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Florida Atlantic University

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“Americans All!” Re-Imaging Ethnicity in America, 1939-1945

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Many valuable ideas and theories analyzing indifference, hatred, and violence among Americans have been presented over the years. Still, some broader questions must be asked: what are the sources of these attitudes and behaviors? Why do misconceptions, misrepresentations and centuries-old stereotypes of diverse ethnic groups prevail? Throughout America's history forms of communication (propaganda) via literature, print media, radio, and more recently film, video, and even musical expression, have been employed in the dissemination of negative depictions of the "other" among Americans of all ethnicities. How have similar tools been utilized to reverse such negative sentiments and more importantly why? By accessing and analyzing historic materials, many of which have not been observed since they were first introduced to the public in the World War II era, I plan to shed new light on why people have thought, and in some cases still do think, what they do about "others." The use of propaganda resulted in a re-imaging of American ethnic groups. Campaigns to foster inclusion of the "other" were generated out of a need by the United States government to foster national unity for the war effort, in particular to create a sense of nationalism to encourage participation in the war efforts, on the front lines and at home. My primary goal is to illuminate the power of propaganda and cultural productions as tools to advance specific ideologies and agendas – a practice more common now than during the World War II era.