Ben Shahn, *We Fight for a Free World!*, ca. 1942. Gouache and tempera on board, 13 × 29 in. Art © Estate of Ben Shahn/© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019. Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York

Fighting for a Free World

Ben Shahn and the Art of the War Poster

Christof Decker

In 1943, as his tenure at the Office of War Information (OWI) was coming to an end, the artist Ben Shahn designed a provocative poster illustrating the government agency's changing spirit. After an institutional shake up, new executives had been hired, mostly from advertising agencies. While the old guard, to which Shahn belonged, had believed in telling the truth about the war, the new guard, so it seemed, was trying to promote it like a product. Shahn's poster protested this shift. According to historian Sydney Weinberg, the poster "showed the Statue of Liberty, arm upraised, carrying not a torch but four frosty bottles of Coca-Cola—[with] the motto 'The War That Refreshes: The Four Delicious Freedoms!'"[1] A spoof on the popular *Four Freedoms* (1943, Norman Rockwell Museum) that Norman Rockwell had painted in early 1943 to honor President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1941 address to Congress, the poster was presumably not one of Shahn's most subtle compositions. Yet it highlighted some of his most pressing intellectual and artistic concerns. Not only did Shahn's poster bring out the stark contrast between advertising and art, but it also emphasized the moral ambivalence of using visual communication to propagate the deadly business of warfare. Selling the war through advertising techniques instead of speaking directly and honestly to the American public would not work, the poster seemed to say. For Shahn and his generation of graphic artists, poster art represented a pictorial tradition that involved aesthetics as much as politics and, furthermore, an ethical dimension by representing an act of communication.

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During World War II, poster production greatly increased, fostering a growing discourse about the genre as art. Mildred Constantine, then curator at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), felt that posters had become a powerful medium of expression, and later remarked that "Because there is no fixed poster style, nor poster medium, only the limitations inherent in the poster limit the artist. The designer is free to invent his own style or to adapt for his personal interpretation the concepts that have been evolved in other art forms." Constantine went on to say that their unique combination of a direct and emotional appeal with a desire to inform and instruct effectively lent posters social and cultural significance.[2] This meeting of aesthetic, affective, and utilitarian functions had evolved within advertising and consumer culture, as well as the propaganda agencies of World War I. Yet, as evidenced by the numerous poster competitions and exhibitions held during the early 1940s, the art form, through interaction with modern art movements, had acquired an "adult character" designed by "America's best living artists," as the *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* stated, indicating that poster art had solidified its social role and its status.[3]

However, while the field of poster design opened up rich aesthetic and creative possibilities during the war, the work of Shahn and other artists in the Graphics Division of the OWI also shows that institutional pressures and political interests often limited their artistic freedom. Revisiting this crucial transitional period of poster production in the early 1940s, I contend that Shahn willingly took on the role of propagandist. In contrast to the prevalent poster style of magazine illustration, which was characterized, as one contemporary critic noted, by "realism, glamorous types and a general effect of slickness and smartness," in his work Shahn was aiming for a modernist-inflected and, indeed, at times reflexive form of propaganda.[4] Against the clear and often simplistic rhetoric of other campaigns, such as Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* film series (1942–45), which presented the war as a struggle between slavery and freedom, Shahn's posters tried to address three core modernist issues—how to acknowledge the mediated nature of knowledge about the war, how to connect the foreign European situation with domestic American issues of injustice, and, most important, how to represent violence appropriately in a media environment increasingly shaped by reports on escalating warfare. In his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin suggests that the context for these modernist issues had been shaped by new media technologies, such as photography or film. These media had diminished the "aura" of art, but they had also established and explored additional layers of reality. Crucially, according to Benjamin, they had furthered the social function of art.[5]

In his own thinking about artistic creation in the age of modernism, Shahn saw form and content as intimately, if not indissolubly, intertwined. He expressed one of his most basic notions of artistic production in the principle that "Form is the visible shape of content."[6] While this may seem to imply a naive reliance on figurative realism, Shahn's concept of form was more complex. It included not merely a point of view and the traces of paint, but a kind of intellectualism and attitude, even a "social milieu," in which an educated, art-conscious public entered the form and became part of the content. Shahn confidently applied this basic notion as much to abstract as to figurative art. More important, this principle seemed to imply that decisions about form always effected the "shape of content." How paintings used abstraction, photographs transformed into paintings, and lettering contributed to the text-image design—all of these questions could be addressed to the new aesthetic objects as well as the act of creation.

News of the War

The political situation in Europe received steady coverage in the American media throughout the 1930s, but it became front-page news with the outbreak of World War II. A few months into the war, U.S. newspapers began to report on atrocities perpetrated in the name of Nazi Germany. As the *New York Times* revealed in January of 1940, according to the Catholic church, "terrible massacres" were happening in Poland, while a second article on mass shootings published four days later included a map of the "Scenes of Atrocities Alleged in Prelate's Report to Vatican."[7] To be sure, the situation in Europe was going to get much worse, but already at this early stage of the war these stories contained three main elements: reports of horrific acts of violence; comments on the veracity of the information; and attempts to frame the accounts in political, military, moral, or simply human terms. As historian Deborah E. Lipstadt has shown, the American public, wary of "government propaganda," was inclined toward isolationism and denial, but many newspapers printed explicit descriptions of the brutal acts committed in Europe, presented with added context and perspective.[8]

In contrast to the powerful American media, which was rapidly shifting its attention to the European war theater, government agencies responsible for informing the public were slow to respond. This began to change after the United States entered the war. Numerous agencies were brought together to create the OWI in June of 1942.[9] Thus, the emergence of what I will call the "narratives of atrocities" of the Second World War took place in a complex media environment. It was shaped by traditional, highly regarded news outlets, such as the *New York Times*; the consumer-oriented "corporate modernism" of photojournalistic magazines, such as *Life*; international news agencies; military units on the front lines documenting the war; and last, but not least, artists—writers, photographers, illustrators, painters, and filmmakers—working for various government agencies.[10] This dynamic constellation of media agents and venues, constantly evolving through modern technologies, at times produced an urgent and paradoxical sense of asynchronicity. For instance, while writers in the OWI were desperately debating, in early 1943, how best to inform the public about the war, newspapers had been reporting—if only in words—the grim details of the war and its millions of casualties for many months.

Yet, as this essay will argue through a reconsideration of Shahn's work, the media ensemble of reportage, information, and art also furthered forms of artistic reflexivity that became a significant element of American modernism. In aesthetic terms, the constant circulation of images and texts allowed for creative crossovers between photography and painting, text and image, or illustration and poster art, and in the process objects were reused and repurposed in ways that transcended boundaries of high and low culture or commercial and noncommercial realms. In rhetorical terms, it meant that new ways of reflecting on the act of representation, a hallmark of modern art and a crucial means of referencing the mediated nature of communication, could and often did become an important element of political messaging.

According to historian Michael Denning, these aesthetic and rhetorical aspects were shaped by the fertile environment of the modern metropolis, in which intellectuals and artists from different immigrant, ethnic, or working-class backgrounds were brought together.[11] Serving as both creators in the culture industries and consumers, they often responded to a dual challenge in their work. As cultural

historian Alan Trachtenberg puts it, they had to face modernism's "age of contrary revolutions: can art be true to itself, to its aesthetic character, and at the same time serve social justice?"[12] Viewed through a transatlantic lens, the vibrant energy resulting from this clash of aesthetic and social concerns, as well as commercial and avant-garde cultures, partially compensated for the seemingly provincial, homemade quality of American modernism. According to the literary scholar Heinz Ickstadt, "American modernists experimented with whatever style came to hand and suited their own purpose."[13] This was especially true for the ways artists engaged with objects from mass and consumer culture, which shaped the modern media environment and could become source material for new work.[14]

As art historian Laura Katzman has shown, Shahn created a large, personal archive of images taken from newspapers, the New York Library's Picture Collection, the OWI, and other sources that he drew upon for his work.[15] Although Shahn's use of photographs for his paintings was never a secret—he mentioned it openly at the time, while critics promoting and explaining his work, such as James Thrall Soby, preferred to downplay their importance—the scope and systematic character of Shahn's source files underscored how the creative crossover between different realms of visual culture was a constant in his art. Thus, it is possible to see him as representative of a modern media constellation. Indeed, the continuing fascination with Shahn's art stems from the fact that it epitomizes aspects of twentieth-century American culture. After his breakthrough in the early 1930s, Shahn, usually considered a social realist, became one of the foremost American artists and achieved great success as a painter and muralist across the country. His popularity peaked with a solo exhibition at MoMA in 1947, only to be eclipsed soon thereafter by the rise of Abstract Expressionism. In the 1950s Shahn enjoyed continued recognition, particularly through his programmatic lectures on art and creation at Harvard University, which were published as *The Shape of Content* in 1957. Since his death in 1969, scholars have examined his work as a photographer for the Farm Security Administration (FSA), his essays, and, beginning with a major retrospective in 1976, his role and identity as a Jewish artist.[16] Thus, Shahn has remained an interesting figure because his art reflects not only its social functions but also the pleasure of aesthetic abstraction. He was open to different kinds of materials and technologies combining photography and painting, but also, crucially, text, and he negotiated various outsider identities—immigrant, leftist, Jew—vis-à-vis mainstream white, protestant American society. Finally, Shahn's art developed in an era that witnessed the rapid expansion of technologically reproduced forms of communication, as well as the slow emancipation of American art from dominant European models, not the least through the repurposing of mass-media products.

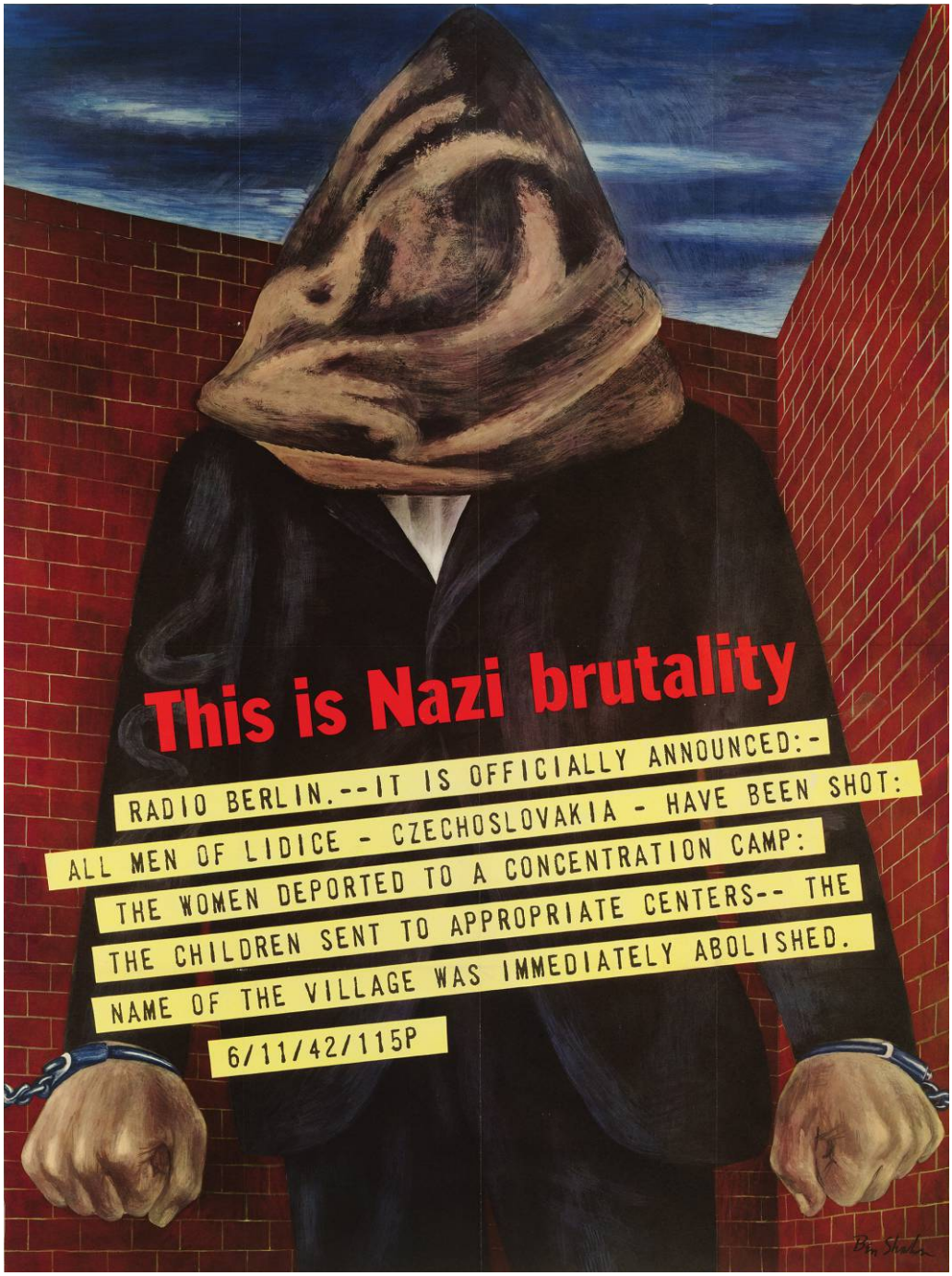
Lidice and the Representation of Nazi Brutality

During the 1930s Shahn had worked for New Deal agencies, among them the FSA, as a photographer and also mural painter, including projects at the Jersey Homesteads and the Bronx Central Post Office.[17] Through these contacts, he became involved in 1942 with the OWI, first in Washington, D.C., and later in New York City, where the Graphics Division was relocated. Although he was active there for less than a year, and many of his projects were blocked or aborted, his work in the Graphics Division provides insight into the government's attempts to

come to terms with, and find appropriate modes of expression for, the narratives of atrocities.[18] While newspapers used photographs or illustrations very sparingly, OWI units dealing with photography, film, or posters had to consider questions of visuality. In the summer of 1942 Elmer Davis, director of the OWI, committed his agency to the high standards of truth-telling, stating that, "This is a people's war and to win it the people should know as much about it as they can. This office will do its best to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, both at home and abroad."[19] That June, Thomas D. Mabry, then acting chief of the Graphics Division, contacted Shahn to ask if he would help create posters for the government. As Mabry put it, the goal was for the artist "to communicate pictorially with the total American public," by first "giving pictorial form to specific war information objectives and second, by providing new pictorial images in the free expression of his creative talent." In his letter to Shahn, Mabry indicated the posters needed to identify the reasons for the war ("Why we fight"), the allies ("Who they are"), and the strategies ("How We Can Win"). It was clear that, almost three years into a brutal war, the operation of creating pictorial information "addressed to the citizen public" was starting from scratch.[20]

During the First World War, the Committee on Public Information, which had been established in 1917 and directed by George Creel, was responsible for producing war posters. War propaganda was thus a well-known field by the Second World War; yet, as Lipstadt and others have argued, its legacy was problematic: "Reports of the Germans' use of poison gas, the brutal killings of babies, and mutilations of defenseless women in Belgium all turned out to be products of the imagination." In the long run, this created suspicion among the public that motion pictures, radio broadcasts, or posters could be used to manipulate gullible audiences, and subsequently fostered resistance to the stories of atrocities coming out of Europe after the onset of the Second World War. As a consequence, those in such government agencies as the State Department feared that horror propaganda could provoke a disillusioned public.[21]

In the summer Shahn joined the Graphics Division of the OWI, which came to be headed by Francis E. Brennan, a former art editor of *Fortune* magazine. From the late summer of 1942 to the spring of 1943, Shahn and his colleagues worked on creating "new pictorial images." Newspaper reports on mass killings and other atrocities suggested that this war was different than World War I and required new approaches to its pictorial representation. Even though many reports did not specify the victims, it was becoming increasingly clear that, following Nazi ideology, the Jewish population was being singled out all across Europe. As the *New York Times* reported, a delegation of representatives of Jewish organizations met with President Franklin D. Roosevelt in December of 1942. Led by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, a highly respected leader in the U.S. Jewish community and chair of the American Jewish Congress, the delegation highlighted the criminal nature of Nazi actions and the predicament of the European Jews, indicating in unmistakable and starkly prophetic terms that, "Every device of a perverted and malignant ingenuity is being employed to hasten the process of their destruction. The result is a crime so monstrous as to be without parallel in history."[22] Eventually this crime would come to be called the Holocaust, but at the time such news was often evaded in the public discourse. According to Lipstadt's analysis of a wide cross-section of newspapers, if the reports resembled the atrocity stories of World War I too closely, the public resisted, so publishers sometimes moved those articles to the inside pages to characterize them as less important or old news.[23]



1 Ben Shahn, *This Is Nazi Brutality*, 1942. Photolithograph, 37⅞ × 28¼ in. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Stephen Lee Taller Ben Shahn Archive, Gift of Dolores S. Taller, M25436. Art © Estate of Ben Shahn/© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019. Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College

One of Shahn's first OWI assignments was about Lidice, a Czech town that had been the site of a horrific massacre in late May and early June 1942; he began to work on the poster in September (fig. 1). A note, scrawled on the OWI's folder for this project, reads, "Man with hood & hands shackled. Mr. Shahn developed sketch & made finish. Message was message as it came over ticker."[24] That the poster was created three months after the event demonstrates the challenges the Graphics Division faced in producing appropriate visual forms quickly enough to be timely. The pressure for artists to have to react rapidly to war actions with complex works of art intensified during

1930s. Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia)—completed in June 1937 after the bombing of that Spanish town by the German air force in April—established the most influential model for high modern art. For anti-Nazi poster art, John Heartfield's innovative and politically radical work for German magazines served as a potent precursor.[25]

The crimes at Lidice shocked the American public when the story broke on June 11, 1942. Reinhard Heydrich, nicknamed the "Hangman of Prague," served under Reichsführer–SS Heinrich Himmler and was instrumental in initiating the so-called Final Solution, the extermination of the European Jews. In September 1941 he became the Deputy Reich Protector in Prague, and, a few months later, he was assassinated, the result of a plot by the Czechoslovak government in exile in London, which was carried out by Josef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš. The Nazis enacted their revenge on the town of Lidice, which was chosen under the pretense that the assassins had found shelter there. In the first wave of executions, 173 men died. Eventually, they killed all the men and sent the women to concentration camps and the children to "educational institutions."[26] As the *Washington Post* reported, the German "vengeance squads" had wiped out the town in the "most savage single act of repression in the history of German occupation of continental Europe."[27] Most commentators agreed and voiced a level of shock that suggests a special significance of Lidice in the public discourse. While to some the reprisal clearly brought out the disproportionate character of the atrocities, others noted that the German government had not only committed the crime but had made no attempt to conceal it; on the contrary, they had announced it publicly. As one article put it, "This murder, this rape, this kidnapping is part of the Nazi revenge for the death of the Nazi butcher, Reinhard Heydrich. The story was not invented by Hitler's enemies. It was proudly proclaimed by the Berlin radio."[28] Thus, the annihilation of Lidice not only became a catalyst for the perception of the enormous scope of Nazi crimes, but it also communicated to the American public that a new quality of terror lay in the German regime openly claiming responsibility for cruel acts of vengeance.

In his poster, Shahn made reference to this public outrage by including the official, ticker-tape announcement and framing it in the moral terms of the media discourse. Two types of lettering distinguished the difference. "This is Nazi brutality" was printed in red against the black background of the man's coat, followed by six lines of ticker tape. There, the lettering was smaller, capitalized, and replicated the punctuation and line breaks of a news wire, while stating the facts—that the men had been shot, the women deported, the children sent away, and the village's name abolished. For maximum visual effect, Shahn placed the inverted white tape with black letters against the man's black coat. Both elements, the compressed nature of the information and the visual representation of the ticker tape, thus claimed the authenticity of the news, an intention confirmed by the remark on the OWI folder that the poster included the "message as it came over ticker"—even if different versions circulated in the United States at the time.[29]

The discursive and pictorial difference of the two written statements, one claiming the authenticity and authority of fact and the other providing moral context, was an important rhetorical device that added to the complexity of the poster design. As a result, the judgment, "This is Nazi brutality," printed in red letters and followed by the announcement, took on a double meaning.[30] It was related to the crime itself, the act of killing and deporting the inhabitants of Lidice, but also to the Nazis' decision to make it public in order to further terrorize a traumatized global audience. The poster's specific use of written material juxtaposing public announcement and moral framing

thus contributed to one level of media reflexivity. It suggested that narratives of atrocities were always represented and evaluated through mass media, often relying on verbal accounts.

Another level was added by the visual imagery of the poster, the massive figure of a hooded man with shackled hands, seen from below against the background of a red brick wall and a small piece of blue sky. Shahn's placement of the lettering forced the viewer to consider the shackled but tightly clenched and powerful hands and the coarsely textured but meticulously placed hood over the man's face. At the pictorial level, the reflexivity of Shahn's design lay in a gesture of negation, his refusal to present one individualized face to stand in for the faceless victims, and thereby deciding against visual ways of making abstract phrases concrete. Thus, Shahn's poster, *This Is Nazi Brutality*, though seemingly simple and straightforward in its message, contained two levels of reflexivity on questions of representation. On the one hand, it foregrounded that narratives of atrocities resulted from processes of mediation, and on the other, it addressed the limits of visual representability, aiming to find individual images of suffering in spite of the knowledge that the horrors of the various massacres, and in particular the industrialized forms of extermination, lay in their massive scale.[31]

This was a new direction in Shahn's work. In the previous decade—for instance, in his social realist paintings and murals, as well as his photography, and whenever he translated photographs into paintings—faces had been important to him for individualizing his figures. The artist blocked and negated this element in *This Is Nazi Brutality*, yet there were still some allusions to his earlier paintings, as he refracted the fate of the men in Lidice through the lens of the struggle against social injustice. The man's hands are in shackles, which seem an unlikely form of restraint in the context of the massacre, and recall those of the protagonists in his painting *Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco* (1931–32, Museum of Modern Art), which are also bound and placed similarly within the frame to highlight the cramped position of the figures. And the red brick wall looming in the background of the poster, surrounding and enclosing the man, alludes to a similar sense of delimitation in earlier paintings, as in the urban setting of New York City in *Handball* (1939, Museum of Modern Art) and the series of paintings that includes *Demonstration* (1933, Harvard Art Museums), depicting protesters at the trial of Tom Mooney, a labor organizer, assembling near the red brick walls of factory buildings.[32] By including these allusions to his earlier work, Shahn connected the domestic scenes of injustice with those in the European theater of war, in the process creating a pictorial palimpsest of socially conscious references.

Various explanations have been put forward as to why Shahn's time at the OWI was not a success and many of his projects, usually developed in collaboration with other artists, were rejected. Some scholars have suggested that his work was perceived as being too violent.[33] Although the level of explicitness in depictions of death, torture, or injury was indeed a contentious topic at the OWI, Shahn, in his own work, was not aiming to be the most extreme. As noted above, *This Is Nazi Brutality* gained its power through negation—by omitting what could have been shown in more drastic terms, as in photographs of the event. Thus, the disconcerting and challenging quality of Shahn's work may be a product not of its depiction of violence but its aesthetic intensity and ambiguous messaging. In simple propagandistic terms, the uses of representational reflexivity, which invited careful scrutiny of the relationship between text and image, resulted in some posters too complex for viewers to process easily and, simultaneously, too ominous to ignore.

At the time, in 1943, British art critic Eric Newton noted this quality in a perceptive review. He located the style of Shahn's poster in the tradition established by the

Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, which showed a preference for "big, clumsy shapes" and the "statement of simple ideas." Newton noted that the terrifying intensity of Shahn's poster resulted from the interplay of aesthetic elements: "The horrifying shapelessness of the sack over the victim's head would not be half so telling if it were not for the clean-cut angle of the brick wall, and the almost childish insistence on the rigid lines of the bricks and the hard white strips from the tape machine." Furthermore, by obscuring the victim's face, the artist employed the crucial strategy for keeping the viewer's attention transfixed. According to Newton, "One goes on gazing at the poster with a sense of claustrophobia, and the eye cannot stop itself from trying to penetrate the sickeningly meaningless folds of the sack."[34] Following this line of thought, then, the disconcerting quality of *This Is Nazi Brutality* came not from a depiction of violence but, on the contrary, Shahn's refusal to be explicit, challenging the viewer to imagine and supplement what was not visible.[35]

The Search for a Propaganda of Inclusion

Shahn's decision to represent Nazi brutality not with an explicit depiction of violence but an implicit dimension of fear was revisited with critical undertones in later years when scholars began to discuss his work in the context of Holocaust Studies. Some of the discussions tended to detach the posters from their institutional context and attempt to find a democratic propaganda based on notions of inclusion. For instance, art historian Ziva Amishai-Maisels critiqued Shahn's "substitutions," in particular his use of photographs as source material for his paintings and illustrations, and alleged this demonstrates his tendency to refrain from showing Nazi atrocities. Contrasting *This Is Nazi Brutality* with drawings of the events by William Gropper, Amishai-Maisels claimed that "Shahn focused on a single man, chained and with a sack over his head to keep emotion down to a minimum, and used the written message, 'All men of Lidice—Czechoslovakia—have been shot,' to convey the image's meaning." In stark contrast to the interpretation by Newton, who saw the hood as an intensification, not a minimization, of the viewer's affect, Amishai-Maisels criticized Shahn, an artist of Jewish descent, for not engaging with the Holocaust directly and, indeed, for evading it.[36]

While her study from the 1990s signaled a more comprehensive and systematic discourse on the depiction of atrocities and profited from a transnational and comparative outlook, her critique of *This Is Nazi Brutality* did not do justice to the complex cultural and institutional context in which Shahn had produced it. When the massacre at Lidice was first reported, and in later years when newspapers mentioned it, the journalists did not connect it to the murder of Jews but instead repeated that the Nazis had chosen the town for its citizens' alleged role in the assassination attempt. The massacre was not presented or seen as an act of anti-Semitism but rather one of revenge on the Czechoslovak population, whose religion was generally not specified.[37] In the early 1940s the Holocaust was indeed increasingly mentioned in public discourse as a unique and pressing problem. Yet in his poster, Shahn did not evade the issue, as Amishai-Maisels has argued, but simply referenced the events in the same inclusive and universalized way that the story was being circulated in the U.S. press. Instead of divorcing the poster from its historical context—the Graphics Division at the OWI—the internal negotiation over realism and truthfulness of representation, as well as the relative autonomy of the artists at the government agency, should be considered by scholars. If Shahn could have presented the events

2 Ronay, *They Can Take Only Our Bodies*, ca. 1942–45. Photomechanical Print. U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Series: World War II Foreign Posters, 1932–1947, Record Group 44: Records of the Office of Government Reports, 1932–1947. Courtesy of National Archives (44-PF-25)

at Lidice like the "brutal shootings" Gropper had shown, as Amishai-Maisels implies, his decision not to do so needs to be be explained not just in individual but also in institutional terms, as a compromise made necessary by the OWI. In his study of the Lidice massacre, the Czech historian Eduard Stehlík points out that, at the time, Gropper's images, too, were ultimately deemed unacceptable and were not officially used by government agencies.[38]

For the OWI, 1942 was a crucial transitional moment. Looking back at his time at the agency, Shahn acknowledged that everyone in the Graphics Division had privileged access to explicit photographs from the front lines: "We were supplied with a constant stream of material, photographic and other kinds of documentation of the decimation within enemy territory. There were the secret confidential horrible facts of the cartloads of dead; Greece, India, Poland. There were the blurred pictures of bombed-out places, so many of which I knew well and cherished."[39] Shahn kept a secret report on "Conditions in Greece: Confidential Photographic Record" (1942), issued by the Greek government in exile, containing photographs documenting the starving and the dead. It included numerous images showing cartloads of dead bodies piled on the ground.[40] Yet in government agencies, these types of images would not have been acceptable for distribution. According to historian George H. Roeder Jr., regulations on visual censorship only began to relax in early 1943, when it became clear that the public needed visual evidence of war action. *Life* magazine published its first photograph of dead American soldiers on September 20, 1943.[41] In late 1942, therefore, Shahn had chosen a design of intense and palpable suffering combined with a forceful message to avoid the posture of morale-boosting heroism adopted in other posters, such as one by the U.S.-based Queen Wilhelmina Fund to gain financial support for the Dutch population during the war (fig. 2).[42] Though familiar with the iconography of piles of decomposing bodies, Shahn, in *This Is Nazi Brutality*, decided to focus on the presence and vulnerability of the body as a living organism.

Among the writers at the Graphics Division, one of Shahn's closest collaborators was the poet Muriel Rukeyser, with whom he worked on numerous projects and memoranda. As her manuscripts from this period show, the artists at the Graphics Division were frantically trying to devise the right strategies to counter the enemy's propaganda efforts. In this process, everything had to be considered—deciding on the best topics, finding the right pictorial means, and writing the most effective captions. In December of 1942, Rukeyser made a revealing statement in a "Memo on procedure," as if the war had just begun: "I suggest that a basic approach to propaganda be worked on in all earnestness in this office." She and her colleagues were trying to find the best mode of propaganda that would not imitate the methods of the enemy, even though, as she admitted openly, Hitler's *Mein Kampf* had been a constant source of orientation. As she stated, "People working in propaganda have had, at certain moments, an irresistible tendency to go back to Hitler's book, to cast about for the Nazi method when

3 Ben Shahn and Muriel Rukeyser (United States War Information Office, Graphics Division), *Our Manpower*, ca. 1943. Poster, 14½ × 20 in. New York Public Library, Digital Collections, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature ©VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019. digitalcollections.nypl.org

a particularly acute problem arises." Even though one could learn from these tactics, ideologically U.S. poster propaganda would have to point in a radically different direction. "Our posters should, I feel, deal with the possibilities that are still open to us, from which the fascists have cut themselves off, systematically and irrevocably, by their own statement and action," she suggested.[43]

Although Rukeyser did not discuss specific passages from *Mein Kampf* in her memo or engage in an analysis of Nazi posters, it is most likely that she was imagining a positive, inclusive social vision as an alternative to fascist propaganda, which had created its most divisive iconography around anti-Semitic stereotypes.[44] In contrast to the "Nazi method" of visually stigmatizing social groups, Shahn and Rukeyser developed their vision in *Our Manpower*, which was not used during the war but later became a well-known Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) poster.[45] One crucial difference between the two versions, however, was the textual message, which, in the earlier composition, expressed the idea of inclusion in specific and unmistakable terms. In a design archived among the Rukeyser papers, two welders in close-up from below—one black man with a clearly visible face, one white man with a prominent pair of goggles—are shown working together (fig. 3). The pair represent the workers as well as the body politic, the "our" reflected in the poster's title. As the text claimed, there should be no division among workers but rather a recognition of diversity. It argued against discrimination and explicitly referenced those groups in society that had been seeking greater acceptance throughout the modern era—African Americans, Jews, and immigrants. This poster, which reflected the designers' reaction to racial tensions in war-related factories, was ultimately not used, but it showed that Shahn, Rukeyser, and others in the Graphics Division were directing their message of inclusion to the home front. For the global conflict, the challenge was to create propaganda without succumbing to the negative tactics of the "Nazi method."

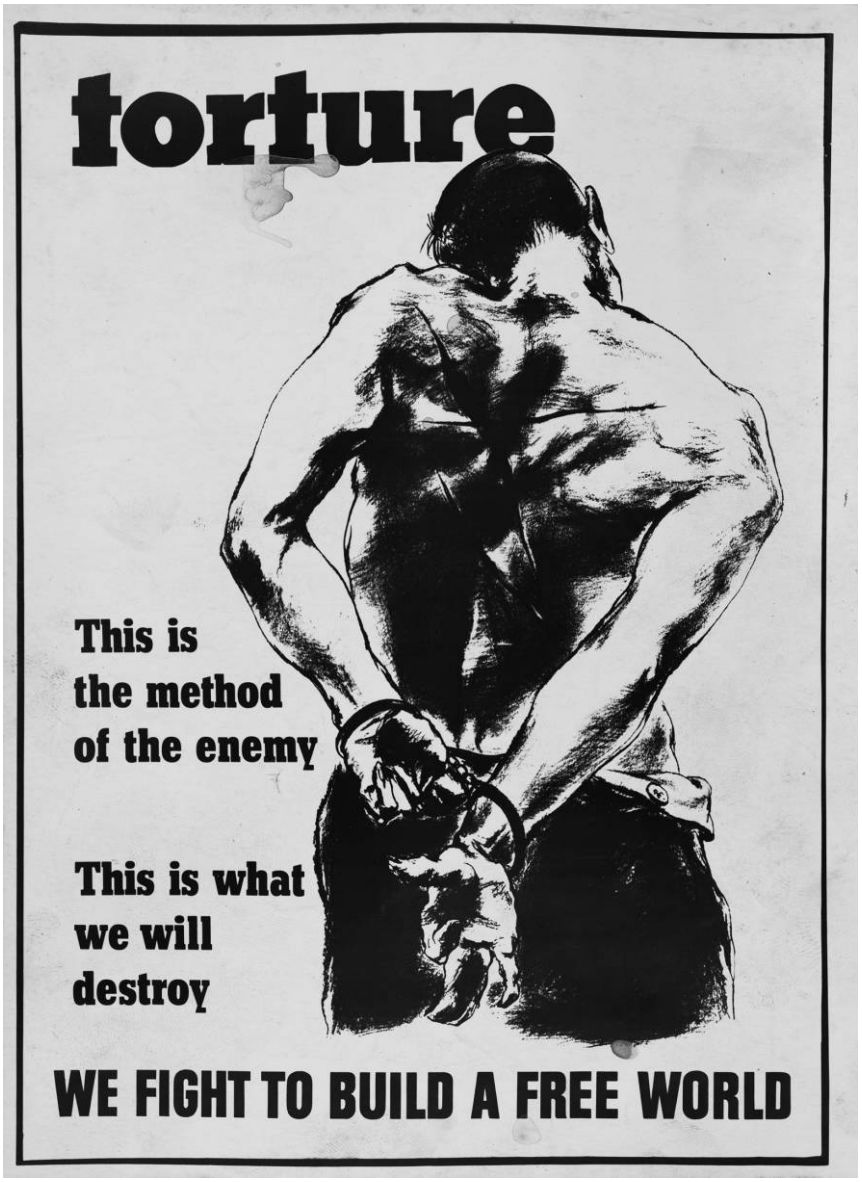
Visualizing the Nature of the Enemy

In the same month of Rukeyser's memo, December 1942, the Graphics Division chief Brennan circulated the translation of an article published in Mexico by the modernist painter Santos Balmori and appended a note calling it "an interesting statement of one phase of informational work that might be valuable to read."[46] As Rukeyser had done in her memo, Balmori tried in simpler terms to envision the potential of democratic propaganda. One of his first criticisms was that the democracies had been laughing at their enemies. He wrote, "It is an axiom that 'one cannot fight an enemy whom one does not hate.' And we never laugh at somebody we really hate. The result is that as long as we are laughing we cannot hate, nor can we guard ourselves against somebody we consider inferior and unimportant." Balmori went on to formulate a number of rules for visual propaganda, among them "simplicity and plainness," and suggested a campaign to "show the hateful methods of the Axis."[47] Other bulletins and recommendations circulating at the OWI echoed this call for simplicity of design, subject, and lettering.[48]

4 Karl Koehler, Victor Ancona, and Stephen Ancona, *This is the Enemy*, 1942. Offset lithograph, 34¼ × 23¾ in. Museum of Modern Art, New York, Poster Fund, 147.1968. Digital image © 2019 Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence

Whether or not the Graphics Division immediately took up Balmori's suggestion of "hate" posters is not clear, but in late 1942 Shahn began to work on a campaign called *The Nature of the Enemy*, for which he used the visual work of fellow artists.[49] A Rukeyser memo from March 1943 described the series of posters and explained that they were meant to counter similar visual attempts in "industrial cartoons" and "big advertising campaigns." In Rukeyser's assessment, those were inadequate, and she voiced the hope that Shahn's poster series would raise new and urgent questions by showing how the American people would suffer under the enemy's regime.[50]

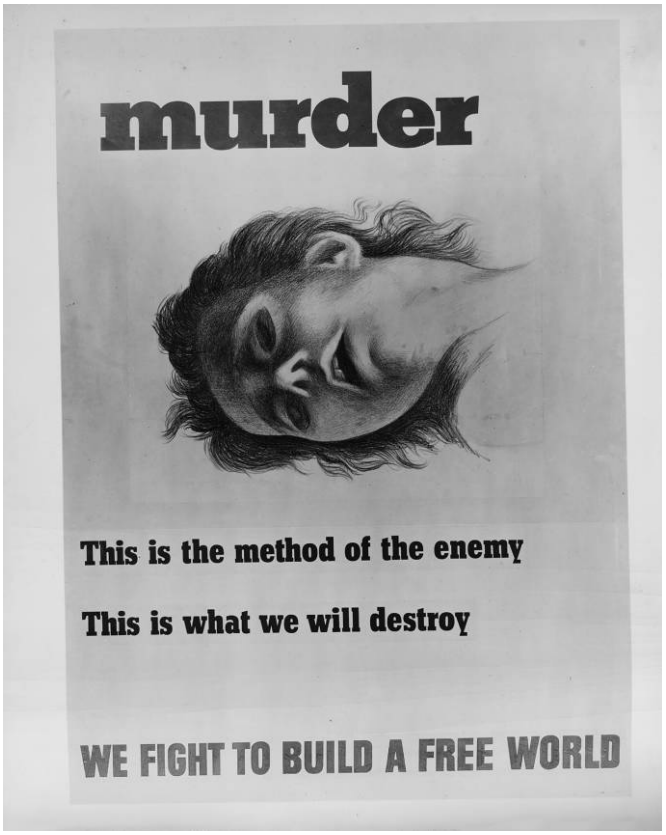
While other posters—among them an award-winning design by Karl Koehler, Victor Ancona, and Stephen Ancona (fig. 4)—portrayed Germans as cool sadists, Shahn's series brought together five iconic images by different artists dedicated to the methods of the enemy, identifying them as suppression, starvation, torture, slavery, and murder.[51] The designs in *The Nature of the Enemy* series demonstrated that, although Shahn and the other artists at the Graphics Division had found a powerful focus for a hate campaign in Balmori's sense, they struggled with the

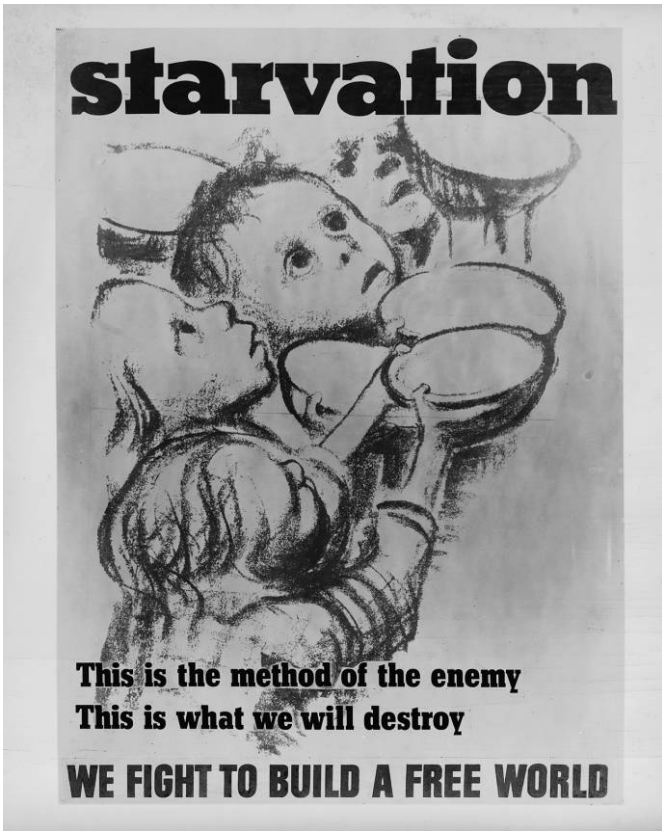


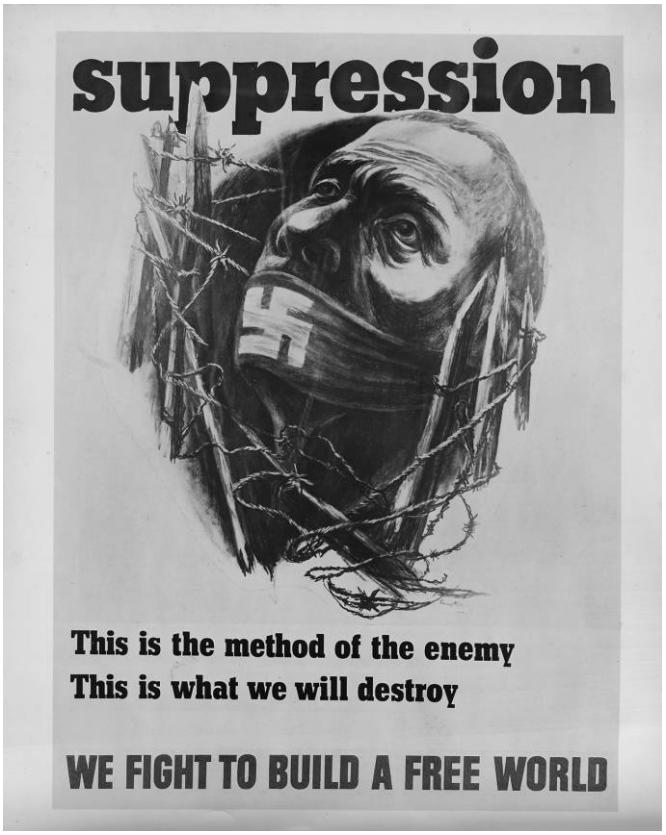
5 Ben Shahn, *The Nature of the Enemy—Torture*, ca. 1942/43. Box 34, folder 26, Ben Shahn Papers, 1879–1990, Bulk 1933–70, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. ©VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019

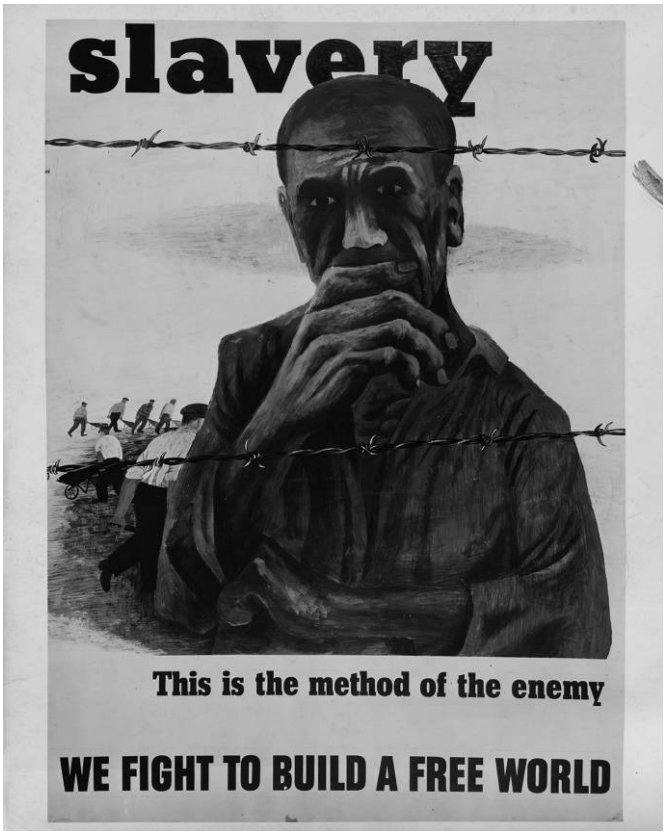
best combination of word and image, and finding the right captions to create a simple and convincing message. The five images were forceful and expressive, but experimentation with different captions indicated that the problem seemed to be how to get from the terror of enemy rule to the positive qualities of life in freedom. Clearly, the urgent questions Rukeyser and her collaborators were asking revolved around the brutal realities of the war, which were evaded by cartoons and advertising. Yet, as the Graphics Division was only dealing with propaganda on the home front, the posters had to relate the horrors convincingly and in simple terms. "A poster that needs its slogan to explain its aim is bad," Balmori had cautioned.[52]

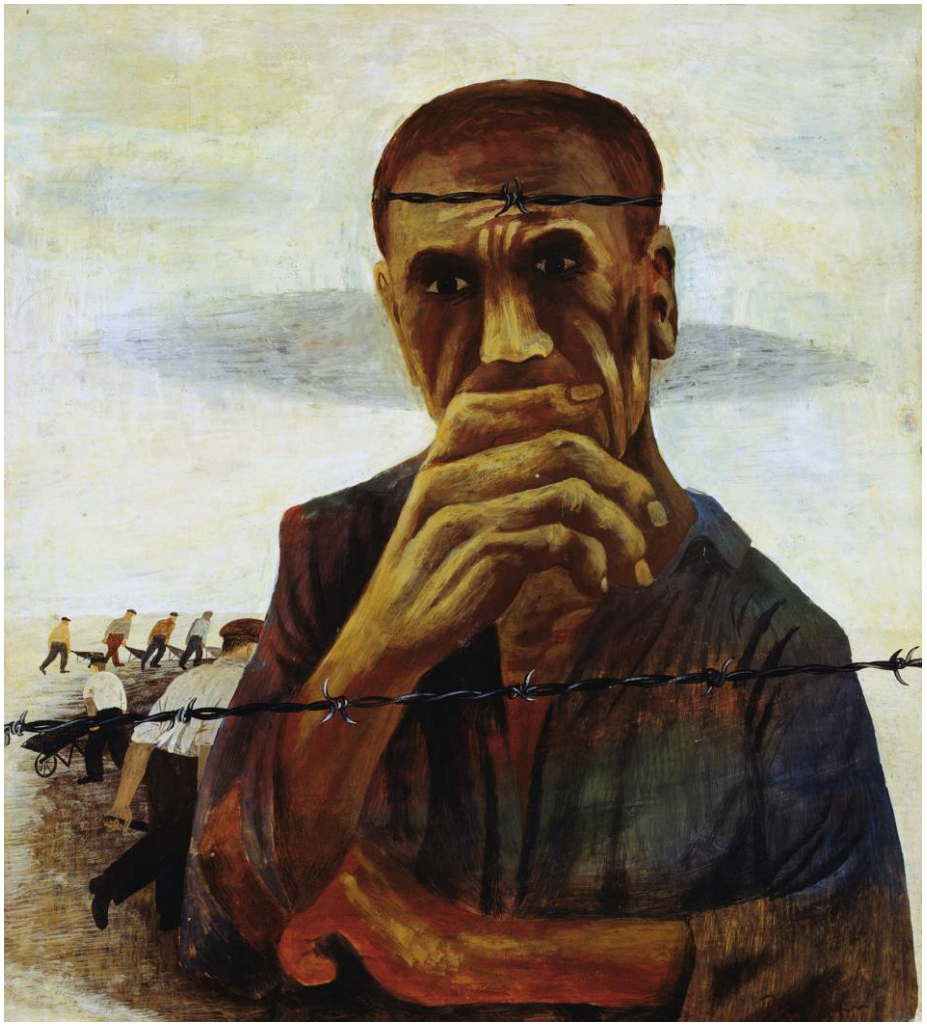
Judging from the different versions of the series' posters, this proved to be a challenge. For instance, Yasuo Kuniyoshi produced the figure of a man, seen from behind, with a naked torso, tied hands, and deep scars on his back. In one version, the text above the man's head reads, "torture is the enemy plan," and below his tied hands, as the central goal of the war vis-à-vis the enemy, "Our answer: UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER" (ca. 1942/43, Smithsonian Archives of American Art). A variation used the same image but a different text. Above the man's head is written "torture"; next to his hands, "This is the method of the enemy"; further down, "This is what we will destroy"; and finally at the bottom of the poster, "WE FIGHT TO BUILD A FREE WORLD" (fig. 5). With this last version, in particular, Shahn tried to move rhetorically from horror to freedom, yet without an equally powerful visual equivalent, it was difficult to imagine what this freedom would look like, and the poster probably required too much of the explaining against which Balmori warned. For the other images, Shahn used the same two basic versions of text, thus foregrounding the different visual styles of representing the methods of the enemy—among them Bernard Perlin's head of a young woman lying on the ground to represent the method of "murder"; Käthe Kollwitz's image of hungry children holding up their empty plates to signify "starvation"; Edward Millman's anxious face behind barbed wire forced to silence as "suppression"; and Shahn's "slavery" image, the figure of a man looking at the viewer with a deeply











6–9 Ben Shahn, *The Nature of the Enemy* series, ca. 1942/43: *Murder*, box 34, folder 26; *Starvation*, box 34, folder 20; *Suppression*, box 34, folder 26; *Slavery*, box 34, folder 20, all from Ben Shahn Papers, 1879–1990, Bulk 1933–70, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019

10 Ben Shahn, *1943 A.D.*, ca. 1943. Tempera on pressboard, 30¾ × 27¾ in. Syracuse University Art Galleries, 1960.034. Art © Estate of Ben Shahn/© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019. Courtesy of the Syracuse University Art Collection

worried face, standing behind a barbed wire fence, with men pushing carts in the background (figs. 6–9). This last image, without the textual information, was later used for the painting *1943 A.D.*, showing a man in a concentration camp (fig. 10).

Shahn selected two of his photographs for the "slavery" poster, both of which had been taken in 1935 for the FSA and were thus unrelated to the war in Europe. In Amishai-Maisels's reading, these crossovers between photography and painting, particularly when using non-Jewish individuals for Jewish topics, indicated Shahn's fear of Jewish parochialism and his attempts to avoid an overt depiction of the Holocaust.[53] Yet, as the complicated situation at the Graphics Division suggests, having to negotiate the struggle of finding acceptable forms of poster propaganda made it very unlikely, and probably not even desirable, that the artists would focus on one group of victims, even if by late 1942 the American public was well aware of the systematic persecution of the European Jewish population from national newspapers. In this sense, then, Shahn's *Nature of the Enemy—Slavery* clearly represented the reality of labor and concentration camps, but, in line with the universal character of *This Is Nazi Brutality*, it did not single out a specific religious, political, ethnic, or national group of victims, although, as Cécile Whiting has noted, there is a gender bias toward male victims.[54] Less an attempt to hide Shahn's Jewishness, this strategy signaled that the various artists collaborating on the series felt that the most powerful message about the nature of the enemy would have to be based on a universalist argument.

In this process, using photographs as sources was not unusual for Shahn. As Katzman argues, the artist's vast pictorial archive suggested his "positive embrace of mass media." Furthermore, whether his sources were "hidden or overt, Shahn never denied his reliance on photography and could be quite matter-of-fact about it."[55] He took the two photographs used for *The Nature of the Enemy—Slavery* on one of his trips to the South for the FSA. The first showed Sam Nichols, a tenant farmer in Boone County, Arkansas; the second most likely documented levee workers in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana. The image of Nichols showed him standing in front of his house looking directly into the camera (fig. 11). His conscious and arresting stance and straight gaze, and the balanced framing of the image with a chicken in

the background, suggest that Nichols was posing for the camera, aware of being photographed, and Shahn was not using his right-angle viewfinder, with which he usually captured his subjects unaware.[56] Similarly, the photograph of the levee workers presented a visually complex scene showing African American men with pushcarts in three diagonal and zig-zagging lines that demarcated three distinct, partially blurred planes of deep space. In the distance to the left, two white men were overseeing the black workers (fig. 12).

For *The Nature of the Enemy—Slavery* (fig. 9), Shahn combined both photographic subjects, adding two lines of barbed-wire fencing and basically keeping the visual arrangement of the photographs intact by placing the image of Nichols in the foreground against the workers in the middle- and background.[57] Yet he also changed key aspects. With Nichols, Shahn flipped the negative and moved visually closer to his upper body. Most importantly, the man in the poster no longer gazed directly at the viewer but slightly to his or her left. Furthermore, the abject poverty of Nichols, indicated by the dilapidated house and his torn shirt and trousers, was not featured in the poster although it was clearly visible in the FSA photograph. Shahn kept the man's pose, yet he enlarged the right hand to massive proportions. With the levee workers, Shahn adapted the zig-zagging motion of the workers receding into the background but did not include the overseers; most importantly, the workers were no longer black but white.

Shahn's repurposing of the photographs created an equally dense, if less dramatic, symbolism as that in *This Is Nazi Brutality*. What was unusual about the FSA photograph of Nichols, the pensive face with deep furrows as well as the slightly defiant pose he had taken vis-à-vis the photographer, Shahn intensified in the poster by combining the fear and sorrow written into the man's face with the subdued strength of his enormous hands—a composition that inspired Rukeyser to detect the look

11 Ben Shahn, *Sam Nichols, Tenant Farmer, Boone County, Arkansas*, October 1935. Nitrate negative. Farm Security Administration—Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-fsa-8a16238 ©VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019

12 Ben Shahn, untitled photo, possibly related to *Levee Workers, Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana*, [October 1935]. Nitrate negative. Farm Security Administration—Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USF33-006112-M3 ©VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019

of "suffering and responsibility" of an individualized experience and a potential for resistance.[58] As mentioned, in Newton's review from 1943, he characterized one American school of poster art as following the influence of Rivera with his huge, strong bodies and the sense of "massive sincerity."[59] Shahn, who had worked with Rivera on one of his murals, was clearly a proponent of this school and suggested in his posters for the OWI that, even though they might seem clumsy, the hands of his figures—tied, raised, working, or gesturing—took on a special significance to express the predicament of human beings but also their inner spirit and resolve.[60]

If Shahn was drawn to the photograph of Nichols because of his ambiguous pose, expressing sorrow but also calm, confident strength, the reasons for including the levee workers photograph seem less clear (indeed, they were left out in a later CIO poster called *WARNING! INFLATION MEANS DEPRESSION*, based on the "slavery" design).[61] Again, similar to the decision not to focus on a specific ethnic or religious group of victims in the labor camps, changing the skin tone of the workers from dark to light was most likely a pragmatic adjustment allowing the poster series to be placed in a European context where, at the time, the presence of black workers in concentration camps would have been difficult to comprehend. It would be misleading, then, to interpret this reworking of the photograph as an act of whitewashing by Shahn, who was actually, as the discussion of the *Our Manpower* poster has shown, trying to include *more* images of African Americans.

And yet, in retrospect, choosing a photograph for the topic of slavery in (European) concentration and work camps that clearly referenced, if implicitly and only at a visual level, the history of American slavery was a significant act growing out of a political analysis and point of view. It created a pictorial palimpsest, a layering of scenes of injustice that corresponded with Shahn's concept of drawing out essences, his idea of form. In one of his Harvard lectures, he stated that, "Form in nature emerges from the impact of order upon order, of element upon element, as of the forms of lightning or of ocean waves."[62] In this sense, the palimpsest-like structure indicated that, for some of the artists in the Graphics Division, the propaganda was not only directed at the Nazi regime but also, more generally, at all historical forces responsible for acts of suppression, torture, or slavery, including past and present experiences in the United States. To some, such as Rukeyser, this made an inclusive, universalist stance of political messaging necessary. And it suggested, as art historian Diana L. Linden has argued, that Shahn fused his Jewish identity "with an inclusive working-class politics that involved cross-union, Popular Front coalition building during the 1930s."[63] Politically and aesthetically, then, Shahn and his colleagues at the Graphics Division were driven by the twin desires to address the American public as a whole in its fight against foreign fascism, but also to acknowledge its domestic struggle for equality and justice. Shahn formulated the challenge at the heart of this strategy in aesthetic terms when looking back at his time at the OWI: "I said we'll have to use Picasso as well as Norman Rockwell. If there are six million who understand Norman Rockwell and only sixty understand Picasso's *Guernica*, then we'll have to do something for those sixty as well as the six million." But, as he went on to explain, the Graphics Division had increasingly begun to embrace the logic of advertising, trying to find "the lowest common denominator that will speak to all" instead of hoping to reach a common culture made up of diverse audiences and needs aesthetically as well as intellectually.[64]

The idea of cultivating a shared but diverse audience characterized Shahn's work at the OWI, as well as the division's internal discussions on democratic propaganda. Yet, in the end, the *Nature of the Enemy* series was not produced. Shahn *did* create one final gouache that incorporated all five posters and was probably the most consummate realization of the original idea. In the painting, the posters were shown pasted on a red brick wall (frontispiece). The five individual motifs together were depicted with the main titles—suppression, starvation, slavery, torture, murder—and the reference to "the enemy method." Underneath the five posters, handwritten in white paint as if graffitied by a member of the resistance, was the phrase, "We FIGHT for a FREE world!" No longer a conventional war poster, the painting was a clever work of art combining two arguments: first, the fight for a free world was a universal, grassroots initiative directed against suppressive power; and second, the representation of atrocities was not a straightforward, transparent act. Rather, it involved a deliberate search for the right content and style. For Shahn, this meant looking for the form best suited to capturing the essence of the material and to formulate its idea so "that thinking and belief and attitudes may endure as actual things."[65] Thus, in this version of the series, Shahn employed a modernist sense of reflexivity by embedding the five individual posters in one large frame. With this double-framing, Shahn presented *and* reconfigured the attempts to show the enemy's atrocious violence, allowing the viewers to scrutinize the varying styles and degrees of explicit realism in the posters.

In April of 1943, after a reorganization of the OWI, Brennan resigned, explaining to Davis that, due to the hiring of advertising executives, he had to quit, and warning him that the new leadership "will want graphics to look 'attractive.'"[66] The lack of explicitness and realism that Shahn and his co-workers had also been struggling with, and the new direction of the Graphics Division as a service provider more for other agencies and less as a producer of original content, finally proved too much for Brennan.[67] Looking back to the previous summer, he recalled that the beginnings of the graphics program had been promising, yet ultimately the new direction seemed unacceptable. As Brennan, who had commissioned Shahn's *This Is Nazi Brutality*, summarized, "while American soldiers rotted in the desert heat, the Graphics Division was designing posters about ordering coal early."[68] For a brief moment, then, the fundamental rift in the propaganda strategies favored by commercial illustrators and modernist graphic artists was brought out in sharp relief.

Brennan's pessimistic comments captured the general mood at the Graphics Division. Many other artists and writers left the OWI, sometimes protesting in public that it was impossible "to tell the full truth," and that on the home front they felt the agency was "dominated by high-pressure promoters who prefer slick salesmanship to honest information."[69] Additionally, due to congressional budget cuts, many more artists had to leave the OWI, among them, in the summer of 1943, Shahn, who went on to work for the graphics division of the CIO's Political Action Committee.[70] And yet, it would be wrong to assume that the OWI was alone in its difficulties of finding the most appropriate representations for the accounts of atrocities coming out of Europe. It was a much larger and far-reaching problem for artists, writers, and journalists addressing the American public.

Arthur Koestler, a Hungarian journalist and author, felt in January of 1944 that the severity of the European situation was still not fully realized. In the *New York Times*, he explained that the stories of Nazi atrocities were true and could not be "dismissed like a bad dream; such crimes are a challenge to civilization."[71] Yet while writing his article, Koestler had been looking at photographs documenting the atrocities, and this had made him bitter and agitated. It seemed to him that with words alone, in the pages of the *New York Times*, he could not make its readers see—a sense of disbelief and denial

persisted. Once the visual evidence of photographs—and, in particular, those showing the horrors of the liberated camps—became public, for instance, in the *Life* magazine issue of May 7, 1945, the shocking revelations radically redefined the terms of representing war crimes.[72] In a sense, the lasting impact of making these images finally available also served, belatedly, as a vindication of the various and often aborted attempts at the Graphics Division to try to find an adequate pictorial language for the narratives of atrocities at a time when the public imagination had not been exposed to this new kind of ghastly realism.[73]

This has several implications for the reconsideration of poster art in the early 1940s and Shahn's tenure in the Graphics Division. If, as art historian J. Stewart Johnson contends, the modern poster aims to create an "instant indelible impression on the viewer," and if this, further, means that it may invite scrutiny but should be "caught on the run," then it is fair to say that Shahn's work in the Graphics Division was too complex to be easily and quickly digested and too ambiguous in its messaging—both qualities well known in modern art.[74] His posters were perceived by the new Madison Avenue executives at the OWI as too unsettling, or as Price Gilbert, the former vice president of Coca-Cola and new head of the Bureau of Graphics and Printing intimated, "too unattractive for display."[75] However, as this article has argued through analysis of *This Is Nazi Brutality* and *The Nature of the Enemy* series, the complexities at work in Shahn's poster designs were at least two-fold. At the representational and aesthetic level, Shahn's compositions tested the limits of showing acts of brutality, and sometimes included in their design a reflection on their status as visual objects, such as the notion of double-framing. This allowed them to be viewed as straightforward messages while at the same time exploring, reflexively, how the accounts of atrocities could and should be represented pictorially. At the political level, Shahn and his colleagues were equally trying to reconcile two related yet contradictory aims. With *The Nature of the Enemy* series, they were clearly urging a disparate American public to be unified in its fight against an external enemy, while their positive vision of U.S. society was aiming to acknowledge its diversified and, indeed, sharply divided internal character. Fighting for a free world was thus at the time a double-edged rhetorical move that addressed Nazi Germany as much as it did American injustice and inequality as viewed through the lens of 1930s political activism. If, in the end, these pictorial and political aspirations seemed to be too complex and ambiguous for the institutional context of American propaganda, in comparison to the slick and easily accessible traditions of advertising, they were immediately recognized as reflecting a new and powerful graphic style by contemporary observers and, in the long run, made a lasting contribution to the history of American poster art.

Notes

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1 Sydney Weinberg, "What to Tell America: The Writers' Quarrel in the Office of War Information," *Journal of American History* 55, no. 1 (June 1968): 73–89, at 86.

2 Mildred Constantine, "The Poster Collection," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 18, no. 4 (June 1951): 2–16, at 4.

3 "Posters for Defense," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 8, no. 6 (September 1941): 3–8, at 6. See also Steven Luckert and Susan Bachrach, introduction to *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda* (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009), 1–11.

4 Eric Newton, "New American War Posters," *Art & Industry* 35, no. 208 (October 1943): 98–106, at 100; and J. Stewart Johnson, *The Modern American Poster* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1983).

5 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 211–44.

6 Ben Shahn, *The Shape of Content* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), 53–72, at 61.

7 Herbert L. Matthews, "Vatican Continues Atrocity Charges," *New York Times*, January 25, 1940, 4; and Camille M. Cianfarra, "Mass Shootings in Poland Laid to Nazis by Cardinal," *New York Times*, January 29, 1940, 1, 5.

8 Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933–1945* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 9.

9 Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942–1945* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1978).

10 John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1988), 14, quoted in Erika Doss, "Looking at *Life*: Rethinking America's Favorite Magazine, 1936–1972," in *Looking at Life Magazine*, ed. Doss (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 1–21, at 11.

11 Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1998).

12 Alan Trachtenberg, introduction to *Paul Strand: Essays on his Life and Work*, ed. Maren Stange (New York: Aperture, 1990), 1–17, at 6.

13 Heinz Ickstadt, "Deconstructing/Reconstructing Order: The Faces of Transatlantic Modernism," in *Faces of Fiction: Essays on American Literature and Culture from the Jacksonian Period to Postmodernity*, ed. Susanne Rohr and Sabine Sielke (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2001), 185–204, at 189.

14 For a history of posters as "visual dissent," see Ralph Young, ed., *Make Art Not War: Political Protest Posters from the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2016).

15 Laura Katzman, "The Politics of Media: Painting and Photography in the Art of Ben Shahn," in *Ben Shahn's New York: The Photography of Modern Times*, ed. Deborah Martin Kao, Katzman, and Jenna Webster (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 97–117; and Katzman, "Source Matters: Ben Shahn and the Archive," *Archives of American Art Journal* 54, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 4–33. On Shahn's relation to moving pictures, see Webster, "Ben Shahn and the Master Medium," in Kao, Katzman, and Webster, *Ben Shahn's New York*, 75–95.

16 Informing this timeline, and referenced throughout this article, is seminal work on Ben Shahn by, among others, Matthew Baigell, Susan Chevlowe, Deborah Martin Kao, Laura Katzman, Diana L. Linden, Frances K. Pohl, James Thrall Soby, and Jenna Webster. For the relationship of Shahn's work to Abstract Expressionism and other postwar movements, see Stephen Polcari, "Ben Shahn and Postwar American Art: Shared Visions," in *Common Man, Mythic Vision: The Paintings of Ben Shahn*, ed. Chevlowe (New York: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998), 67–109. Soby discussed Shahn's use of photography in his early study, *Ben Shahn* (West Drayton, Middlesex, U.K.: Penguin Books, 1947), 6–13. Following Shahn's death, important contributions came from John D. Morse, ed., *Ben Shahn* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972); and Kenneth W. Prescott, *Ben Shahn: A Retrospective 1898–1969* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1976).

17 Diana L. Linden, "Ben Shahn's New Deal Murals: Jewish Identity in the American Scene," in Chevlowe, *Common Man, Mythic Vision*, 37–65.

18 Howard Greenfeld, *Ben Shahn: An Artist's Life* (New York: Random House, 1998), 187–96.

19 After Elmer Davis took over the newly established OWI, his instructions were reprinted in "Davis's Instructions on War News," *New York Times*, July 11, 1942, 7.

20 Thomas D. Mabry to Ben Shahn, June 23, 1942, box 23, folder 54, Ben Shahn Papers, 1879–1990, Bulk 1933–1970, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Shahn Papers).

21 Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 5–9, at 9, 135–58, 192–93; and Luckert and Bachrach, introduction to *State of Deception*, 1–11.

22 Cover memo to President Franklin D. Roosevelt from Jewish delegation quoted in "President Renews Pledges to Jews," *New York Times*, December 9, 1942, 20. See also the earlier report, "Slain Polish Jews Put at a Million," *New York Times*, November 26, 1942, 16.

23 Lipstadt (*Beyond Belief*, 159–96) discusses the press coverage of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise's statement. Isolated references to the "Holocaust" could already be found in the public discourse of the early 1940s. See Joseph Jastrow, "War Captives Offer Chance," *New York Times*, June 15, 1943, 20.

24 Job Folder "Lidice. Office of War Information. Graphics Division. Washington, D.C. Job No. 243, 256 [1942]," box 1154, RG 208, Office of War Information, NC-148, Entry E-251, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereafter National Archives).

25 For instance, Heartfield's photomontage titled *Das ist das Heil, das sie bringen!* (*This Is the Salvation That They Bring!*) from June 29, 1938, addressed the Japanese bombings of Canton in May. See David King and Ernst Volland, *John Heartfield: Laughter Is a Devastating Weapon* (London: Tate Publishing, 2015), 159.

26 "Nazis Blot Out Czech Village; Kill All Men, Disperse Others," *New York Times*, June 11, 1942, 1, 7; and Eduard Stehlík, *Lidice: The Story of a Czech Village*, trans. Petr Kurfürst (Prague: Lidice Memorial, 2004), 60–73. The incident had wide-ranging cultural repercussions; for instance, Fritz Lang's film *Hangmen Also Die!* (1943, United Artists) was loosely based on Heydrich's assassination.

27 "Community Razed; Women, Children Sent to Other Areas," *Washington Post*, June 11, 1942, 1, 13.

28 "Lidice the Immortal," *New York Times*, June 12, 1942, 20.

29 For a different version, see "The Women of Lidice," *Washington Post*, June 21, 1942, B2, 4.

30 The OWI Job Folder at the National Archives suggests that more artists were probably involved in the creation or execution of the poster, stating the names "Shahn—Jones—Smith" on the cover, although in other agency material such as job overviews, it is only attributed to Ben Shahn. Job Folder "Lidice," box 1154, RG 208, National Archives.

31 Building on W. J. T. Mitchell's work, I have discussed the question of mixed-media representations in Christof Decker, "Trauma Narratives, Mixed Media, and the Meditation on the Invisible," *Imaginations* 3, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 92–103. See also Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994), 83–107.

32 See Frances K. Pohl, *Ben Shahn* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1993), 46–49.

33 See ibid., 70; and Weinberg, "What to Tell America."

34 Newton, "New American War Posters," 102, 106.

35 Cécile Whiting places the beginning of the shift in Shahn's work "from a focus on the histories of particular individuals to the general suffering of human beings" in his postwar *Lucky Dragon* series. I contend it was already taking shape in his poster art for the Graphics Division. Whiting, "Ben Shahn: Aggrieved Men and Nuclear Fallout during the Cold War," *American Art* 30, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 10.

36 Ziva Amishai-Maisels, *Depiction and Interpretation: The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993), 76–80, at 77. See also Amishai-Maisels's earlier essay, "Ben Shahn and the Problem of Jewish Identity," *Jewish Art* 12/13 (1986–1987): 304–19; Matthew Baigell, *Jewish Artists in New York: The Holocaust Years* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2002); and Baigell, *American Artists, Jewish Images* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2006).

37 See Edward D. Ball, "Remember How Lidice Died? Here's How Its Memory Lives," *Washington Post*, June 2, 1945, 5.

38 Amishai-Maisels, *Depiction and Interpretation*, 77; and Stehlík, *Lidice*, 113.

39 Shahn, *Shape of Content*, 41–42.

40 A. Michalopoulos, "Conditions in Greece: Confidential Photographic Record," Official Publication of the Royal Hellenic Government, 1942, box 30, folder 30, Shahn Papers.

41 George H. Roeder Jr., *The Censored War: American Visual Experience during World War Two* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), 10–14; and "American Dead at Buna," *Life*, September 20, 1943, 35. William L. Shirer, contemporary observer and columnist for the *Washington Post*, pointed to the related danger that publicizing atrocities could play into the hands of the enemy's own propaganda. In January of 1943 he reported that the German propaganda ministry had referred to Allied atrocity propaganda as being reminiscent of the First World War. In Shirer's assessment, this represented one of Joseph Goebbels's strategies to deflect Allied statements about the persecution of the Jews and possible forms of retribution. Shirer, "The Propaganda Front," *Washington Post*, January 3, 1943, B7.

42 See Hendrik Edelman, *The Netherland-America Foundation, 1921–2011: A History* (New York: Netherland-America Foundation, 2012), 26–28.

43 Muriel Rukeyser, "Memo on procedure," typescript (carbon), with Rukeyser's manuscript corrections, December 14, 1942, 2, folder United States, Office of War Information, Graphics Division, Muriel Rukeyser Papers, The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library (hereafter Rukeyser Papers).

44 See the collection of posters in Luckert and Bachrach, *State of Deception*. For a comparative look at art in Germany and the United States during the 1930s, see Heinz Ickstadt, "Versions of Public Art: National Self-Representation in the Iconographies of Nazi Germany and the New Deal," in Rohr and Sielke, *Faces of Fiction*, 261–78.

45 According to Frances K. Pohl, the CIO poster was widely seen in 1944. It included the text "for full employment after the war," while the earlier OWI version, which had been rejected by Brennan, said "A Need for All in Time of War, a Place for All in Time of Peace." The OWI version archived in the Rukeyser papers, which Pohl does not mention, differed substantially from the latter by including more textual information and explicit references to individual social groups. All three posters thus used the same image, but the two OWI versions represent sharply different visions of inclusion. Pohl, *Ben Shahn: New Deal Artist in a Cold War Climate, 1947–1954* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1989), 10–11. For a recent discussion, see Katzman, "Source Matters," 21.

46 Francis E. Brennan, December 22, 1942, cover memorandum for Santos Balmori, "Mexico in the Antitotalitarian Struggle," X-7651, literal copy of translation, typed manuscript, n.d. [1942], box 24, folder 1, Shahn Papers.

47 Balmori, "Mexico in the Antitotalitarian Struggle," 1, 3, 4.

48 See "Bulletins for Graphics Specialists," Office of War Information, Graphics Division, New York City, n.d. [April 1943], box 24, folder 2; and "How to Make Posters That Will Help Win the War," n.d. [1942], box 24, folder 1, both in Shahn Papers.

49 An overview of projects of the Graphics Division from January 1943 listed the five posters (plus one poster showing a map with "Axis Invasion Countries") and stated that "Mr. Shahn is the author of this poster program, supplemented by other material." "The Service of the Graphics Division of the Office of War Information," Graphics Division, Domestic, January 21, 1943, 4, box 1153, RG 208, Office of War Information, NC-148, Entry E-251, National Archives.

50 Muriel Rukeyser, "Memo re. the poster series on the nature of the enemy," typescript draft, with Rukeyser's manuscript corrections, March 12, 1943, Rukeyser Papers.

51 In November 1942 the poster by Karl Koehler, Victor Ancona, and Stephen Ancona had won a prize in the National War Poster Competition, "held under the auspices of Artists for Victory, Inc.—Council for Democracy—Museum of Modern Art," as the poster stated. Newton, who reviewed it as one of the "hate" posters, commented favorably, "This poster takes a type and turns him into an individual without sacrificing any of his typical characteristics. It is nearer to allegory than to caricature." Newton, "New American War Posters," 102, 106. For another contemporary review, see June Watson, "Poster Show War Theme Panorama," *Washington Post*, January 24, 1943, L4. The prize was announced in a press release of the Museum of Modern Art, "President Roosevelt Congratulates 2,200 Artists of the Country on Response to National War Poster Competition," press release no. 421121-76, November 21, 1942, Museum of Modern Art Archives.

52 Balmori, "Mexico in the Antitotalitarian Struggle," 3.

53 Amishai-Maisels, "Ben Shahn and the Problem of Jewish Identity"; and Amishai-Maisels, *Depiction and Interpretation*, 76–80.

54 Whiting, "Ben Shahn," 5.

55 Katzman, "Source Matters," 13, 29.

56 See Soby, *Ben Shahn*, 12.

57 When the poster was later reworked into the painting (fig. 10), the top barbed-wire fence was painted over against the sky, leaving it only around the man's forehead—"an obvious reference to Christ's crown of thorns," as Frances Pohl has suggested. Pohl, *Ben Shahn: New Deal Artist*, 23.

58 Rukeyser, "Memo re. the poster series," 2.

59 Newton, "New American War Posters," 102.

60 For a discussion of their collaboration, see Diana L. Linden, *Ben Shahn's New Deal Murals: Jewish Identity in the American Scene* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 2015), 19–34.

61 Kenneth W. Prescott, *The Complete Graphic Works of Ben Shahn* (New York: Quadrangle, 1973), 132.

62 Shahn, *Shape of Content*, 68.

63 Diana L. Linden, "Modern? American? Jew? Museums and Exhibitions of Ben Shahn's Late Paintings," *Prospects* 30 (2005): 665–84, at 676. On Shahn's generation of increasingly secularized Jewish artists, see Baigell, *American Artists, Jewish Images*.

64 Forrest Selvig and Ben Shahn, "Ben Shahn Talks with Forrest Selvig," *Archives of American Art Journal* 17, no. 3 (1977): 18.

65 Shahn, *Shape of Content*, 70.

66 Francis E. Brennan to Elmer Davis, April 6, 1943, 3, 1, box 24, folder 2, Shahn Papers.

67 For more on this debate, see Winkler, *Politics of Propaganda*; and Weinberg, "What to Tell America."

68 Brennan to Davis, April 6, 1943, 2.

69 "'Impossible to Tell Full Truth,' Say OWI Writers Who Quit," *Washington Post*, April 16, 1943, B14.

70 See "Domestic OWI Dropped 777 Out of 1,269 to Meet Congressional Slash in Budget," *New York Times*, August 11, 1943, 21; and Pohl, *Ben Shahn: New Deal Artist*, 9–60.

71 Arthur Koestler, "The Nightmare That Is a Reality," *New York Times*, January 9, 1944, SM5, 30.

72 "Atrocities," *Life*, May 7, 1945, 32–37.

73 In an autobiographical passage from her seminal study on photography, cultural philosopher Susan Sontag describes the significance and ambiguity of these images for the ethics of photography; Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 16–21.

74 Johnson, *Modern American Poster*, 8.

75 Weinberg, "What to Tell America," 85.