

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

“ONE AND ALL WITH A HIP-HIP-HURRAH”: COVERAGE OF THE GREAT WAR
IN WISCONSIN NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the 20th century, the world dissolved into chaos in the form of the First World War. Being the first truly modern war, military doctrine and strategy were not able to comprehend the newly acquired advancements in weapons technologies resulting in devastating losses, decimating the male population of Europe. The United States attempted to stay out of the conflict but soon abandoned its isolationist policies to become the “defender of democracies.” Alongside the physical combat, the U.S. also had to deal with the war at home. Through the regulation and creation of organizations such as the Associated Press and the Committee on Public Information, most information reaching the American people could be controlled and censored if need be. Through a comparison of newspapers in Wisconsin before and after U.S. declaration of war, an understanding of how these organizations influenced news publications within the state of Wisconsin can be made. As the United States became increasingly active in the war effort, so did its newspapers.

*Johnnie, get your gun,
Get your gun, get your gun,
Take it on the run,
On the run, on the run.
Here them calling you and me,
Every son of liberty.*
-George M. Cohan, "Over There" 1917

INTRODUCTION

In the early twentieth century, nearly one hundred years ago, the first of two devastating wars erupted. It would be one of the first "modern" wars, involving the efforts of entire nations. As is with any conflict, there are a number of factors that led up to the official declarations of war. In the short term, the hostilities were started by the assassination of a monarch, however the competitive atmosphere of European politics at the turn of the century combined with new weapons technologies is at the heart of this problem. The nations of Europe also formed a variety of alliances in an effort to increase their military might and retain a proper balance of power. However, to separate itself from Europe, the United States adopted an isolationist policy. This stance on foreign relations allowed for the US to stay neutral for a greater half of the conflict.

A comparative analysis of American journalism during World War I by analyzing two Wisconsin publications will allow for a proper look at how information was presented and evolved throughout the war. By choosing events before and after United States intervention in the war, a proper comparison of similar events will be made to determine the effect the entrance of America into the war had on news reporting. The mechanisms in place to influence newsgathering and publication are an important part of understanding why print media changed and institutions such as the Associated Press and the Committee on Public Information were the heavy hitters during the First World War. Each article will be analyzed in terms of its style,

content and overall tone as well as its relation to and influence of the organizations mentioned above.

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and *The Eau Claire Leader* will be the two newsprint publications evaluated. In 1917, the Census Bureau estimated that approximately 4.7 million people living in the United States had been born in Germany or in one of the other Central Powers.¹ The *Sentinel* and *Leader* were chosen due to their locations within Wisconsin (East and West), the difference in circulation and their similar percentage of German born populations within their regions. A comparison of the two will also provide insight into how different news organizations, *The Eau Claire Leader* being a member of the Associated Press, interpreted and portrayed the information of World War I. As only comparing newspapers circulated at the city level, we are able to obtain a better understanding of how the residents of Wisconsin received their information and what bias or spin was associated with such.

There is an abundance of secondary source literature on World War I. I have distilled from that a list of monographs and journal articles relating to the topics of either the Great War, the media in general and propaganda to contextualize the various newspaper articles compared. A historiography regarding the United States in the Great War, published in 2002, provides an overview of the recent scholarship about the First World War and America.

World War I was the first of its kind and due to the upcoming centennial of this tragic event, there is going to be a surge of interest in this topic as it came to define the early twentieth century. This paper proposes to analyze American journalism during World War I in two Wisconsin newspaper publications through the careful analysis of their articles in terms of content, style and tone and how the Committee on Public Information and Associated Press

¹ William Bruce Wheeler and Susan Becker, *Since 1865*, 006 ed., vol. 2 of *Discovering the American Past: A Look at the Evidence* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), page 124.

affected these articles. It focuses on what information was being made available to the average literate American citizen and how propaganda machines and the growing involvement of the United States in the war affected that information. As the war progressed and American involvement increased, the nature of newspaper articles evolved to promote American war efforts and help keep the US citizens reading them distanced from the atrocities of the Western Front.

BRIEF HISTORIOGRAPHY

There is an enormous amount of literature on the subject, the bulk of which would take several lifetimes to cover. In a recent study of the historical category of “the First World War” and how it has been constructed, authors Jay Winter and Antoine Prost have divided the histories written of World War I into three basic categories and time periods. The first time period is defined as the end of 1918 through the post World War II period and the early 1960s. Historic thought of this period was dominated by traditional military and diplomatic focuses. In this, historians told the stories of the important men of politics and diplomacy and the prestigious generals of the military rather than civilians and common soldiers, for their experiences were deemed of little or no importance. During the second half of the twentieth century, higher education boomed. As a part of a three-part trend in the *American Historical Review*, the 1960s experienced a rapid growth of interest in World War I. It was during this explosion that a second historical perspective was crafted. This new wave of historians focused their efforts on telling the stories of the masses. They developed a social history, a “second wave” that reversed the perspective, telling the story of the war from the view of soldiers and civilians. In spite of this, historical thought continued to evolve and push forward. Deeply rooted in the events of the last

quarter of the twentieth century with the decline of the Soviet Union, the third and final perspective emerged. Historians shifted their emphasis to that of a “modern” cultural based history, with representations, feelings and emotions of men and women at the center of investigations. This period began in 1992, with the opening of *Historial de la grande guerre* at Peronne in France and continues to this day.²

PART ONE:

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN WWI

In the summer of 1914, one of the most destructive and costly wars in human history was unleashed upon the world. Over the course of the last century, it has been described as “The Great War” and a “war to end all wars.” Dubbed the First World War, this conflict was truly the first example of a ‘modern’ war and demonstrated the darker side of warfare. According to figures from the U.S. Department of Justice, an estimated 57.5 percent of mobilized forces were killed in action.³ Often referred to as a “Powder Keg,” Europe at the turn of the century was rife with political and spatial dissension. In the short term, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria on the 28 June 1914 can be described as the ‘spark’ that set the next four years of death and destruction into motion.



*Figure 1.1 - Headline from the July 28, 1914 issue of the *Milwaukee Journal* announcing the official Austria-Hungarian declaration of war against Serbia.

² Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies 1914 to Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 7-205.

³ “The Great War. Resources. WWI Casualties and Deaths,” Public Broadcasting Service, http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath_pop.html (accessed April 3, 2011).

As the assassination of the Austrian monarch Franz Ferdinand acted as a trigger, a look at Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century provides the ammunition. Balance of power has always been an issue in Europe. With the emergence of Germany as a unified nation during the late 1800s, Europe's other, older entities were forced to find ways to maintain their positions of power. The creation of complex networks of political and military alliances was their answer. Although these alliances shifted and went through various iterations over the nineteenth century, they eventually boiled down to the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente. The Triple Alliance was composed of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires as well as the Kingdom of Bulgaria. Russia, Great Britain and France made up the Triple Entente. These agreements between states ensured that if conflict ever arose, it would involve the entire European continent and potentially the world. This atmosphere produced rivalries between nations, most notably in imperialistic affairs. Colonies were a way for states to increase their power and extend their reach. They also provided new markets and raw materials. In the mad grab for land, Europe also began to stockpile military equipment. An example of this was the massive armament of the Germany Navy during the early twentieth century sparking Great Britain to retrofit its navy to compete and assert dominance over the seas. Needless to say, Europe was ripe for conflict.

In the early years of World War I, Europe experienced a massive amount of bloodshed. This was due largely in part to the lack of comprehension of the new systems of warfare. Great technological advancements in firepower without proper corresponding advancements in mobility caused the conflict to quickly become a defensive effort, a stalemate based on trench warfare. Inventions such as the machine gun, which allowed a single soldier to be able to hold off hundreds, and barbed wire, which limited mass infantry advances, were new and not well understood by those in charge. In France, the *offensive à outrance*, or all out offensive,

dominated military strategy until its disastrous effects during the beginning years of World War I.⁴ It is not as though this ideology came out of nowhere, however. Tactics imposed by Joseph Joffre and Plan XVII⁵ were greatly influenced by the more recent engagements in the Balkans and between Japan and Russia. In Japan's defeat of Russia during the Russo-Japanese War, military strategists and theorists admired how the island nation was able to win and learned from this victory. This offensive policy displayed how ignorant and oblivious militaries were in relation to the effect new weaponry would have on warfare. The use of poison gas and armored tanks also had a great impact on the way the war was fought.

This new era of military technology brought destruction, as many generals did not grasp their devastating capabilities. As one historian puts it, the standard tactic was "simple and stupid" which was to bunch the infantry together and move them forward as fast as possible.⁶ Machine guns, repeating rifles and fast firing artillery were very effective at laying into an attacking force. This caused a stalemate between the opposing forces and created the need for trench warfare. The Germans first used poison gas in October of 1914 and it was not until April 1915 any sort of success became of it. The Germans used chlorine gas discharged from cylinders that broke French forces in a wave 5 miles wide.⁷ However, they were not prepared to follow up the attack, which resulted in the gap closing when the gas dispersed. Initially these new technologies were not utilized to their full extent, but as the war progressed, tactics and strategies associated with them developed.

⁴ Gerd Krumeich, *Armaments and Politics in France on the Eve of the First World War: The Introduction of Three-Year Conscription 1913-1914* (New York: Berg Publishers Ltd., 1985), 23.

⁵ Plan XVII represents the culmination of offensive doctrines in France. It called for an assault into the Lorraine region of Europe, which had exchanged hands between the French and Germans numerous times. The problem was the terrain of this region was difficult to maneuver en masse.

⁶ Norman Stone, *Europe Transformed: 1878-1919 (Blackwell Classic Histories of Europe)*, 2 ed. (Oxford, UK.: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), page 342.

⁷ Robin W. Winks and R. J. Q. Adams, *Europe, 1890-1945: Crisis and Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2003), page 92.

U.S. involvement in the war can be categorized in two distinct phases: The period of August 1914 to April 1917 when America was officially neutral, although economic, cultural and spiritual ties sided more with the Allies (Triple Entente) and the period after April 1917 where the U.S. was providing men, money and munitions to the war effort.⁸ Prior to and during this first phase, America was officially neutral. The United States had adopted an isolationist policy so as to not get wrapped up in the turmoil of Europe. Isolationism was the most important foreign policy until the mid-twentieth century. As illustrated by President Jefferson's admonition in 1801 against "entangling alliances," isolationism came to mean "military and diplomatic non-entanglement."⁹

During his re-election race in the summer of 1916, President Wilson ran under the slogan "he kept us out of the war." This was far from the case. In the winter of 1915, America was forced to choose between a policy, which helped Germany, and one which favored the allies. With the proclamation of submarine warfare in 1915, the United States had to choose between opening a road to Germany and making an enemy of Germany.¹⁰ The illusion of American neutrality remained while the dangers of the U.S. being drawn into a war the people opposed grew closer. Much like the events at Pearl Harbor were for the United States and World War II, the resumption of unlimited submarine warfare and the sinking of the Lusitania¹¹ nudged the

⁸ David H. Mould, *American Newsfilm 1914-1919 – The Underexposed War* (New York, Garland Publishing Inc. 1983), 1.

⁹ Patrick Callahan, *Logics of American Foreign Policy: Theories of America's World Role* (New York: Longman, 2003), page 52-53.

¹⁰ Walter Lippman, *World Conflict in its Relation to American Democracy*. 65nd Cong. 1nd sess., 1917. S. Doc. 80. pg 6

¹¹ The Lusitania was a British ocean liner that was sunk off the coast of Ireland as a result of Germany's use of unrestricted submarine warfare. Its destruction saw the loss of American lives.

American people into the direction of war. Also speculation of a Mexican addition to the Triple Alliance as a result of the Zimmerman Note¹² pushed the U.S. to war.



*Figure 1.2 – Headline from the May 8, 1915 issue of the *Eau Claire Leader* chronicling the destruction of the Lusitania.

Fueled by Allied propaganda, Germany was portrayed as a militaristic monster, through its invasion of France through Belgium using a modified Schlieffen Plan,¹³ use of poison gas and its ruthless conduct of the war at sea. It became clear that if America had to fight, it would do so for the “peace and order of the world.” Joining the Triple Alliance proved counterproductive to this mission, as another role of the United States was to spread democracy. The Russians were still considered an absolute monarchy, with the power resting in the Tsar Nicholas II. In 1915, Nicholas butchered his public approval by taking control of the army taking the place of the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevich against all advice.¹⁴ The army fell victim to defeat after defeat with casualties totaling almost six million killed, wounded or captured by the end of the war.¹⁵ Being directly linked to the military meant Nicholas was held responsible for its failures. Russia was still in a state of modernization, industrialization and urbanization. These processes were put on the fast track at the onset of World War I. The rapid development of Russia into a modern nation helped to facilitate the revolutionary ideas floating around the state. By promoting new

¹² Zimmerman note was a telegram intercepted and translated by the British. It was a document from the German Foreign minister calling for Mexico to ally with Germany against the United States.

¹³ The Schlieffen Plan was a plan to invade France through Belgium under the idea to end hostilities with France quickly so as to not fight a war of two fronts.

¹⁴ Lionel Kochan, *Russia in Revolution 1890-1918* (The New American Library, 1967), page 176.

¹⁵ John M. Thompson, *Revolutionary Russia, 1917*, 2 ed. (Waveland Press, 1996), page 11.

technologies in transportation and communication allowing for the easy movement of people and ideas, modernization helped out the revolutionaries' efforts.¹⁶ Also, this influx of dislocated workers utilizing these new technologies helped to weaken the fabric of old society; calling in a need for a new system of government. Needless to say, the many problems that afflicted Russia culminated in the Russian Revolution of 1917, bringing in the communist regime. With Russia out of the war, Woodrow Wilson and the United States could join the alliance with a clear conscious.

Adopting this moniker as a “defender of democracy” the United States entered the war officially on April 6, 1917. There were two paths of peace: the first through political revolution in Germany and Austria Hungary and the other by the “definite defeat of every item in the program of aggression.”¹⁷



*Figure 1.3 – Headline from the April 6, 1917 issue of the *Eau Claire Leader* announcing the official United States entrance into the First World War.

With America officially involved in the war, there was a need for men, money and supplies. In particular, Wisconsin was very generous to the war effort. The state contributed \$364,265,858 to the war in the form of loans and support of various war activities. Wisconsin pioneered a variety of programs to bolster the war effort including “wheatless” and “meatless” days and the “soldier pal” movement, which was a correspondence program so that “every man

¹⁶ Thompson, *Revolutionary Russia* page 10.

¹⁷ Michael Howard, *The First World War* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 92; Lippmann, *World Conflict* 3,9.

who went to the front would have a person at home looking after his welfare.” Out of the 4,355,000 troops mobilized, Wisconsin contributed 118,000 of her youths to the war. In the first draft alone, Wisconsin filled half of its expected quota through enlistment. Wisconsin was the first state to complete registration and report for the draft. The people were behind the war effort in Wisconsin.¹⁸

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the role of the press and its relation to world peace came into question. Individuals such as William C. Deming, editor of the *Wyoming Tribune* in 1912, had high hopes for members of the press in curtailing conflict and promoting overall cohesion among countries. In a statement released to the 62^d Congressional Senate, he stated, “It will prove a much easier task for the press of the world to create a sentiment of peace than for Governments, hampered by centuries of indulgence in legalized barbarism, to destroy the desire for war.”¹⁹ He acknowledged the role newsgathering organizations had in instigating American aggression as a result muckraking and yellow journalism²⁰ against Spain to spawn the Spanish American War in 1898; he concluded that if newspapers could encourage war, they could also prevent war and promote peace. In theory a unified effort of a worldwide press network working toward this notion of world peace seems feasible. However, as the pride and ego of countries

¹⁸ Fred Holms, *Wisconsin's War Record* (Madison, Capital Historical Publishing Co., 1919)

¹⁹ William C. Deming, *The Opportunity and Duty of the Press in Relation to World Peace*. 62nd Cong. 2nd sess., 1912. S. Doc. 764. pg. 3.

²⁰ Yellow journalism was a movement within the newspaper industry in the early twentieth century used to boost sales that featured sensational headlines that “screamed excitement” often about comparatively unimportant news. It was not uncommon for some news stories to be fraudulent.

grew to dominate the world stage, “the best answer to the machine gun was the spade” and not the pen.²¹

The Associated Press (AP) was the dominant news organization of the early twentieth century. Perhaps no institution was more widely known by name yet more vaguely understood. The Associated Press was founded in May of 1846 and functioned as a cooperative owned by contributing newsgathering sources. In 1913, President of the AP Frank B. Noyes released a document articulating the institution’s functions and organization. The AP was described as “an association of something over 850 newspapers, operating under a charter of the State of New York...for the interchange and collection of news,” meaning that the AP served as a pool of resources for newspaper organizations so as to not be limited to their locality. It was a way for newspapers to share newsworthy material. The Associated Press represented roughly one third of the daily newspapers of the United States at the turn of the century. The AP also aided the news industry in development of technologies to streamline this process, notably with the invention of the Teletype system in 1914, which allowed for information to be transmitted directly to printers over telegraph wires.

An understanding of the AP is crucial, especially when one of the publications addressed later, *The Eau Claire Leader*, was a member. The Associated Press was governed by a board of directors composed of active newspapermen elected by its members at annual meetings. Its leadership served without salaries. With members scattered all over the world, the AP served to “furnish its members with a truthful, clean, comprehensive, nonpartisan report of the news of the world.” In order to go about providing this service, the AP required its members to contribute the news of their localities as well as weekly fees to cover the costs of leased telegraph wire systems,

²¹ Douglas Porch, “The Marne and After: A Reappraisal of French Strategy in the First World War,” *The Journal of Military History* (October 2005) pg. 375.

and offices in major American and foreign cities to collect news throughout the world. The amount of information this generated ranged from 500 words daily to over 50,000 words daily in more important cities.²²

To be successful, smaller newspapers almost had to join the Associated Press. They just could not afford to have individual correspondents in the major cities reporting the news. A common misconception of newspaper readers of the early twentieth century was to attribute anything seen in print to the Associated Press. As explained by Noyes, “the individual correspondent...for a given newspaper having a common bias may be permitted to indulge in partisanship or in propaganda.” This sort of behavior was not permitted within the AP. Its function was to supply news, not views.²³

This cooperative of newspapers was and still is meant to serve its members and not control them. During the early years of the war, the Associated Press was free to pursue its function documenting the war without bias. However, as the Committee on Public Information (CPI), a prominent government propaganda organization of the United States during World War I, gained control over information entering or leaving the country, the AP was forced to examine its purpose. The Associated Press may still have issued unbiased releases to its members, but the legal and ‘unpatriotic’ ramifications from the CPI might have limited their access to the public.²⁴

THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC INFORMATION

²² Frank B. Noyes, “An Article Relating to the Methods of Operation, Organization and Collection and Distribution of News Matter by the Associated Press.” 63rd Cong. 1st sess., 1913. S. Doc. 27. pg. 3-6; it is important to note all this information is presented as it was understood in 1914. The Associated Press more likely than not has changed over the past 100 years.

²³ Noyes, *Methods of Operation*, pg. 6.

²⁴ Censor media through various legal implications including the Espionage Act in 1917.

With the advent of war, President Wilson and the United States Government were forced into a position to either initiate complete control over information within the country, implement harsh censorship or dominate the channels of communication and influencing public opinion in a more 'voluntary' manner. Within a day of declaring war, members of Wilson's cabinet called for "some authoritative agency to assure the publication of all the vital facts of national defense." The proposed organization was to serve two functions, censorship and publicity.²⁵ In light of letters from the Secretary of War, State and Navy calling for the need of such an organization, The Committee on Public Information was ushered into existence via an executive order from the President. Its leadership was composed of the three secretaries (War, State and Navy) and a civilian chairman, George Creel. However, the cabinet officials were often too busy with their duties to manage such an agency, so leadership of the CPI ultimately fell to Creel. Initially, the CPI was charged with the task of "encouraging and then consolidating the revolution of opinion which changed the United States from anti-militaristic to an organized war machine." Under isolationist policy prevalent during the first part of the war, many Americans were against involvement with a war that was not seen as our American business. It was up to the CPI to push the message of Wilson's "fight for peace and order in the world" and "America to the rescue of civilization."²⁶ The task of shaping the American mind during wartime became the business of the CPI.

Commonly known as the Creel Committee, the CPI was responsible for influencing the American public in the direction of supporting U.S. participation in Europe. The CPI used a variety of mediums to do this, which included print (newspapers, posters, etc), film, photographs

²⁵ Robert Emery, "The *Official Bulletin*, 1917-1919: A Proto-Federal Register." *Law Library Journal* (Vol. 102. No. 3 2010) pg. 441-442

²⁶ James R. Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words That Won the War; the Story of the Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919*. Princeton University Press, 1939. pg. 4-5.

and even public speaking; divisions within the committee were set up to regulate each. The cornerstone of the CPI was its Division of News. Staffed by professional journalists, this division was responsible for “the collection and issuance of the official news of government.” The Division of News produced the official daily newspaper of the United States government in the form of the *Official Bulletin*; its doors never shut. Alongside this publication, 6000 news releases were issued, reaching an estimated 20,000 newspaper columns per week.²⁷ Representing the visual mediums, the CPI had both a Picture Division and a Film Division, which merged in March of 1918. Prior to April 1917, the documentation of the war fell to civilians, who worked on both sides of the conflict. After the United States’ entrance into the war, the task of documentation fell upon military personnel in the Signal Corps photographic unit, which totaled seventeen officers and 102 enlisted men, and a select few civilians who could obtain a permit. As the sole mechanism of distribution, the Film Division worked closely with the motion picture industry creating weekly film reels to be played in theaters across America. Any profits made were to be fed back into this machine.²⁸ In a time before radio, the CPI knew the importance of the spoken word. They commissioned over 75,000 volunteer speakers, “the Four-Minute Men,”²⁹ to travel the country giving four-minute talks in movie houses, theaters and other public places, usually during the minutes between reel changing. Their speeches dealt with promoting as well as informing the public of the American war effort and contributed to morale of the American people. These were the organizations in place to help the CPI achieve its goal to rally the unwavering support for the American Expeditionary Force’s actions in Europe.

²⁷ Emery, “The Official Bulletin,” pg. 442; Mock, *Words That Won the War*. pg. 67.

²⁸ Newton D. Baker, Letter From the Secretary of War. *Still and Moving Pictures of War Preparations and of the American Expeditionary Force*. 65th Cong. 2nd sess., 1918. H. Doc. 1227. pg. 2-3; for a sample permit form see appendix.

²⁹ For an excerpt of a Four Minute Man speech, see appendix.

The product that best represented the ideology and goals of the CPI as a propaganda machine was the *Official Bulletin*. The *OB* was created to serve as the official gazette of the U.S. government, allowing for the reduction of correspondence between government departments and the spread of government news throughout the country. It was to be the “official source to which the public could look for authoritative information” about their government.³⁰ However, actions not pertaining to the war effort were usually only noted or briefly summarized. Combined with the information regarding government proceedings, the *OB* also contained various stories ‘boosting’ popular morale such as recipes for wheatless pies and “war plum pudding.” The publication was produced daily and ran from May 10, 1917 to March 31, 1919 and was anywhere from eight to thirty pages.³¹

The CPI represented the distillation of Progressive ideology when it came to running a propaganda organization. Creel employed a program of ‘voluntary censorship’ when it came to dealing with the press, however there were far too many legal ramifications for this program to be considered voluntary. For example, at the end of April in 1917, the President effectively suppressed all cable telephone and telegraph messages entering or leaving the U.S. with wireless establishments having been seized by the Navy previously. These actions effectively allowed for full government control of electrical communication in or out of the United States.³² As the war progressed, the voluntary nature of censorship developed legal consequences if publications failed to honor Creel’s programs. The CPI also gained authority through Congressional and Presidential action such as the passage of the Espionage Act in 1917.³³ During the first fifty-three

³⁰ Emery, “The Official Bulletin,” pg. 442

³¹ Emery, “The Official Bulletin,” pg. 444

³² Mock, *Words That Won the War*. pg. 78

³³ Espionage Act of 1917 was a United States federal law passed in 1917 designed to prohibit any attempt to interfere with military operations, to support U.S. enemies during wartime, to promote insubordination in the military or to interfere with military recruitment.

days of the war, domestic news was uncensored; a publication's editor solely controlled the selection of news published. This spawned a set of rules issued in a preliminary statement from the CPI, calling for the regulation of news stories. The CPI was the "velvet glove that hid the iron fist of the Sedition, The Espionage and the Trading with the Enemy Acts."³⁴

According to, "What Government Asks of the Press," rules issued by the CPI, news fell into three categories: dangerous, questionable and routine. These categories reflected how safe it was for a publication to print its material. Dangerous stories included those of ongoing naval and military operations, threats and plots against the life of the President, movements of alien labor, and movements of official missions. Questionable material was to be published with great caution, usually only with approval from the CPI itself. Examples of the classification include naval and military operations and technical inventions. Routine stories were the most numerous. If writers or editors were doubtful at all, they were urged to submit the story to the CPI for authentication. Newspapers were forbidden to publish information regarding troop movements, concentration, ongoing operational assignments, etc. These rules were the pinnacle foundation of the CPI's censorship efforts meant to curtail negative publicity of the American war effort.

Dubbed "America's first Propaganda Ministry," the CPI was effective in accomplishing its goals and exerting its control over public opinion. It was abolished in June 1919 when Congress refused to allocate funds to the committee for operation. It is important to note that the CPI never had 100 percent conformity to its rules. Creel's Committee could afford to overlook violations in a small number of papers because of the support from the rest of the press "pounding out an anvil chorus of patriotism." When analyzing newspapers of World War I during America's war years, it is impossible to overlook the effect of the CPI. The CPI packaged itself as "an intermediary between law enforcement bodies and the people," while in reality it

³⁴ Emery, "The Official Bulletin," pg. 444

held the dominating power of censorship via direct legal force.³⁵ The understanding of its ideas, policies and programs allow for a better understanding of news publications during the years of American involvement in Wilson's war to end all wars.

PART TWO:

The two newspaper organizations compared from this point on are *The Eau Claire Leader*, a newspaper from Eau Claire in western Wisconsin and *The Milwaukee Journal* from Milwaukee Wisconsin. The *Sentinel* and *Leader* were chosen due to their locations within Wisconsin, the difference in circulation and their similar percentage of German born populations within their regions. A comparison of the two will also provide insight into how different news organizations, *The Eau Claire Leader* being a member of the Associated Press, interpreted and portrayed the information of World War I. As only comparing newspapers circulated at the city level, we are able to obtain a better understanding of how the residents of Wisconsin received their information and what bias or spin was associated with such. The events compared include the declaration of war by Austria-Hungary, the sinking of the *Lusitania*, The Battle of the Somme and the Battle of Verdun, US entrance into the war and the signing of the Armistice.

WISCONSIN NEWSPAPERS PRE-DECLARATION

DECLARATION OF WAR AND THE LUSITANIA

In late July of 1914, the major powers of the world would engage in what was thought to be a short war. This conflict would come to devastate the populations of each country involved,

³⁵ Mock, *Words That Won the War*. pg. vii, 90, 20.

creating a ‘lost generation.’³⁶ On July 29, 1914, both *The Eau Claire Leader* and *The Milwaukee Journal* ran headlines announcing this event.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

*Figure 2.1 - Headline from the July 28, 1914 issue of the *Eau Claire Leader*. For the *Milwaukee Journal* Headline, see Figure 1.1.

Of the two, *The Eau Claire Leader* ran with the more sensationalized headline, reminiscent of yellow journalism. Each paper portrayed the story in a different way. *The Eau Claire Leader* presented the declaration of war as an event outside of the United States, compliant with isolationist ideology. The front page of this edition contained only a handful of stories regarding the declaration of war, with the rest devoted to more localized news such as with the story entitled “‘Wild Man’ Attacks Minneapolis Woman.” *The Milwaukee Journal*’s July 28, 1914 edition was littered with stories regarding the coming conflict in Europe such as “The War is On” and “Fleet of Kaiser is Making Ready.” These stories presented the conflict in such a way as to sort of anticipate the war as something of a ‘world war.’ This is most apparent in their representation of Europe, outlining the two major alliances and the neutral parties of Europe.

³⁶ The term is used for the period from the end of World War I to the beginning of the Great Depression and in describing those who came of age during and shortly after World War I.



*Figure 2.2 - A map from the July 28, 2914 issue of the *Milwaukee Journal*.

The Eau Claire Leader on the other hand is more devoted to the conflict between “Austrian and Servian Forces” with references to the various alliance networks of Europe. It is important to note that the *Leader* never divides Europe as the *Milwaukee Journal* had. Although both papers provided stories regarding the peaceful settlement of these growing tensions, *The Eau Claire Leader* was concerned more with these plans to “Avert Conflict Thru Joint Mediation” while the *Milwaukee Journal* accepted the inevitable conflict and was hopeful “...To Limit Theater of War.”

In May of 1915, the British ocean liner *Lusitania* was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat or submarine during their use of unrestricted submarine warfare during the Great War. The liner was owned by the Cunard Steamship Company Ltd and was captained by W.T. Turner. As one of the largest and fastest transatlantic ships, this generated headlines. As the news began to come in, news organizations released the information as soon as they received it. *The Eau Claire Leader* was a day late in reporting on the *Lusitania*. Figure 1.2 shows the *Leader*’s headline for May 8, 1915.



*Figure 2.3 - Headline from the May 7, 1915 issue of *The Milwaukee Journal*.

In reporting on the destruction of the *Lusitania*, both newspapers sympathized with the British, concerned more with the massive loss of life as well as the death of any American on board. More emphasis was placed in the stories of *The Milwaukee Journal* questioning the American response to the American casualties, seen in the story “No Complication Unless American Lives are Lost.” In sympathizing with the British, both publications considered the acts as heinous. *The Milwaukee Journal* also tried to be objective regarding the attack stating that the ship had flown an American flag in February of 1915, resulting in a statement released by the British foreign office explaining it was flying a neutral flag. Both publications commented on how quick the ship sank, happening within a half hour. However, neither address why. The *Lusitania* was known to be carrying ammunition during its fateful encounter, which is a fact left out and even denied by British authorities in these newspaper publications.

There was a dramatic shift in war coverage in *The Eau Claire Leader*. This is most apparent when comparing the front pages of the declaration of war and the sinking of the *Lusitania*, with few stories being devoted during the declaration and the entirety of the front page devoted to the devastation at sea. The story broke earlier for *The Milwaukee Journal* than *The Eau Claire Leader*, meaning more content could be created as the story stayed relevant.



*Figure 2.4 – Map from May 7, 1915 issue of *The Milwaukee Journal*

It is already apparent in these early stories that the general trend was to side more with the Allies.

BATTLE OF THE SOMME AND VERDUN

The battles of the Somme and Verdun are two of the most popular engagements along the Western Front of World War I. Besides the first and second battles of the Marne; they were also some of the most devastating in terms of the loss of life and overall destruction. As with most battles, they are named for the area they take place. These skirmishes took place along the Somme River and around the city of Verdun along the Meuse River respectively. Since these campaigns occurred over a period of time, coverage within newspaper publications vastly differ from those of single events like the declaration of war or the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Most of the time, coverage came in the form of short updates, but when major gains were made, they tended to make headlines.



*Figure 2.5 – Headline from the July 2, 1916 issue of *The Eau Claire Leader* (Sunday Edition)

The effective engagement dates for the battle of Verdun were February 21, 1916 to December 18, 1916. This issue of *The Eau Claire Leader* chronicled the British gains at the Somme as well as French progress at Verdun.

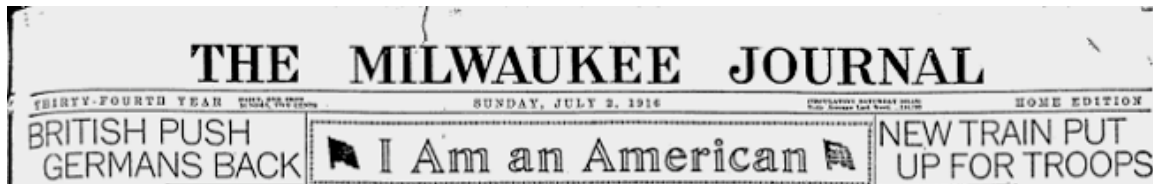
“London. July 1. – British and French troops thrown forward in grand offensive against the German lines on both sides of the river Somme, sixty miles north of Paris, have penetrated at one point to a depth of five miles; taken several villages and captured a labyrinth of trenches extending to a depth of 1,000 yards on a front of seven miles.”³⁷

This press release demonstrates the newspapers tendency to lean toward the Allies. As the gains of the Triple Entente are rarely described in such detail. The French beginnings at Verdun are also touched on in this issue describing “This important starting point has changed hands several times and around it probably thousands of men have fallen.”³⁸ Verdun was very symbolic due to its important role throughout history as a defensive stronghold, most notably Attila the Hun failing to capture the town. Throughout the engagement, coverage chronicled the ups and downs of the Allied war effort. There is never an exclamatory headline as with the July 2, 1916 issue of *The Eau Claire Leader* describing German gains. The term German is rarely used, preference was given to the term *Teuton* which references a Germanic tribe and is used to describe all Germans.

³⁷ *The Eau Claire Leader* July 2, 1916.

³⁸ *The Eau Claire Leader* July 2, 1916.

The Milwaukee Journal ran a very similar headline, describing the initial advancements of the British and French forces at the Somme; however, this issue is peculiar in the fact that there are a number of elements that break isolationist ideologies.

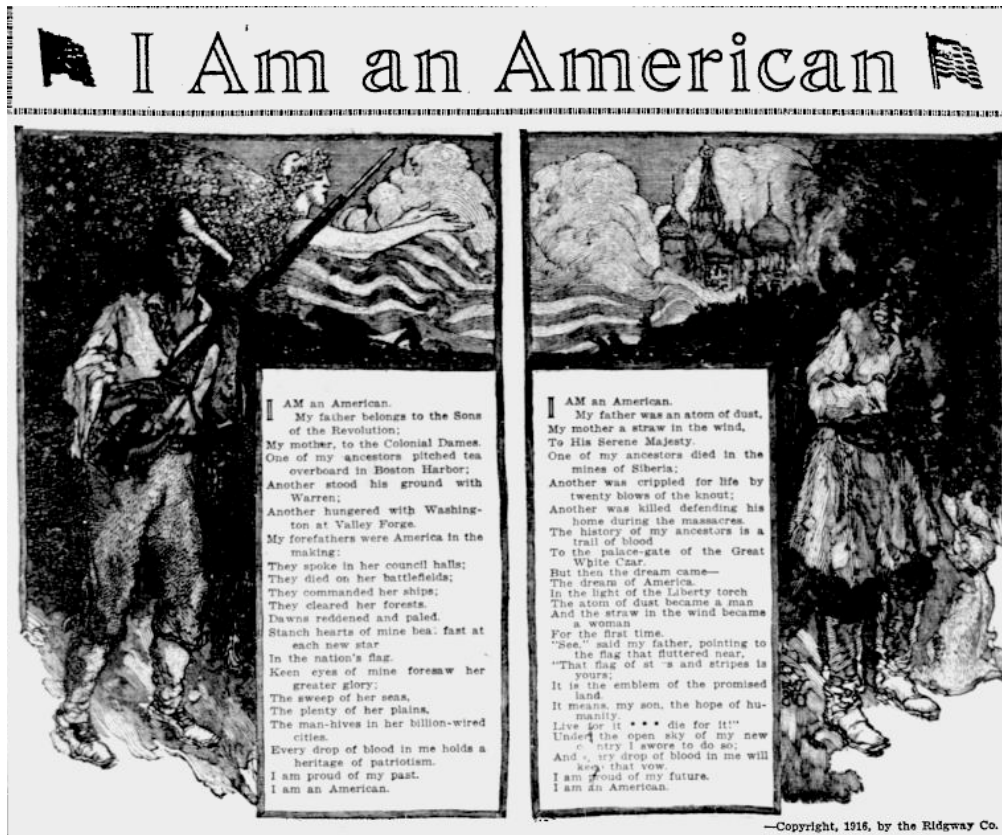


*Figure 2.6 – Headline from the July 2, 1916 issue of *The Milwaukee Journal*.

The Milwaukee Journal described the preliminary gains of the British forces at the Battle of the Somme and described them “in the throes of a mighty struggle.”³⁹ However, the publication of two stories within this issue question the *Journal*’s true intentions. It is important to note that this was published during the summer of 1916, almost a full year before the US officially entered the war. Already talks of patriotism and joining the war effort are present. “Join the Red Cross, Patriots’ Slogan” was the article that took center stage in this issue. It called for “every businessman, every business woman, every man, woman and child in the city of Milwaukee and its suburbs, who is a patriot.”⁴⁰ These early talks of patriotism demonstrate the publication’s anticipation and possible support of the United States entering the war. This is further shown through the publication of the poem “I Am an American” by Elias Lieberman.

³⁹ *The Milwaukee Journal* July 2, 1916.

⁴⁰ *The Milwaukee Journal* July 2, 1916.



*Figure 2.7 – “I Am an American” by Elias Lieberman, published in the July 2, 1916 issue of *The Milwaukee Journal*.

Coverage of the major arenas of combat during World War I usually favored the actions of the Allied forces of Britain, France and Russia. Although *The Eau Claire Leader*, being a member of the Associated Press, attempted to present all sides; the paper did extend a level of favoritism over the actions of the Allies. *The Milwaukee Journal* mimicked that favoritism and took it further, almost pushing an American response. They were shaping the minds of their readership, preparing them for the inevitable war to come.

WISCONSIN NEWSPAPERS DURING THE WAR YEARS

THE US ENTERS THE WAR

In early April of 1917, President Woodrow Wilson drafted a declaration to enter World War I on the side of the Allies. A day later, the declaration of war passed the Senate with a vote of 82-6 and finally on April 6, 1917, the House of Representatives approved the document with a vote of 373-50. America was officially a participant in the Great War. This was big news, and the newspapers ran with it. As shown in figure 1.3, the headlines for *The Eau Claire Leader* were extremely patriotic. The inclusion of small American flags across the top of the paper is evidence of that.



*Figure 3.1 – Header from the April 6, 1917 edition of *The Eau Claire Leader*.

The Eau Claire Leader jumped on the bandwagon and threw their support behind the war.

“United States Brings Power Never Equalled into World Conflict; over 20,000,000 men capable of military duty.”⁴¹ Their support came in the form of ‘selling the war’ to its readers, and for the most part, they did an effective job. They did run a story centered on the opposition of the declaration within the House of Representatives, however they described war as being “accepted by most representatives as only course of honor.” To further support *The Eau Claire Leader*’s patriotic role, they ran a photography of the American flag with the title “Old Glory is Unfurled in Battle.”

The Milwaukee Journal took an entirely different approach to announcing the entrance of the United States in the war. Instead of going the route of extreme patriotism, like *The Eau*

⁴¹ *The Eau Claire Leader* April 6, 1917.

Claire Leader did, they took a more simplistic approach, featuring a rather large political cartoon⁴² versus “Old Glory.”



*Figure 3.2 – Headline from April 6, 1917 issue of *The Milwaukee Journal*.

As noted under the headline, the *Journal* published the entire proclamation of war issued by President Wilson. Other notable stories run were a “Where to Enlist” section detailing where exactly in the Milwaukee area one would go to enlist in various branches of the military and the song “Up with the Flag” by Berton Braley.

“Let our flag unfurled to a watching world
 Be proof that we keep our trust,
 That we take our part with a valiant heart
 In a cause that we know is just!”⁴³

There were fears expressed by President Wilson concerning American public opinion and whether or not those who supported the nation’s neutrality and noninvolvement would not support the war effort. This prompted the creation of the CPI only a few days later with executive order 2594. It is apparent that there already was a large amount of support for the war effort, with the extremely patriotic ‘explosion’ of *The Eau Claire Leader* and the stories run by *The Milwaukee Journal* calling for enlistment and overall support.

PEACE AND THE END OF THE WAR

⁴² To see the political cartoon, see appendix.

⁴³ Verse from “Up with the Flag” by Berton Braley printed in *The Milwaukee Journal* April 6, 1917.

Although US engagement in the war was short-lived and many troops saw limited combat, America was deeply connected to the events of 1914 to 1918. With the war over and the armistice signed there was always bound to be a “loser.” Those involved were out for revenge and chose Germany as the scapegoat. It was best described in the Associated Press War Summary release “Victory—and peace! After more than four years of struggling, the rights of mankind are served. The greatest day in the history of nations has dawned. The German military classes—arrogant beyond expression—are in defeat.”⁴⁴ Germany was forever vilified and the effects of such persecution would shape Europe for the next several decades.



*Figure 3.3 – Headline for the November 12, 1918 issue of *The Eau Claire Leader*.

The Eau Claire Leader was a day behind *The Milwaukee Journal* in reporting the end of the war. This can be attributed to their smaller size. The focus on the “November Call for 300,000 Men is Off” and “Draft Orders Cancelled...” portrays the end of the war in relation to America versus a more world view in *The Milwaukee Journal*.

⁴⁴ *The Eau Claire Leader* November 12, 1918.



*Figure 3.4 – Photographs from the November 11, 1918 issue of *The Milwaukee Journal*.

The Milwaukee Journal again printed the entirety of the Terms of the Armistice as they had done with Wilson’s proclamation of war. Although within the terms it laid blame upon the Germans, there were few references outside it among the other stories holding Germany accountable for the war. Not to say that the paper did not personify Germany as the enemy, in comparison to *The Eau Claire Leader*, it was not as prominent in language and frequency. *The Eau Claire Leader* frequently used the term “Hun” when describing Germans and even ran a headline November 20, 1918 “Will Kaiser Try to Get Back Power?”

CONCLUSION

World War I was a new kind of war. It challenged the old conventions of war strategy and propelled those who fought into the modern age. Utilizing new technologies, the destructive capabilities of individual soldiers were dramatically increased. The machine gun coupled with fast firing artillery ended in stalemates between the opposing forces, making it extremely difficult to break through enemy positions. Favoring the defenders, armies dug in, utilizing the weapon that won the war, the shovel. This conflict encompassed the entirety of Europe and

eventually saw the action of the United States. For years, the United States had a foreign policy based around isolationist theory, that is to say “military and diplomatic entanglement.” World War I saw a break in this policy, as America became a “defender of democracy” and a champion for peace. The question now was whether the heterogeneous society of the United States could be persuaded into supporting the war effort. Through the creation of the Committee on Public Information, the United States government ensured the success of swaying public opinion. The CPI was to use every means necessary to garner support for the war effort, through the creation of propaganda as well as discouraging and sometimes banning anything counterproductive to the war effort. Through a comparison of two local newspapers in Wisconsin during the war years, we are able to discern how these different news organizations interpreted and portrayed the events of the war. In *The Eau Claire Leader* and *The Milwaukee Journal*, there was a general trend to favor the Allies throughout the war. Allied advancements and gains in battle were given headlines stretching across the page while those of the Triple Entente were given less attention and often featured a smaller typeface. As the war progressed, the level of favoritism increased until the official entrance of the United States into the Triple Alliance. Although there was an underlying alignment to the Allies, the CPI and the Associated Press undoubtedly played a large role in shaping the information of the war in the news especially after the United States entered the war in April 1917.

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APPENDIX

6 STILL AND MOVING PICTURES OF WAR PREPARATIONS, ETC.

WAR DEPARTMENT.

PHOTOGRAPHER'S PERMIT.

Date issued.....

(This permit must be presented for use within 15 days of above date, and will be taken up by the authority to whom it is addressed and returned by him to the Committee on Public Information, 10 Jackson Place, Washington, D. C.)
TO COMMANDING OFFICER,

Permission is hereby extended to the photographer named below to take photographs of the following subjects within your jurisdiction, subject to such restrictions as you may deem advisable, and to those imposed below.

No photographs showing the following shall be made: Experiments in materials, entrenchments, or formations; machine-gun targets; camouflage work.
Firm or organization.....
Address.....

Permit must be presented by individual named below.

Name of photographer.....

This permit is issued on the express condition that all photographs shall be submitted promptly and before publication to the Committee on Public Information, 10 Jackson Place, Washington, D. C., and that only those pictures will be released that secure official approval from the War Department through the Committee on Public Information.

Still photographs with name of photographer and titles marked plainly on reverse side should be submitted in triplicate; one print, if approved, will be stamped "Passed by the Committee on Public Information, Washington," and will be returned to the owner; one print will be retained as a record by the Committee on Public Information, and one print will be retained as a record by the War Department. Prints that are not admissible will be stamped "Not passed by the Committee on Public Information, Washington," and will be returned to the owner. The publication, reproduction, sale, or other distribution of such pictures is forbidden.

Motion-picture films with titles to be used should be submitted in duplicate and in positive. One film will be returned to the owner with directions for alterations, if required, and the other film will be retained by the Committee on Public Information as a record.

The War Department reserves the privilege of using such photographs for official purposes.

This permit may be revoked at the discretion of the authorities to whom this communication is directed.

By order of the Secretary of War.

Adjutant General.

Approval recommended.

*For the Committee on Public Information,
Washington, D. C.*



EXCERPT OF A SPEECH BY A FOUR-MINUTE MAN.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I have just received the information that there is a German spy among us—a German spy watching *us*.

He is around here somewhere, reporting upon you and me—sending reports about us to Berlin and telling the Germans just what we are doing with the Liberty Loan. From every section of the country these spies have been getting reports over to Potsdam*--not general reports but details—where the loan is going well and where its success seems weak, and what people are saying in each community.

For the German government is worried about our great loan. Those Junkers* fear its effect upon the German *morale*. They're raising a loan this month, too.

If the American people lend their billions now, one and all with a hip-hip-hurrah, it means that America is united and strong. While, if we lend our money half-heartedly, America seems weak and autocracy remains strong.

Money means everything now; it means quicker victory and therefore less bloodshed. We are *in* the war, and now Americans can have but *one* opinion, only *one* wish in the Liberty Loan.

Well, I hope these spies are getting their messages straight, letting Potsdam know that America is *hurling back* to the autocrats these answers:

For treachery here, attempted treachery in Mexico, treachery everywhere—*one billion*.

For murder of American women and children—*one billion more*.

For broken faith and promise to murder more Americans—*billions and billions more*.

And then we will add:

In the world fight for Liberty, our share—*billions and billions and billions and endless billions*.

Do not let the German spy hear and report that *you* are a slacker.

*Potsdam – a suburb of Berlin, where the Kaiser lived.

*Junkers – the Prussian nobility.

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