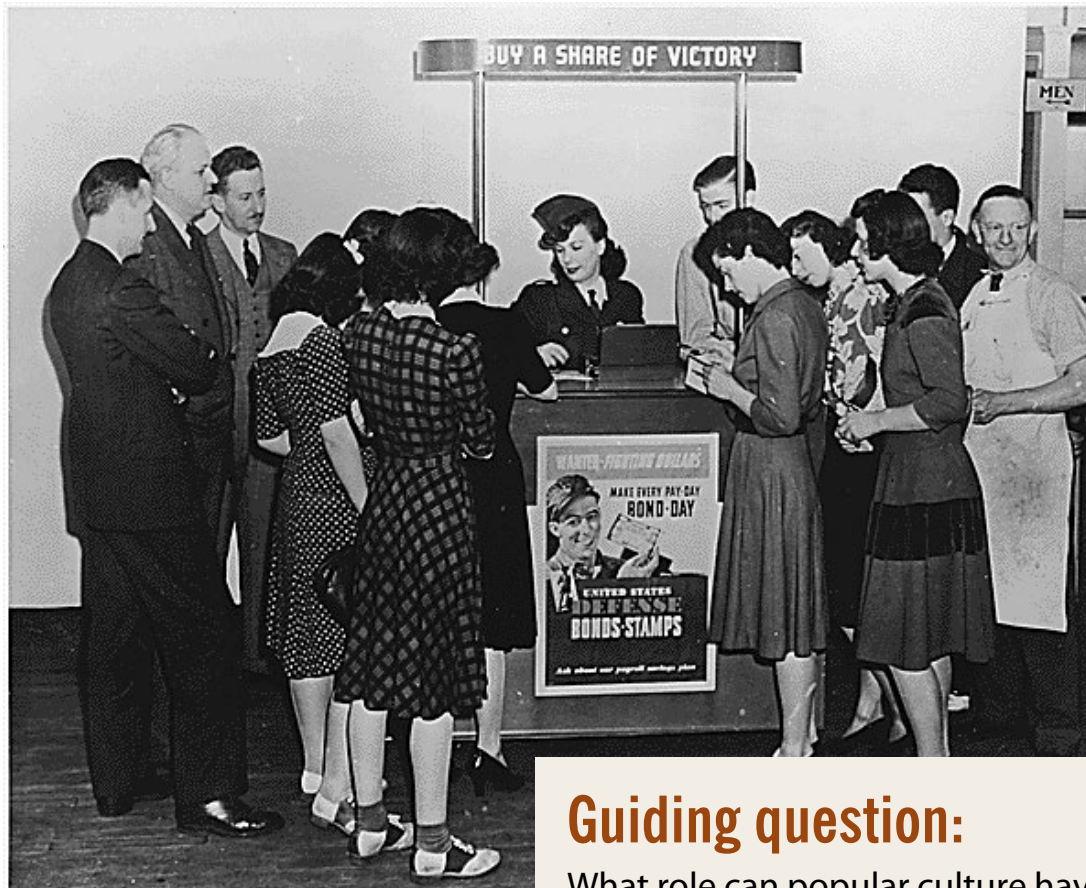




UNDERSTANDING
SACRIFICE

Activity: “I Sustain the Wings”: The Role of Performers in Selling War Bonds in World War II



Guiding question:

What role can popular culture have in war waging?

DEVELOPED BY GENA OPPENHEIM

Grade Level(s): 6-8

Subject(s): Social Studies, Theater

Cemetery Connection: Manila American Cemetery

Fallen Hero Connection: Evelyn Wahlberg



NHD
NATIONAL
HISTORY DAY

ROY ROSENZWEIG
Center FOR
History AND
New Media

Overview

Using vintage newsreels and radio broadcasts from the National Archives and Records Administration and other primary sources, students will learn about the effective collaboration between the entertainment industry and the U.S. government in funding the war effort through the sale of war bonds. Students will conclude by recording their own war bond fundraising radio program modeled after those from this time period.

Historical Context

The World War II bond campaign was arguably the first recorded moment in popular culture where art influenced the political, financial, and social spheres. Performing artists became part of the American military machine in an official capacity. They encouraged other civilians to buy war bonds. More than 85 million Americans — half the population of the time — purchased bonds totaling \$185.7 billion. Those incredible results, crucial to financing the World War II effort, have never since been matched.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to

- Understand how war bonds financed much of World War II;
- Understand that performing artists from both Hollywood and theaters across the United States were the driving forces behind the fundraising effort;
- Understand why the use of familiar faces helped legitimize the war bond effort; and
- Recreate a convincing marketing campaign using the tactics of those behind the war bond effort.

“War bonds allowed civilians to be active participants in World War II. Many know about the role of USO performers in uplifting the morale of troops, but are not aware that members of the entertainment industry were also integral in helping to fund World War II. As a theater teacher who creates shows based on historical events, I have observed how the performing arts have been an integral part of the American landscape. This was evident in the many tales my grandfather, who served in the Pacific Theater during World War II, told about war bond rallies in Brooklyn before he entered the war. While it was hard for him to talk about his participation in the war itself, he loved to talk about seeing Judy Garland and Rita Hayworth inspire everyone to participate in the effort.”

— Gena Oppenheim

Oppenheim teaches at Saint Ann’s School in Brooklyn, NY.

Documents Used ★ indicates an ABMC source

Primary Sources

Newsreel, *Everybody Joins the War Effort*

Office for Emergency Management, Office of War Information, 1942

National Archives and Records Administration (38919)

catalog.archives.gov/id/38919

Radio Broadcast, *NBC War Bond Parade [0:00-8:00]*, 1944

Internet Archive

archive.org/details/NBCWarBondParade440307SeventhConsecutiveWarBondDrive

War Bond PSA starring James Cagney, 1942

Warner Brothers Pictures

Internet Archive

archive.org/details/WarBondsPsa

Secondary Sources

Laurence M. Olney, *The War Bond Story (excerpts)*, 1971

The Library of Congress

lcweb2.loc.gov/service/gdc/scd0001/2009/20090722002wa/20090722002wa.pdf

Materials

- Computer with internet capability, projector, and speakers to watch War Bond PSA and listen to *NBC War Bond Parade*.
- Musical props (instruments, pots or pans, or even desks) to create sound effects for “live” radio broadcast.
- Cardboard or posterboard and markers for students to create radio logo and signage. Students can also make time period appropriate “microphones” using coffee cups and dowel rods.
- Radio Show Production Assignment and Rubric

Lesson Preparation

- Make one copy of chapter one and the conclusion of the *The War Bond Story* for each student.
- Make one copy of the Radio Show Production Assignment and Rubric for each student.
- Set up classroom technology.
- Test all online resources before class.

- Create a list of at least five to ten historic individuals from the time period, from popular culture to military figures (examples: Bob Hope, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, General Douglas MacArthur, etc.)

Procedure

Activity One: The War Bond Story (30 minutes)

- Read excerpts from *The War Bond Story* explaining the history and importance of war bonds.
 - Ask the students to identify why war bonds were necessary in funding World War II.
 - Ask the students, *Olney states the war bonds democratized public finance in the war effort. Do you think this is true? If so, why?*
- Watch the War Bond PSA starring James Cagney, an example of an actor promoting the war bond effort. Ask the students:
 - *Why did the War Department turn to Hollywood to promote war bonds?*
 - *Do you think this was effective?*
 - *Can you think of any examples of collaboration between entertainers and the U.S. government today?*
- Listen to the opening segment of the *NBC War Bond Parade* (first eight minutes of broadcast).
 - Ask students for reactions to broadcast.
 - Make a list on board with students of elements that help make a successful radio broadcast. Ask students to make a similar list in their notebooks for future reference.
 - **Teacher Tip:** Answers could include: clear diction, well-written scripts, topical information and entertaining content that features popular culture figures from the day.

Assessment

- Divide students into small groups of four or five students per group.
- Distribute copies of the Radio Show Production Assignment and Rubric.
- Assign student groups to produce their own five to ten minute live radio program modeled after the *NBC War Bond Parade* and imagine they are creating it during World War II. Students should first choose a specific event from the war to focus on (i.e. bombing of Pearl Harbor, D-Day invasion of Normandy, Battle of Guadalcanal, etc.) and storyboard their program, using elements from their list of what makes a successful radio broadcast. The content of the show could feature short news updates sourced from headlines of the time and creative content (such as jingles, sketches using sound effects created from items found in the classroom, and interviews with notable “personalities” and service members.)
 - **Teacher Tip:** Based on the age of the students and prior knowledge, provide access to computers or library resources to help them put their events in context.

- Schedule time for students to present their radio show to their classmates.
- Give each student a budget at the beginning of class, and give them fake money to buy bonds from the radio broadcast they feel most successfully persuades them to do so.
 - **Teacher Tip:** Student will be assessed on their grasp of time period specifics (including researching popular personalities of the time who would be featured, and grasping of current events from their chosen date, as per sheet created by teacher highlighting events or people.) Students will also be assessed on their ability to convince their classroom community to “buy” war bonds.

Methods for Extension

- Students with more interest in the role of entertainers in the war bond effort can research war bond tours that many Hollywood studios and Broadway theaters set up to bring entertainers to small towns across the U.S.
- Older or more advanced students may record a longer radio program on GarageBand or other recording software.
- The American Battle Monuments Commission maintains U.S. military cemeteries overseas. These cemeteries are permanent memorials to the fallen, but it is important that students know the stories of those who rest here. To learn more about the stories of Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice, visit abmc.gov/education and NHDSilentHeroes.org.
- Teachers can enhance students’ interest in World War II covert actions by exploring these related lesson plans:
 - [Place Your Faith in Radio](#)
 - [USO Camp Shows, Inc.](#)

Adaptations

- Teachers can adapt the project to younger learners or English language learners by changing the focus of the last activity to a short class skit. Younger learners could also do a smaller project simply creating a war bond song or jingle.

Laurence M. Olney, *The War Bond Story* (excerpts), p. 1

The Library of Congress

CHAPTER I

THE U. S. SAVINGS BONDS DIVISION

The first "baby bond" officially known as the Series "A" United States Savings Bond, was issued March 1, 1935. Legislation was passed by the House and Senate in January and signed by the President on February 4, 1935.

The program was originated by Secretary of Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, Jr. Previously he had taken a trip abroad to England and France, where he became impressed by the benefits of small denominational government bonds offered to the people at large. ✓

At the time the Savings Bonds were being discussed, the government was about to undertake a number of programs to relieve the unemployment situation throughout the country. An appropriation bill for \$4,800,000,000 was pending -- a huge sum for those days. This required deficit financing. Treasury officials wanted to avoid having the new securities held by a relatively few buyers -- the banks and wealthy individuals. They believed that widespread holding of the national debt was a sound principle of government financing.

The Savings Bond was an instrument of government showing an evidence of debt. It was not a marketable security which fluctuated in price like the old Liberty Bond of World War I. It recorded that John Doe had loaned his government a number of dollars which the Treasury promised to pay back with interest at the end of so many years. If John Doe needed the money in the meantime, he could redeem his bond with interest.

There were three sound objectives of the Savings Bond program:

1. To instill into the minds of the American people the habit of thrift;
2. To educate the people with respect to government securities;
3. To bind the people closer to their government, not only in financial affairs, but for its total well-being -- a Savings Bond was "A Share in America."

The baby bonds were purchased at 75% of their ten-year maturity value -- \$25, \$50, \$100, \$500 and \$1000. They were registered in the owner's name, and if desired, with co-owner, or beneficiary payable on death of owner. They were non-marketable--redeemable at stated cash value. If held to

Laurence M. Olney, *The War Bond Story* (excerpts), p. 2

The Library of Congress

maturity the baby bond yielded 2.9% interest. From March 1, 1935 to May 1, 1941 there were four series of baby bonds issued -- A, B, C, and D. At the beginning it was the idea to have a letter of the alphabet represent each year. This was soon dropped.

Treasury Department Order No. 13 established the Division of Savings Bonds under the Office of the Fiscal Assistant Secretary with Eugene W. Sloan in charge.

During the six years of operation, the baby bonds brought in almost \$4 billion in cash at purchase prices. This was a very respectable business since there was no field force, no sales agencies except the Post Offices and only about 200 paid employees. The principal method of promotion was an elaborate apparatus of circular lists -- a direct mail operation with folders and pamphlets. They also had a paid advertising campaign in nineteen magazines.

There were two features of the program which did not please Secretary Morgenthau. During the six years there were 17½ million bonds sold, over 57% of which were in denominations of \$100, \$500 and \$1000. The program was not reaching the small investor. In addition, there was the paid advertising which the Congressional Appropriation Committee criticized. In their report the appropriation of the Savings Bonds Division for 1939 was cut \$500,000. In making the reduction, the Committee stated they did not approve of large sums for advertising.

Laurence M. Olney, *The War Bond Story* (excerpts), p. 3

The Library of Congress

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

From May, 1941, through December 1945, the War Finance organization, and its preceding organizations, were responsible for the sale of 185.7 billion dollars of government securities. Aggregate goals in the eight special loan drives were oversubscribed by 48%. Individuals increased their holdings of Savings Bonds to 42.7 billion dollars and Series E bond holdings stood at an impressive total of 33.7 billion.

The purpose of the Series E bond was to democratize public finance in the United States. The objective was to have the ownership of America in the hands of the American people. When war broke out they served not only as a vital factor in financing the rearmament of our fighting forces, but what is even more important, they gave to the average citizen a sense of the war's meaning and of the urgent nature of the national danger. Throughout, the program was conducted on a genuinely voluntary democratic basis. From the beginning it avoided certain high-pressure sales tactics which unavoidably attended the fund-raising of World War I. It was determined that there should be no compulsion, no hysteria, no slacker lists and no invidious comparisons between those who bought bonds and those who did not.

The desire of the people "to help", the sense of participation in the national cause, could never have been realized except through a voluntary program. But a voluntary program could succeed of course only through the efforts of volunteer workers. We in the Treasury could fulfill only the functions of a general staff. The real battle had to be fought and won in the field -- fought and won by sustained, unstinting, tireless service -- which we had.

The various divisions of the Treasury worked closely with us. The Division of Research and Statistics headed by George Haas, and with Wesley Lindow and Sidney Tickton, Assistant Directors, marshaled the facts bearing on the public debt problems and their economic significance. They provided alternative sketches and blueprints as to the various shapes which the debt structure might take. Their influence on the planning of campaigns was profound. It will always be remembered their early techniques of briefing laymen into the mystery of finance and the sources of funds that theretofore had been considered largely esoteric areas.

Laurence M. Olney, *The War Bond Story* (excerpts), p. 4

The Library of Congress

During the war Dr. Peter Odegard was our consultant on policy matters. After Harold Graves left, he was the final approval on all promotional materials and many times was a speaker at sales conferences. Ted Gamble consulted with Odegard on most of the policy problems.

War Savings stamps were often overlooked in the program because of their small sales return in dollars as compared with bond sales. Stamps had an important part, both in dollars and other values. The total sale of stamps from May 1941 through December 1945 was \$1,652,089,000, of which 92% were redeemed. Of the stamps redeemed, 83.6% were redeemed for War Bonds -- 16.4% were redeemed for cash and Postal Savings Certificates. The great bulk of the stamp sales were through schools or newspaperboy clubs. The impact of the thrift message on youngsters who were growing up to be future payroll savings and bond-a-month customers was important to the long range bond program.

The banks' part in the War Bond program, great as it was, instead of hamstringing them, left them in a position to service enthusiastically a virile private enterprise system. They were not only able to maintain a strongly liquid position as a result of the manner in which the nation's war finance had been handled, but also they found an opportunity for public service.

Unlike any previous major war in American history, the Second World War was financed at a low level of interest rates -- Morgenthau's greatest accomplishment in all his years at the Treasury. In the period between the outbreak of the First World War and its end, the average rate of interest on the national debt had risen from 2.36 to 4.22 per cent. In contrast, on July 30, 1939, just before the start of the Second World War, the average rate of interest on the national debt, then some \$45 billion, amounted to 2.53 per cent; six years later, with the debt at \$257 billion, the average rate had fallen to 1.94 per cent. These figures understated the savings in interest cost between this war and the last one, because interest on the securities of the Second World War was not tax free.

Twenty years later, Morgenthau reversed none of his war-time judgments. He observed that the Defense Bond program had served, in the absence of any federal propaganda agency as "the spearhead for getting people interested in the war." As he had before, so again, he lamented corporate speculation during Treasury Bond Drives. Most of all he expressed satisfaction with the Treasury's reliance on voluntarism, and with the bond campaigns as instruments for awakening the American people to the implications of war. He was still deeply grateful to Harold Graves, Peter Odegard and Ted Gamble for their help. He regretted only his signal failure, the failure of the whole executive branch, to bring the Congress to a responsible tax policy for which he had fought continually.

- 106 -

Laurence M. Olney, *The War Bond Story* (excerpts), p. 5

The Library of Congress

TWENTY FIVE YEARS LATER

May 1, 1966 was the 25th anniversary of the Savings Bonds program. From an auspicious beginning the Defense Bond, War Bond and Savings Bond programs grew into the greatest continuing program of government finance in history.

It was widely assumed that the bond program would come to a natural end with the closing out of the wartime emergency which had brought it into being. But the bond-buyers thought otherwise. Having tasted the fruits of regular saving -- many of them for the first time in their lives -- millions of them wanted to go on with their payroll savings for bonds, or regular purchases at the bank. The volunteer corps felt the same way. Business and industry, banks, labor organizations, womens' and veterans' groups of all kinds demonstrated a belief that popular participation in government financing had a place in a peacetime economy as well as under wartime conditions. So the program continued on a less intensive but equally broad-gauged basis making undramatic but steady gains year by year.

The drive techniques of war time were discarded in favor of constant day-by-day promotion of our major markets -- wage and salary, banking and investment, farm and schools. The staff was sharply reduced in size, to some 592 persons from its war-time height of about 2,000.

During the 25 years of the bond program, some \$152 billion of bonds were sold and \$102 billion of this amount were redeemed to buy the things their owners had saved for -- new homes, education, retirement, and other important needs. The attainment of the \$50 billion goal of bonds outstanding in 1966 was a fitting climax to the Silver Anniversary year of the Savings Bond program.

Although the Series E bond became a wartime security shortly after it was created, it has been a peacetime security since 1945. It is somewhat altered in its appearance as a result of a graceful aging, but it is essentially the same security that was used in 1941. Its long life and eventual place in history can be traced to the fact that the bond was issued at the right time and it was the right security for the time.

A quarter of a century later no fewer than 2 billion 600 million copies of that original bond had been purchased by the American people. It is interesting to note that the American people bought twice as many separate savings bonds since the

Laurence M. Olney, *The War Bond Story* (excerpts), p. 6

The Library of Congress

Victory Loan as they purchased during the wartime period.

The saver -- particularly one of the eight million who bought bonds automatically through the payroll savings plan in some 40,000 companies -- looked upon Savings Bonds as the answer to the age-old problem of how to show a profit for his labors. He rightly considered them as safe and protected, something he could put away and forget about. Although the idea of "helping to manage the public debt" was furthest from his mind, he still looked upon his Savings Bonds as a kind of badge of citizenship.

Since 1946, there was a 70½ billion dollar increase in the public debt. Fifty nine billion dollars of this was picked up by the trust funds for investment of their surpluses and the central bank to meet credit expansion needs. Thus, the publicly held Federal debt since 1946 increased only 11½ billion dollars. Savings bonds provided more than that amount of public financing, in fact, a total of 19½ billion -- savings bonds outstanding increased from 30½ to over 50 billion dollars. This permitted a net decrease of \$8 billion in all other issues held by the public.

The volunteer support which has made this record possible is impressive, both in volume and variety. From the presidents of giant corporations who have served on national payroll savings committees to the smallest business man who conducted a payroll savings campaign; from the savings bonds committee of the American Bankers Association to the country banker who served as Savings Bond Chairman for the smallest county; from the agencies associated with the Advertising Council who produced our advertising program to the weekly newspaper who purchased an ad; from the top officials of AFL-CIO to the shop steward who worked in a payroll savings campaign, the volunteers gave selflessly of their time and effort to make the program succeed. National civic and fraternal groups, womens' organizations, industry associations and community groups of all kinds have provided the backing, the endorsement and the promotional activity necessary to keep the Savings Bonds program a flourishing enterprise.

Most important of course, there was the permanent volunteer structure of state, county and local chairmen and the respective committee members, without whose dedicated efforts the program could never have grown to its present stature. Bankers were on the forefront of the volunteer corps since 1941, both as individuals and through their institutions, which promoted and serviced the Savings Bonds program. In 1966 about 60% of the state and county bond chairmen were bankers and many of them had served since the beginning of the program.

One of the major highlights of the 25th anniversary year was the issuance of a colorful commemorative postage stamp saluting the American serviceman and the volunteers of the

Laurence M. Olney, *The War Bond Story* (excerpts), p. 7

The Library of Congress

Savings Bonds program. The stamp was designed by Stevan Dohanos of Westport, Connecticut, one of America's best known artists. The design was based on a photograph of the flag with the Statue of Liberty towering in the background.

It was to the vast army of bond volunteers that the 25th Anniversary of the Savings Bonds program was dedicated.

Radio Show Production Assignment

Overview: Students will use elements from the *NBC War Bond Parade* radio broadcast to create their own script and in-class (or recorded) performance. Students should:

- Find a way to market war bonds in a creative manner.
- Incorporate material appropriate for both troops stationed overseas during World War II and their families listening at home.
- Include historical and/or popular cultural figures of the World War II era.
- Create a show that is eight to ten minutes in length.

Students will be evaluated using the following rubric:

Radio Show Production Rubric

	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Emerging
Show Content	The show is eight to ten minutes and exceeds all requirements.	The show is eight to ten minutes and contains all requirements.	The show is five to eight minutes and contains some of the requirements.	The show is less than five minutes and is missing major requirements.
Delivery of Message / Persuasiveness	The program convinces whole class to buy war bonds.	The program convinces most of class to buy war bonds.	The program convinces some of class to buy war bonds.	The program is not successful in convincing class to buy war bonds.
Performance Values / Clarity of Speech	Radio performers articulate material in advanced and effective manner.	Radio performers articulate material in clear and effective manner.	Radio performers articulate material in effective manner, with some performance areas that can be clearer.	Radio performers communicate material in a way that makes it hard for audience to follow.