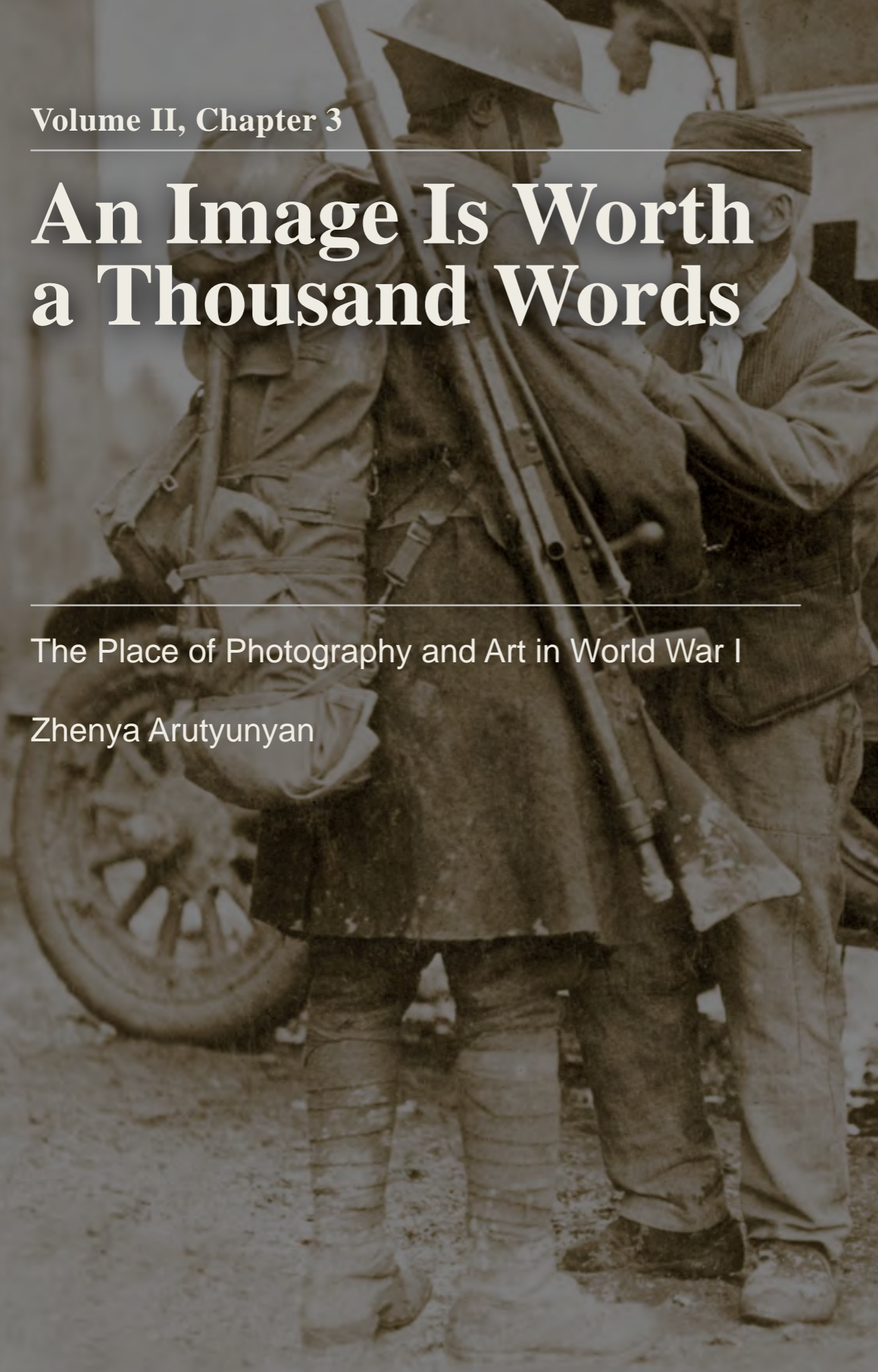


Volume II, Chapter 3

An Image Is Worth a Thousand Words

The Place of Photography and Art in World War I

Zhenya Arutyunyan



This chapter situates image analysis within World War I's historical narrative and helps students evaluate images and draw historical information from them. For example, consider how personal photographs of soldiers differ from official photographs taken by the military and/or journalists. How does art reflect internal and personal experiences? How do images of the Meuse-Argonne during the war compare to the images of the place today? Consider how images (photography and art) relate to the notions of forgetting, memory, time, and expression of personal and public experiences. In this chapter, I discuss how the Allied and Central powers used images to influence public opinion and maintain support for their war efforts. Special attention is given to the role of the ABMC in commemorating American efforts in World War I, including the Meuse-Argonne offensive and the American cemetery nearby, a resting place for over 14,000 Americans.

Introduction

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. **How can you use a single image to tell multiple stories?**
2. **Why do different audiences come up with different interpretations of the same image?**

“A picture is worth a thousand words.” This statement is as true in today’s digital age as it was a hundred years ago during World War I. My fascination with images began in my childhood. Growing up in the Soviet Union, I saw a variety of images, real or altered, in books, public spaces, and among family treasures. Family photographs from the early 20th century especially intrigued me; after all, all I had was the image and sometimes a date or a name attached. There were no stories to accompany these images, which left me to figure out the meaning, or even to invent one. When I became a student of history, the power of images continued to fascinate me. As my learning and teaching progressed, I found myself utilizing images more to help students understand historical narratives; students loved the approach because images provided an emotional, visual, and interpretive dimension to history. In the age of digital technology, students have great opportunities to analyze World War I, especially the U.S. involvement in and commemoration of the war, on a visual level. Doing so will, I hope, enhance students’ ability to question and analyze the images they encounter in the digital age.

Background

Even though war photography and art predate World War I (1914-1918), the First World War produced a far greater volume of art and photography than any previous war. Consequently, photography and art had a great impact on the government,

civilians, and participants in the war. There were different kinds of images, including, but not limited to, propaganda, personal experiences, and official coverage. Images were in high demand. Allied and Central powers alike needed to increase public support for the war effort. After all, the “boys will be home by Christmas” rallying call to war proved false. The war dragged on and turned into a meat grinder in the trenches at Somme and Verdun. Propaganda posters and photographs became vital tools in the age of technological advances in communication and the early evolution of mass media. Mass-produced posters, photographs, and films appeared in homes, public spaces, workplaces, newspapers, and in the increasingly-popular cinemas. Producers of these images sought to increase nationalism and gain public support for government war efforts.

The case of the United States is particularly interesting, as the country joined the Allied cause late in the war (1917). In such an isolationist nation, posters and films were instrumental in building support for joining the war. Photographs from the trenches connected the public to the events at the front, sometimes comforting them with images of smiling soldiers and at other times showing fields of dead soldiers, images targeted to increase public hatred of the enemy. Photography became a profession; the government attached photographers to military units and paid them to create images to be distributed in newspapers and magazines across the United States. Newspapers sent their own photographers, competing with each other for the most

sensationalist photos. Finally, amateur photographers, often officers because cameras were still quite expensive, captured personal experiences, providing some of the most truthful and personal accounts of the experience of war.

When the war ended, the United States government created the American Battle Monuments Commission to build and maintain American cemeteries in Europe, and later in other parts of the world. The Meuse-Argonne American military cemetery is the largest graveyard for American soldiers abroad, built as a resting place for over 14,000 American soldiers. Its architectural and artistic design tell a story of soldiers’ bravery, while helping to preserve the memory of their sacrifice.

General Questions to Ask

The questions below can be used with any of the activities throughout the rest of the chapter.

- What story does the image convey? How many stories do you see in the image? Whose stories do you see? Who do you think is the target audience?
- How does the image tell the story/stories?
- How different is the experience of viewing this image today versus what it would have been 100 years ago?
- What do you think is different about official photos versus private photos?
- How does the image relate to the notions of forgetting, memory, and time?
- What purpose does the image serve as a form of personal and public expression?
- Does it matter if we know who was behind the camera?

- What do you see in the image? What can you infer about the story/stories/people in the image?
- What's in the name?
- Are photographs more truthful than the written word?
- How might the government use this image?
- Is a photograph ever a reflection of truth and reality?
- What role do funeral art and architecture play in commemorative efforts? Why is commemoration important?

Example

Study the image carefully.

- What do you think is happening in the image? (an elderly couple is saying something to the soldiers, reaching out to them in a friendly way)
- How many stories are there? (story of the couple, story of the soldier, story of promotion of U.S. role in France, story of the devastation, story of the Red Cross truck behind the couple)

French Couple Thanks U.S. Soldiers



French couple thanks U.S. soldiers who liberated their town on November 6, 1918.” <http://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries-memorials/europe/meuse-argonne-american-cemetery>

- Do you think this is an official or unofficial photo, why? (it is an official photograph – how does this fact alter the purpose of the image?)
- What’s in a title: “French couple thanks U.S. soldiers who liberated their town on November 6, 1918”? How does knowing the title changes your understanding of what’s happening in the image?

- How could the government use this image (show France’s appreciation for the U.S. assistance, justify U.S. entry into the war; show how kind, strong, and tall U.S. soldiers are)

Introductory Activity: “I can’t even imagine”

1. Ask students to think of their favorite leisure-time activity and bring or create an image that symbolizes their enjoyment of that activity, something that requires no words to make their point. They should not provide title or context. Put students in small groups or keep the whole class as one group. Then engage students in a conversation about their choice of the image and what it represents; the power of the image; the actual meaning versus what other students may have interpreted the image to mean. Discuss the power of the image and the multiplicity of the interpretations.

2. Next, ask students to create a video or a Powerpoint-style presentation of powerful images with no annotations that tell the stories of World War I and relate to their notions of war in general. Ask them to justify their choice of images. What makes the images they chose powerful? You can refer students to “Additional Resources for Photography Imagery” document for suggested links to World War I photographs.

3. Provide students with pairs of images from the activities that follow. Have students analyze the images using any of the questions provided in the previous section or the following activities.

Additional Resources

Additional Resources For Using Photography and Propaganda Imagery To Teach World War I

A wonderful interactive visual history of the Great War created by the American Battle Monuments Commission. http://www.abmc.gov/sites/default/files/interactive/interactive_files/WW1_index.html

Photographs and excerpts from letters of an American doughboy from Meuse-Argonne Offensive. <http://worldwar1letters.wordpress.com/the-adventure-unfolds-over-there-1918-1919/meuse-argonne-offensive-oct-nov-1918/>

“Never Before Published World War I Photographs” by an unknown photographer reveal life in the trenches. <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/never-published-world-war-one-photographs-revealed-n114421>

Great coverage of World War I with images, audio, interactive guides, and many other great tools to teach about the Great War from a global perspective. <http://www.bbc.com/ww1>

An article on World War I and its link to several of the words that we still in use in the English language; it also contains a condensed visual history of the Great War. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/20/opinion/lighter-world-war-i-language/index.html>

“The Great War: Photography on the Western Front” by Caitlin Patrick provides a nice overview of the role photograph played on the Western front. <http://www.ned.ie/photoconflict/histories/ww1photography/>

World War I image archive neatly classifies images and provides basic information about each image. <http://www.gwpda.org/photos/> It is part of the larger World War I Primary Document Archive. <http://www.gwpda.org>

A wonderful collection of 20th century propaganda posters organized by topic. <http://guity-novin.blogspot.com/2010/05/chapter-29-propaganda-posters.html>

LEARN NC has a nice database of World War I propaganda posters with brief descriptions of each poster. <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/ww1/posters/>

Tap or click the preview image to view the document.

Weaponry and Men in the Trenches

American Soldiers



American soldiers, members of Maryland's 117th Trench Mortar Battery, operating a trench mortar. This gun and crew kept up a continuous fire throughout the raid of March 4, 1918, in Badonviller, Muerthe et Modselle, France. (U.S. Army Signal Corps) The photo is far more staged than the next image (Taylor 2014).

U.S. 23rd Infantry



U.S. 23rd Infantry, France, 1918. This photograph was taken during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, perhaps the most important offensive for the U.S. troops and the outcome of World War I (Andrews 2014).

During World War I, both newly-invented and previously-developed deadly weapons were used on a large scale; machine guns, barbed wire, tanks, airplanes, and mustard gas are just a few of the weapons that made combat so deadly. Many of these new weapons were used in trench warfare, costing millions of lives in battles at now-infamous places, like the Somme and Verdun.

Questions to Consider

- What is missing from the first image?
- What is the message the photographers are trying to convey in each photo?
- What is the audience: domestic? International?
- What does each image say about men, weapons, and trench warfare?
- Which image is more powerful? Why?
- If you were a field photographer, what would you want to capture as a “realistic” depiction of the war?
- As photographs are taken by professional war photographers, often embedded with the troops, how much control should the government or army have in determining what is photographed and how it is photographed?

Do the Ends Justify the Means?

Photography was invented decades before the beginning of World War I; however, its widespread use during the Great War made it a powerful tool for governments, individuals, and the press. From surveillance to newspaper coverage to commemoration of personal experience to propaganda, photography became a 20th century phenomenon beginning with the Great War. The public saw photographs as unaltered reflections of the events. Governments saw them as a powerful tool in rallying public support for the war. But could photographs be fully trusted? Even in the early stages of photo technology, images were altered by some war photographers.

Questions to Consider

- Do you believe that an image is worth a thousand words? Do you believe images you see online today? Why? Why not?
- Have you ever used Photoshop or other technologies to alter the message of a photograph? Why? What was the result?
- What was the goal of World War I photography? How does it relate to the goals of photography in general?

The Morning After the First Battle of the Passchendaele



"The Morning After the First Battle of the Passchendaele." Montage of World War I photography. The image has been altered by Australian photographer Frank Hurley who added the sun beams and the cloud to create a more dramatic effect in the image. Frank Hurley thought that to capture the essence of the war, one picture was not enough, so he put several photos together, a form of World War I Photoshop activity (Spiegel Online 2014).

“Death the Reaper”



“Death the Reaper” is another photograph by Frank Hurley, in which he combined negatives to dramatize the scene. He believed that truth lies in ideas and that images are narratives that draw on viewers’ emotions. While he montaged several photos, he staged others, yet photographed the rest as they were (Ruggenberg 2014).

- Was it justifiable for photographers to stage photographs or combine the images into a montage, as Frank Hurley did? If they were staged, do they correctly represent the war experience? Is it ethical for photo journalists to stage or alter images?
- How do the technology and use of photographs during World War I compare to present day?
- Are these images a form of propaganda or mirrors of the truth? Can they be both?

Why Do We Build Memorials? What Stories Do They Tell?

After World War I ended, dozens of nations faced the question of how to commemorate their dead. Many European towns and villages erected obelisks and walls, often listing the names of the dead and missing. Larger communities, often in bigger cities or at the sites of the most deadly battles, built larger monuments. In the United States, however, early attempts to commemorate World War I focused on practical construction, often called “living memorials”: stadiums, parks, and other communal structures. For example, the American Legion Memorial Stadium in Charlotte, NC, built in 1935-1936, was dedicated to Mecklenburg county soldiers who died in the Great War. Consider the two monuments that follow.

Montfaucon Memorial



A French World War I Memorial in Montfaucon, France. Photographer: Patrick Touart

World War I Memorial in Charlotte, N.C.



Questions to Consider

- What is each memorial trying to convey? How?
- What is the difference between memory and commemoration? How does each image address memory and/or commemoration?
- Do communities need to commemorate fallen soldiers? Why? How? Who should pay for the memorials?

Activity

Create a monument for the soldiers from your community who fell in battle; you can pick any war for this exercise. What aspects of commemoration would you emphasize and why? What would your monument look like? Feel free to go beyond the confines of traditional monuments and consider creating communal spaces for commemoration.

How Many Stories Are In a Picture?

Three types of photographers covered the Great War: official, media, and amateur. Combat photographers had the greatest access to the war; their photographs often served as propaganda tools in the hands of governments with the goal of raising nation's morale and creating a unified homefront. However, the images often told multiple stories as in the following images. In the first image, the photographer shares his interpretation of the place of women during battle: as nurturing nurse, serving combat soldiers. The photograph also conveys the history of food: doughnuts became popular thanks to American doughboys who ate them to feel closer to home and continued to enjoy them when they returned home. To read more about doughnuts and World War I, see the Smithsonian Magazine article, "[The History of the Doughnut.](#)" The official story emphasizes happy, smiling, cared-for U.S. soldiers at the front. And then there is the other story that most did not see – the photo's staged background, most likely away from the front lines, given that the participants are under a tent rather than in a fortified bunker, relaxed and clean with plenty of time to enjoy a drink and a bite to eat. In the second image, the story focuses on the men and food, but in a very different setting.

Red Cross Nurse Serving the Troops



Red Cross Nurse Serving the Troops," University of South Carolina Library. Web. July 25, 2014 <http://library.sc.edu/spcoll/hist/bloom/images/bloom5.jpg>

Cooking for French Soldiers During Battle



“Cooking for French Soldiers During Battle,” Photos of the Great War. World War I Gallery. The World War I Document Archive. February 28, 2009. Web. July 26, 2014. <http://www.gwpda.org/photos/coppermine/displayimage.php?album=search&cat=0&pos=3>

Questions to Consider

- How many stories can you find in each image? Consider the woman, the food, the men, and the settings.
- What is the role of women versus the role of men in World War I as depicted in these photos?

Activity

Find an image of women serving in the U.S. military or working with the military in the modern times and compare it with the first image. What is different? What is similar? What should be the role of women in the times of war? See “Additional Resources for Using Photography and Propaganda Imagery” for suggested lists of link for images.

Additional Resources

Additional Resources For Using Photography and Propaganda Imagery To Teach World War I

A wonderful interactive visual history of the Great War created by the American Battle Monuments Commission. http://www.abmc.gov/education/interactive/interactive_files/WWI/index.html

Photographs and excerpts from letters of an American doughboy from Meuse-Argonne Offensive. http://www.wwi.com/letters/wwi_letters.htm

“Never Before Published World War I Photographs” by an unknown photographer reveal life in the trenches. http://www.abmc.gov/education/interactive/wwi_photos/never-before-published-11441

Great coverage of World War I with images, audio, interactive guides, and many other great tools to teach about the Great War from a global perspective. <http://www.1914-1918.com/>

An article on World War I and its link to several of the words that we still use in the English language; it also contains a condensed visual history of the Great War. <http://www.oxfordjournals.org/doi/full/10.1093/oxfordjournals.iaa.a011441>

“The Great War: Photography on the Western Front” by Caitlin Patrick provides a nice overview of the role photography played on the Western front. <http://www.oxfordjournals.org/doi/full/10.1093/oxfordjournals.iaa.a011441>

World War I image archive neatly classifies images and provides basic information about each image. <http://www.wwi-images.com/> It is part of the larger World War I Primary Document Archive. <http://www.gwpda.org/>

A wonderful collection of 20th century propaganda posters organized by topic. <http://www.wwi-images.com/20th-century-propaganda-posters.html>

LEARN NC has a nice database of World War I propaganda posters with brief descriptions of each poster. <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/wwi/posters/>

Tap or click the preview image to view the document.

Propaganda Posters

The art of propaganda posters flourished during World War I and gave rise to the art form's prominence in the 20th century.

Propaganda posters linked art with government and served as a political bridge between the government and the general public, something that the visual arts had not achieved prior to the war. These posters reflect the time and the culture of their audience. Consider that some of the American propaganda posters, such as those depicting Uncle Sam, are recognizable to an American audience today. Others, such as the first poster below, may need additional deciphering when taken out of their historical and national/cultural context.

Recruitment posters were crucial in recruiting over four million U.S. soldiers, over one million of whom participated in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in 1918.

Propaganda Designed to Unify



“A Belgian Man Killed by the Germans” – a drawing in a 1916 French magazine. Source: Lisa Pennington

Propaganda Designed to Recruit



“Protect your children! Protect your women! Protect yourself! Join Reichswehr today!” “Protect Your Children!..” Armchairgeneral.com. Web. July 30, 2014 <http://www.armchairgeneral.com/forums/showthread.php?t=103329&page=75>

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Questions to Consider

- Does the term “propaganda poster” have a negative connotation? Why?

- Compare posters in each grouping: what do they have in common?
- What persuasive techniques can you find in each poster? (Consider choices of color, size of the figures, themes, background, words if any, etc)
- What emotions does each poster evoke?
- Can you find a modern propaganda poster? Why or why not?

Activities

- Create a propaganda poster for the Meuse Argonne offensive and U.S. war efforts. You may draw or use graphic design apps to create your poster. Write a short reflection piece on your choice of color, words, figures, themes, background, and any other techniques you employed in create of your piece.
- Context: In 1918, General John J. Pershing and his staff decided to focus their attack on the German positions at one location: in the countryside around Verdun, the site of an earlier Allied tragedy of epic proportions. During September 28 - November 11, 1918, over one million men participated in the offensive considered by some the largest single battle in American history. Even though the landscape favored German defenses, American troops overran the enemy’s first line of defense already on the first day only to face German reinforcements that stalled the advance temporarily. American troops fought for every yard. The result of the

offensive was an Allied victory at the cost of 120,000 American lives. (ABMC, last accessed October 19, 2014)

- Create a modern propaganda poster (drawn or designed on a computer) that has a military, political, economic, or social message. Use the reflection guidelines for the previous activity.

Propaganda in Film

Stake Uncle Sam to Play Your Hand



In this World War I U.S. propaganda film "Stake Uncle Sam to Play Your Hand," A German soldier attacks an innocent Belgian woman, played by Mae Marsh. The choice of woman's nationality reflects German violation of Belgium's neutrality, an event that drew Britain into the war. "Stake Uncle Sam to Play Your Hand," Spiegel Online. Web. July 28, 2014

<http://www.spiegel.de/fotostrecke/film-und-zeitungspropaganda-im-ersten-weltkrieg-fotostrecke-115930-10.html>

Questions to Consider

- Why does the director give the woman Belgian nationality? How is this nationality symbolized? Consider gender choice in your answer.
- How is the German soldier portrayed?
- How does the setting of the room and the angle of the shot enhance the drama of the moment?

Activities

- Using any available apps, create your own short propaganda film. Here are some tips for the propaganda film recipe: choose a message you want to emphasize, add emotional appeal, omit any counterpoints, know your audience, choose your words strategically, add a drop of fear if necessary, and design an appropriate setting. After completing and presenting your film, reflect on the experience. You can choose any message. Here is one possibility: "You have been asked to create a 1-minute video to encourage parents to send their children to your school. What would your honest reaction to

this request be? Would you have some negative things to say about your school? If your salary relied upon putting a positive spin on your school, what would your resulting video look like?”

- Research a propaganda film, preferably from the first half of the 20th century. What techniques did the directors use to transmit their message? What is the message?

ABMC Commemoration Efforts

The American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) was established by Congress in 1923, to commemorate “the service, achievements, and sacrifice of U.S. armed forces” (ABMC 2014). While ABMC brochures provide a thoughtful narrative of the Meuse-Argonne offensive and the cemetery’s construction and configuration, a visitor experiences the cemetery viscerally. What do you see when you walk around the grounds? How do you interpret and learn from images with few or no words attached? What emotions are evoked as you stroll through thousands and thousands of graves?

The figures below depict stained glass windows portraying American unit insignia at the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery chapel. They celebrate and commemorate American units that fought in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, as well as promote American military might.

Questions to Consider

- Are these stained glasses a form of propaganda? If so, is that a bad thing?

- Consider the location, a chapel interior. Is it proper for the government to decorate a chapel with military insignia? Why or why not?
- It is important to maintain the memory of U.S. participation in various wars? Why or why not? Consider the costs and benefits of the maintenance of American military cemeteries at home and abroad.

Activity

Research the background of each of the divisions in the images below or any other divisions that fought in the Meuse-Argonne offensive: their history, role in the offensive, and post-World War I story. Include a bibliography of sources for your response.

Questions to consider as you research:

- What is the story behind the choice of the division’s emblem?
- What’s in the image?

ABMC Commemoration Efforts



Stained glass windows at the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery chapel depicting insignia of the American units that participated in the Meuse-Argonne offensive. Photographer: Kate Harris.



Section 11

Meuse-Argonne Cemetery Architecture and Art of Memory and Remembering Activity

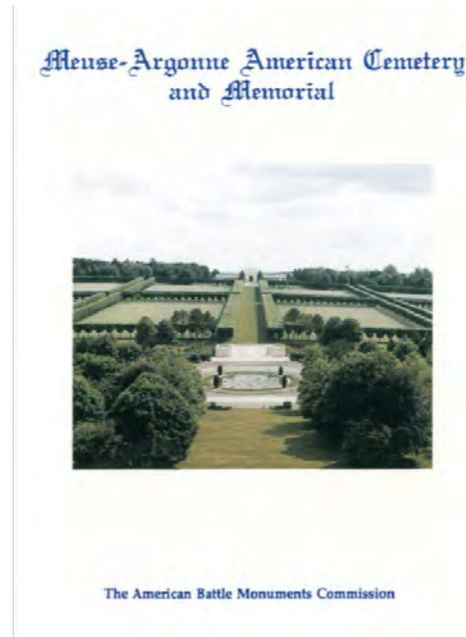
What can the images from the cemetery tell us about World War I?

You are a virtual visitor to the Meuse-Argonne cemetery, eager to learn about the way the cemetery commemorates U.S. soldiers who died or went missing during the Meuse-Argonne offensive. Using the Meuse Argonne Booklet and the AMBC website, answer the following questions:

1. Looking at the layout, views, and the Memorial Chapel, what emotions do they evoke in the viewer? Consider the impact of symmetry, the use of water, and the chapel design. What is the significance of the layout of the graves (rows of crosses and stars of David)?
2. Look at the image on page 14, “Section of the Tablets of the Missing”: what is the purpose of listing the names of the missing as opposed to summarizing their deaths by numbers?
3. How does the cemetery combine the functions of both a resting place and a commemorative monument?

4. At the ABMC website, click on Multimedia, then select “World War I” and “images” for your search. Choose two images and write a short narrative on what story or stories the images tell about U.S. soldiers and their experience during the Meuse-Argonne offensive.

Meuse-Argonne Booklet



Tap or click the preview image to view the document.

Stories in the Images Activity: Individual Stories from the Meuse-Argonne

In this activity, you will research stories of individuals buried at the Meuse-Argonne cemetery.

1. Go to [the ABMC website](#).
2. Click on “Search ABMC Burials”
3. On the left side, pick “World War I,” “Meuse-Argonne Cemetery,” and specify the time frame to be between 07.01.1918 and 11.11.18 to make your search easier. You can further narrow your search by looking for servicemen from your home state under “Entered service from.”
4. From the list, pick 2 servicemen to research that fall into different categories, such as race, age, rank, and service branch. You get to play a historian trying to find out whatever you can about the person. Create a paper or digital poster that tells the story of the two servicemen, addressing the following:
 - Name, racial background (there were colored regiments in World War I), branch of service, time the person entered the service and the state from which he originated, time and place of death, insignia of the regiment

- Using information about the regiment and place of death, try to recreate where the person might have fought during the Meuse-Argonne offensive. Use online sources, including the *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe* and its chapter on the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

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Please note that this chapter may contain links to third-party websites or videos embedded from such sites. These third-party websites are not controlled by the American Battle Monuments Commission nor subject to our privacy policy. ABMC provides these links and videos solely for our users' information and convenience. Once you follow a link to another site, you are subject to the policies of that site. ABMC does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of information on a linked website. ABMC does not endorse the organizations sponsoring linked websites and we do not endorse the views they express or the products or services they offer. ABMC cannot authorize the use of copyrighted materials contained in linked websites. Users must request such authorization from the sponsor of the linked website. ABMC is not responsible for transmissions users receive from linked websites. ABMC does not guarantee that outside websites comply with Section 508 (accessibility requirements) of the Rehabilitation Act.



AMERICAN BATTLE
MONUMENTS COMMISSION

“Time will not dim the glory of their deeds.”

GENERAL OF THE ARMIES JOHN J. PERSHING

LEARN NC

