
Theodore Seuss Geisel—better known as Dr. Seuss—was born in Springfield, MA to parents of German heritage. After graduating from Dartmouth College, he moved to New York in 1927, where he worked as a cartoonist and an author. From 1941 until 1943, Geisel served as chief editorial cartoonist for the leftist newspaper PM, which advocated for American intervention in the war against European fascism. Dr. Seuss’s cartoons rebuked isolationism and branded its adherents demagogues and hypocrites. This cartoon, published in PM on October 1, 1941, takes aim at the America First Committee, an isolationist group headquartered in New York. As Geisel suggests, America Firsters seemed all too happy to let European children suffer at the hands of the Nazis, so long as Americans were spared the unpleasantness of war.


Wartime advertising for women's bras reflected the huge increase in women's participation in the workforce. When the federal government threatened to cut off Maidenform’s supply of nylon and steel wire, the company launched a campaign to prove that its brassieres were “a vital necessity to women at work.” Soliciting the medical expertise of local doctors, Maidenform argued that the Allies needed female defense workers to win the war, and female defense workers needed brassieres to do their jobs. Although Maidenform succeeded in its campaign to produce brassieres throughout the war, the company compromised by adopting alternative materials.


Harlem resident and painter Jacob Lawrence joined the Coast Guard in 1943. Assigned to the USS Sea Cloud the following year, he became part of the first racially integrated ship in the armed forces. Commanding officer Carlton Skinner ensured that Lawrence had the time and supplies he needed to paint at sea. Control Panel is one of a series of paintings Lawrence created aboard the Sea Cloud. In this scene, Lawrence captures the elegant symmetry of the ship’s control panel, as well as the heroism of everyday activities in the Coast Guard. The painting was one of over 40 works included in Lawrence’s 1944 solo exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art—the museum’s first solo show by an African American artist.

The Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVES) was established in June 1942 as the all-female branch of the U. S. Naval Reserve, and its members served shore duty in the wartime Navy to free male sailors and officers for duty at sea. The WAVES’ most important training site was at Hunter College in the Bronx (now Lehman College), and—as this poster emphasized—the NYC location was a boon to recruitment.


Thomas Hart Benton’s formidable painting *Embarkation—Prelude to Death* emphasizes the crucial role that New York played as the key point of embarkation for troops and supplies. Benton based this canvas on sketches he made in Brooklyn in August 1942, as the first American troops prepared to depart for Africa.


Hundreds attended an anti-Nazi meeting in Manhattan’s garment and fur district on November 15, 1938. Signs carried by the protesters berated Nazi Germany for its treatment of Jews and called for the boycotting of German goods. The protest followed shortly after Kristallnacht, a coordinated series of attacks by Nazi party members and civilians throughout Germany and Austria on Jewish individuals and their homes, businesses, and institutions.

7. Macy’s, *We’ve Enlisted! There Will Be No Parade This Thanksgiving*, 1942. Courtesy of Macy’s Inc. Archives.

In 1942, Macy’s suspended its Thanksgiving Day Parade and consigned the rubber balloons to the salvage yard, their materials to be given over to the war effort. This ad, seemingly penned by the balloons themselves, expresses neither sadness nor regret, but a selfless patriotism and confidence in a future day when Macy’s balloons might float down Broadway again.
Immediately following American entry into the war, New York became the chief embarkation point for soldiers bound for North Africa and Europe. Passenger traffic in Pennsylvania Station increased eighty percent between 1941 and 1942, as scores of troops arrived in the city from points across the United States. The concourse, pictured here, was crowded with soldiers throughout the duration.

Although they would not see combat, the WAVES adhered to the same stringent discipline as the rest of the Navy, including a strenuous physical fitness regime. Here, WAVES undergo a physical education review at their training center at Hunter College (now Lehman College) in the Bronx. From 1943-1945, 6,000 women representing every state in the Union were on site, as trainees and instructors.

This poster, designed by the influential graphic artist E. McKnight Kauffer, highlights the sense of fear and urgency that descended upon the city after Pearl Harbor. Although New York never saw battle, the city transformed itself for war.

Irving Boyer captured the raucous, sensual mood of the wartime city. Recreating a scene he had glimpsed from a train at the Prospect Park BMT station, Boyer depicted soldiers and sailors enjoying a night on the town with attractive, seemingly available women.

Fight for Freedom, Inc., was an interventionist group whose high-profile leaders forcefully promoted American involvement in the war. Fliers such as this, which depict Hitler as a common criminal and call for his arrest as a murderer, were among the group's many propaganda tools.

13. **WWII Allied Ships in New York Harbor, September 9, 1941. AP Images.**

In 1941, following passage of the Lend-Lease bill, which enabled the United States to supply the Allies, New York became one of the chief ports through which war materiel was shipped to Europe. On September 9, 1941, over 100 British, Dutch, and Norwegian merchant ships passed through the Narrows at the start of their voyage across the Atlantic.


Beginning in June 1942, at the invitation of the board, the New-York Historical Society’s two large first-floor exhibition galleries were converted into surgical dressing stations by the American Red Cross. An average of 250 women worked in those galleries each day, preparing a total of four million surgical dressings over the course of the war. In a ceremony on June 16, 1942, pictured here, Mrs. William W. Green, the unit’s first director, raised the Red Cross flag over the museum entrance.

15. **WAVES on the Subway. New-York Historical Society.**

After being sworn in at New York’s City Hall with 413 others, a small group of WAVES and SPARS (the women’s reserve of the U.S. Coast Guard) travel by special subway train to their commissioning ceremonies at Hunter College (now Lehman College) in the Bronx. Along with 90,000 WAVES, Hunter’s Bronx campus served as the training site for nearly 2,000 SPARS during the war.
With the departure of hundreds of thousands of men from the workforce and into the armed forces, women took jobs en masse in New York's plants and workshops. By early 1944, women comprised roughly twenty-eight percent of the city's workforce in occupations ranging from seamstress to welder. The Brooklyn Navy Yard hired women for the first time in its history. Here, 20-year-old Bronx resident Minerva Matzkowitz takes her place at an engraving machine in the Yard's Ordnance Machine Shop.

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