

New Uses for Old Photos: Renovating FSA Photographs in World War II Posters

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Shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, in an effort to enhance its motivational publicity drive, the U.S. government's War Production Board (WPB) commissioned the privately-owned poster company Sheldon-Claire to produce a series of poster campaigns for circulation to American factories. Earlier that year, Sheldon-Claire had drawn national media attention following the enthusiastic reception of its first wartime poster series "Produce for Victory" and the WPB realized that the company was thus a valuable ally. The creation of effective poster campaigns was a matter of urgency because the government's own propaganda agency, the Office of Facts and Figures (OFF, renamed the Office of War Information [OWI] in June 1942), had failed to develop a coherent poster strategy despite having distributed thousands of posters nationally. In the words of one OFF staffer, the agency had produced only "a hodge-podge of good, mediocre and bad design [with] no semblance of balance as to subject matter, and no coordination as to timing."¹ The commissioning of Sheldon-Claire signaled an effort to develop a more rationalized poster strategy.

The first campaign that Sheldon-Claire produced for the government, "This is America," in 1942, was a marked improvement on this "hodge-podge." Unlike the confusing panoply of design techniques and thematic inconsistencies seen in the OWI's posters² (which included illustration, photography, and graphic design, and came in a variety of sizes), "This is America" was an exercise in streamlined design and slick emotional appeal. The campaign included thirty posters, each of which came in two sizes, (4.5 feet × 2.2 feet and a smaller

3 feet × 2 feet version) complete with wooden frames with electric spotlights to showcase the “Poster of the Week.” Placed in work areas and high-traffic locations throughout the factory, the posters gave workers visual reminders about the imperatives of American victory in the war and emphasized the virtues of the American Way of Life and its rewards for those who worked hard. Each poster included a colorized photograph and brief copy which succinctly conveyed the poster’s message and linked it to the campaign theme. With bold captions, the thirty posters portrayed Americans in a variety of situations, such as at work, at home, and at leisure, and harmonized these scenes within a narrative of patriotism and free-enterprise values. The campaign included one further feature, the “Employee Mail-O-Gram,” a one-page précis of each poster which was mailed to workers’ homes a week before the installation of a new poster in the workplace.

Promoted by government agencies including the WPB and the OWI, and sold by Sheldon-Claire’s salesmen who traveled the country calling on factory managers, “This is America” gained success and wide national circulation, selling thousands of sets to industrial employers throughout the war. Sales ranged from one or two sets sold to smaller companies to five hundred sets sold to large corporations which purchased posters for all of their plants. In the process, Sheldon-Claire established a roster of around five hundred client companies. Government support for the promotion and sale of “This is America” thus served Sheldon-Claire well; it became the leading poster company in the country, a position that it maintained well into the postwar period.³

Sheldon-Claire’s success resulted from its ability to align itself with the doctrine of “liberal consensus” which became the dominant political credo of the postwar United States. According to the architects of liberal consensus in government and business, to secure the nation’s economic progress it was necessary to reign in the powerful labor unions of the 1930s, to expand the autonomy of business and to create a higher standard of living by increasing production. For industrial employers the creation of consensus rested on the eradication of labor-management conflict, a reality throughout the war.⁴ “This is America,” with its affirmations that a commitment to cooperation and free-enterprise values expanded workers’ freedoms, appealed to the government and employers alike.⁵ In fact, Sheldon-Claire’s design rationale was entirely consistent with liberal consensus doctrine. As the company’s chief designer, Ben Schenker remarked, the posters aimed to communicate visually what Eric Johnston, President of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and liberal consensus ideologue, called “areas of agreement” between management and labor.⁶

Like other government-sponsored motivational campaigns such as Norman Rockwell’s “Four Freedoms,” “This is America” connected the rhetoric of freedom to the objectives of war and evoked a postwar future of abundance as the reward for workers’ commitment to the war effort.⁷ Yet more specifically, the campaign enacted a *visual renovation* of the past.⁸ Seven of the thirty posters

included altered versions of photographs created by the government's Farm Security Administration (FSA) several years earlier during the Depression. Photographs by Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Ben Shahn, Russell Lee, and John Vachon, were cropped, colorized, recaptioned, and integrated into the campaign's vision of a citizenry that was committed to national victory and devoted to the principles of free enterprise. The photographs that Sheldon-Claire used were mostly from the latter part of the New Deal. Unlike earlier photographs that depicted the devastating effects of the Depression, these more positive images emphasized the success of the National Recovery Act.⁹ With modification, these photographs of hope during recent hard times could be turned into stimulating motivational publicity.

The renovation of FSA photographs in "This is America" presents an important subject for historians and scholars of visual culture. The federal government used poster campaigns extensively as propaganda tools during World War I and during the Depression to publicize New Deal programs.¹⁰ But World War II signaled a moment when the government honed the poster's communicative capacities more fully than in the past. As historians of documentary photography have demonstrated, the circulation of FSA photographs during the Depression was subject to a highly selective process by FSA Photographic Section chief, Roy Stryker.¹¹ During his tenure the circulation of FSA photographs grew considerably as Stryker released them to magazine editors who used them in news stories. But while the use of FSA photographs in popular publicity and public relations has received some scholarly analysis, their incorporation into motivational posters has not.¹² The rationale for the selection of photographs and Sheldon-Claire's acquisition of them is not recorded in the company's archived documents but it likely obtained them from the WPB or from Stryker. The use of FSA photographs in "This is America" thus underscores how wartime alliances between the federal government and motivational specialists made it possible to utilize images that were created for one ideological project—to generate support for the New Deal—for another ideological purpose, the cultivation of cooperation and free-enterprise values among industrial workers.

This article uses "This is America" as a case study of how World War II motivational posters reworked Depression-era images into an aesthetic pedagogy that promoted free-enterprise capitalism. I analyze a number of the posters and the photographs on which they were based to explain how Sheldon-Claire's alteration and reuse of FSA photographs redefined the recent past to suit the campaign's agenda. Ultimately, "This is America"'s visual renovation of FSA photographs highlights the process of aesthetic manipulation that shored up the liberal-consensus claim that the United States was a classless society.

In the last two decades, scholars have demonstrated that World War II and the early postwar period involved a vigorous campaign by the business community to expunge class rhetoric from national life.¹³ As labor historians have shown,

the wartime doctrine of labor-management cooperation gave employers new leverage with which to break the social authority of the labor movement and to advance business interests.¹⁴ Yet this work has not explored how employers conducted their campaign for authority *inside the workplace*, or how they mobilized cultural apparatuses to that end. Using posters and other aesthetic tools, employers utilized the workplace as a *habitus* in which the values and behaviors of consensus could be actively taught and defined as normal.¹⁵ By trading on the realism of FSA photographs, “This is America” offered an aura of authenticity that was otherwise lacking in wartime motivational publicity.

Despite renewed interest in visual culture in recent years, little analysis of the poster’s pedagogical significance has been forthcoming. The federal government’s sponsorship of posters during World Wars I and II and changes in poster design have been explored in a number of poster survey books. However, the alteration and use of existing images and the actual uses of posters have not been addressed fully.¹⁶ The absence of a comprehensive account of motivational posters is curious given their widespread circulation and use in employers’ efforts to promote free-enterprise values and to contain union authority.¹⁷ If the New Deal spurred “the first truly national popular visual culture,”¹⁸ the war served as an occasion for employers to appropriate and deploy Depression-era aesthetics to new ends: to promote a new popular nationalism that vaunted free-enterprise capitalism and erased “laborist” and class rhetoric.¹⁹

Visual Renovations: The Genealogy of a Poster

The poster below, from “This is America,” depicts five men gathered around a gas station porch (fig. 1).²⁰ Two of the men wear baseball uniforms while one holds a baseball glove and another sits with a baseball bat between his legs. The group’s demeanor—hands on hips and steely stares—suggests an aura of preparedness. This feeling is conveyed especially by the man in the baseball uniform who leans against the pillar, casually resting a Coca-Cola bottle against his thigh. His facial expression appears resolute and unruffled. The men’s close proximity to each other and the unifying theme of baseball suggests a tightly-knit group—a team mentality.

The text superimposed above and below the image builds on the baseball theme to convey a patriotic message and to proclaim the virtues of free enterprise. Above the men, a large caption on a rectangle banner proclaims, “*This is America . . .*” The angled caption serves as a sort of textual “salute.” The phrase, “*This is America . . .*” draws the viewer’s eyes across the poster and frames the men as representatives of the nation. The poster’s honorific depiction of the men is complemented by the concluding caption at the bottom of the poster, which reads, “Where a fellow can start on the home team and wind up on the big league. Where there is always room at the top for the fellow who has it on the ball * This is your America . . . *Keep it Free!*” This caption offers textual inter-

pretation of the image, linking the “team” in the image to the free-enterprise system. The preservation of their freedom and their ability to succeed as individuals, teammates, and Americans, are attributed to free-enterprise, which is defined as a natural and self-evident aspect of American culture. The poster’s vivid colors (which are not visible in the black-and-white reproduction included here) add to the poster’s striking appeal for individual commitment to the nation’s wartime objectives. The bright red gas pump which dominates the building frontage at the center of the image, the blue overalls and baseball caps and the white baseball uniforms and shirts that the men wear—the colors of the nation’s flag—support the poster’s patriotic message and add urgency to its appeal. Thus, between the image and the text we see a tension between two themes—teamwork and individuality. This tension embodies the liberal consensus notion that by working together as a *team*, worker-citizens would attain *individual* rewards.

The poster’s references to baseball have important bearing upon its message. As sport historians have shown, baseball’s emergence as a mass-spectator sport was intimately connected to industrialization and with the growth of the urban working-class (which comprised the bulk of “This is America”’s audience).²¹ Baseball’s emphasis on the need for individual determination to secure the team’s victory also resembled changes in management’s methods for generating labor-management cooperation during World War II. After World War I Taylorism, which emphasized the maximization of individual production in exchange for financial incentives, gave way to human-relations theories which defined teamwork as a catalyst for workplace cooperation.²² The poster’s motivational appeal thus draws on baseball’s working-class appeal and on contemporary management tactics for creating cooperation.

The photograph upon which the poster is based was created by Dorothea Lange for the FSA in July 1939 and exudes a rather different feeling than the version in the poster (fig. 2).²³ A comparison of the photograph and the poster reveals how modifications made to the image changed the import of the photograph. Lange’s 35mm, square black-and-white photograph has a more mundane tone than its reworked version in the poster. Without embellishment by colorization, cropping, and recaptioning, the photograph is more austere; whereas the colorized version in the poster gives the men’s faces a look of resolve and determination, and the cropping and recaptioning lends their bodies an air of national purpose, Lange’s photograph evokes a more relaxed mood. The relaxed feeling in the photograph is reinforced by the caption²⁴ which reads, “Fourth of July, near Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Rural filling stations become community centers and general loafing grounds. The men in the baseball suits are on a local team which will play a game nearby. They are called the Cedargrove Team.”²⁵ The replacement of this caption with celebratory free-enterprise rhetoric in the poster revises the import of the photograph. The environment is no longer a “loafing ground” and we no longer see a shabby gas station and a dusty road. Animated through colorizing and recaptioning the image becomes a parable of



Where a fellow can start on the home team and wind up in the big league. Where there is always room at the top for the fellow who has it on the ball * *This is your America!*

... Keep it Free!

Figure 1: Poster No. 11 from Sheldon-Claire's "This is America." (Courtesy National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution).

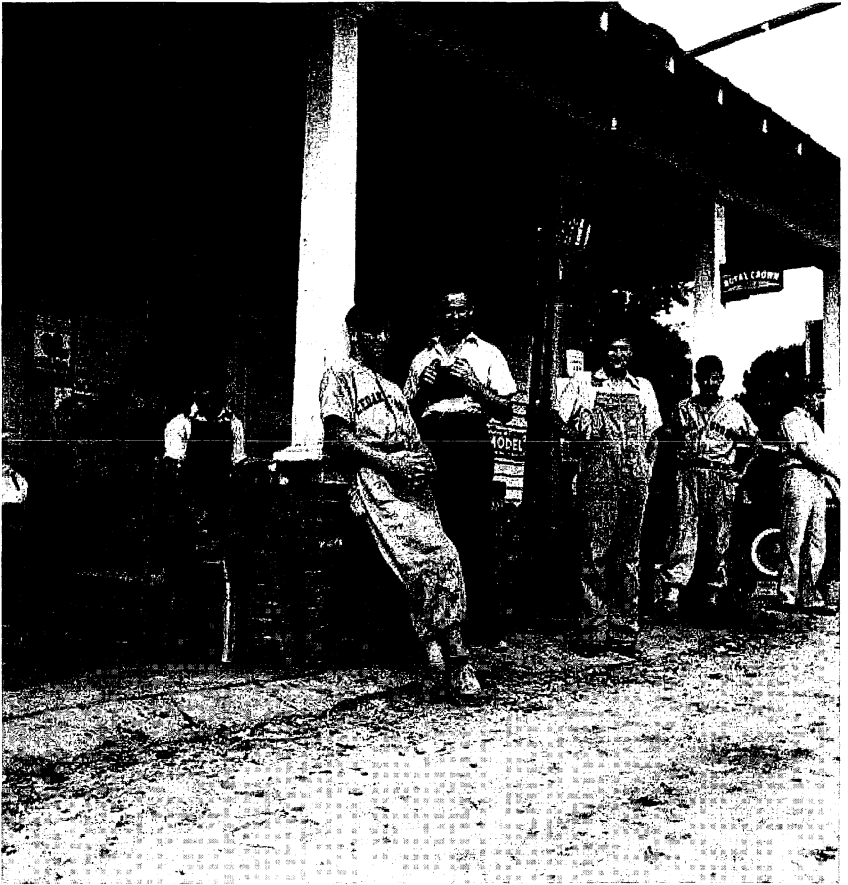


Figure 2: Dorothea Lange’s photograph on which Sheldon-Claire’s baseball-themed poster (fig. 1) is based. The caption reads, “Fourth of July, near Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Rural filling stations become community centers and general loafing grounds. The men in the baseball suits are on a local team which will play a game nearby. They are called the Cedargrove Team.” (Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection).

individual upward mobility which is complemented by the cropping of the photograph and gives the men a tight-knit, unified appearance.

By accentuating the theme of baseball, Sheldon-Claire amplified the photograph’s pre-existing references to interdependence and unity—what might be called its latent motivational capacities. Themes of interdependence and unity appeared frequently in FSA photographs, particularly from the late 1930s onward as Stryker shifted the agency’s emphasis away from the economic and social devastation of the Depression and toward the success of the New Deal

and the NRA.²⁶ Baseball was one of many activities that Stryker emphasized as desirable subject matter to FSA photographers and he requested photographs that depicted it on at least two occasions.²⁷ Altered, and integrated into the poster, the photograph morphed from a depiction of everyday life that drew on baseball's national ubiquity into a declaration that teamwork was fundamental to the individual's advancement in the American free-enterprise system.

Lange's photograph includes four men cropped out of the image in the poster. One of these men, the one on the far right, is turned in a different direction than those who appear in the poster while the three on the far left blend into the shade of the porch, one partially cropped. In contrast to the unified, team-like aura of the five men in the poster, the nine men in the photograph project a less unified sense of purpose; as Lange put it in the caption, they are "loafing." The grainy black, white, and grays of the photograph convey a sense of ordinariness which is characteristic of FSA photographs more generally. The men's bodies look relaxed but idle in contrast to the calm preparedness that pervades the group in the poster due to the use of colorizing, cropping, and recaptioning. This suggestion of idleness is enhanced by the space at the top and bottom of the photograph. The bottom third of the photograph consists of the dirt road in front of the gas station while the top third shows the underside of the porch roof and some gray sky. The unadorned road contrasts with the lushness in the poster's reworked version of the photograph that is suggested through the addition of color (the green trees and blue sky).

The cutting, colorizing, and recaptioning of the photograph, and its integration into the poster dissolve the men's loafing demeanor and transform the image into a bold declaration of individual advancement that is implied to be attainable for those who are "on the ball" enough to "wind up in the big league." This narrative of upward mobility embodies a fundamental belief in the American mythos: the claim that regardless of status at birth, one can achieve the "American Dream" via determination and enterprise. The association between upward mobility and teamwork enhance the democratic aura of the poster's implicit call for teamwork. In his analysis of the *Los Angeles Times* astrology column in the early 1950s, Theodor Adorno observed "the general tendency of the column to prepare the addressees to act as members of 'teams.' . . . It is as though it had been accepted as a major ideological tenet that everything can be settled by majority decisions taken at some 'meeting.'"²⁸ We see a similar correlation between teamwork and democracy in the interplay of the poster's image of the baseball team and its caption's assertion about the openness of the free-enterprise system. The poster, like the astrology column described by Adorno offered a sense of comfort to its viewers by suggesting that they were members of a community in which decisions were made democratically by individuals who were united in their belief that the free-enterprise system provided security.²⁹

The alteration of Lange's photograph in the poster thus recalibrates its subjects' relationship to "America." In Lange's photograph the men's relationship

to the nation is undershot with irony—the fourth of July is an occasion for “loafing.” Conversely, the cropped, vertical image in the poster focuses the viewer’s gaze on a close-knit team which is apparently committed to the progress of their nation. The coloring of the men’s skin suggests a healthy demeanor and their clothes exude a stylized workmanlike aura. The campaign slogan (“*This is America . . .*”) at the top of the poster, and the lengthier caption underneath the image cement the transformation of the photograph from an ordinary moment in small-town life into a bold assertion that citizens can prosper through an abiding faith in free-enterprise ideals.

The poster’s adaptation of the photograph also reinterprets the physical environment in ways that support its portrayal of the United States as a panacea of abundance. In Lange’s photograph, handbills are visible on the left of the porch. These handbills advertise Hollywood movies of 1939 including *Dark Victory*, *Sudden Money*, and *Montana Skyline* and the popular burlesque radio act, Howard and Shelton, as well as tobacco and soda. In the poster these ads are not discernible but those promoting consumer objects (Chesterfield Cigarettes, Model Tobacco, and Crown Soda) are embellished through the use of color, emphasizing the abundance of goods in the American free-enterprise system. In this sense the poster offers a utopian vision of American life that anticipates the shift from “social freedoms” to “consumer freedoms” that Eric Foner argues was characteristic of World War II and the postwar period.³⁰ The things that were cut from the photograph—the men at the edges of the photograph, the physical reminders of loafing, suggestions of an austere environment, and movie posters from 1939—might be understood as “disturbances” that were neutralized in order to create a streamlined and effective motivational tool that was aesthetically consistent with liberal consensus conceptions of the nation and its citizens. Thus, we see a process of visual erasure and renovation—a willful forgetting of history through visual manipulation.³¹

The transformation of Lange’s photograph can be read in various ways. On one hand, the renovation of the photograph is indicative of the wartime harnessing of New Deal publicity about rural and small-town folk culture for the purposes of wartime motivation. In turn, the alteration of the photograph speaks to the efforts of the business community to anchor rhetoric about freedom in the discourse of individualism. Then again, the alteration and reuse of the photograph amounts to the replacement of one form of visual manipulation for ideological purposes for another. As historians of documentary photography have shown, Stryker composed and distributed shooting scripts to the FSA’s photographers that asked them to submit specific kinds of photographs. In 1940, Stryker asked photographer Jack Delano for some

autumn pictures . . . Emphasize the idea of abundance—the “horn of plenty”—and pour maple syrup over it—you know mix well with white clouds and put on a sky blue platter. I

know your damned photographer's soul writhes, but to hell with it. Do you think I give a damn about a photographer's soul with Hitler at our doorstep? You are nothing but camera fodder to me.³²

Stryker, like Sheldon-Claire, regarded photographs as tools that could inspire belief in national progress and was not averse to accentuating the positive if it suited his purposes.

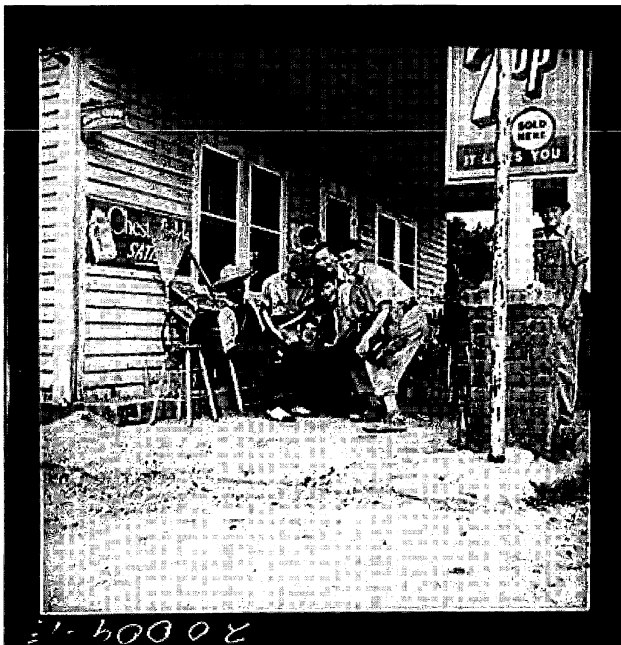
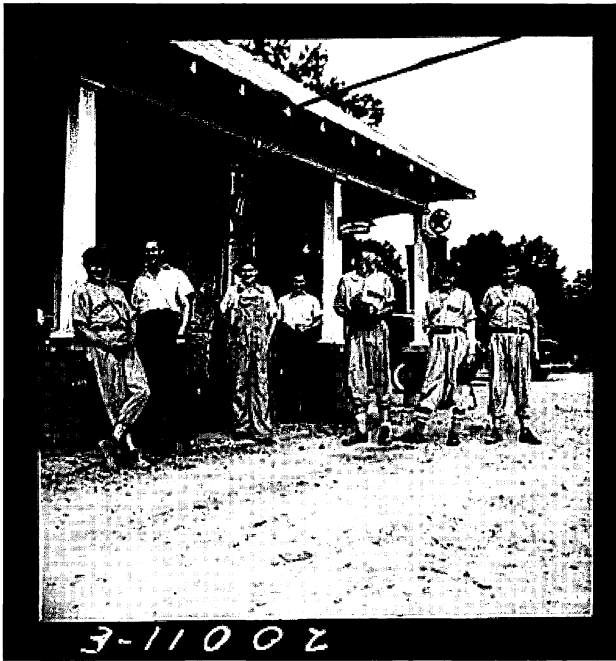
If a similar proclivity for visual manipulation existed at the FSA and Sheldon-Claire, "This is America" was a more systematic attempt to cultivate a sense of national community that was characterized by free-enterprise values. The reworking of Lange's photograph in the poster underscores Benedict Anderson's arguments about the ways that print capitalism helps to imagine national communities into existence. Anderson argues that nationalism is based on a common sense understanding of the typicality and simultaneity of national experience.³³ Thus, he writes, "an American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his . . . fellow-Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity."³⁴ Motivational posters enact the process that Anderson identifies in visual terms. The poster in question trades on the claim that the men that it depicts represent average Americans anywhere and anytime. The alteration of the photograph and the interplay between image and caption thus seek to evoke a sense of affinity among its audience. As Roland Barthes argues, the cultivation of complicity is central to the persuasive abilities of visual communication. For example, in "electoral photography" (photographs of politicians used during political campaigns), the politician is invested with the characteristics of the "common man." Consequently, "a photograph is a mirror, what we are asked to read is the familiar, the known; it offers to the voter his own likeness, but clarified, exalted, superbly elevated into a type. This glorification is in fact the very definition of the photogenic: the voter is at once expressed and heroicized. . . ."³⁵ This poster, like electoral photography, appeals to its viewers by exalting them honorifically—as defenders of and representatives of the nation and, therefore, as *heroes*.

The process of image selection in the poster becomes even more interesting when we consider the larger body of images from which the photograph was taken. The FSA file at the Library of Congress contains five photographs taken by Lange at the gas station that day. I have included two more of them here (figs. 3 and 4).³⁶ Whereas fig. 2 (despite its disturbances which were erased to enhance the poster's message as discussed above) contained latent motivational capacities, in fig. 3 the arrangement of the men in a straight line lacks the close-knit feeling that Sheldon-Claire embellished so effectively in adapting fig. 2 in the poster. In fig. 3 the baseball player who leans coolly against the pillar, and who draws the viewer's gaze in the poster, is now one of eight men whom the

viewer may peruse. The eight men in the photograph include four of the five who appear in the poster but their physical arrangement—in a wide line across the gas station frontage and into the dirt road—is such that unlike fig. 2, no one individual stands out. The men are all laughing and two of them look away from the camera, which undercuts the tight-knit, resolute aura that the group projects in fig. 2. Whether or not fig. 3 was offered to Sheldon-Claire is not stated in its archived records but the existence of this and other photographs from the same sequence in the FSA file suggests that certain physical arrangements were deemed more appropriate for the message that Sheldon-Claire wished to convey in “This is America.”

Figure 4 offers insights into inter-racial dynamics at the photo shoot which did not find expression in the poster. In this photograph, taken from the side of the gas station, we see some of the men engaged in horseplay. They grab one man by the arms and legs and hold him up in the air, apparently for the benefit of the camera. On the left, a black man dressed in overalls sits on a chair under the porch next to the group who jostle their victim. In this photograph, like fig. 3, the subjects lack the resolute aura that made fig. 2 suitable for inclusion in “This is America.” But its non use also underscores the ways in which federal-government photographs depicting racial intimacy failed to find wide circulation during the war. Lange and other FSA photographers produced many photographs depicting inter-racial relations among ordinary Americans, none of which appeared in “This is America.” As George Roeder has shown, the OWI and other government agencies responsible for disseminating publicity about the war effort routinely censored photographs of inter-racial intimacy.³⁷ Similarly, Lange’s photographs of Japanese-Americans in wartime internment camps were “impounded” for the duration of the war.³⁸ “This is America” thus reflected prevailing assumptions about the assumed naturalness of racial hierarchies that defined whiteness as the *de facto* marker of citizenship during the war.

The affirmation of whiteness in “This is America” and in wartime motivational publicity more generally must also be seen in the context of industrial action that was often inspired by white workers’ antipathy towards perceived challenges to white racial authority and to race-based hierarchies in the workforce. Wartime strikes and walkouts were frequently motivated by white workers’ anxieties about racial intimacy in the wake of President Roosevelt’s Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) of 1941.³⁹ As Eileen Boris points out, while the FEPC was intended to end discrimination in employment in the war industries, it was mainly a “symbolic threat”; the factory remained a site of struggle around racial and sexual intimacy in which the black body was defined as pathological.⁴⁰ The display of motivational posters in the workplace depicting white workers as heroicized embodiments of national courage but excluding black subjects served as daily reminders of the naturalness of racial hierarchies even as official government discourse emphasized racial and ethnic pluralism



Figures 3 (above) and 4 (below): Dorothea Lange, Farm Security Administration, 1939. (Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection).

as exemplars of American freedom in contrast to the fascism of the Axis powers. Like much wartime motivational publicity, “This is America” emphasized *ethnic* pluralism but did not visualize *racial* pluralism, a tendency that reflected a wartime emphasis on the Americanization of ethnic-Americans.⁴¹ For example, several of Sheldon-Claire’s wartime posters used Ellis Island as a symbolic reference point when celebrating American pluralism. One poster reworked Lewis Hine’s photograph, “Climbing into America” in the same manner as it altered FSA photographs; another poster from the earlier, “Produce for Victory” campaign included a close-up photograph of a worker with a determined-looking expression and a caption that proclaimed, “I’m an Ellis Island American. I left the old country to be free—and nobody is going to take that away from me. . . .” The celebratory pluralist rhetoric that pervaded Sheldon-Claire’s posters and other wartime motivational publicity underscore a prevailing assumption within official aesthetic depictions of American democracy during World War II: The collapse and erasure of ethnic difference was assumed to be the principal means for guaranteeing inclusion into the category, citizen. Thus, wartime motivational aesthetics putatively inscribed ethnic-Americans as the only suitable candidates for inclusion as American citizens and as recipients of American freedoms.⁴²

I have offered a prolonged analysis of fig. 1 and the photographs in the sequence from which the poster’s image was taken because they illuminate the process by which particular FSA photographs found their way into “This is America.” Looking to the larger body of photographs created by Lange at this North Carolina gas station—the story behind the poster, so to speak—allows us to understand the process by which Sheldon-Claire gave material form to the ideology of consensus within the workplace where it was encountered daily by workers. The preceding discussion also illustrates how “This is America”’s celebration of freedom negotiated the contradictions of pluralism that existed during World War II.

Constructing a Classless Folk Culture

As the selection and alteration of Lange’s photograph in fig. 1 suggests, the visual strategy of “This is America” depended largely on bringing ordinary Americans and free-enterprise idealism under the aegis of nationalism. In pursuing this objective, Sheldon-Claire achieved a more specific goal: while the campaign integrated the visual and rhetorical expressions of the folk into its assertion of the openness of the free-enterprise system for all Americans, it de-emphasized those aspects of the photographs that explicitly or implicitly evoked class. This tactic enhanced the campaign’s claim that anyone with the determination to succeed could do so; in turn, the de-emphasis of class complemented the posters’ appeals to cooperation by suggesting that by cooperating, workers would receive the material and psychic rewards of the free-enterprise system.

An analysis of other posters in “This is America” that included altered FSA photographs reveals how Sheldon-Claire constructed the campaign’s celebra-

tion of a classless folk culture. One poster used an altered version of Walker Evans's 1937 photograph of Moundville, Alabama to depict small town America as a wellspring of free enterprise (figs. 5 and 6).⁴³ The colorized poster's depiction of "Main Street" (that most ubiquitous symbol of small town America) shows a bustling commercial hub replete with stores, cars, and trucks. A comparison of the two images reveals that trees and sky at the top of the photograph were embellished in the poster. Evans's photograph ends just above the roofs of the stores whereas the poster includes some extra trees and sky. These changes inject a feeling of fertility to the scene and invest it with an aura of enterprise that supplements the buoyant patriotism of the larger campaign. Whereas the gray tones and the wider breadth of Evans's photograph invite the viewer to peruse a more expansive scene, the vivid blue, red, and yellow of the stores and cars and the cutting and integration of the photograph into the poster's vertical format constrain the viewer's interpretation of Main Street. The colorized street and the addition of text above and below the image suggest a sense of urgency that resembles a tabloid newspaper. The caption that accompanies Evans's photograph offers only the factual description, "County seat of Hale County, Alabama." In the poster, the title caption, "This is America," forms a "V" shape with the line of the street so that the eye is drawn diagonally from left to right, facilitating a sense of movement. The arrangement of the title caption thus implies that Main Street *leads somewhere* (to "America," or to freedom, perhaps?). In Evans's photograph the scene is one of mild activity. A dozen or so people are visible on the sidewalk. In the poster, the colorization and bold captions assign a more purposeful quality to the scene. "Main Street" is a place "[w]here through free enterprise, a free people have carved a great nation out of a wilderness." Thus, the poster upholds Main Street as verification of the civilizing effects of free-enterprise capitalism, which is defined as a distinctively American characteristic, echoing Benedict Anderson's point that publicity functions as a discourse of nationalism by implying a typicality and simultaneity of social experience.⁴⁴

The extent of the poster's renovation of Main Street is further realized when we consider an earlier description of this same street. Evans created the photograph in the summer of 1936 while he and James Agee were researching the assignment that eventually became *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, their Depression-era reportage of the lives of poor Southern tenant-farming families which was published in 1941. The prevailing characteristics of the street in Agee's description of Main Street in the book were emptiness and hostility. Driving down the whole length of Main Street at five miles an hour, Agee observed "not a stir of life anywhere: every last soul in all these shaded, jigsawed, wooden houses must be dead asleep under the weight of the hot greasy Sunday dinner in shaded rooms."⁴⁵ Entering a diner, he noted, "three hard-built, crazy-eyed boys of eighteen lounged in a slow collapse like dough, talking low in sexual voices and sniggering without enthusiasm; sick and desperate with noth-



..where Main Street is bigger than Broadway. Where, through free enterprise, a free people have carved a great nation out of a wilderness • This is your America

... Keep it Free!

Figures 5 (left) and 6 (below): Animating Main Street. Sheldon-Claire's reworking of Walker Evans's 1937 photograph of Moundville, Alabama. Integrated into the vertical format of the "This is America" series, and with the addition of a triumphant caption and color, Main Street was reimagined as a vibrant community and a symbol of a flourishing free-enterprise system. (Fig. 5 courtesy National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. Fig. 6 courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection).



ing to do and with the rotting which the rightborn energy of their souls could by no chance have escaped. They looked at me with inevitable enmity."⁴⁶ Agee's description underscores the emasculating effects of the Depression on Main Street which embodies the very antithesis of the progress that was suggested in its altered version in "This is America." The economic stagnation of the town has created a sense of deadness, which Agee suggests in his description of the boys "loung[ing] in a slow collapse . . . without enthusiasm." Sheldon-Claire's renovation of the photograph and its interjection of vivacity into Main Street underscore the manipulability of documentary images. Viewed in its original state and in conjunction with Agee's description in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (and alongside the book's other photographs which depict poor tenant families) Evans' photograph offers corroboration of the social despondency of the Depression. Altered and incorporated into the poster, the photograph seems entirely congruent with "This is America"'s veneration of a triumphant free-enterprise system and with its claim that workers would receive the rewards of a classless America if they embraced the teamwork ethos.

In another poster, Sheldon-Claire cropped and recaptioned a photograph by John Vachon to similar effect (figs. 7 and 8).⁴⁷ Vachon's photograph depicts a Minnesota farmer (an "FSA borrower" according to the photograph's caption) and his wife. In the photograph, the farmer's clothes have a well-worn appearance. His shirt is creased and grubby, showing signs of work. His trousers are held up by a tightly fastened belt, the end of which is bent out of shape. Sheldon-Claire cropped the photograph substantially when incorporating it into the poster. The man's wife is completely removed and his body is cropped above the waist so that his lower torso, belt, and trousers are no longer visible. These changes imbue the man with a tidier and more healthful demeanor and diminish the photograph's allusions to the Depression (tattered clothes, the tightened belt, and the dilapidated shed behind and to the right of the man). The removal of the man's wife, his lower torso, and much of the sky from the photograph in the poster tightens the framing of the man and gives him a more elevated position in relation to the viewer, investing him with a more honorific aura. His ruddy complexion, visible in the color poster, suggests a more healthful appearance than he possesses in Vachon's black-and-white photograph and the close-up framing of his face amplifies his wry smile. His eyes, which are shaded in the photograph, are more discernible in the poster. He now looks up toward the caption, "*This is America*," implying his esteem for the nation. The image has also been reversed, allowing for greater visual harmony between the caption, "*This is America*" and the man's pipe and arm. As in the reworked versions of the photographs by Lange and Evans the title caption and photograph content have been arranged in a way that creates an approximation of a "V" shape. In this case, three converging lines—the title caption, the man's pipe, and his arm—draw the viewer's eye towards his face.

The cropping of the photograph repositions the viewer's perspective. Whereas the photograph invites the viewer to look at two individuals and in-



"Smile--man--smile. You're an American... free to speak . . . free to worship . . . free to work . . . free to live in your own way. Stay on the job. This is *your* America."

... Keep it Free!

Figures 7 (left) and 8 (below): *Renovating folk culture.* A "This is America" poster and John Vachon's 1941 photograph of a Minnesota farmer (an FSA borrower) and his wife on which it is based. The removal of the man's wife and the cropping of other parts of the photograph enables the visualization of motivated, patriotic manhood. Note how the reversal of the image creates visual alignment between the phrase, "This is America," and the man's pipe. Note also how the cropping of the photograph gives the man a more honorific appearance and requires the viewer to look up at him. (Fig. 7 courtesy National Museum of American History. Fig. 8 courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection).



cludes a large area of sky, the close cropping of the photograph in the poster means that we must gaze upwards at the man. Like Lange's baseball players he appears heroic, albeit without their athleticism. Unlike the posters discussed thus far the caption hails the man directly: "Smile—man—smile. You're an American. Free to speak . . . free to worship . . . free to work . . . free to live in your own way." After asserting the freedoms that the man enjoys as an American, the remainder of the poster's text is directed toward the workers who viewed the poster in the factory: "Stay on the job. This is your America. *Keep it Free.*" Thus, the poster uses the well-recognized figure of the ordinary man to hail workers in a no-nonsense vernacular and to inform them that they are active participants in the preservation of American Freedom.⁴⁸

During the war, Sheldon-Claire received numerous letters of admiration in response to its poster campaigns. Representative of government agencies, industrial organizations, the military, chambers of commerce, and schools and libraries wrote to proclaim the posters' contributions to the morale of workers and the broader citizenry.⁴⁹ Some union officials also wrote to Sheldon-Claire to express their approval of its posters. While a lengthy analysis of those letters is not possible here, a review of a small sample demonstrates the campaign's positive reception among some union officials. The President of the Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America enthused that the posters were, "very effective reminders, voicing the thoughts of American workers, [and] excellent morale stimulators. . . . [W]e feel that every shipyard can help their production by showing these in the yards to the men while they are on the job . . . in the sheds, in the locker rooms, eating places, and in other . . . locations."⁵⁰ The Educational Director of the Textile Workers of America emphasized the posters' realism, noting, "[o]ne of our business agents points out that the posters are so effectively done that they give the workers the feeling of working right next to the person shown in the poster, rather than viewing the portrait as a hypothetical figure." He concluded by requesting further copies for display in the union's offices.⁵¹ The Vice President and Director of the United Auto Workers Aviation Division was passionate in his appraisal of "This is America," writing to Sheldon-Claire, "[y]our suggestion that you would appreciate any 'comment' or 'criticism' by me places me in the position of a visitor to the Vatican being asked by the guide to comment on the works of Michael Angelo [sic]." He concluded by proposing that Sheldon-Claire depict President Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms," anticipating the OWI's use of Norman Rockwell's illustrations of them months later.⁵²

In expressing support for Sheldon-Claire's campaigns these union representatives aligned themselves with employers' efforts to cultivate labor-management cooperation. By stating that the posters were "voicing the thoughts of American workers," and were "excellent morale stimulators" the writer of the first letter not only positions himself as an advocate of cooperation, but also affirms the appropriateness of motivational specialists circulating images that

supposedly represented workers' thoughts. The first and second letters' references to the circulation of the posters in "sheds, in the locker rooms, eating places, and in other . . . locations" and in the union's offices reflect the ways in which union personnel sometimes aided the integration of employer and management publicity into spaces that were ordinarily the preserve of union publicity. And, in offering suggestions for further designs to Shalett, the writer of the final letter advocates the very apparatus through which employers hoped to weaken workers' class consciousness.

By viewing two of the posters that I have discussed together with other posters from "This is America," we can observe how effectively Sheldon-Claire integrated FSA photographs into the campaign's visualization of a classless culture. The four posters shown in fig. 9 depict a variety of fundamental American ideals according to the campaign that include the sanctity of the home; the veracity of free enterprise; the patriotism of ordinary Americans; and workplace cooperation.⁵³ These posters were displayed for one week each in weeks 7, 11, 19, and 23 of the campaign. Thus, while the posters were not displayed in consecutive weeks, my arrangement of them replicates the process of serialization in the campaign and maintains the order in which they appeared. Seen together, these four posters underscore designer Ben Schenker's attempts to visualize the "areas of agreement" which Eric Johnston described as fundamental to the creation of classless consensus.

The poster at the top left underscores the sanctity of family via a depiction of a family dinner time. The father sits with his back to us while raising a coffee cup to his mouth. His wife looks directly at him with a deferential expression as if listening to him intently. The caption proclaims the importance of patriarchal authority by stating, "the family is a sacred institution . . . where a man's home is his castle." The second and third posters, those that incorporate photographs by Lange and Vachon (top right and bottom left) underscore the virtues of free enterprise (through the analogy of baseball) and the freedoms enjoyed by ordinary citizens (represented by the smiling farmer). As discussed earlier, these two posters incorporate elements of an American folk culture that is implied to be classless. The last poster (bottom right) visualizes a fourth aspect of consensus, labor's cooperation with management. It depicts a worker placing an envelope in the factory suggestion box. The poster's caption asserts the democratic nature of work in the United States by declaring, "This is America . . . where your thinking is appreciated . . . where men work together, to do a better job—to make a better product—to build a better nation."⁵⁴ Thus, the posters visualize four parts of a larger schema of consensus. The two posters that incorporate FSA photographs are visually congruous with the others, which include stock publicity images. Thus, Sheldon-Claire incorporated photographs that documented national crisis into a seamless narrative of national progress that asserted the rewards that workers received as beneficiaries of the American way of life. In this narrative, work was imagined as the route to freedom, which was to be enjoyed within the private sphere of the family and the home.⁵⁵



...where the family is a sacred institution. Where children love, honor and respect their parents . . . where a man's home is his castle * This is your America

... Keep it Free!



Where a fellow can start on the home team and wind up in the big league. Where there is always room at the top for the fellow who has it on the ball * This is your America!

... Keep it Free!



"Smile--man--smile. You're an American... free to speak . . . free to worship . . . free to work . . . free to live in your own way. Stay on the job. This is your America."

... Keep it Free!



... where your thinking is appreciated . . . where men work together, to do a better job -- to make a better product -- to build a better nation * This is your America

... Keep it Free!

Figure 9: The integration of the posters containing altered FSA photographs into the "This is America" campaign was fundamental in erasing the photographs' emphasis on class. Viewing these four posters together, we see the seamless incorporation of FSA photographs into the larger campaign, in which they appear aesthetically congruous with the other posters. Two of these posters (at top right and bottom left) include altered versions of FSA photographs created by Dorothea Lange and John Vachon respectively. (All posters courtesy National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution).

If the individual posters assert the existence and naturalness of consensus and its various components (free enterprise, classlessness, and cooperation) the slogan, "This is America! . . . Keep it Free!" which appears in all of the posters, establishes the campaign's chief mode of addressing workers. This is at once a bold and indeterminate message; the slogan proclaims to the viewer that America is "free" and that he/she must "Keep it Free," but stipulates no particular course of action. Thus the campaign sought to inspire and motivate simply through repetitive reminders of the freedoms offered by the American way of life. This aesthetic rationale was shaped by Sheldon-Claire president, Lew Shalett's belief that workers absorbed posters' messages while working or while moving around the workplace—in a "read and run" fashion as he put it—rather than by contemplating them at length.⁵⁶ An effective poster, Shalett believed, was one that imparted its message swiftly without causing workers to interrupt their work. Shalett's conception of the poster's communicative method echoes Theodor Adorno's contention that people absorb the messages of mass-circulating publicity in a "distracted mental state."⁵⁷ The phrase, "This is America! Keep it Free" left little possibility for lengthy contemplation or misinterpretation of instructions. Similarly, indeterminate appeals to patriotism and nationalism left less possibility for the viewer to decline to comply than did demands for specific actions. The campaign thus articulated a less specific message than that of many of the other posters circulated by the government during the war. Most of the posters circulated by the OWI encouraged workers and citizens to perform or avoid particular tasks ("produce more," "save scrap," "don't waste time" and so forth). While those slogans gave clear instructions, "This is America" offered a less tangible and, therefore, less refutable message than the "hodge-podge" of commands, appeals, and admonishments frequently used in OWI posters. The integration of the campaign into the workplace and in public spaces thus marked a refinement of motivational publicity by targeting the cultivation of dispositions and attitudes through subconscious appeals to national values. The visualization of a classless culture in "This is America" also underscores the successful efforts of industry and the state to co-opt and integrate laborist aesthetics into the discourse and imagery of consensus during the war.

The "Employee Mail-O-Grams" that Sheldon-Claire's clients received as part of the campaign allowed them to disseminate the campaign's messages to workers' homes. The Mail-O-Gram was a one-page communiqué that included a small reproduction of the poster and several paragraphs of text that elaborated the poster's message. The Mail-O-Gram was sent to each worker's home a few days before the poster was installed in the workplace to familiarize workers with the ideas expressed in the forthcoming "Poster of the Week." The text of the Mail-O-Grams consisted of patriotic rhetoric that was expressed through stirring, emotive language that hailed workers as producers of American freedom. The Mail-O-Grams emphasized significant moments in the nation's history and defined these as stepping stones to citizens' freedom of which World War II and its hoped-for allied victory was the culmination point.

The Mail-O-Gram for one poster drew on its image of American schoolchildren to expound upon the nation's legacy of triumph over adversity (fig. 10).⁵⁸ It began,

This is America . . . where the little ones of today will be the big people of tomorrow—where they are learning by example that freedom is a blessing to be protected and defended. This is America . . . where you and millions of Americans are adding another glorious page to history . . . where your children and their children will read about the heroes of 1776, 1812, 1865, 1917 and 1943 . . . where the history of our great nation is studded with conflicts to liberate men. This is America . . . where men are fighting and working so that these little ones may continue to enjoy the freedoms and the opportunities of democracy.⁵⁹

The text blends patriotism and military triumphalism into an oratory of national regeneration, trading on connections between youth and innocence to define the nation's history as a struggle to secure a threatened liberty. The text suggests that by supporting the war effort, workers would become *participants* in the creation of American history, like the heroes of previous wars.

The poster's photograph, a reworked version of Russell Lee's May 1941 photograph of an FSA migrant worker's camp in Caldwell, Idaho, underwent significant alteration. As a comparison of the poster and Lee's original photograph (fig. 11) reveals, the image was heavily cut when reproduced in the poster.⁶⁰ In the poster the two main children are shown from the knees up, drawing the viewer's attention to their faces which appear to be absorbed in the act of learning. (The text of the Mail-O-Gram informs workers that the children in the poster are "learning . . . that freedom is a blessing to be protected and defended.") Lee's photograph, on the other hand, depicts a less sanguine scene. The children wear dusty overalls and scuffed shoes, and the photograph's caption reads, "Schoolchildren at the FSA . . . farm workers' camp. Caldwell, Idaho." Captions accompanying other photographs in the sequence explain that most of the schoolchildren's parents were "working in the fields."⁶¹ The theme of regeneration through youth is a mainstay of war propaganda but it served specific purposes in the United States during World War II. The Depression undermined the nation's narrative about the sanctity of youth and its importance to national progress. The emotional weight of FSA photographs frequently traded on an image of poor and malnourished children which was frequently linked to the devastation of the family in the face of joblessness and migration. This tendency was typified by the FSA's most famed and recognizable photograph, Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother." The alteration of Lee's photograph and the Mail-O-Gram's narrative of the heroic citizen-worker who fights to pre-

POSTER OF THE WEEK!



1776, 1812, 1865, 1917 and 1943... where the history of our great nation is studded with conflicts to liberate men.

This is America... where men are fighting and working so that these little ones may continue to enjoy the freedoms and the opportunities of democracy.

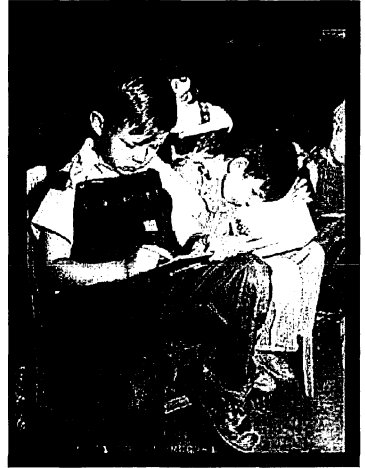
This is America... where more than one hundred and thirty million people have gladly laid aside the ease and comforts of peace — where every American dedicates his effort, his life and his fortune that the America of tomorrow shall be free.

Your job is your opportunity to fight the enemy. Your job is your way of keeping faith with America — yourself — your children. Your job is your foxhole — your machine gun — your bomb — your hand grenade to score for victory. Your job is your place of honor in the scroll of America's heroes who fight for freedom. Do that job well — every day.

STAY ON THE JOB!... KEEP AMERICA FREE

This is America... where the little-ones of today will be the big people of tomorrow — where they are learning by example that freedom is a blessing to be protected and defended.

This is America... where you and millions of Americans are adding another glorious page to history... where your children and their children will read about the heroes of



Figures 10 (left) and 11 (right): Sheldon-Claire “Employee Mail-O-Gram” which was sent to workers’ homes to inform them of the forthcoming “Poster of the Week.” The poster shown in the Mail-O-Gram is an altered version of Russell Lee’s 1941 photograph of children at an FSA migrant worker’s camp. Lee’s photograph is shown here on the right. (Fig. 10 courtesy National Museum of American History. Fig. 11 courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection).

serve the freedoms of the nation’s children thus reworked the photograph’s import. Whereas Lee’s photograph makes its emotional appeal through an image of child poverty, the Mail-O-Gram reframes and recaptions the children to construct a celebration of the heroic citizen-worker who ensures the freedom of [America’s] “little ones.” In the process, all references to the Depression and to the class inequities that it involved are erased.

The reworking of this and other FSA photographs in “This is America” constructed a coherent narrative of a classless America. This narrative involved a process of erasure in which cropping, colorizing, and captioning were used to deemphasize the photographs’ evocations of the Depression and to accentuate their latent motivational qualities. Cropping, colorizing, and captioning thus served as a triptych of procedures for creating a visual narrative about the nation and its citizens that was congruent with consensus ideology. Michael Denning has demonstrated that due to the artistic movements of the New Deal and

the Popular Front of the 1930s, popular culture became infused with “laborist” discourse and aesthetics.⁶² Noted less by historians, however, is the business community’s wartime appropriation of images of workers and working-class Americans. The alteration and reuse of photographs of ordinary Americans during the Depression in “This is America” demonstrates how this appropriation of such images advanced employers’ interests in the workplace, and in the industrial system more generally by normalizing the discourse and aesthetics of cooperation, free enterprise, and classless consensus.

My discussion of the alteration and reuse of FSA photographs in “This is America” offers insights into the political, social, and cultural transformations between the Depression and World War II in the United States. First, it demonstrates how employers’ efforts to institutionalize cooperation shaped wartime struggle over the definition of “America,” especially in relation to class. As historians have demonstrated, labor unions’ wartime acquiescence to labor-management cooperation weakened unions’ social authority and gave validation to consensus doctrine in labor-management relations after the war.⁶³ Yet historians have not explained how the ideals associated with consensus—classlessness, free enterprise, and cooperation—were integrated into the circulating discourses and pedagogical apparatuses of the workplace and, in turn, how these ideals acquired substance. As the preceding discussion suggests, the integration of motivational campaigns within and beyond the factory walls gave material form to the ideological claims associated with consensus.

The preceding discussion also casts new light on the *periodization* of liberal consensus. Historians usually define liberal consensus as a post-World War II formation. As Godfrey Hodgson argues of the postwar period, “[n]o tenet of the consensus was more widely held than the idea that revolutionary American capitalism had abolished the working class, or . . . that everybody in America was middle class now or that American society was rapidly approaching economic equality.”⁶⁴ But if consensus emerged as a full-fledged political doctrine after the war, the wartime workplace was a seedbed where its ideological claims were circulated and defined as normal. For industrial employers, World War II was not only a moment when patriotism would stimulate production. It was also an opportunity to eradicate the memory of the class conflict of the 1930s and to inaugurate a culture of cooperation and consensus in the industrial system. This erasure of tension and instability is the larger context to which “This is America” speaks.

My discussion also offers insight into how motivational posters were used as *pedagogical tools* to shape values and dispositions in the workplace. I have argued that “This is America” possessed a more rationalized pedagogical schema than the OWI’s posters. First, by using photographs that workers were familiar with in a general sense (even if they had not seen the particular photographs that were used in the posters) Sheldon-Claire offered employers realistic and emo-

tionally resonant ways to define cooperation as a normal and necessary characteristic of the industrial workplace. Second, the synchronization of “This is America”—its sequential display of thirty weekly posters in spotlighted frames in conjunction with the Mail-O-Grams that were sent to workers’ homes—provided a more comprehensible narrative than did the OWI’s poorly coordinated “hodgepodge” of posters. Third, the campaign’s thematic coherence and rationalized execution replicated pedagogical formulas seen in the culture at large. Like advertising and public relations, the campaign blended emotional appeal and Taylorist principles of repetition to appeal to the senses.⁶⁵

“This is America” might thus be understood as a form of *aesthetic training* through which employers honed the factory as an environment where the values and behaviors of consensus—teamwork, enterprise, and faith in the classless ideal—could be learned and actualized. By understanding posters and other visual motivation techniques as a form of aesthetic training, we may appreciate more clearly the ways in which the workplace factored into the ideological struggles between the Depression and World War II. Aesthetic training is a more useful concept than that of propaganda, which is often used to categorize posters such as these. The term, propaganda, draws attention mainly to the poster’s diffusion of misinformation and deception. Conversely, the concept of aesthetic training undercores the ways in which posters actually helped to generate the dispositions, values, and habits that were defined as normal by employers, managers, and hired specialists like Sheldon-Claire who organized the aesthetic environment in the workplace. To interpret these posters in this way is not to diminish their propagandistic nature but to reveal more concretely than “propaganda” permits how they were used to cultivate the dispositions and habits that were necessary for consensus ideology to acquire social form. Indeed, by looking at how motivational aesthetics were (and still are) used to influence disposition we may understand more clearly how cooperation and other forms of discipline are produced in the workplace.

Finally, my discussion has implications for how the wartime transformation of politics and culture in the United States may be elucidated in the classroom. First, “This is America” demonstrates palpably how the ideology of consensus found material form in the places where many people worked during the war. A discussion of the campaign in conjunction with work by labor scholars can offer students insights into how wartime calls for cooperation acquired materiality and how gendered and racialized definitions of citizenship were defined as normal in the workplace.⁶⁶ Second, an examination of the alteration and reuse of FSA photographs in “This is America” can help students to appreciate the posters’ social and pedagogical nature and to see the ways in which posters can shape social norms in working environments. Perhaps because reproductions of posters now circulate widely as kitsch memorabilia in stores, museums, and on the Internet (usually without supporting information about their design rationale and specific uses) posters have not yet received the in-depth analysis

that other, supposedly more “serious” cultural products such as movies, documentaries, and novels have received.⁶⁷ Only by grounding World War II posters in the fuller contexts of their design rationale, their circulation, and their use will it be possible to offer a more practical account of their significance. To locate the poster in the context of the shifting political, social, and cultural milieus of its time—to insist upon its protean nature and its social life—thus remains an important challenge for historians.

Notes

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Abbreviations: RSCC, AC, BC, NMAH, SI: Records of the Sheldon-Claire Company, Archives Center, Behring Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. CHRC, UCSC: Charles H. Rosenfeld Collection, University of Chicago Special Collections.

1. George A. Barnes to Archibald MacLeish, 20 December 1941, folder: “Posters, RG 208,” Box 42, E-7, OWI-OFF 1941-42, alpha subject file, “NACP.” No precise figure exists on the number of posters disseminated during the war but historians of the World War II poster concur that they numbered in the thousands. For the most recent and insightful of these studies, see William L. Bird and Harry Rubenstein, *Design for Victory: World War II Posters on the American Home Front* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998). In Chapter 5 the authors emphasize Sheldon-Claire’s use of advertising techniques, though they do not address its use of FSA photographs.

2. Although the OFF was renamed the OWI in June 1942, I refer to the agency as the OWI here and throughout the rest of the paper to avoid confusion.

3. Sheldon-Claire’s archived records do not contain complete order lists but a collage of its clients’ insignia includes those of around five hundred. Series 1, Box 2. Subject file: “Our Work Guarantees Our Wages,” “The Competitive Edge: Your Key to Greater Profits,” (“Management Manual,” 1955). RSCC, AC, BC, NMAH, SI. Sheldon-Claire’s records do not provide annual breakdowns of posters sales but discussions at its sales meetings after the war reveal that the company’s wartime trade set it on the path to annual profits of nearly one million dollars a year by 1948. See the proceedings of Sheldon-Claire’s annual sales meetings, CHRC, UCSC, Box 11, unprocessed materials.

4. On labor-management conflict during World War II, see George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Class in the 1940s* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), especially chapters 3-7, and Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

5. The key scholarship on postwar liberal consensus includes Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War at Home*; Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), and Alan Brinkley, *Liberalism and its Discontents* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

6. Ben Schenker, address to Sheldon-Claire annual sales meeting, 1947. CHRC, UCSC, Box 11, file: “Proceedings of the Sheldon-Claire Company Sales Conference, New York, January 31-February 1, 1947,” 49-51.

7. See Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998). See especially Chapter 10.

8. I use the word “renovation” in the sense that Jani Scandura and Michael Thurston have used it. As they have recently argued in their discussion of modernism, cultural production reimagines the past through a process of erasure. See “Introduction,” Jani Scandura and Michael Thurston, eds., *Modernism, Inc.: Body, Memory Capital* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

9. I would like to thank Paula Rabinowitz for drawing my attention to the ways in which FSA policy changed in the late 1930s, shifting from depictions of social and economic devasta-

tion to ones that underscored the success of the NRA. I also wish to thank her for her suggestions more generally during the revision of this article.

10. A comprehensive account of the literature on government-sponsored posters of World War I and the New Deal is not possible here. Among the most noted literature are, George Theofiles, *American Posters of World War I: A Price and Collectors Guide* (New York: Dafran House Publishers, Inc., 1973), and Christopher DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA* (Los Angeles: Wheatley Press, in association with the University of Washington Press, 1987).

11. This point is made in most scholarly accounts of FSA photography. See for example, Maren Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America 1890-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must be Represented: The Politics of Documentary*, (New York: Verso, 1994); Lawrence Levine, "The Historian and the Icon: Photography and the History of the American People in the 1930s and 1940s," in, Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 256-290; John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1988); and John Rogers Puckett, *Five Photo-Textual Documentaries from the Great Depression* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984).

12. Discussing Stryker's circulation of the FSA's photographs to "picture magazines," Maren Stange underscores Stryker's role in "ensur[ing] photographs that were compatible with corporate photojournalism's modes of production. . . ." (*Symbols of Ideal Life*, 108). Stange points out that Stryker distributed 193 FSA photographs per month in 1935 compared with 1406 per month in 1940 (108-111). As John Puckett points out, "[Roy] Stryker established the policy that any person could reproduce FSA photographs without charge, provided the original credit line was quoted." Puckett, *Five Photo-Textual Documentaries*, 10. Elspeth Brown has made similar arguments about the compatibility of Lewis Hine's photographs with employer's motivational campaigns. She argues, "Hine's 1920s employee work portraits were intended, and used, as a type of motivational portraiture, designed to engineer employee loyalty." See Elspeth Brown, *The Corporate Eye: Photography and the Rationalization of American Commercial Culture, 1884-1929* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 218.

13. As several scholars have pointed out, wartime and postwar social policy was largely concerned with linking citizenship to private enterprise and classlessness. This involved encouraging home ownership, spending, and affirming the family and home as the basis of the "American Way." Lary May explains how the movie industry promoted classless consensus during and after the war. Elizabeth Fones-Wolf explains how business institutions such as the National Association of Manufacturers used advertising in its assault on New Deal politics after World War II. William L. Bird explores business's use of advertising after the war. See Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-1960* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994); and William L. Bird, *A Better Living: Advertising, Media, and the New Vocabulary of Business Leadership, 1935-1955* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999).

14. On the rise of corporate authority after World War II, see Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, and Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*, especially chapters 3-7.

15. Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus* contends that meanings and social relationships are shaped through the cultivation of habits and dispositions conducive to the regulation of class relations in social environments. See Pierre Bourdieu, "Structures, *Habitus*, Practices," in Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, Richard Nice, trans. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 53.

16. For an account of the emergence and development of the motivational poster business and the honing of poster design and use, see David A. Gray, "Visualizing a Classless America: Motivational Campaigns in the Industrial Workplace, 1920-1955" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2007). None of the recent books on visual culture and visual studies examine posters. Visual studies is currently focused mainly on photography, film, painting, and digital media. See for example, David Michael Levin, ed., *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay, eds., *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996); and James Elkins, *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003). Space does not permit me to provide a full summary of the many survey books on World War II posters here. For a comprehensive list of these works, see Bird and Rubenstein's bibliography in *Design for Victory*.

17. As management historians point out, in the postwar years, "employee-relations" departments became a customary aspect of industrial management. Employers routinely hired specialists in the new fields of employee- and public-relations who were skilled in the design and use of aesthetics as tools for the cultivation of labor-management accord and consensus. See for example, Sanford Jacoby, *Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism Since the New Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). On the ways in which the business community marshaled

visual publicity to advance free enterprise ideology after World War II, see Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise*.

18. Rabinowitz argues that the photographs, films, literature, and other artistic forms created by Hollywood, New Deal agencies, and the Popular Front of the 1930s constituted the first “truly national popular visual culture.” *They Must Be Represented*, 77.

19. Michael Denning refers to the “laboring” of American culture to describe the ways in which popular and mass culture became characterized by themes of labor and working-class expressions in the 1920s and 1930s. See Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Verso, 1996), xvi-xx.

20. Fig. 1: Poster No. 11, “This is America” poster series, 1942. Collection, Series 1, Box 1, Subject file: “This is America,” RSCC, AC, BC, NMAH, SI.

21. On the social significance of baseball in the United States, see Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Elliot J. Gorn and Warren Goldstein, *A Brief History of American Sports* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); and Ted Vincent, *The Rise and Fall of American Sport: Mudville’s Revenge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

22. The shift from Taylorism to human relations as the dominant management method for producing cooperation in the workplace is a key theme in the work of business historians. However, the importance of this shift in advancing classless ideology is yet to receive significant attention. I explore this subject in my dissertation. See Gray, “Visualizing a Classless America,” Chapter 1. On the ascendance of human relations, see Jacoby, *Modern Manors*; Andrea Gabor, *The Capitalist Philosophers: The Geniuses of Modern Business—Their Lives, Times, And Ideas* (New York: Time Business, 2000); and James Hoopes, *False Prophets: The Gurus Who Created Modern Management and Why Their Ideas are Bad for Business Today* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2003). On the relationship between human relations and free market ideology, see Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism, and the End of Economic Democracy* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), especially Chapter 5.

23. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, Washington, DC. Reproduction number: LC-USF34-020010-E DLC.

24. The authorship of captions for FSA photographs has received much attention. Maren Stange explains that captions for all FSA negatives were written at the FSA head offices in Washington based on the photographers’ field notes (*Symbols of Ideal Life*, 113). However, as she and others add, the captions that photographers submitted with negatives were often used unaltered. Stryker was especially complimentary about Lange’s captions. As Stange observes, “[p]oor captioning was not one of the faults that Roy Stryker found with Lange’s work; on the contrary, he held her up as exemplary to other photographers” (120). In her discussion of Lange as an “agricultural sociologist” Linda Gordon underscores the ways in which Lange’s captions added depth to her photographs’ exposé of economic blight. She shows that Lange often composed short essays and fought (unsuccessfully) to have these published with the photographs. See Linda Gordon, “Dorothea Lange: The Photographer as Agricultural Sociologist,” *Journal of American History* 93 (December 2006): 698-727, especially 716-719. While it may be tempting to imagine that Lange and her fellow FSA photographers were troubled about the alteration and reuse of their photographs, as John Raeburn points out in his discussion of the alteration and reuse of FSA photographs in the press during the 1930s, “[s]uch blatant disrespect for a photographer’s creative intelligence was the tribute exacted from an undertaking predicated on public relations. If these journalistic disfigurements discouraged the photographers they have left no record of it.” John Raeburn, *A Staggering Revolution: A Cultural History of Thirties Photography* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 164.

25. This image and caption appear also in Hank O’Neal, et al., *A Vision Shared: A Classic Portrait of America and Its People, 1935-1943* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976), 196.

26. As Stange puts it, the FSA photography file “. . . was intended to publicize not only the long-standing rural distress which had necessitated such unprecedented federal intervention but also the ameliorative effects and the unique long-range goals of agency programs” (*Symbols of Ideal Life*, 107).

27. Stryker initially made this suggestion to Robert Lynd, co-author of the influential *Middletown* study. Roy Stryker, *This Proud Land: America 1935-1943 as Seen in the FSA Photographs* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1973), 187. In 1936 Stryker distributed a Shooting Script to all FSA photographers that described the baseball diamond as “an important part of our general landscape.” In 1939 he asked the FSA’s photographers for “studies of small-town movie-going, shopping . . . baseball games, rural homes, barns, and fences of all types, and other similarly miscellaneous topics” (Raeburn, *A Staggering Revolution*, 161-162).

28. Adorno argued that astrology was a form of “abstract authority” which readers used for moral and ethical guidance and entrée to esoteric knowledge. Theodor W. Adorno, “The Stars Down To Earth: The Los Angeles Times Astrology Column,” in Theodor W. Adorno, *The Stars Down To Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture*, ed. Stephen Crook (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 34-127.

29. Writing after World War II, C. L. R. James pointed out that employers and the employee-relations specialists whom they hired emphasized security in their efforts to promote labor-management cooperation. James articulated this argument especially in his essays, "Freedom Today" and "The Struggle for Happiness." See C. L. R. James, *American Civilization*, ed. Anna Griwshaw and Keith Hart (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 106-117 and 166-198 respectively.

30. As Foner argues, in the 1930s, the discourse of freedom was largely defined in social terms due to the New Deal's emphasis on the need for collective intervention during the Depression whereas during World War II the discourse of freedom was increasingly tied to individualism. See Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, Chapter 10.

31. My discussion of the erasure of disturbances is informed by Paula Rabinowitz's work on documentary. She has demonstrated the ways that modern techniques of image production such as cutting and captioning, as well as the sheer reproducibility of images in the twentieth century neutralized and amplified political meanings in documentary images. See Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented*, especially chapters 4 and 9.

32. Quoted in Levine, "The Historian and the Icon," 287.

33. Anderson discusses the construction of typicality and simultaneity in particular in his analysis of late nineteenth-century Filipino writing. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), especially 26-32.

34. *Ibid.*, 26.

35. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 91-92.

36. Fig. 3: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, Washington, DC. Reproduction number: LC-USF34-020011-E DLC. Fig. 4: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, Washington, DC. Reproduction number: LC-USF34-020009-E DLC.

37. See George Roeder, *The Censored War: American Visual Experience in World War II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

38. Lange's photographs of Japanese-American internment camps during World War II and their suppression from public circulation are discussed in Linda Gordon and Gary Okihiko, *Impounded: Dorothea Lange and the Censored Images of Japanese Internment* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).

39. On whiteness in the wartime industrial workplace, see for example, Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*, and Eileen Boris, "'You Wouldn't Want One of 'Em Dancing With Your Wife': Racialized Bodies on the Job in World War II," *American Quarterly* 50 (March 1998), 77-108.

40. Boris, "'You Wouldn't Want One of 'Em Dancing With Your Wife,'" 83.

41. Whereas war publicity photography and films created by the OWI and by employers for public-relations purposes frequently depicted black workers, few government-sponsored posters did so. Of these was a 1943 poster by the U.S. Treasury Department which portrayed "Tuskegee Airman" Robert Deiz. The poster is included in Bird and Rubenstein, *Design For Victory*, 36. As Reed Ueda has pointed out, naturalization became a "major social movement" in the wartime United States. See Reed Ueda, "The Changing Path to Citizenship: Ethnicity and Naturalization during World War II," in eds. Lewis Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch, *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 202-216. Ueda points out that more immigrants became naturalized during World War II than in any previous five-year period and that one of every four who became citizens between 1907 and 1945 did so during the war (202).

42. The reworked Lewis Hine photograph appears in Poster No. 5, "This is America" poster series, 1942. Series 1, Box 1, Subject file: "This is America," RSCC, AC, BC, NMAH, SI. For the poster that proclaims "I'm an Ellis Island American . . ." see "Produce for Victory" poster series, 1941. Series 1, Box 1, Subject File: "Produce for Victory," RSCC, AC, BC, NMAH, SI.

43. Fig. 5: Poster No. 15, "This is America" poster series, 1942. Series 1, Box 1, Subject file: "This is America," RSCC, AC, BC, NMAH, SI. Fig. 6: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, Washington, DC. Reproduction No. LC-USF342-T01-008166-A DLC. The photograph appears in the series of images at the beginning of James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

44. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 26-32.

45. Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 334.

46. *Ibid.*, 336.

47. Fig. 7: Poster No. 19, "This is America" poster series, 1942. Collection, Series 1, Box 1, Subject file: "This is America," RSCC, AC, BC, NMAH, SI. Fig. 8: John Vachon, FSA (Farm Security Administration). "Borrower and wife. Cut-over area of Itasca County, Minnesota." 1941, July. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, Washington, DC. Reproduction number: LC-USF346-063342-D DLC.

48. On hailing, cf. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (Old Woking, Surrey: New Left Review Editions, 1971). See especially pp. 160-165.

49. Sheldon-Claire's archived documents contain over 160 such letters, over 70 of which were written during World War II. For a fuller discussion of the letters and their implications for the wartime and postwar proliferation of motivational discourse, see my dissertation. For the letters, see, Series 1, Box G. Subject file: "World-Wide Endorsements and Acknowledgements of Sheldon-Claire Services." RSCC, AC, BC, NMAH, SI.

50. Original emphasis. Paul Cusic, President, I.U.S. of S.W.A. Local 43, to Sheldon-Claire, November 16th, 1943. Series 1, Box G. Subject file: "World-Wide Endorsements and Acknowledgements of Sheldon-Claire Services." RSCC, AC, BC, NMAH, SI.

51. Larry Rogin, Educational Director, Textile Workers of America, undated letter during World War II. Series 1, Box G. Subject file: "World-Wide Endorsements and Acknowledgements of Sheldon-Claire Services." RSCC, AC, BC, NMAH, SI.

52. Richard T. Frankenstein, Vice President and Director of the UAW Aviation Division to Lew Shalett, February 15, 1943. Series 1, Box G. Subject file: "World-Wide Endorsements and Acknowledgements of Sheldon-Claire Services." RSCC, AC, BC, NMAH, SI.

53. These are posters 7, 11, 19, and 23. All posters, "This is America" poster series, 1942. Series 1, Box 1, Subject file: "This is America," RSCC, AC, BC, NMAH, SI.

54. *Ibid.*

55. In this way, these posters gave aesthetic validation to Cold War definitions of family structure and life as demonstrated by Elaine Tyler-May in *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

56. Lew Shalett, "Proceedings of the Sheldon-Claire Company Sales Conference, February 17-18, 1950," 184-185. CHRC, UCSC, Box 11.

57. Adorno, "Stars Down to Earth," 96.

58. Employee Mail-O-Gram No. 16, "This is America" poster series, 1942. Series 1, Box 1, Subject file: "This is America," RSCC, AC, BC, NMAH, SI.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, Washington, DC. Reproduction No.: LC-USF34-039130-D DLC.

61. The reference to the children's parents "working in the fields" is in the caption for the photograph numbered, LC-USF34-039131-D. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, Washington, DC.

62. See Denning, *The Cultural Front*, xvi-xviii.

63. On union leaders' acquiescence to labor-management accord during and after World War II, see Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, Chapters 6-12 and Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*, Chapters 2-11.

64. Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time: From World War II to Nixon, What Happened and Why* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 81-82.

65. One of the defining characteristics of effective motivational aesthetics was their blending of Taylorist and human relations sensibilities. In this sense, the producers of motivational posters and other "employee-relations" practices worked from a similar perspective to theorists of advertising and management like Walter Dill Scott who argued that human behavior was determined not by logical reasoning but by sentiment and the cultivation of habits. See Scott, *Increasing Human Efficiency in Business* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1911).

66. For example, an analysis of "This is America" in conjunction with any of the following would offer students useful insights into race, gender, and class during World War II: Boris, "You Wouldn't Want One of 'Em Dancing With Your Wife"; Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*; Nelson Lichtenstein, "The Making of the Postwar Working Class: Cultural Pluralism and Social Structure in World War II" in *The Historian* L1 (November 1988), 42-63; Gerstle, "The Working Class Goes to War"; and George Roeder Jr., "Censoring Disorder: American Visual Imagery of World War II" in Erenberg and Hirsch, *The War in American Culture*, 46-70.

67. In her discussion of billboards which promote conservative family values, Lauren Berlant suggests that scholarly aversion to bourgeois publicity may be due to a prevailing view that such publicity is fictitious and, thus, trivial compared to more "serious" sites of visual culture and subaltern cultural expressions. See Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 10-15.