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Humanities Core Discussion

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Anti-Vietnam War Posters:
The Techniques used to Appeal to Civilians and Their Effectiveness

When someone mentions the Vietnam War, there are various things that may first come to people's minds. They could think of the Agent Orange, the Tet Offensive, the burning Buddhist monk, or the Tonkin Gulf incident and resolution. However, those will all most likely come second to the thought of anti-war protests. These anti-war protests may have begun with students, but they soon spread to many different groups throughout the country. By the last few years of the war in the 1970's, only 30% of the United States population supported the Vietnam War (Hagopian). This change in thought was a result of demonstrations, protests, and propaganda work. In an era when various protests were occurring for different causes and television news stations showed real clips of the war, there was a dramatic culture shift. People began to think less logically and calculated and began to think more emotionally. Therefore, the demonstrations and propaganda groups had to appeal to such a change in thinking. As seen through the demonstration poster, "How Many More", organizations began to equally incorporate rational and emotional thinking and appeal into their flyers and posters in order to intrigue the largest variety of individuals and thus rapidly gain the most support and active members for their cause.

The demonstration poster, "How Many More" may have a simple layout and design, yet all of its aspects were delicately placed in order to capture the attention of the public. The only color that can be found on the poster is the color of the poster's paper, which is yellow.

Otherwise, the image and multiple lines of text are both black, as seen in the Appendix. This contrast in the yellow background and the black image and text allows for both of them to stand out and quickly grab the reader's attention. Therefore, even if people decide to not read the poster in its entirety, they are still aware of its main topic.

As one's eyes scan the poster from top to bottom, the topics become more and more focused. A large image of a young Vietnamese boy is repeated five times across the top portion of the poster. Underneath the identical images is the poster's title "how many more", which is printed in the largest text font, as well as in all capital letters. Below that, the phrase "every day counts" is similarly displayed, just in a slightly smaller font. Further down the poster is the phrase "every day" which is repeated five times vertically. The first four phrases are followed by various sentences describing the impact of the Vietnam War on different groups of people. The last phrase is succeeded with a detailed description of a demonstration plan in order to bring attention to Vietnam's daily death toll to President Nixon and the White House in Washington DC. The rhetorical question, "will you take responsibility for a life" is then sandwiched between this description and the contact information of the demonstration's organizers (Miller). Overall, the poster is dominated by detailed text, yet the image of the Vietnamese boy still captures one's attention.

This Anti-Vietnam war demonstration poster was printed and seen by the public in 1971. However, it was not the first of its kind. In fact, since the United States' escalated participation in Vietnam following the Tonkin Gulf Incident of 1964, the anti-war protests seemed to escalate as well. As the United States spent more time, energy and bodies in Vietnam, it became evident that they were no longer simply supporting the South Vietnamese army in an attempt to fend off the Communist North Vietnamese. Rather, The United States was essentially fighting the war for the

South. Both armies were consistently losing battles, increasing the rate of Vietnamese soldiers' desertion and significantly decreasing overall moral of both the Vietnamese and American troops. (Hagopian). All these events accumulated in the back of the minds of individual soldiers as they slowly lost hope in the war. Yet, unlike many of the previous wars, these draining thoughts did not just stay in Vietnam. Rather, new technologies enabled these wearying ideas to travel across the globe and reach the United States population.

Due to television, news, and media, the American public was exposed to the realities of the Vietnam War with less of a filter than ever before. As Daniel Hallin describes in his book, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*, "It was the first war in which reporters were routinely accredited to accompany military forces yet not subject to censorship..." (Hallin). The ability to witness the atrocities of the Vietnam War through television and media only worked against the government, as more and more civilians began to oppose the war. American citizens were shown real clips of the war torn country and the effects war had on it. Furthermore, they were given detailed reports of the war through newscasters. They no longer knew of it simply through just speeches and old accounts. Now, they had knowledge of, and images to relate to all of the horrific events occurring in Vietnam, such as the Tet Offensive and the My Lai Massacre. Thus, as the war continued to drain U.S. soldiers, it slowly began to drain the American public support as well.

Although many American citizens opposed the war, a majority of its protestors and strong advocates for peace were youths, and even Vietnam War veterans. Thus, the poster's goals to obtain "...300 Americans from a different area of the country" in order to "go to the White House to lay the daily death toll at Nixon's doorstep" seems to be an idealistic goal, rather than a realistic one (Miller). Most people, college students, working adults, or retired soldiers,

did not have the ability to simply place their lives on pause and travel to Washington D.C in order to protest a war, no matter how strongly they felt about it. Thus, this poster's main goal to actually execute this detailed plan is followed by a strong secondary emphasis on simply raising awareness in the United States of the daily death toll in Vietnam. Furthermore, it hoped to increase anti-war sentiments regarding the Vietnam War through such a graphic detail.

Individuals who read this poster may not be actually participate in such a demonstration, but the poster's intention is to evoke a yearning to participate and a desire to become more active and involved in anti-war protests.

There are various ways in which this poster works to evoke anti-war feelings from its readers. The first thing a person will most likely notice in regards to the poster is the image of the Vietnamese boy that lines the top portion of the paper. The boy is wearing a hat sideways and a piece of clothing that is seemingly too large for him. It seems to just be an extra piece of fabric, with holes by the shoulder, which someone simply crafted into clothing for him out of necessity. In addition to the material objects on his body, the boy wears an expression that can be described as a combination of confusion and worry. His brows are furrowed and his mouth bent into a frown. Lastly, the boy's left hand is clearly seen and is touching his chest. However, his right hand is not as easily visible. At first glance, he seems to be missing it, as it fades into the darkness of his clothing. This detail hints at the bombings done by the United States throughout Vietnam by illustrating its possible effects on Vietnamese civilians. Although the boy's location is unclear, as there is no background image, his attire and facial expression speak loud enough for themselves. The combination of the two work to evoke a sympathetic reaction from its reader.

In contrast, the rest of the poster contains text, which may appear to be logically appealing, but it truly works to additionally be subtly emotionally enticing. The first portion of the text continues to stimulate this impassioned response, yet through words instead of images. It begins immediately with the rhetorical question, “How many more” and the statement “every day counts” (Miller). These phrases are simple, yet carry heavy emotional meaning. Through the image of the boy and the first two lines of text, readers are drawn into the poster through an emotional connection with the war while also quickly gaining knowledge on the intent of the poster due to the prominently large and dark font.

As one continues to read, the font size gets smaller. The drastic change in text size shifts between the lines “every day counts” and “300 people are killed in Vietnam” (Miller). This shrinkage in font size mirrors how the content of the text itself becomes more specific. By giving an exact numerical value on the daily death toll in Vietnam, the organization subtly invites its readers to compute the total amount of deaths. However, this also allows individuals to estimate the future deaths relating to the Vietnam War and precisely answer the poster’s overarching question of “how many more”. These two phrases evoke a logical and calculated mindset which leads to an emotional response once the reader realizes the enormity of the total possible deaths in Vietnam due to the war. However, this understanding is emphasized even more through the image of the Vietnamese boy at the top of the poster. It seems to not just be asking how many more are going to die. Rather, it seems to be asking how many more innocent, young children, similar to this boy, are going to die. Thus, these aspects of the poster work together to tug at the heart strings of readers while also evoking a logical mentality.

The content of the remaining smaller font is also meant to appeal to one’s emotions yet it still has aspects of a logical approach. “Hundreds more are killed in Cambodia and Laos. Thousands

are wounded. Thousands are made refugees.” (Miller) The poster’s audience is then invited to imagine or attempt to comprehend the multitude of hundreds and thousands of individuals.

However, this portion of the text has a larger emotional appeal versus logical. This is due to the fact that the organization only placed a specific value on deaths in Vietnam, yet not in Cambodia or Laos. The poster also does not specify the value of individuals wounded or made refugees on a daily basis. Thus, readers are unable to calculate an exact value for any of these groups.

“Thousands” and “Hundreds” could mean two thousand/hundred or nine thousand/hundred (Miller). This large yet ambiguous amount of people impacted by the war makes it difficult for individuals to sufficiently comprehend these values. Therefore, the poster relies on individuals to simply imagine this overwhelming value and immediately feel sympathetic instead of attempting to calculate and visualize three hundred individuals. Through the differing diction, the poster attempts to reach a broad audience by evoking a reader’s feelings as well as their reasoning.

One way which helps readers understand the multitude of deaths caused by the Vietnam War is repetition. Not only does the poster replicate the image of the Vietnamese boy, but it also repeats the phrase “every day” (Miller). Generally, repetition is used to emphasize one’s main points. In the case of the “how many more” poster, people are able to easily identify its cause. Even if one does not read the details of the poster when passing, the phrase every day in conjunction with the sad image of the seemingly poor, malnourished Vietnamese child is enough for someone to comprehend its primary purpose. However, the repetition serves as more than just a rhetorical device that stresses a message. It serves a larger purpose: to aid in a reader’s understanding of the amount of lives negatively impacted by the Vietnam War.

This strategy of repetition to illustrate the effect of the Vietnam War is related to Immanuel Kant’s notion of mathematical sublime. This describes a conflict in which one is faced with

something so overwhelmingly large that one fails to comprehend its magnitude which results in a feeling of discomfort. Thus, one will attempt to understand this idea and eliminate the discomfort through reason and comparisons (Ginsborg). The repetition of the phrase “every day” five times vertically enables individuals to break down the impact of the Vietnam War on a smaller scale (Miller). Each phrase is followed by a detailed description of those affected by the Vietnam War. Therefore, instead of simply asking readers to envision hundreds of thousands dead over the course of the war’s entirety, individuals can attempt to imagine only three hundred deaths, yet repeated over again as each new day comes.

The multitude of deaths is further segmented by the image of the Vietnamese boy. The image of the boy is repeated five times horizontally, all equally spaced. There is no obvious significance to the value five. However, through the repetition displayed in this poster, the five identical images of the Vietnamese boys allows individuals to see the boy as a representation of the hundreds and thousands impacted by the Vietnam War each day. It may be difficult for people to visualize hundreds and thousands of individuals, but it is much easier to picture how war can destroy the lives of five boys.

The Vietnamese boy as a symbol for all those who are affected by the war is emphasized through the boy’s attire and body positioning. As previously described, his clothes are ill-fitting and seemingly put together out of necessity. The shadows and darkness of the image portray the boy was dirty or unwashed. Such a depiction is similar to how one would imagine a refugee to look. Furthermore, his right hand seems to fade into his black attire, making it unclear to the reader at first if it is even there or not. Thus, the boy also represents the thousands who have been wounded by the Vietnam War. Through the repetition and details of the image of the

Vietnamese boy, the American public can now more easily comprehend the scale of destruction occurring due to the Vietnam War.

The repetition of the phrase “every day” is concluded by a shift in topic, signified by a larger gap between the last two phrases (Miller). The poster goes from describing what is occurring due to the Vietnam War to the organization’s plans to stop such atrocities. Yet, by continuing the repeated phrase “every day”, the poster demonstrates how both events are linked and how a single action on one day in the United States of America can impact multiple lives in Vietnam (Miller). Thus, the simplicity of the poster in addition to the repetition subtly attract the attention of the public as well as stimulates their rational and emotional thoughts.

As mentioned earlier, the last repeated phrase “every day” is followed by the organization’s demonstration plan, which is scheduled to take place daily, with no specified end date (Miller). The commitment of demonstrating at the White House each day may seem like a large task, but the organization words their plans in such a way that it mimics the deaths of people in Vietnam. The organization invites individuals to imagine three hundred Americans stopping their daily lives in order to go to the White House for the day. It makes people imagine the impact of such an event, and thus allows for the distant deaths in Vietnam to relate to the lives of American civilians. This seemingly logical and detailed description of the organization’s plans on the demonstration poster subliminally causes an emotional response from its readers through its similar phrasing of “every day” as well as its connection between the lives of those in the United States of America and those fighting in Vietnam (Miller).

Although much of the text has been attempting to gain an emotional response through analytical sentences, the last line on the demonstration poster blatantly relates to the sad image of the Vietnamese boy in an attempt to gain sympathy and support for the anti-Vietnam war cause.

It simply rhetorically inquires, “Will you take responsibility for a life” without any punctuation mark (Miller). It seems to combine a declaration that any lack of action may result in a death, as well as a question of whether the reader is willing to take such a burden. The question makes individuals feel guilty for their lack of action. It is essentially saying that this young boy, seen at the top of the poster, could die but you could help save him by participating in this demonstration. Therefore although it may be financially or personally impossible for individuals to partake in the demonstration, the poster evokes a desire to act and to protest the war in some way. As seen throughout this poster, the roles of emotion and rationality work together in order to gain support from the largest possible audience.

The “how many more” demonstration poster is clear in its intentions, opposite of many posters and propaganda during its time, which attempted to hide its message. Thus, this brings into question the effectiveness of each differing technique. In his book, *Film Propaganda and American Politics: An Analysis and Filmography*, James E. Combs argues that subliminal propaganda and hidden messages are a more effective way of reaching a larger audience. He states, “If one’s receptivity is enhanced by an atmosphere of play...One gets caught up in the imaginative narrative of the medium, without critical realization ...” (Combs 8). Essentially, Combs is arguing that people do not like being instructed on what and how to think, rather they obviously take pleasure in fun activities. Therefore, through these activities, such as watching television or reading cartoons, individuals will be more receptive to learn since they are enjoying themselves.

By simply looking at the “how many more” demonstration poster, it can be said that it blatantly states its reasons for the intended actions and goals, thus directly opposing Combs’ belief. It asks for volunteers to take action in an attempt to stop the Vietnam War as soon as

possible. Thus, it must use facts and be straight forward in its purpose in order to change the mindset of civilians quickly and encourage immediate participation. In comparison, hidden film propaganda is effective in the long term as it slowly morphs people's opinions regarding other countries or individuals. The end result of continuous subliminal propaganda will indeed be the belief of the intended message as it was consistently drilled in people's minds. Therefore, Combs is correct in that film propaganda is successful, however only in regards to long period of time. Contrastingly, causes with immediate action need to be direct with their message in order to quickly gain more support.

The poster does not simply tell people how they should behave. Rather, it gives individuals the facts about the war, their specific plan to stop the war, and questions why one is not involved. However, through the image of the Vietnamese boy, the description of the plan and the guilt-induced questions, the poster evokes an emotional response from its audience. Overall, the "how many more" Anti-Vietnam war demonstration poster uses a combination of both logical word phrasing and emotionally laden images and rhetorical questions in order to elicit a response from a large audience and gain support for their cause.

It should be noted that there is no evidence to suggest that this planned daily demonstration at the White House actually ever took place. Therefore, the poster may have failed in its primary intention to gain enough individuals to partake in such a protest. However, the poster was not necessarily unsuccessful due to its techniques. Rather, the magnitude of the protest and the required dedication from its participants was most likely the cause of its downfall. However, the techniques of combining rational and emotional appeal through the usage of text, images, simplicity and repetition did succeed in the poster's secondary goal of rapidly and immediately increasing people's desire to participate in protesting the Vietnam War.

Appendix:
“How Many More” Anti-Vietnam War Demonstration Poster



“HOW MANY MORE

EVERY DAY COUNTS

EVERY DAY 300 people are killed in Vietnam
EVERY DAY Hundreds more are killed in Cambodia and Laos
EVERY DAY Thousands are wounded
EVERY DAY Thousands are made refugees

EVERY DAY Beginning Monday, November 8th, 300 Americans
from a different area of the country will go to the White
House to lay the DAILY DEATH TOLL at Nixon’s doorstep

If President Nixon sets the date for total withdrawal from
Vietnam the killing could stop, and prisoners of war come home.

WILL YOU TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR A LIFE

Set the date. Stop the Killing

A delegation from this area will go to Washington, D.C _____
For more information in this area contact: _____”

Annotated Bibliography

Brewer, Susan A. *Why America Fights Patriotism and War Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.

Combs, James E., and Sara T. Combs. *Film Propaganda and American Politics: An Analysis and Filmography*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Combs discusses the use of film propaganda in the United States and its rising usage during the 20th century. He analyzes how films were used to subliminally manipulate public opinion and perception by discussing feature films. Furthermore, he analyzes how such film propaganda impacted the politics of the time. He argues that subliminal propaganda is the most effective technique. Although Combs does not directly discuss the use of film propaganda during the Vietnam War, the techniques and its success mentioned can be compared to similar propaganda during the war. Furthermore, Combs' points regarding propaganda techniques can be used as a counter argument for my analysis of my anti-war poster with a blatant purpose.

Gibson, Stephen, and Simon Mollan, eds. *Representations of Peace and Conflict*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print.

Ginsborg, Hannah. "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology." Stanford University. Stanford University, 2 July 2005. Web. 22 May 2015.

This online article is a section of Stanford University's encyclopedia of philosophy. Specifically, it focuses on Immanuel Kant and his third critique, which is the Critique of Judgement. It begins by discussing the influence of Kant and his views and theories throughout history. Then, it proceeds to dissect each aspect of his Critique of Judgment. However, for the purpose of my research paper, I focused much of my attention on Ginsborg's discussion of the mathematical sublime. I analyzed how it relates to the demonstration poster's technique of repetition and how it aided readers in understanding the impact of the Vietnam War.

Hallin, Daniel C. *The "uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam*. New York City: Oxford UP, 1986. Print.

In his book, Daniel Hallin analyzes the impact of television and media in general on the American public's opinion of the Vietnam War. He discusses how the roles of journalist's changed, as they became more independent and less constrained by the government. He argues that this new, less filtered view of the Vietnam War is what

played a large role in the increased amount of protests. Hallin's stance and support regarding direct communication between the public and those who controlled the media supports my position that a logical approach is most effective when immediate results or reactions are needed.

Hagopian, Patrick. *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing*. Sheridan, 2009. Print.

As opposed to discussing the actual posters and advertisements used as propaganda during the war, Hagopian analyzes the influence of the actual Vietnam War veterans, who slowly returned from war, on the public memory and opinion of the war. He discusses how the stories and actions of veterans coming home led to an increase in protests of the war. The book works through the various stages of the United States' public opinion of veterans during, right after and years after the war. These varying time periods allow for analysis of the public's changing opinion. It furthermore demonstrates how emotions can influence one's thoughts and opinions towards an event.

Jowett, Garth, and Victoria O'Donnell. *Propaganda & Persuasion*. Sixth ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2015. Print.

Miller, J. Wesley. Vietnam Demonstration Recruitment Poster. Digital image. Wisconsin Historical Society. 9 Nov. 1971. Web.

This propaganda poster does not use color to attraction attention of the public. Rather, it uses sympathetic images of a Vietnamese boys, repeated five times for emphasis, along with the question, "how many more". The purpose of the poster is to recruit American University students to travel to Washington D.C in order to protest the Vietnam War. It includes informational times and dates as well as text describing the death toll in Vietnam. This primary source poster is vital to my research paper as it demonstrates the various techniques anti-war protesters used in an attempt to gain more support for their cause.

Rollings, Peter. "The Vietnam War: Perceptions Through Literature, Film and Television." *American Quarterly* 36.3 (1984): 419-32. Print.

Sproule, J. Michael. *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. Print

Westheider, James E. *The Vietnam War*. Westport: Greenwood, 2007. Print.

