Giving the Global High Sign: Coca-Cola Advertising of the “American Way” in Life Magazine, 1941-1947

Scott Greenfield
sgreenfield@pugetsound.edu

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Scott Greenfield

Professor Douglas C. Sackman

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Introduction: Selling the “American Way of Life”

In *Fables of Abundance*, Jackson Lears opens his exploration of American cultural history through positing what advertisements served to accomplish. “What do advertisements mean...” Lears wonders. He answers his own question, clarifying, “…they urge people to buy goods, but they also signify a certain vision of the good life; they validate a way of being in the world...their significance depends on their cultural setting.”¹ By the time the United States entered World War II in 1941, American society had developed a prominent vision of the “American Dream:” a lifestyle defined by suburban communities, technology, modern appliances, and immediately available ice-cold Coca-Cola. The “American Way of Life” was as much at stake as any individual country’s sovereignty. Advertisements such as those for Coca-Cola that ran in *Life* Magazine from the onset of war through the immediate post-war years placed various products in the construction of what the stakes were for the United States winning the war. Enjoying a bottle of Coca-Cola, for instance, became a patriotic duty for Americans at the home front to perform, not only to confirm a quantifiable vision of what America stood for but also to morale the soldiers until American-inspired freedom ruled over the innumerable war zones.

Yet, in order to sell itself as a natural extension of the “American” way of life, Coca-Cola required time and space to establish the relationship between consumers and product. Only then could the soft drink be incorporated into the national consciousness. The Company accomplished this goal through its print advertising in *Life* Magazine. *Life*, a publication started by Henry Luce (editor of partner publication *TIME*), emphasized the preeminence of photojournalism and making domestic and international news accessible.

to a wide readership base. Coca-Cola published around 50 full-page advertisements in *Life* between 1941 and 1947, capturing a period in American history that spanned from the events leading up to Pearl Harbor to the subsequent era of American prosperity following Allied victories both in Europe and the Pacific in 1945. These advertisements paint a compelling picture of an American product asserting its dominance both on the home front and around the world, convincing the stationary U.S. consumer that “Whenever you hear ‘Have a Coke’ you hear the voice of America...”

This thesis will contribute to the vast historiography of cultural, intellectual and marketing perspectives on American history. Mark Pendergrast is the primary author on Coca-Cola, publishing the most comprehensive history of the company in 1993. Expanding upon this perspective, historians such as Jackson Lears in his *Fables of Abundance* have examined advertising as a cultural phenomenon in the United States. Lears also contributed to the scholarly focus on consumerism in addition to authors like Richard Wightman Fox and Roland Marchand. Last, there is an emerging scholarship on the history of *Life* Magazine, a publication that ended its regular run in 1972. Wendy Kozol and Erika Doss are two contributors to this bourgeoning field. One important aspect of this preexisting historiography is that they concentrate on distinct themes and no author I have encountered has framed a brand history with an intellectual focus on American culture.

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hope to unite the thinking of scholars like Pendergrast and Lears, providing a historical
narrative of Coca-Cola print advertising on the home front during World War II with a focus
on the evolution of social and cultural ideologies in the United States as reflected through
these visual symbols of American history the soft drink company created and circulated.

In this exploration, I want to investigate how Coca-Cola advertising in *Life* Magazine
adapted to the social demands of the American home front during the World War II era
(specifically from 1941 to 1947). I plan to accomplish this goal through evaluating *Life’s*
purpose as a communicator of American values and Luce’s agency in determining what his
magazine would promote in the war effort. After tracing the evolution of the Coca-Cola
brand as it responded to consumer anxieties regarding World War II, I will analyze the
introduction of practicing consumerism as a demonstrative oath of loyalty to United States
advertising history.

Magazine advertising through these years marketed American products to a
consumer base that was becoming more patriotic. This “patriotic consumerism” manifested
itself both in its foundational support for the United States’ involvement in World War II
and in its constant implementation of the “American Dream” ideology that mixed nostalgia
and modernity in preparation of a post-war world. Expanding upon the resulting cultural
behavior of classifying the support of American business as a quasi-civic duty, The Coca-
Cola Company successfully situated the “American Way of Life” as a global aspiration
through its product’s entanglement in the global settings of war, ensuring that Coca-Cola
would symbolically safeguard the era following Allied victories in Europe and the Pacific as
the “American Century.

**Henry Luce and the “American Century”**
When *Life* magazine ran its first issue in 1936, it entered a crowded field of general-interest publications that reached millions of American mailboxes each year. Under Henry Luce’s watch, *TIME* and *Fortune* targeted different social classes in their various audiences; *TIME* and *Fortune* readers tended to come from the upper class due to their emphasis on financial news and international affairs. With *Life*’s entrance into the magazine market, the new publication sought to capture the attention of the middle class like never before, by photographing scenes of Americana in order to prove successful Luce’s mission “to see life; to see the world...” through visually stunning images, cataloging historical moments as they unfolded within America’s resurgence from the Great Depression.4

In *The Magazine Century*, David E. Sumner suggests, “magazines mirror American culture. They do not shape it...magazines emerge and evolve to meet the demand for the changing public interests and tastes...”5 *Life* followed suit, documenting Americana in an accessible, multipage format. However, the magazine’s allegiance to Sumner’s claim is contestable: whether Henry Luce pursued objectivity or sought a marketable Zerrspiegel (“distorted mirror”) permeates modern studies of magazine communications in the United States.6 The *TIME* and *Life* publisher discerned what his mirror would reflect with painstaking attention. With the field of photojournalism in its infancy during the 1930s, Luce formatted *Life* as an archive of lives observed across the world that persuasively

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6 “Zerrspiegel” is a German term that roughly translates in English to “distorted mirror.” Roland Marchand mentions this term as a potential source of the discrepancy between what mass communications observed and what they published. This dichotomy influences the conversation surrounding Luce’s intentions for publishing *Life*, showing life “as it ought to be” and incorporating scenes of Americana from companies such as Coca-Cola into various issues of the magazine. Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), xvii.
mirrored what he wanted to see. In his prospectus for what would become *Life* that Luce circulated around *TIME*, Inc., the Editor-in-Chief insisted that the photo serial would satisfy the modern desires “to see and to take pleasure in seeing; to see and be amazed; to see and be instructed…” 7 Thus, *Life* wanted to move beyond the expectations of other magazines, not only in its source of content but also in its frame of purpose: *Life* reflected the desire of its readership to serve as eyewitnesses to experiences that only *Life*’s photographs could provide, impressing the world with what an American magazine could accomplish.

When *Life* took on the duty to track the process of Europe collapsing into global conflict, Luce immediately connected the conflict in Europe and America’s impending involvement into a passionate declaration of what was really at stake in the battle between the Western World and Nazi Germany: the “American Way of Life.” The conflict America would enter after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 was perceived to be the catalytic determinant of American omnipotence, testing American strength both militarily and intellectually. Frank W. Fox addresses this rallying cry for unification within U.S. support of the war in *Madison Avenue Goes to War*, an exploration of wartime advertising during World War II. Fox hypothesizes, “...the war was seen as a test, perhaps the test, of the American Way of Life. And if the American Way passed this test—it deserved never to be questioned again...” 8 Therefore, advertisers and the publishers who would communicate those messages to a receptive public would have taken measures to not only defend “Americanness” but also to broaden its appeal for a worldwide audience.

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If the proponents of the “American Way” sought another ally to propagate their views, Henry Luce would have stepped into that role with impressive ease. Unabashedly vocal in his support for American intervention in the war, Luce penned an article in the February 17, 1941 issue of Life pleading to his American audience to embrace the national duty to support the war if and when direct involvement would become necessary. This essay, titled “The American Century,” would drum up support for America to enter the war and for Americans to put aside their hesitations in order to preach that their lifestyle was the superior worldview to other national lifestyles.

Luce’s essay on the forthcoming “American Century” takes on multiple tasks: first, he identifies how American-branded democracy requires the United States to remain interested in the outcome of World War II; then, he expounds upon his gospel that “the twentieth century is the American century;” finally, he concludes by insisting that the United States should willingly assume the burden for preserving world order as old systems disintegrate through the endless fighting. This proclamation explicitly favors American intervention as the only available option and predicates his obligation as a magazine publisher to frame this worldview for his impressionable audience.

While recognizing that the United States at that point had refrained from engaging in direct war, Luce demands that his audience recognize their involvement in the war because of their obligation to uphold American democracy. The Life editor presses the magazine’s readers to acknowledge, “We are in a war to defend and even promote, encourage and incite so-called democratic principles throughout the world.” At that

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10 Ibid., 5.
moment, Luce called out the hypocrisy of the United States fearing the consequences of losing to Hitler while passively observing a fragile England defend itself against Nazi Germany’s military power. The American mission, furthermore, sought not only to preserve American ownership over democracy in the 20th Century but also to revitalize it in preparation for a vulnerable post-war world.

Yet, the mission the TIME and Life editor outlined would not operate solely as a goodwill mission. Luce believed that America served to gain from its leadership in the country’s persistent support of the war effort. He constructed the relevant history of the United States in the course of the century, outlining American interventionism as President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s greatest chance of preserving a legacy to the American public as strong as the photographic archive Life simultaneously provided. In light of the time era earning different titles such as “a baffling and difficult and paradoxical century,” Luce insists, “the world of the twentieth century, if it is to come to life in any nobility of health and vigor, must be to a significant degree an American Century.”11 This statement implies that the “American Way of Life,” in light of Luce’s apparent beliefs, would have epitomized the strength in character that the publishing magnate contended was vital to guaranteeing a beneficial outcome of the war. Thus, an Allied victory in World War II would reap a bountiful reward for American ideology regardless of the extent of direct involvement in the European theater. This unreserved faith in the power of Americana guided Luce to assign his countrymen the duty to actively construct his vision of an “American century.”

This universal adaptation of “Americanness” solidifies Luce’s trust in the United States as a global leader among nations. Potential comparisons with the expansionist

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11 Ibid., 9.
language of manifest destiny are not far off from Luce’s intended argument regarding America’s role in the 1940s. In beckoning his readers to be “the Good Samaritan of the entire world,” Luce emphasizes the predominance of American freedom as an effective tool to combat war. The Life editor expands upon that classification to implore his readers to remember, “...It is the manifest duty of this country to undertake to feed all the people of the world who as a result of this worldwide collapse of civilization are hungry and destitute...”\(^\text{12}\) Luce views the war as an opportunity for America to reinforce “American ideals” such as goodwill and charity, a comforting assurance of the power Americans arguably held to impact the world around them, a message that aligned perfectly with the vision the publication that published this essay preached.

Predominantly, the “American Century” essay that captivated Life readers in early 1941 offered an initial gospel of American superiority in its impression on the world, a powerful tool for Luce to predetermine what would be recognized as American ideals. Erika Doss explores this conclusion in her historical overview of the magazine, clarifying that “the ‘certain things’ that Life ‘stood for’ were nationalism, capitalism, and classlessness, a sense of confidence, optimism, and exceptionalism, and the sure belief that the American way was the way of the world.”\(^\text{13}\) While Henry Luce would claim to merely reflect the United States public's passion for international goodwill through the spreading of American-style democracy, he succeeded in having his publication promote a nuanced interventionist agenda leading up to the American entrance in World War II. Although Luce might have sought solely “to see, and to show,” the lens through which Life witnessed the

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 11.
human experience was not a true mirror, as Sumner contends that magazines provided; rather, it was tinted to highlight the American potential to create the world Luce wanted his magazine to capture on film during the war and beyond.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Coca-Cola advertising in \textit{Life} Magazine, 1941-1947}

At the initial onslaught of World War II, Coca-Cola CEO Robert Woodruff made an incredible promise to distribute Coca-Cola in all corners of the globe. In an internal memo shared around the Coca-Cola Company, Woodruff was quoted as saying, “‘We will see that every man in uniform gets a bottle of Coca-Cola for five cents, wherever he is and whatever it costs our company.’”\textsuperscript{15} This declaration ensured that Coca-Cola would continue its production in spite of worldwide turmoil overseas in order to make their soft drink accessible to fighting men everywhere, even selling it at a loss if necessary.

However, this promise only represented one part of the company’s obligation to uphold the reverent status of their delicious invention. Domestically, Coca-Cola needed to convince the American public that their soft drink was vital to the sustenance of the United States war effort. To this aim, Coca-Cola published over fifty advertisements in \textit{Life} Magazine between 1941 and 1947 to demonstrate the necessity of Coca-Cola’s purpose in successfully testing the “American Way of Life” inside and out of the United States.

During the 1920s and 1930s, The Coca-Cola Company utilized a slogan that it hoped would capitalize on the modern American’s need to enjoy relaxation. Leisure time was seen as a hallmark of the burgeoning middle class lifestyle, and Coca-Cola sought to


encapsulate the contentment of taking a break by inexplicably matching the conscious act of drinking an ice-cold glass of Coca-Cola with the physical joy displayed on the subject’s face in any given advertisement for the brewed soft drink. The slogan that equated Coca-Cola with the quenching of thirst was “the pause that refreshes,” a declaration not only of Coca-Cola’s ubiquitous character but also of its unmatched impact on the satisfaction of modern consumers.

By 1943, over a year after President Roosevelt declared the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor to “live in infamy” and the United States entered World War II in battles against Nazi Germany and Japan, “the pause that refreshes” had morphed into “that extra something...you can spot it every time!” The subtle shift in terminology transformed the intended use of Coca-Cola. Before, the advertisements only implied that receiving a Coke-induced contentment would increase productivity and waste less time. Now, with the majority of able-bodied men enlisting in the army to serve overseas, Coca-Cola had to cater its message to convince the families with loved ones in the army that drinking its specialty beverage would make their soldier a better apostle of American democracy.

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16 In Advertising the American Dream, Roland Marchand elaborates on advertising’s reliance upon “participatory anecdotes” and necessity of “accommodating the public to modern complexities.” This strategy includes the consumer in constructing the world in which various scenarios meant to sell a product could occur within, aiming to either validate or inspire individuals, depending on how well he or she fits the archetypal character display in a particular advertisement. Roland Marchand, Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 9-12.

17 In the 1920s and 1930s, Coca-Cola stressed the singularity of its soft drink’s taste and quality partially in response to several copycats trying to capitalize on the cola phenomenon. Therefore, the company adopted “you trust its quality” both as a reassurance to its loyal consumers but also as a forewarning to any potential imitators to sought to steal a piece of the monopoly Coca-Cola enjoyed on the soft drink market. For a sample advertising representing this trend, see: The Coca-Cola Company, Print advertisement in Life Magazine, Vol. 11, No. 17, Nov. 10, 1941, accessed online February 10, 2016.

18 I borrow the language of “apostles” from Roland Marchand and his work, Advertising the American Dream. Marchand characterizes advertising in 1920s United States as an “apostle of modernity” for transition American social consciousness away from rural, isolating living to urban or suburban communal existences that could unify what could be easily recognized as the “American Dream.” Roland Marchand, Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 9.
this circumstance in an advertisement The Coca-Cola Company ran in the January 11, 1943 issue of *Life* Magazine (see Figure 1).

In this particular advertisement, the primary subject is a Navy officer donning his dress blues with a jacket and a small carry-along bag. The young man looks energetic and eager, presumably to “head home” as the copy suggests. “Home,” the copy continues, contains nostalgic elements of the 20th Century American lifestyle: “familiar scenes and places” such as the “old neighborhood soda fountain.” Harkening to the advertising strategies of the 1920s and 1930s, Coca-Cola sought to place thirst and refreshment as polar opposites, with the cola soft drink serving as the only method of reconciling that struggle. The copy ends with the expert assumption that “there are many things for thirst but one stands out for refreshment...ice-cold Coca-Cola.” The Company incorporated the modern urge toward “nostalgia” to target both the fighting men who would be on furlough around the time the *Life* issue reached circulation but also the sweethearts and mothers who were implicitly charged with ensuring that soldiers would have as much access to their favorite soft drink as they did in overseas war zones. This category of Coca-Cola advertisements represented a dramatic shift in the appeal and purpose of the characteristic

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19 The soda fountain was unabashedly idealized as the symbolic location for Americans to exercise their nostalgia when taking that pause Coca-Cola so carefully sold to its diverse audience. Before Coca-Cola accelerated its bottling operation in the late 1890s, the soda fountain was the exclusive avenue of enjoying the cola soft drink. For more information on the relationship between The Coca-Cola Company and neighborhood soda fountains, consult: Anne H. Hoy, *Coca-Cola: The First Hundred Years* (Atlanta, GA: The Coca-Cola Company, 1986). For information on Coca-Cola’s early branding strategies, consult: David Powers Cleary, *Great American Brands*, (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1981).


21 The root of the word “nostalgia” translates to “homesickness,” a coincidence that advertising historians frequently mention in their various projects. Marchand elaborates upon this important origin by claiming that modern advertising had to showcase the future while still preserving past realities for individual consumers to build long-lasting loyal relationships with a product and a brand such as Coca-Cola. Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), xix.
cola beverage. Instead of these displays portraying the modern American woman carefully poised in relaxation, the ads of World War II showed vigor and strength, if for no other reason than to assuage the fears of American families that global conflict would not deter the American man from imbibing in the simple pleasures Coca-Cola guaranteed to provide each and every consumer.

As World War II progressed and the United States expanded its military reach within the conflict, Coca-Cola upgraded its international focus in a series of advertisements aiming to capture American forces spreading goodwill throughout the world through their direct involvement in the war. Moving quickly along an advertising timeline that sold “the pause that refreshes” to “that extra something,” the Coca-Cola advertisements distributed in the throes of the Battle of Sicily, D-Day in Normandy, and Battle of the Bulge shared scenes of camaraderie between American soldiers and the various nations in partnership with the Allied forces, bonding over the global aim of the Coca-Cola drink to inspire friendly relations between people at work.\textsuperscript{22} This new campaign decreed the classic product as the “global high-sign,” a universal token of democracy and friendship as upheld by American honor and integrity. These advertisements seemed to follow the American path toward victory, concentrating on settings where Allied victories had propelled the fight for democracy forward or eliminated the Axis threat from that region. One prominent example is an advertisement from the closing days of the war in the European theater that ran in the April 2, 1945 issue of \textit{Life} (\textbf{see Figure 2}).

This example is notable for its outright unification of the consumer product with a quantifiable “American Way of Life” as multiple scholars have identified. Similar to the examples that came before it, this Coca-Cola advertisement placed the suggestion to “have a coke” with a foreign saying that captured the desired sentiment. In this scene, “la moda Americana” (translated to English as “the American Way”) is conceptualized within a group of American soldiers surrounding a military jeep. One man plays the guitar on the hood of the vehicle and another serviceman in the foreground of the ad squats down to offer a bottle of Coca-Cola to a little Italian girl as her mother observes the interaction. The setting is physically decimated by a recent attack and the townspeople try to restore the central square where business ran as usual before the war usurped their lifestyle.

The ad copy invigorates the relationship the Coca-Cola forms between peacekeeping and the promotion of American ideals, blurring the distinction between a universal hope for an end to the war and the arguable “American” ability to promote peace throughout the world:

*Have a Coke,* foreigners hear the G.I. say when he wants to be friendly, and they begin to understand what America means. For in this simple gesture is some of the essence of Main Street and the family fireside. Yes, the custom of the pause that refreshes with ice-cold Coca-Cola helps show the world the friendliness of American ways.

Furthermore, Coca-Cola was no longer a product America exported to satisfy physical thirst cravings of consumers both domestic and abroad; as “the global high-sign,” the drink became an arranged symbol of America itself, a convenient ornament of what American

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fighters claimed to be fighting for. Coca-Cola’s vision of World War II was not just a battle to protect global interests in peacekeeping, but rather to brand the United States and the American person as the primary agents of that “friendly gesture” the American servicemen were trained to share with foreign friends. The “friendliness of American ways,” as the copy suggests, promoted a strategic unity between the refreshment a bottle of Coca-Cola guaranteed and the satisfaction that would reach the ravaged corners of the war once the Americans ensured an Allied Victory in Europe. Thus, the interaction between the friendly American serviceman and the Italian child represented an ideological conversion of the “Italian way” to the elements of the “American way” a bottle of Coca-Cola was supposed to contain, ensuring that a post-war future in Italy would be founded upon the transaction of “the global high-sign” between American ambassadors of goodwill and their receptive audiences.

Ultimately, that Americans claimed victory against the Axis powers both in Europe and in the Pacific, with both theaters closing active battles by fall 1945. The first holiday season following the conclusion of World War II provided Coca-Cola myriad avenues of sentimentality to convey the relief felt by all American families that soldiers were returning home and reestablishing the American society that had assumed an productive fervor in the servicemen’s absence. A majority of the advertisements in Life Magazine from this time centered on the portrayal of the American serviceman’s unbridled joy to be reunited with his family. Coca-Cola followed suit, notably in a Christmastime advertisement immediately after the war (see Figure 3).

In contrast to the advertisement from 1943 mentioned earlier, where the serviceman depended upon nostalgia and wartime morale to preserve the cause, this scene
from 1945 signified the realization of those desires that trapped soldiers in the international conflict. Now, as the 1945 advertisement suggested, the returning soldier could drop his traveling sack on the couch, lay next to the Christmas tree and surround himself with the love his wife and child sought to share with him. This was, in alignment with Coca-Cola’s affinity for being empathetic, “the time of all times,” the “…home-like, truly American moment where the old familiar phrase Have a Coke adds the final refreshing touch. Coca-Cola belongs to just a time of friendly, warm family feeling…”25 The sanctity within drinking a bottle of Coke gains immense power when situated in the circumstances the advertisement illustrates. “Have a Coke” is an invitation and a declaration, allowing the serviceman to reclaim the luxuries of his American upbringing he left behind in the war. This sentiment, now removed from the conflict itself, allows Coca-Cola to contextualize its product as a hallmark of what the countless battles represented. The western world was not the only force threatened by World War II; the time-honored American ritual of sharing a bottle of Coca-Cola was also at stake, and The Coca-Cola Company was determined to show its domestic consumers that it would serve American interests in global relationships as well as any soldier depicted in their advertisements.

The theme of reunion permeated Coca-Cola advertisements following the war, including one centered on the American ritual of the family Thanksgiving dinner. Evocative of the unmistakable Rockwell portrait from the 1930s, this advertisement refines the characterization of Americana and adapts it for the post-war era (See Figure 4).26 If any

26 The allusion in this section to Norman Rockwell is not without merit. In addition to his prolific illustrative work for The Saturday Evening Post, Rockwell also drafted print advertisements for Coca-Cola in multiple contracts, notably in the 1930s. More insight on Rockwell’s interaction with Coca-Cola can be found in the
one sentence were to represent the aims of the Coca-Cola Company following World War II, it would come from the copy accompanying this ad: “Turkey Day or any day, Coca-Cola adds life to good living, in American homes everywhere.” Through their soft drink, Coca-Cola targeted post-war Americans anxious to characterize again their lived experience, to form another chapter in the mythologized American Dream. The refreshment Coca-Cola brought remained distinct and indispensable, even though the lives Americans lived shared very few similarities to the Great Depression era.

Over the course of six years, Coca-Cola demonstrated in their wartime advertisements that the cola soft drink that originated in Atlanta at the turn of the twentieth century played as vital of a diplomatic role in conceptualizing what the war was fought for. American “friendliness,” as multiple advertisements alluded to in their copy, was abstract in theory but indistinguishable in practice. The United States won the war, according to Coca-Cola, in part because Robert Woodruff had stressed the importance of distributing his soft drink around the globe, even in the most dangerous war zones. Coca-Cola was the American servicemen’s greatest weapon in inspiring a worldwide appreciation for American products and the lifestyles that fueled their success.

**Patriotic Consumerism in World War II**

Although Robert Woodruff’s 1941 promise to provide Coca-Cola for all American servicemen was extraordinary for it required tremendous logistic maneuvering, the Coca-
Cola CEO was not alone in the fervent integration of his product into the United States’ cultural acceptance of the war effort. Rather, Coca-Cola fit into a new brand of 20\textsuperscript{th} Century American consumerism, one that expanded on the middle class perceptions of nostalgia and camaraderie to classify products produced by the United States as vital to the successful outcome of World War II. These displays rebranded the purpose of American products in the war effort. Through an emphasis on substantiating morale as it impacted the daily lives of soldiers overseas, the Coke advertisements that ran in \textit{Life} Magazine from 1941 to 1947 encapsulated the domestic audience’s desire to see American business profit not only financially but also ideologically.

Within the historiography on advertising during World War II, some scholars suggest that companies like Coca-Cola were notably patriotic in their allegiance toward the war effort in order to reflect the rationalization of millions of American families who justified to themselves why their soldier was serving across the world. As Holsinger and Schofield elaborate in \textit{Visions of War}, the class of product mattered little in comparison to the fact that “...World War II era advertisers were selling patriotism and promise first; their products second. If the apple pie which had been the symbol of America was currently out-of-stock, more and better apple pie became the war cry of [advertising].”\textsuperscript{28} Coca-Cola gained social acceptance for the unparalleled decision to prioritize international production of the soft drink in place of the American domestic market. The company realized early on in the war that the American consumer (who were primarily females around World War II) would recognize the sentiment Coca-Cola shared through its

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{28} Holsinger and Schofield, “Madison Avenue Goes to War: Patriotism in Advertising during World War II,” in \textit{Visions of War}, (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992), 125.}
allusions to other examples of courageous action. Such an example comes from a fascinating historical display that ran in the May 3, 1943 issue of *Life* (See Figure 5).

In this particular advertisement, the visuals are spread out over three historical moments: 1863, during the Civil War; 1918, at the conclusion of World War I; and 1943, the height of American involvement in World War II. The largest visual depicts Stonewall Jackson, the fabled Confederate general who perished after the Battle of Chancellorsville. The copy accompanying the visual of the domineering commander explains, “Stonewall Jackson taught us what *the pause that refreshes* really means.” The 1918 visual claims that soldiers pined for “ice-cold Coca-Cola” once they returned from battle. Last, the 1943 visual prioritizes the role of morale in conditioning the success of American servicemen. It emphasizes, “Every time you enjoy a Coke it tells you all over again what it means to morale.” “Morale” was a vital term for Coca-Cola during the war because the satisfaction that Coca-Cola claimed to deliver took on historical significance. Through quoting Stonewall Jackson’s influence on the popular Coke slogan “the pause that refreshes,” this advertisement legitimizes the notion that the soft drink transcends its own existence and that it carries with each bottle produced the spirit and vitality deemed conducive to the well being of American soldiers. Furthermore, connecting the story of Coca-Cola to the legacy of Stonewall Jackson as a recognized war hero assists the Coca-Cola Company in convincing the families reading each issue of *Life* that their soldier can act as valiantly as Stonewall Jackson did during the Civil War. These conscious choices reaffirm the

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29 Advertisers during the period almost universally recognized the power of the female American consumer as the primary buyer of material goods for her family. Mrs. Christine Frederick, a contemporary scholar of consumer culture in the 1920s, explores the woman’s role within consumer culture in her influential, if not somewhat archaic, text: Christine Frederick, *Selling Mrs. Consumer*, (New York: The Business Bourse, 1929).

glorification of the American serviceman as the ambassador of a worthy cause—American-style freedom.\(^{31}\)

Morale as a call to action had motivated American society for a substantial period leading up to World War II, as evidenced in the “Stonewall Jackson” advertisement from 1943. However, exemplifying what advertising meant “to morale” took on particular significance in the 1940s due to the presence of mass media and the visual impact of American domestic consumers seeing their soldiers confident and refreshed. John Bush Jones explores the distinction of “wartime morale” in *All-Out for Victory*, differentiating various definitions for morale and how they give insight to particular advertising methods utilized during the war.\(^{32}\) Rather, Jones evaluated morale as a motivational spirit that aimed to guide the whole of American society, soldiers and their families combined, toward an Allied victory and a return to the American Dream once the war ended. “Wartime morale,” in other words, “...was the spirit or attitude instilled in people by a goal to be achieved, that morale in turn fostering their capacity to achieve that goal.”\(^{33}\) The implication on American advertisers during this time was that the various consumer goods produced had to integrate into the call to arms that removed millions of American men

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\(^{31}\) Of course, Coca-Cola’s decision to include an allusion to Confederate General Stonewall Jackson in one of the company’s advertisements earns historical controversy. While no author has explicitly written on this particular example, I imagine that, given its southern origin and cultural allegiance to the American South, Coca-Cola leadership and those in charge of the creative decisions regarding print advertising would have been sympathetic to characterizing Stonewall Jackson as a military hero removed from historical circumstances of his own death and the Confederacy's loss during the Civil War. Mark Pendergrast addresses Coca-Cola’s southern heritage in his history of the company: Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola: The Definitive History of the Great American Soft Drink and the Company that Makes It*, (New York: Basic Books. 2000).

\(^{32}\) Jones mentions two definitions for “morale” coming from *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* and Princeton University’s WordNet. He clarifies that both definitions “define morale as a state of psychological well-being based upon one’s sense of confidence, usefulness, and purpose...” concluding that well-being and happiness are ill-suited to understanding morale during the war years. John Bush Jones, *All-Out for Victory*, (Hanover, US: Brandeis, 2009), 123.

\(^{33}\) *Ibid.*
from society in order to protect global interests of peace and freedom. Thus, the Coca-Cola advertisements that ran in *Life* Magazine throughout the war would have adapted the prominent obligation to share “the pause that refreshes” to signify how the consumption of their soft drink could and would revitalize and rejuvenate the soldier in his mission to win the war. The preeminence of an American lifestyle in contrast to older civilizations in Europe and Asia fueled Coca-Cola’s construction of a nostalgic home for which soldiers and families could yearn. In *Madison Avenue Goes to War*, Frank W. Fox introduces the theme of “goodwill advertising” as the category of communication most advertisements produced during the war followed. These advertisements, he contends, were not just selling products; rather, they were “…selling civilization, culture, comfort, convenience, refinement, health, hygiene...and everything else.”

Within Coca-Cola’s marketing strategy to place its soft drink as an inescapable ornament of the “American Way,” the company attached an impressive sentimentality to the refreshing taste of an ice-cold Coca-Cola. Coke equalized the impact of receiving letters from home with the worldwide bottling operation of the cola soft drink.

In one advertisement from the June 7, 1943 issue of *Life*, Coca-Cola congratulates the American servicemen who have expressed an evocative longing for home with assistance from the “Sprite Boy” (see Figure 6). The company places its product on a train of thought that supposes to symbolize the needs and desires of American servicemen overseas. The copy for this ad starts, “Next to wives, sweethearts and letters from home,

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35 For an in-depth analysis of the “Sprite Boy” as a product of 1940s advertising, see: Anne H. Hoy, *Coca-Cola: The First Hundred Years*, (Atlanta, GA: The Coca-Cola Company, 1986).
among things our soldiers mention most is Coca-Cola...”36 This sentiment construed a five-cent beverage served at soda fountains across the United States as the most precious American product these fighting men recalled. The Coca-Cola Company presumed that the ordinary American would have established an emotional connection with the availability of the brewed soft drink. Coke could have intended to reassure the wives and sweethearts mentioned above that their contribution was equal to the effort to distribute “America’s Favorite Soft Drink” because its immediate availability would impact the path to victory advertisers were obligated to sell the American middle-class public. Through their careful positioning of capitalistic products in classic hallmarks of what the soldiers perceived “home” to be, Coca-Cola and other companies advertised to disseminate “wartime morale” as the prominent purpose of continued Allied involvement in the increasingly brutal war.

In any instance, American advertising in popular magazines such as Life upheld this sacrificial perception of what it meant to morale in the portrayal of servicemen operating overseas.37 The characterization of the war as a necessary obligation of the United States rationalized the dramatic impact the war had on the American social structure. The focus remained on the American serviceman’s patriotic will to uphold American “friendliness” as demonstrated by the examples mentioned in the prior section. John Morton Blum captured this sentiment in his book on how American culture became politicized like never before during World War II. Fighting in Europe and the Pacific, according to Blum, “...was neither a threat nor a crusade. It seemed, as Fortune put it, ‘only a painful necessity...’”38 The

37 Reference “Have a Coke” advertising campaign for Coca-Cola (1943-1945), Figures 2 and 3.
American soldier as perceived by these advertisements assumed a characteristically
diplomatic role, appearing before the readers of *Life* as a conduit of transmitting American
values all over the world. Therefore, the subjects of the Coca-Cola advertisements stood as
stoic symbols of a valiant cause that United States consumers were obligated to cherish.

Thus, American businesses were bound to two different markets: one, which supported American businesses making a profit in the accessible, market which the war effort supported; and another, which faithfully clung to the belief that the United States, in partnership with the Allied forces, would win the battle for human freedom in both the European and Pacific theaters. Essentially, Coca-Cola and other companies that chose to advertise through mass-produced magazines were “selling victory.” Frank W. Fox quotes the aims of wartime adman Walter Weir, who listed three reasons why advertisement were vital assets in preparing the American social mindset for Allied victories throughout the world:39

1. Admen “could demonstrate to the American people in a way that no one else could what the realities of war really were.”
2. “Advertising could galvanize the amorphous sentiments of the people into concrete statements of purpose, and thus give definition and meaning to the wartime experience...”
3. “…It was up to advertising...to destroy the complacency which seemed to abound in wartime America and fire a spirit measured to the task...”40

The producers (companies like Coca-Cola contracting out various advertising agencies) and the distributors (common publications such as *Life*) nourished the rise of patriotic consumer as it permeated domestic Americans tracking the soldiers’ progress in both

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39 John Bush Jones actually criticizes Fox for what he contends to be an incomplete analysis of Walter Weir’s impact on the course of advertising during World War II. Jones suggests that wartime advertisements succeeded because they inspired guilt rather than fear, providing a different call to action that Weir might have assumed. See John Bush Jones, *All-Out for Victory*, (Hanover, US: Brandeis, 2009), 54.
theaters with a never-before-experienced frequency. As long as United States businesses satisfied their consumer’s desire to foreground a friendly and diplomatic American victory over Japan, the Nazi Regime, and other Axis compatriots, Americanness seen through the lens of patriotic consumerism thrived unchallenged.

**Conclusion: Coca-Cola’s “American Way” Passes the Test**

If one were to give Henry Robinson Luce the opportunity, the publisher of *TIME* and *Life* magazines probably would have insisted that his magazines contributed to the Allied victory in World War II. At least, that claim would not seem as far-fetched after seeing the cover image for the May 15, 1950 issue of *TIME*, one of the few instances in which the publication placed an illustration on its cover. On this rare occasion, illustrator Boris Artzbasheff drew a manifestation of Coca-Cola feeding its signature cola drink to a thirsty and appreciative world. He labeled his creation by claiming the image depicted “world and friend: love...that American way of life” No other product of the 20th Century symbolized “Americanness” more profoundly than the soft drink that had grown from a tonic of the 1880s to become “America’s Favorite Soft Drink.” Luce above anyone else wanted one of his publications to showcase the important role Coca-Cola had played in the course of spreading American goodwill throughout the world in the previous decade.

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41 Contrary to what Coca-Cola might have wanted consumers to believe, World War II amassed tragic casualties at multiple battles throughout the United States’ engagement in the war. One jarring cover image from a 1943 issue showed three dead soldiers on a beach as a testament to the sacrifice American servicemen made to fight for their country. Wendy Kozol investigates the domestic impact of seeing these images and living through the war in her evaluation of the society Luce’s publication supported: Wendy Kozol, *Life’s America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994). Erika Doss also provides valuable insight on the matter in her own work mentioned in the historiography earlier: Erika Doss, *Looking at Life Magazine*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

As United States soldiers rolled in to liberate European cities after V-E Day on May 8, 1945, the servicemen brought along the ice-cold Coca-Cola they enjoyed during their service overseas, imparting a little part of their American roots with every civilian they encountered. The fabled soft drink became a symbol of unconditional friendship and alliance between people that transcended nationalities yet reinforced Americanness. Further, the Coca-Cola Company never tried to conceal its desire to place its product within a one-sided transaction that exchanged decimated European customs for revitalized American values. This projected relationship justified Coca-Cola’s characterization during the war as the “global high-sign.” One such example comes from an advertisement the company ran in *Life* in the July 2, 1945 issue (see Figure 7).43

The ideological influence of the United States on European society would become one contributing factor to the aggressive spread of Cold War tensions between once-allied Americans and Soviets. Critics of the rapid pace at which American businesses would import their products referred to the intersection of post-war international politics and American consumerism as “Coca-Colonization,” a term crafted by noted scholar Rickard F. Kuisel.44 World War II was evaluated as the ultimate test for the “American Way of Life.”45

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43 This advertisement is set under the Eiffel Tower in Paris, a city that fell under Nazi Rule from 1940 to 1944. The scene depicts two American servicemen handing a gentlewoman and a young boy a bottle of coke, earlier established as an expression of “Yank friendliness.” The advertisement’s mission in evoking American values is apparent: “Wherever you hear *Have a Coke* you hear the voice of America...inviting you to enjoy the pause that refreshes,—a national custom now becoming an international symbol of good will as well.” The language of “custom” and explicit comparison of Coca-Cola once being national and now assuming an international presence is a blatant example of patriotic consumerism. The Coca-Cola Company, Print advertisement in *Life* Magazine, Vol. 19, No. 1. Jul. 2, 1945. Accessed online February 10, 2016.

44 Richard F. Kuisel addresses this topic inventively in his article on the entrance of Coca-Cola to the post-war French social economy. He argues that the French government’s resistance to allow Coca-Cola to produce in their country indicated an ideological resistance to the American domination that had propelled the Allies to liberate France from the Nazis and reunite Western Europe under democracy. A unique condition of using France as a case study is the prevalence of wine as a preferred “drink of choice” and the French social reluctance to accept any substitute for a drink that already provides them the refreshment Coca-Cola would
Through its forceful yet friendly military presence as depicted in the advertisements mentioned above, the United States successfully demonstrated the universality of American friendliness as the only antidote to the war and the enemies the Allies identified as the Axis. Advertisements reflected this unyielding will to prove how all things American could improve the world, even through the thirst-quenching act of drinking Coca-Cola.

There exist several features of the advertisements that have comprised the primary focus of this thesis that require further investigation by fellow scholars of the cultural and advertising history of the 20th Century. For instance, the advertising industry's perception of gender roles factors heavily into the ways in which companies like Coca-Cola marketed to a now-complete American society. In one sense, the advertisements of 1946 and 1947 drew similarities to those from the 1930s. However, just as American culture had adopted patriotism as one of its hallmarks in the 1940s, the post-war years focused on maintaining what made America great, including the molds into which American men and women were expected to fit. Another example for how the advertisements of this study could otherwise be contextualized is the integration of American products in the international marketplace during the Cold War, with one potential source of research being the methods through which Coca-Cola and other American brands responded to various ideological barriers as they pursued new markets. Though impossible to fully address within the scope


46 Frank W. Fox elaborates on how World War II served as the ultimate test of the “American Way of Life,” claiming that “if the American Way passed this test—it deserved never to be questioned again...” This could have fostered the spirit of America’s global dominion over democracy and freedom as it entered the Cold War with the Soviet Union after 1945. See: Frank W. Fox, Madison Avenue Goes to War, (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 173.

46 No source has accomplish anything close to what would satisfy gender theorists of the 21st Century regarding gender history as it is preserved in print advertising. However, two sources that could inspire fellow researchers are: Erving Goffman, Gender Advertisements, (New York: Palgrave, 1976); Judith Williamson, Decoding Advertisements, (London, UK: Marion Boyars, 1978).
of this particular project, the points of intersection mentioned above could speak to why “American friendliness” superseded its own nationalistic origins to infiltrate cultures the whole world over.

Neither Life nor Coca-Cola were phenomena built for World War II; both had thrived for many years before Pearl Harbor, yet the two cultural artifacts formed an undeniable partnership when thrown with the demands of satisfying a society disrupted by war. When recalling what role Life Magazine would play in the collective memory of the “American Century,” John Corry insisted that World War II “was made for Life,” due to the publication’s promise to convey experiences throughout the world as vividly and fantastically as possible. Similarly, World War II was made for Coca-Cola. The global conflict secured America’s political status as a world superpower, but the United States’ expert utilization of its cultural symbolism solidified American ideology’s unchallenged dominion. Serving a bottle of Coca-Cola brought American “friendliness” to all corners of the globe, providing the vital refreshment needed to navigate toward world based on American-style freedom and a simple soft drink that came to define what America meant both to itself and to the entire world.

Appendix

Figure 1: January 11, 1943 advertisement in Life Magazine

Figure 2: April 2, 1945 advertisement in Life Magazine
Figure 3: December 17, 1945 advertisement in *Life* Magazine
Figure 4: November 18, 1946 advertisement in *Life* Magazine
Figure 5: May 3, 1943 advertisement in Life Magazine
That Extra Something!

...You can spot it every time

1863

"Stonewall Jackson taught us what the pause that refreshes really means."

A new idea joined the army in "the sixties." It was the rest pause... with refreshment. Here's what a Coca-Cola advertisement said about it in 1931:—

"Stonewall Jackson always got there first. On the march he gave his men rations of sugar and at intervals required them to lie down for a short rest. Thus he marched troops farther and faster than any other general in the field. Since his day all marching troops have been given a short rest period out of every hour."

To our fighting men and war workers everywhere that fact has new importance. A short pause helps you in any task. A pause for the energy-giving refreshment of ice-cold Coca-Cola helps you even more.

1918

"Ice-cold Coca-Cola"—it even saved lives in World War I. A soldier from the British Expeditionary Force described how a "Cold Coca-Cola" helped him win a medal of honor.

1943

"Coca-Cola" is a symbol of hope to our men and women in service. Every time you enjoy a Coca-Cola it tells you all over again what it means to America.

The best is always the better buy!
"Caps off to our fighting men"

MINIMUM CONTENTS
& FLUID OZ.
Coca-Cola
REG. U.S. PAT.OFF.

“Next to wives, sweethearts and letters from home, among things our soldiers mention most is Coca-Cola. Of course, our fighting men meet up with Coke many places overseas. But Coca-Cola got there first. Yes sir, Coca-Cola has been a globe-trotter since way back when. It has been sold in more than 100 foreign lands. Even with war and so many Coca-Cola bottling plants in enemy-occupied countries, our fighting men are delighted to find Coca-Cola being bottled right on the spot in so many places around the globe. And do they go for it when they find it? Who doesn’t?”

Did you know this? There are Coca-Cola bottling plants in: Australia, England, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, India, Iceland, Spain, Bermuda, Cuba, Mexico, Jamaica, Trinidad, Newfoundland, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Nassau, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, British Guiana, Chile, Colombia, Dutch Guiana, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, British Honduras, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, El Salvador.
Figure 7: July 2, 1945 advertisement in Life Magazine
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