A Bill of Goods: How Advertisers sold the Great War, and Created the Lost Generation

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A Bill of Goods

How Advertisers Sold the Great War and Created the Lost Generation

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“Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts of the City College of the City University of New York.”
1.1) **Introduction: Defining the Génération Perdue**

When we think of early 20th century American writing, we tend to think of the works of the “Lost Generation,” a troupe of disaffected literary luminaries that came of age during World War I. The term was popularized by Ernest Hemingway, who credited it to Gertrude Stein, but it was allegedly coined by a French garage owner. The story goes that the unnamed auto worker told a listless young mechanic working on Stein’s car, “You are all a génération perdue [lost generation] (Hemingway 61).” This anonymous bit of social commentary has since worked its way into the cultural lexicon, but it’s important that we understand what was meant by the word “lost.”

In this case, lost does not mean lost in the sense of being gone or forgotten, but rather, in the sense of being aimless, disillusioned, and apathetic all at once. The consensus was that those who emerged from the historically brutal gauntlet known as The Great War came away indelibly scarred, heedless of societal expectations, and numb to all but the most outrageous extravagances. Literary historians have long assumed that it was the trauma stemming from the death and destruction this generation witnessed that made it “lost,” but the story is more complicated than that. In truth, warped expectations were as much to blame as harsh realities -- expectations that were carefully crafted by the United States Government and its newest ally: The advertising industry.

This paper will argue that this unprecedented relationship gave birth to the Lost Generation, by willfully misrepresenting the conflict and willfully misleading the American populace. In the pages to come, we'll see how the advertising industry helped
turn an extremely unpopular war into one backed by a vast popular consensus and helped transform a generation of idealists into a generation of cynics.

1.2) Writers as Anti-Establishment Thinkers

On July, 25 1846, Henry David Thoreau was jailed for refusing to pay six years of delinquent poll taxes. His refusal was an indirect protest of the Mexican-American war, a conflict that he considered to be unjust and imperialist (Richardson 179). Thoreau would not have his money used to help fund a war he believed was being waged to expand slavery’s dominion – so he spent the night in jail. When contemporary Ralph Waldo Emerson visited him in his cell the following morning, he famously asked “What are you doing in here?” to which Thoreau famously replied “Waldo, the question is, what are you doing out there? (Richardson 175).”

Over time, we’ve come to associate American literary figures with that sort of political sentiment. By necessity, a writer must think critically about the world around them, digging beneath the surface and looking past the facades that so many accept at face value. Politically, this has allowed the men and women who have practiced this craft to question the motives of the state and to quickly and astutely identify societal injustices.

Thus, literature has historically given voice to anti-establishment ideas, sometimes satirizing the status quo, sometimes advocating its overthrow, and sometimes even helping to cause it. Since wars are waged by the establishment, writers have historically been skeptical of war as well, viewing many conflicts as beneficial to the state, and detrimental to the citizens that comprise it.
In essence, writers have often stepped in to provide the counter-narrative to the state-sponsored version of events -- but the advertising industry’s involvement in World War I was a game-changer. Swimming against the current is always difficult, but as we'll see, with a tactical, efficient, highly organized and extremely well-funded campaign driving support for the Great War, it became that much more daunting.

We’re all affected by societal norms, but we have historically relied on writers to help us see the inequity, hypocrisy, or outright absurdity of these norms. When writers don’t serve this function, you can assume one of two things: Either they aren’t recognizing the injustice of the status quo, or they view it as too entrenched to change. For Lost Generation giants like Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald -- all very young men when World War I broke out -- it was probably a little bit of both.

It was not until well after the Great War had concluded, that these literary icons reacted to the societal pressures that had coerced them and so many others to volunteer for or otherwise support an effort that was, at first, extremely unpopular. So what took so long? Why weren't these men and so many other Lost Generation authors railing against the war from the outset? To answer that question, we'll need to delve into the history of World War I and into the history of the advertising industry that helped sell it.

1.3) The Origins of World War I and the Rise of Government-Sponsored Propaganda
While it had existed for centuries in one form or another, it was in the lead-up to World War I that the term “propaganda” first made its way into common usage (Casey). During this era, propaganda matured into a skillful, targeted, and highly manipulative machine, one capable of controlling the narrative, for better or for worse. With the continued rise of mass production and mechanization, armies grew far larger around World War I, but large fighting forces necessitated large civilian armies, which, in turn, necessitated the engagement of a larger portion of the populace in the overarching war effort (Casey). As a result, the campaign for the hearts and minds of the public became more important than ever before. All that said, selling a war to the masses becomes more difficult in situations like the one that existed prior to the United States’ involvement in World War I.

To begin with, wars fought on foreign soil tend to be a tough sell -- and they’re even tougher when their origins are as murky as those of World War I. The territorial disputes that culminated in the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand essentially amounted to a local spat, half a world away, between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, two nations that your average American undoubtedly would have struggled to locate on a map.

Given that fact, it’s not exactly surprising that the United States initially took up an isolationist stance, vowing not to get involved in what was a European war, involving European interests. It wasn’t until Germany began attacking U.S. merchant and passenger ships in the seas surrounding England that it even considered getting into the war. Then

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there was the Zimmermann telegram, an intercepted message that seemed to show the Germany trying to ally itself with Mexico, lest the United States enter the war. There is still some question about whether the latter was an elaborate ruse by British intelligence, meant to draw another ally into the war, but historians have largely rejected that theory (Boghardt 177).

In any case, it’s clear that World War I wasn’t your run-of-the-mill fight against tyranny or oppression -- even an imperialist war where there was some territory or influence to be gained might have been an easier sell. It also wasn’t your run-of-the-mill war in terms of how it was being fought. Sabers and single-shot rifles were being replaced with chlorine gas and Gatling guns. Advances in technology had made World War I the first truly modern war, and modern war was a decidedly different animal from what had come before it. And so, for the first time in American history, the government needed help selling a war -- and who better to turn to then the professional salespeople employed by the advertising industry?

1.4) Advertising as an "Implement of War"

During World War I, the United States Armed Forces contracted almost all if its myriad functions to military personnel. Outsiders were used sparingly and only for a few select tasks (Keene 25). That said, selling a war effort of this size was a big and difficult job -- one that the military itself was ill-equipped to handle. The advertising industry, however, was better equipped for this job than at any other time in its history (Casey). With the rise of radio, advertisers the world over could communicate with customers like

never before and were beginning to market goods “less on rational grounds and more
according to emotional appeals (Clampin).” Moreover, the continued proliferation of
mass production meant more people were trying to sell more things more often. All of a
sudden -- marketing was no longer about appealing to a want or need -- it was about
creating a want or need (Clampin). Advertisers were becoming skilled at synthesizing a
narrative, and then capitalizing on it, a skill that would prove integral to the U.S. Military.

The great author H.G. Wells once said, “Advertising is legalized lying,” while
William Faulkner called it, “selling something you haven’t got to someone who doesn’t
want it (Altstie, Grow 15)(Inge 83).” Whichever turn of phrase you prefer, the sentiment
is the same: Selling any product that isn’t attractive enough to “sell itself” requires, at
least, a gentle massage of the truth. As we’ve already established, World War I was not
the most attractive proposition. For proof of that, we need only turn to the enlistment
statistics, which show that only 73,000 men volunteered for The Great War in the first six
weeks of fighting -- just a shade over seven percent of the one million soldiers that
Woodrow Wilson had requested of Congress (Zinn 364).

There was also a significant and active opposition to the conflict from the anti-
war Socialist party, which was gaining strength and influence at a historic rate. The
Plymouth Review newspaper wrote of its meteoric rise, "probably no party ever gained
more rapidly in strength than the Socialist party just at the present time." The Akron
Beacon-Journal newspaper drew similar conclusions about the situation on the ground
and wrote that the country had "never embarked on a more unpopular war (Zinn 364,
365)." Eventually, this state of affairs prompted the Commander & Chief to read the

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3 Page numbers not available for Clampin piece. Full text can be accessed by visiting:
http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/commercial-advertising-as-propaganda
writing on the wall and call for a system of conscription. Congress quickly acted to pass the Selective Service Act of 1917, which became the basis for a selective draft of males aged 21 to 31, a range which was later expanded to include those from 18 to 45. Ultimately, the United States Military ended up with a total of 4.8 million soldiers, of which 2 million – less than half – had volunteered of their own volition (41).

Conscription had mustered a sufficient fighting force, but it could not instill morale in those that were drafted or win the hearts and minds of those left behind. For that task, the military needed to hire out, and -- for the first time in its history -- it sought to enlist advertisers in an official, public relations capacity (Lee, 79)(Casey). Just as advertisers were perfecting the practice of creating wants, needs, and even fears, the biggest client of them all walked in the door, looking to market ideas rather than products, ideas that would put these new advertising strategies to the test.

The armed forces quickly began collaborating with advertisers on selling everything from Liberty Loans to income tax on the home front, to sex, glory, and heroism overseas. Ads were papered across movie theaters, churches, office buildings, and department stores, all with one message: Unite behind the war effort. But these weren’t all your typical, clichéd calls to glory, these were calculated campaigns devised by professionals with years of experience in manipulating public opinion. As Ralph D. Casey puts it in his essay What Is Propaganda? "propaganda for the first time became [an] all-important and formal branch of government (Casey)."

Transforming the once random and disorganized discipline into a well-oiled machine, the military's professional propagandists quickly launched a clever and

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4 See citation no. 41. For more information, visit https://www.sss.gov/About/History-And-Records/Induction-Statistics.
ruthlessly manipulative campaign to discredit those who stayed behind and to lionize those that went over and fought. The latter were held up as hyper-masculine, sexually-desirable heroes who seized the moment and the former were put down as emasculated, defective cowards who let that very same moment get away.

The face of said campaign was a series of propaganda posters, many of which suggested (quite bluntly) that men who enlisted were real men and would thus be more attractive to women. Howard Chandler Christy, a successful World War I-era artist and illustrator, was responsible for several works that promulgated this notion. One of his pieces depicts an attractive woman in a naval uniform, smiling invitingly beside the text “Gee !! I wish I were a man, I’d join the Navy (Fig 1.1).” The same poster also implores the reader to “Be a man and do it.” Another of Christy’s posters showcases an attractive woman in a naval uniform as well, this time beside the text “I want you for the Navy (Fig. 1.2).”
Posters like these proved so successful that the United States Government devoted a wing of the erstwhile government agency known as The Committee on Public Information (which we'll discuss at length later) specifically to "pictorial publicity (Vaughn 30)." The division was headed up by famous American illustrator Dana Gibson -- whose "Gibson Girl" was the precursor to what came to be known as the "Christy Girl" -- and appealed to patriotic American illustrators to get involved in promoting the war effort.

Thanks to Christy's work, the military could now leverage sex in an attempt to aid recruiting for the first time in its history. Traditionally, war propaganda had appealed to a man’s sense of pride rather than his libido, but appealing to both at the same time proved even more effective. All that said, the new campaign would have been markedly less successful if there wasn’t at least a little truth behind such propaganda.
In Katherine Anne Porter’s *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, a reporter (Miranda) is entangled in an ill-fated love affair with a soldier (Adam) on his way to the front. Lamenting that he must go, she decries those who are staying behind, “I hate these potbellied baldheads, too fat, too old, too cowardly, to go to war themselves, they know they’re safe; it’s you they are sending instead (Porter 122).” In a sense, as the armed forces’ conscription process was deciding who was fit to fight, it was also deciding who was fit to love. Those who stayed behind were seen as falling into one of two categories: Unable to fight, or unwilling to fight. With the effectiveness of war propaganda rallying those on the home front to the cause, both of those designations debased these men in the eyes of "red-blooded," patriotic females.

Though it wasn’t released until 1943 -- in the heat of the second World War -- a song by Bette Davis entitled “They're Either Too Young Or Too Old” sums up the sentiment of many World War I-era women: “They're either too young, or too old, / They're either too gray or too grassy green, / The pickings are poor and the crop is lean. / What's good is in the Army, / What's left will never harm me.” In other words, the men left at home amounted to table scraps, pre-rejected and inadequate in one way or another.

The situation for enlisted men, of course, was just the opposite. They had been pre-screened as mentally and physically fit. In fact, the United States Military was so successful in marshalling the women who stayed behind in support of the war effort, that so-called “charity girls” became prevalent. These women provided soldiers with companionship, both sexual and platonic, and were interested only in those who had been bestowed with a uniform. As an added benefit, that uniform also qualified its wearer to
mingle socially with women of a higher class than his own, women he otherwise could have never interacted with (Gandal 9, 10).

Due to its collaboration with the advertising industry, the United States Military had created a climate in which it could leverage sex to sell the war, but after this sexualization of war lead to a deadly outbreak of venereal disease amongst soldiers, the campaign quickly pivoted to encourage a “‘clean' and celibate” fighting force (Gandal 6). As if that weren’t hypocritical enough, the military began court-martialed soldiers for risky sexual behavior and spearheaded an unprecedented effort to jail prostitutes and even promiscuous women seen as imperiling soldiers with their behavior (Gandal 112). As part of the Selective Service Act of 1917, the military had the power to “arrest any woman within five miles of a military cantonment” without probable cause (Gandal 111). As part of the act, not only did women forfeit their civil rights the moment they were arrested, they were also “subjected, involuntarily, to a medical exam (Gandal 111).” If a woman was found to be infected with a sexually transmissible disease, they could be sent to a hospital or “farm colony” to be rehabilitated (Rosen 35). In fact, some 30,000 women were “detained in detention houses, reformatories, or local jails by the CTCA [Commission on Training Camp Activities] (Gandal 112).”

We see a reaction to this state of affairs in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and the Damned*, which was first published in 1922. Fitzgerald began writing this novel shortly after the war ended and consequently, it's dripping with angst. The book's main character, Anthony Patch, is a member of the American gentry who is humiliated, emasculated, and essentially destroyed by his experience in the military. During his time in the camp, he becomes utterly depressed and is overtaken by a "deep loathing for the
military profession and all it connoted (Fitzgerald 281).” Part of what causes this disillusionment is the fact that Anthony is court-martialed during his time in camp for becoming involved with a charity girl named Dot. Not surprisingly, Fitzgerald himself was disciplined for a similar offense while in military training and clearly the irony of using sex to sell a war, while punishing soldiers and women for engaging in it, was not lost on the author (Gandal 178).

In fact, these sorts of ironies were at the heart of what caused much of the “génération perdue” to lose its way. Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and F. Scott Fitzgerald were 15, 16, and 17 respectively when World War I first broke out: Young, naive, and bristling with excitement to get over and get involved in the action: Prime targets for advertisers, newly employed by the United States Military. They were not yet the cynics they would soon become and weren't yet aware of just how disingenuous advertisers and government officials were capable of being.

1.5) War As an Implement of Advertising

As we’ve already established, selling the war provided a windfall for the advertising industry, and helped increase its power and influence in society. But that wasn’t the only way the industry benefitted from the war. Advertisers of the era also leveraged the fighting to help sell products on the home front, while doubling down on their propaganda. In his article “Commercial advertising as propaganda in World War One,” David Clampin shows us how this process played out in another allied nation: Britain.
“As the war developed, there was a surge in newspaper readership as the public clamoured for news from the front. This increase represented large numbers of potential customers to advertisers, who were keen to place advertising in pursuit of those readers who might be inclined to buy their products. Further, given the sense of unity within the nation, simple sales messages could be devised, which keyed into the popular narrative and reinforced pervasive propaganda messages. Patriotism was a recurring motif in commercial advertising, alongside the denigration of the enemy. In this process, buying the products of the Allied nations was absolutely key and extended to distinguishing the Allies’ approach to war in contrast to that of the enemy, as well as tacitly advocating an emotional connection through the consumption of these goods (Clampin).”

This process was prevalent in America as well, with companies like J.P. Morgan & Co., Eastman Kodak (Fig. 1.3), Perrier⁵, and many others running advertisements that appealed to patriotism and pro-war sentiment. Not only was the advertising industry making money selling the war, it was using the war to make money selling everything from tobacco to underwear. Throw in the fact that the war meant more readers for newspapers and more listeners for radio programs, and their ads could also reach more potential customers than ever before (O’Barr).

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⁵ Though Perrier was a French company, it ran ads in Allied nations like England and the U.S., encouraging patriots not to drink "German waters."
Furthermore, many of the advertising industry's clients, especially those in the manufacturing industry, had shifted from making consumer goods to "war production," a business which could continue if – and only if – the war continued to rage (Fox 74). All in all, advertisers clearly had a vested interest in making sure the war was popular and – one could argue – in making sure that it continued.

As we see in Fitzgerald's 1931 essay “Echoes of the Jazz Age,” it wasn't until after the fighting had ceased that most of the Lost Generation began to understand that the Great War had helped certain industries rake in historic profits. It was then that they began to wonder whether they had “gone to war for J. P. Morgan’s loans after all (Fitzgerald 1).”

From a modern perspective, it may seem naïve that they hadn't considered how private industry might be exploiting the fighting for its own gain, but at this point, the armed forces' relationship with private defense contractors – now known as the military
industrial complex -- was just beginning to develop in earnest (Ledbetter 18). Just as the military had preferred to handle propaganda in house before it contracted with advertisers during World War I, it had preferred to manufacture its own arms until at least the late 19th century. Though the private arms industry helped supply and fund the military as far back as the Civil War, it took another 20 years for a permanent relationship to develop (Ledbetter 18). By the time World War I rolled around, this relationship was still relatively new. Since this generation didn't have any prior examples of a large-scale military mobilization that directly benefitted private enterprise, the idea that executives might be lining their pockets with money earned from defense contracts likely wouldn't even have occurred to those that came to participate in the war effort -- especially not to the youngest and most impressionable among them.

On top of that, in the World War I era, a much lower percentage of the populace was educated. Estimates suggest that less than 20 percent of those entering the military at the time had attended high school, whereas, by 1960, 40 percent of those over the age of 25 had achieved a high-school degree; today, that number is closer to 90 percent (Gandal 84, 85)(46). Clearly, the majority of the citizenry was incapable of comprehending the nuances of foreign affairs, much less criticizing the way its government negotiated them. That said, finding folks who were both educated enough to understand what was going on and skeptical enough to openly doubt the state-sponsored version of events was rare to say the least.

1.6) Branding vs. Advertising

See citation no. 46. For more information, visit http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p20-566.pdf.
Thus far, we've been referring to the efforts of the professional marketers employed by the United States Government as advertising, but that's actually simplifying things a bit. Traditionally, advertising is used to create a call to action and to sell something in the short term. Though a good deal of propaganda featured urgent calls to enlist, advertisers were also playing the long game, one which can do more to influence behavior over time.

It would be entirely speculative to suggest that any Lost Generation author saw an ad in the newspaper that promised sex, glory, or both, and resolved themselves to enlist, but such direct cause and effect isn't the goal of all advertising. In fact, much of what the advertising industry did for the armed forces could be considered branding.

As opposed to traditional advertising, branding is about influencing the public's perception of a particular entity, and not just the products and/or services that said entity is offering (Clifton 17). Convince the public that a company or institution is trendy, and whatever it might be trying to sell becomes trendy by association. The same rule applies for companies or institutions that want to appear valorous, righteous, trustworthy, etc.

This idea is exemplified by one of the most famous advertisements in history: "The Penalty of Leadership," authored by Theodore F. MacManus for Cadillac automobiles. The ad was issued in response to criticism of the company's pioneering V-8 engine -- which had been short circuiting, causing fires, and generally not performing as advertised – but instead of extolling the merits of the engine itself, MacManus chose instead to issue a sort of brand manifesto (Fox 71, 72). Printed entirely in black & white, the spot is one long paragraph of text that essentially reads as an ode to those who have the courage to shoot for the stars and blaze their own trail. Though this may seem a
curious response, the ad is heralded today as one of the greatest of all-time. Rather than ignore or spin the issue, MacManus took the opportunity to define Cadillac as an industry leader and an innovator that – if it faltered – faltered because it was daring greatly, a quality to be admired and respected. In other words, advertisers don't always need to sell a product directly, sometimes the entity offering said product is a much easier sell.

When the military enlisted the advertising industry to help it sell World War I, its goal was to bolster enlistment, to be sure, but it was also to control the narrative about the armed forces and the United States in general. If it could control that narrative well enough, and for long enough, those institutions would get the benefit of the doubt when people were evaluating whether or not to buy liberty loans, take up charitable collections on the home front, or enlist and fight in the war. This combination of call-to-action-style advertising and long-term branding is how advertisers took an anti-war climate and created a pro-war fervor so pronounced, that to take up an anti-war stance was to relegate oneself to the fringe of society.

Of course, that’s not the place an author seeking acclaim, success or money wants to be. By the time the United States entered the war, Hemingway was writing for The Kansas City Star, Faulkner had begun working with a mentor who would shape his writing for years to come, and Fitzgerald was dreaming openly of literary acclaim, worrying that he would be killed in battle before that dream could become a reality (Young 137). All three men had at least an inkling that they might one day be celebrated authors and none of the three were willing to jeopardize that by staying behind and missing a chance for fame, glory, and -- perhaps most importantly of all -- a good story. Much of the rest of the Lost Generation was in the same boat. Anyone with dreams, or
status, or a reputation to protect would have been very wary of going against the prevailing winds. That meant not only avoiding anti-war speech, but also avoiding anything that could be perceived as anti-war action – which in turn would have meant not only enlisting but being one of the first to enlist.

1.7) Warped Expectations And Harsh Realities

As noted earlier, this paper posits that the Lost Generation's collective attitude was as much a product of warped expectations as harsh realities, but to drive this point home, we'll need to take an in-depth look at the actual wartime experiences of some of the era's major authors. In so doing, we will see how those experiences diverged wildly from what they – along with the rest of their generation -- had been promised, a disconnect that profoundly affected their subsequent writing.

Once again, let's use the example of Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald. From the outset of American involvement in the war, all three men wanted to be pilots, but a bad eye (Hemingway), short stature (Faulkner), and a poor performance (Fitzgerald) respectively derailed those dreams (Gandal 175). Moreover, the Army’s pioneering, meritocratic system meant that neither their Anglo heritage nor their well-to-do financial status qualified them as officers (Gandal 6). Instead, they were thrown into competition with men who had been comfortably “beneath” them all their lives and were ultimately left with war stories that were a far cry from those they may have envisioned and from those they’d seen glorified through propaganda.
Hemingway made it to the Italian front as an ambulance driver and was injured by shrapnel but never fought. Faulkner was rejected from the American Army because he was too short and -- after literally trying to stretch himself out and increase his height -- he joined the Canadian Royal Air Force, only to watch the war end before his training concluded (Gandal 153). Fitzgerald failed to secure his desired promotion during officer’s training and earned a reputation as the “world’s worst second lieutenant”; the curtain went up on the “big show,” as it was often called, before he could step on stage (Gandal 33). “I didn't go overseas,” said the writer in a 1936 interview with the New York Post. “My Army experience consisted mostly of falling in love with a girl in each city I happened to be in (Brucolli, Baughman 124).”

By now, Hemingway, Faulkner and Fitzgerald have become mythical figures in the American literary canon. As such, they are regarded with almost complete reverence and are seen as having possessed an astute and deeply nuanced understanding of the human condition. But back in April of 1917 -- when the United States first entered World War I -- these were relatively green young men, all less than 21 years of age; they were intelligent to be sure, but inexperienced nonetheless. That said, to suggest that they wouldn’t have been at all influenced by popular attitudes and trends is to hold them in unrealistic esteem. The advertising industry had built a nearly unanimous consensus around the previously unpopular prospect of American participation in World War I and -- given that these men were not against the war effort themselves -- we can conclude that they too were subject to the persuasive powers of this new era in propaganda, if only indirectly.
While there’s no way of knowing exactly how the marketing effort behind the war affected these three authors, we can say for certain that, as Keith Gandal puts it in his book “The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction of Mobilization,” that it was “not the case … that Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner saw the war itself or the American military involvement as a mistake (Gandal 55).” Instead, Gandal argues, these men felt the “mistake” was in the manner in which the war was being carried out, and more specifically, with the types of folks it elevated and the types of folks it sometimes kept down. We’ll come back to that later, but suffice it to say that none of these men were out picketing against World War I -- quite the contrary. As noted earlier, all three men volunteered to go over, despite the fact that the majority of the American fighting force was conscripted via the draft. So what was it that made three burgeoning authors -- keen observers of human nature and of the world around them -- want to rush off to fight half a world away? Could the advertising industry have influenced their decision?

Fitzgerald’s first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, provides us with some insight into the questions above. Muddled and intermittently brilliant, the book tells the tale of young Amory Blaine’s journey of self-discovery. For basically the entire novel, Blaine is wafting about, looking for purpose and meaning through experience. “I know myself … but that is all--” reads the last line of the book, which feels more like a starting gate than a finish line (Fitzgerald 260). Early on, Amory doesn’t know enough about himself to have any convictions about the world around him. He does things because others do them and society expects them and because he wants to see what they are about. There is no more depth to his actions than that.
Given that this novel is widely considered to be autobiographical, we can glean a great deal about Fitzgerald’s own young adulthood from Amory’s struggles. One particularly illuminating passage comes when Blaine -- now a second lieutenant in the 171st Infantry preparing to head to the front -- receives a letter from his mentor Monsignor Darcy, part of which reads, “You went to war as a gentleman should, just as you went to school and college, because it was the thing to do. It's better to leave the blustering and tremulo-heroism to the middle classes; they do it so much better (Fitzgerald 150).”

The significance of this passage becomes clearer when we consider its context. The character of Monsignor Darcy is widely believed to be based on a man named Monsignor Fay, with whom Fitzgerald had a close relationship. And Blaine, of course, shares many similarities with Fitzgerald: Both men were Midwesterners, both attended Princeton, both served in the Army, and both engaged in failed romances with upper-class young women. Therefore, we can assume that Fitzgerald’s attitude about a great many things, including the war, was reflected through his protagonist.

In *This Side of Paradise*, we are led to believe that Monsignor Darcy is right and that Blaine did go to war “because it was the thing to do,” which led Frederic James Smith to conclude in his article “Fitzgerald, Flappers, and Fame,” that " … like certain young America, [Fitzgerald] slipped into the world war via the training camp and officership. We suspect he did it, much as the questioning hero of *This Side of Paradise*, because ‘it was the thing to do’ (Bruccoli, Baughman 6)." The question we must answer, then, is: How did it become that way? *This* is where we truly begin to see how the advertising industry altered the course of American literature.
In 1917, as part of the United States Army's propaganda campaign, the aptly named James Montgomery Flagg created perhaps the most iconic recruitment poster in history. "I want YOU for U.S. Army" reads the text, as a stern-faced Uncle Sam points directly at the viewer, calling them to arms (Fig.1.4). While there aren't many accounts from soldiers who both recognized and admitted to the effect that advertising had on their decision to enlist, plenty of folks within the advertising industry understood just how much they were manipulating hearts and minds. Said Flagg after the war, "A number of us who were too old or too scared to fight prostituted our talents by making posters inciting a large mob of young men who had never done anything to us to hop over and get shot at ... we sold the war to youth (Turngate 19)."
Try as you might, you won’t find a more honest and direct account of the effect advertisers had on prospective soldiers. Note that Flagg doesn’t simply say “we sold the war,” but rather, “we sold the war to youth.” This was a targeted effort to appeal directly to younger, fitter, and more impressionable Americans. Posters like Flagg's were meant to leverage guilt and to gradually sway public opinion until the war became, as Monsignor Darcy put it, "the thing to do." This is how advertisers created and helped maintain what Stephen R. Fox refers to in *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators* as "near-unanimity of public opinion" in favor of a war that was once wildly unpopular (Fox 75). Once that effort succeeded, younger, more suggestible men flocked to the armed forces in droves and the military began to muster the fighting force it so desired – but swaying public opinion to this degree was no easy task and required a massive commitment on the part of the United States Government.

Before the United States entered World War I, there was simply no precedent for a large-scale, government-directed propaganda campaign, a reality that didn't deter journalist George Creel in the slightest (Vaugn xi). Creel was the major force behind the now infamous Committee on Public Information and pitched it to then President Woodrow Wilson by promising “a plain publicity proposition, a vast enterprise in salesmanship, the world's greatest adventure in advertising (Fox 75).” An independent agency of the U.S. government meant to sway public opinion on American participation in the Great War, what has come to be known as "The Creel Committee" largely delivered on that promise. With the help of an advertising division headed up by “five prominent figures in the trade,” the CPI placed $1.5 million worth of donated ad space and copy and sponsored 75,000 speakers who gave roughly 750,000, rousing, pro-war
speeches in American cities and towns (Fox 75). Creel enlisted some of the best copywriters in the country to write those speeches and mined the advertising industry's top talent for a variety of different tasks. He himself stated that he turned, "almost instinctively," to advertisers for help, knowing that they would be among the best-equipped professionals in the country to assist him in his mission (Vaughn 141). As Howard Zinn puts it in *A People's History of the United States*, the Creel Committee was "a massive effort to excite a reluctant public" and as such, it needed folks who were practiced at swaying hearts and minds (Zinn 364).

On top of these manipulative and subtly oppressive efforts to sway the public, Congress passed – and Wilson signed – the Espionage Act in June of 1917, which provided for jail sentences of up to 20 years for "whoever, when the United States is at war, shall willfully cause or attempt to cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny, or refusal of duty in the military or naval forces of the United States, or shall willfully obstruct the recruiting or enlistment service of the U.S. (Zinn 365)." While the bill also included contradictory language that insisted it was not meant to curtail free speech, The Espionage Act was used, on several occasions, to imprison those who spoke out against the war (Zinn 365).

It’s no surprise, then, that Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and so many others did not see World War I as a mistake, since anti-war speech was hushed and advertisers paid to work on the American public until they could achieve a consensus around the conflict. That said, it’s also not surprising that these men became deeply cynical after they were confronted with the harsh realities of war and realized that they, along with the rest of American society, had been sold a bill of goods.
1.8) Bonded Through Betrayal: The Reaction of the Literary World

Malcolm Cowley and Philip Young, among others, have helped advance the theory that members of the Lost Generation were wounded physically and/or mentally by the war and carried those scars forward into the fiction they produced. This version of events is still taught in classrooms all over the world and, while not wholly inaccurate, it is certainly oversimplified.

This reading applies “trauma theory” in attempting to understand the literature of the Lost Generation and the character of the generation in general, and it has gained particular notoriety as it pertains to Hemingway's work. Says Michelle Balaev in her essay "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory," "...contemporary literary trauma theory asserts that trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity (Balaev 1).” She goes on to describe so-called trauma novels that demonstrate "how a traumatic event disrupts attachments between self and others by challenging fundamental assumptions about moral laws and social relationships (Balaev 1)."

Young applies the theory to Hemingway’s oeuvre thusly: "...suffering from the wounds and shock crucially sustained in the First World War, Hemingway, in terms of Freud's analysis, was continually in his prose ... returning compulsively to the scenes of his injuries. He had his preoccupation with death as a result of an overexposure to it. He saw too many helmets 'full of brains,' and he built his monument in recognition of the meaning of his own misfortune (Young 166)."
While Young is inclined to read Hemingway’s seeming obsession with death and war as a post-traumatic stress reaction, and cites his World War I wounds as the central instance of trauma in his life, we have since learned that the author misrepresented his injuries, or, at the very least, didn't correct a common misrepresentation of them (Hemingway 37, 38). And since, like Hemingway, most Lost Generation authors didn’t see actual combat in the war, this reading of his work and the work of his contemporaries leaves quite a bit to be desired. It now seems safe to conclude that, contrary to popular academic belief, it was not the lingering nightmare of a hellish and brutal war that caused Hemingway and others to cast off established morals and modes of behavior.

If World War I-era authors were simply shell shocked from destruction and death, you’d expect the same result from the Civil War, World War II, or any number of large-scale conflicts. One wonders why there wasn't the same outbreak of apathy, disillusionment, and moral indignation after those conflicts. Were those experiences not grisly enough to inexorably damage those generations? In other words, why hasn’t every post-war generation become a Lost Generation?

One cannot diminish the war’s impact on the modernist literature that flowered in its wake, but the war was a symptom of a greater problem with the world, one the Lost Generation was confronted with in the disparity between what had been presented to them via propaganda and the horrid reality of World War I. The conflict crystallized a life-altering truth for the men and women of the era: The world was mostly full of shit. The way the war had been artfully sold and thoughtlessly bought, combined with the destruction and death that it wrought, prompted the authors of the era to develop what
Hemingway later called a writer’s “most essential tool ... a built-in, shockproof, shit detector (Plimpton).”

As noted earlier, the Lost Generation was a generation of disaffected cynics -- and nothing creates cynics faster than a major betrayal of trust by an authority figure or figures. Given what we know about how this generation was exploited, we can conclude that its collective consciousness developed, less as a reaction to the unspeakable brutality of war, and more as a reaction to the manipulations and machinations that coaxed so many to the front. If one’s own government is willing to hoodwink them into fighting and dying with false promises of glory, status, and sex, then who is a person to trust? Naturally, only the others who have been hoodwinked in a similar fashion.

In reflecting on the Great War and its aftermath, Fitzgerald said it was the 1919 May Day riots, during which Socialists clashed violently with Liberty Loan workers, that first got his generation wondering if it had “gone to war for J. P. Morgan’s loans after all (Fitzgerald 1).” He goes on to say that “...because we were tired of Great Causes, there was a ... short outbreak of moral indignation (Fitzgerald 1).” For Fitzgerald, it was the moment that the Lost Generation became so, the moment that they collectively realized they had been sold an industrial-sized can of snake oil. It wasn’t the war that resulted in the irreverence and moral looseness of the génération perdue, it was the realization that authority figures were by no means practicing what they so oppressively preached. They were appealing to honor, loyalty, honesty, and a host of other virtues that they themselves had callously cast aside in effort to recruit a young, strong, and unquestioning fighting force capable of furthering their aims. In fact, Fitzgerald himself addressed the already
tired reasoning that the destruction and death of the Great War was responsible for his generation’s collective attitude as early as 1921, when he said:

"I am tired ... of hearing that the world war broke down the moral barriers of the younger generation. Indeed, except for leaving its touch of destruction here and there, I do not think the war left any real lasting effect. Why, it is almost forgotten right now ... the younger generation has been changing all thru the last twenty years. The war had little or nothing to do with it. I put the change up to literature. Our skepticism or cynicism, if you wish to call it that, or, if you are older, our callow flippancy, is due to the way H.G. Wells and other intellectual leaders have been thinking and reflecting life. Our generation has grown up on their work. So college-bred young people, here and in England, have made radical departures from the Victorian era (Brucolli, Baughman 7)."

In Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, the phrase “one of us” is used three times, always by Lady Ashley and always to refer to the Count, a suitor of hers who has been in “seven wars and four revolutions (Hemingway 51).” Though it’s never stated outright that World War I is one of these conflicts, it’s certainly implied. While critics like Keith Gandal have suggested that the phrase is meant to delineate between those of Anglo heritage (like the Count) and ethnic/religious “others,” it is better read as a reference to those who experienced a shared betrayal. We certainly shouldn’t ignore the fact that Robert Cohn -- who does not fit into the “one of us” category -- is Jewish, but his ethnicity is not the main reason that he stands out. Though he did attend military school, he is someone who has not seen or been scarred by war -- in fact, he hasn’t seen
or been scarred by much of anything. It’s the reason that he breaks off his relationship with Francis, the reason he bumbles his way through his relationship with Brett, and the reason he doesn’t fit in with the others. Worldliness and endurance through pain and betrayal are the virtues that this crew respects, and Cohn has not been forged in the same crucible as they have. Even his distaste for drinking is viewed as a negative. Since, unlike the others, he doesn't have any real pain to dull, his relative sobriety contributes to his status as an outsider.

It was in the epigraph to this novel that the term "Lost Generation" first appeared in print and consequently, it is viewed as perhaps the quintessential text of the period. Given that it reads largely as an examination of the génération perdue -- and that it is also considered a roman à clef7 -- this book can tell us a great deal about Hemingway’s attitudes towards the military and towards war in general. With that in mind, consider that we learn early on that narrator Jake Barnes has been rendered impotent by an injury incurred by fighting in World War I. While impotence is often used to emasculate characters in literary texts, its function is more nuanced in this narrative. Rather than making him appear weak, pathetic or undesirable, Jake’s war wound actually makes him more attractive to Lady Ashley, the siren that seems to hold every man in the palm of her hand. Since Lady Ashley seems to covet Jake, not just in spite of his impotence, but largely because of it, their relationship bears closer examination. While it would be easy to assume he is attractive purely for his unattainability, framing the discussion in the context of the aforementioned distinction between “one of us” and “one of them” may offer us a sharper insight.

7 Loosely translated as "novel with a key" a roman à clef is a text in which each character is based on an actual person.
Since we know that Lady Ashley lost “her own true love” during the war, and since she generally groups the novel’s characters according to who has and hasn’t experienced it, we can connect her desire for Jake directly to this everlasting wound that it has left him with (Hemingway 36). His wound, then, serves to deepen the existential crisis he experiences as a betrayed and misled member of the Lost generation. So profound is the war’s effect on Jake, that it robs him of sex, and consequently, of romantic love, arguably the most important driving force in all of human life. We see this play out in the text when Brett refers to Jake as “my own true love” but then quickly says “Isn’t it rotten? There isn’t any use my telling you that I love you (Hemingway 48).” There isn’t any use because, given his impotence, they’ll never be able to consummate their love and they both know that it’s foolish to try to carry on a romantic relationship without a sexual component. Thus, we can see that Jake has been wounded more profoundly by the war than any other man in the novel, and is therefore more attractive to Lady Ashley, who also bears the scars of this great betrayal.

A close reading of William Faulkner’s work shows that he too felt betrayed by the tactics used to sell World War I. Soldier’s Pay, his first novel, presents the case of Cadet Julian Lowe, who is a "rejected" man, defined almost exclusively by the fact that he doesn't see any actual combat in the war. Since he was not good enough for the battlefield, he is not good enough for the object of his affection (Margaret Powers) either. She views him exactly as the military and the advertising industry has painted him: As a boy who stands in stark contrast to battle-hardened men like the injured Officer Mahon, whom she cares for an eventually marries.
"I would have been killed there if I could, or wounded like [Mahon]" cries Cadet Lowe to Margaret (Faulkner 47). It’s a pitiful scene and one that helps us understand just how effective the military and the advertising industry were in tying manhood, not just to military service, but to actual combat action. In spite of Lowe’s good faith attempt to get involved in the fighting (he was two weeks away from his pilot’s “wings” when the war concluded), he is forever branded as lesser than those who made it over.

Meanwhile, as Frederick R. Karl notes in his introduction to the text, Mahon is seen as “something extraordinary or sacred” and is painted as a “‘dying god’ figure (Karl xiii, xii).” Knowing that Faulkner was himself a thwarted pilot, one could write Soldier’s Pay off as an emotional and bitter response to a military establishment that didn’t recognize the author’s merits, but one could also read it as a legitimate critique of the synthetic and specious narrative promulgated by the armed forces, with the help of their new allies in the advertising industry.

Once confronted with the chaotic and senseless brutality of the war itself, or merely the oppressive discipline and conformity of military service, those enlisted would have quickly realized that the advertising industry’s narrative was, at best, wildly misleading. Courage, gusto, and valor did not, in fact, overcome all, and a surplus of all three had little effect on the chances that one would serve and/or die in unceremonious anonymity. Despite the military’s best efforts to further the narrative that those with their “blood up” could literally charge through machine gun fire during trench warfare, a
soldier needed only to experience one battle to dispel this particularly pernicious brand of fiction (Gandal)\(^8\).

In Katherine Anne Porter’s *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, we see echoes of this skewed narrative about life on the front. As Adam prepares for his deployment, he seems vaguely skeptical of the things he has heard but -- despite the fact that he has very little chance of coming back alive and even less chance of returning in one piece -- he seems resigned to his fate. At one point, he says of the hellishness he’s headed into, “It’s the kind of thing that happens once in a lifetime … I don’t know a darn thing about it, really, but they make it sound awfully messy (Porter 111).” His tone is one of resignation and his admission betrays a startling lack of knowledge about the war effort, the impetus behind it, and the tactics involved in its execution. This leaves the reader scratching his or her head, wondering how many soldiers were in the same boat.

We see a similarly naive and misled soldier in *Plumes*, an autobiographical novel by Laurence Stallings. The book follows Richard Plume, a United States Marine and red-blooded patriot who buys the war lock, stock, and barrel but later realizes that he was sold a proverbial bill of goods. Unlike much of the literature to emerge from the post-World War I era, *Plumes* isn’t just anti-war or anti-military in general. It criticizes the so-called Great War specifically, ruthlessly, and repeatedly, and skewers those who promoted it. At one point, during a conversation with Gary, a fellow World War I veteran, Richard says, “I'm no longer angry because I was seduced into it by men like Taft who went about speaking for Wilson's participation in the war. They were duped just as I was. I overestimated their intelligence. That poor old devil in the White House

\(^8\) From Prof. Gandal’s War & Mobilization Literature course via The Society for Military History Conference in 2009.
swallowed the same aphorisms fed me (Stallings 128).” Later, in speaking about a
German soldier that he wounded with a bullet through the shoulder, Richard repeats the
metaphor of the war being force fed to soldiers, this time in reference to the other side.
“He was fed exactly the same diet of shining swords that I was fed. Perhaps he got it
earlier and in stronger quantities. The Precisionists, as you say, worked on him from
babyhood. That's all the more reason why he is blameless (Stallings 129).”

The fact that Richard comes to feel a sort of kinship with a man he once saw as an
enemy combatant shows us just how far he has come in the course of the novel. Once he
realizes that he has been fooled into supporting the war, he comes to realize that things
were no different on the other side of the battlefield. Despite that this soldier was once
trying to kill him and anyone like him, Richard can now empathize with the man beneath
the uniform, since they were both betrayed by the powers that be. The German soldier
now belongs to the elusive “one of us” class that Lady Ashley identifies in The Sun Also
Rises and the only enemies that remain, the only group culpable for the war, are those
who “fed” the aphorisms to the populace -- those who sold the war.

As we know, the literature produced by Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald
does not directly grapple with whether or not World War I was justified, and none of the
three was against the war at its outset. While one could argue that these men didn’t write
anti-World War I novels because they didn’t the harbor the sort of anti-World War I
sentiment that drove such narratives, a compelling argument can be made that these men
were simply setting their sights on a broader, more fundamental injustice.

Sure, sending a generation of young men off to war for a dubious cause is morally
questionable, but in this case, the war itself was less consequential than the willingness of
the political establishment to consistently and deliberately mislead the citizenry for its own benefit. The way that the government collaborated with advertisers and sold the war to the youth caused a generation to lose confidence in authority, which left them lost in general, casting about for meaning and truth. That is what Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald were reacting to; that is why their work was dripping with apathy, angst, and cynicism. The problem they were addressing was that the civilized world was built on a foundation of lies and it was a problem so seemingly insurmountable, that the solution was to be practical and to get what one could out of life, rather than tackle it directly and spend one’s time spitting into a gale force wind. This is an idea that underpins much of the literature of the Lost Generation. As Jake Barnes puts it in The Sun Also Rises, “I did not care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it (Hemingway 119).”

1.9) Advertising and Commercialism in Lost Generation Literature

If advertising and commercialism truly played a major part in disenchanting the Lost Generation, then we should see echoes of its effects in the texts of titans like Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald. Not surprisingly, we do see such echoes – and we don’t have to look all that hard to find them. In fact, one could argue that advertising is actually a central character in perhaps the most celebrated novel of the post-war era: The Great Gatsby.

In Fitzgerald's opus, he takes great pains to delineate between the picturesque and idyllic landscape of both East and West Egg and the grotesque and desolate Valley of
Ashes, a place where industry and commercialism have turned the landscape into a wasteland. Overseeing this barren and hopeless locale, of course, are the giant, disembodied and bespectacled eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg:

"But above the gray land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic — their irises are one yard high. They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a nonexistent nose. Evidently some wild wag of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in the borough of Queens, and then sank down himself into eternal blindness, or forgot them and moved away. But his eyes, dimmed a little by many paintless days, under sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground (Fitzgerald 23)."

Reading Fitzgerald’s prose in these sections, one gets a palpable sense of violation, molestation even. Eckleburg "looms" over the valley on an enormous billboard, seeming to peer into the souls of all who pass. These giant eyes are probing beneath the surface and accessing something private and protected, something meant to remain out of sight.

Some have suggested that these eyes are meant to serve as a sort of ironic messiah in this commercialized wasteland; others have suggested that they represent the judgement of society and authority; but at their most elemental, these eyes are simply a component of an advertisement. Now that we know the sort of effect the advertising industry had on World War I -- how it created wants and needs, how it glorified the
battlefield, how it sold sex, etc. -- might it make sense to interpret these eyes as a commentary on advertising and how inescapable commercial manipulation had become for this generation? Perhaps even how it had perverted the very American Dream that Gatsby believed in so wholeheartedly?

While *The Great Gatsby* includes commentary on advertising in general, Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* tackles war advertising and propaganda more directly, suggesting that the words used and the messages presented by such “proclamations” willfully misrepresent the reality of war. About halfway through the novel, Hemingway’s Lieutenant Frederic Henry, an ambulance driver with the Italian Army, gets caught up in the Retreat from Caporetto, a real-life event that saw the Italian forces flee en masse as German and Austro-Hungarian battalions bore down on them. In the lead up to this chaotic and brutal retreat -- one in which the Italian Army cannibalized itself, subordinates gunned down officers, officers chased down deserters, and the chain of command collapsed -- Henry reflects on the state of the war and the way it has been bought and sold thusly:

"I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain
dates and these with the names of places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates (Hemingway 184, 185).”

In this section, perhaps the most famous in the entire novel, Henry asserts that the words commonly used in war advertisements (sacred, glorious, sacrifice, etc.) are devoid of dignity and even calls them “obscene” in comparison to concrete and objectively truthful words, numbers and phrases. These "obscene" words have been shouted at him and his fellow soldiers by their commanders and one gets the feeling that they have read them in an endless procession of “proclamations” as these are “slapped up” over pre-existing ones saying much the same thing and have been preaching their message for “a long time.”

While Henry is cynical about such messaging, this protracted inner monologue is set off by a fellow soldier named Gino’s use of the same words he is railing against. According to Henry, Gino is a “patriot” and as such, he has bought into the shouted words, barely audible above the roar of the rain and the repeated refrains of advertisements, callously calling for these men to lay down their lives for honor, glory, and other words that have becomes platitudes to Henry. Like Henry himself, Hemingway was an ambulance driver on the Italian front and -- though he did not participate in the retreat from Caporetto -- it provided him with a way to highlight what he believed to be the absurdity and meaninglessness of the words used to coerce young men into battle.

This section of the novel reads as an unromantic interpretation of the madness of war and a scathing rebuke of the military as an institution. It culminates in Henry being
hunted by, and fleeing from, his own Army, a cruelly ironic twist that effectively shows us what Henry tells us just a few pages earlier: He and soldiers like him are tools, fighting not for glory or courage or any of the now-obscene words that had been put forth as justifications for the war. They have been used, betrayed by those in positions of authority and influence. This is why Henry immediately makes a point of cutting the “cloth stars” off of his sleeves. The move is a direct rejection of the military that originally bestowed them and a rejection of what he now realizes is meaningless symbology. Given what we know about Hemingway, we can read this section of the book as a metaphor for his own experiences, and for his realization that he and others like him had been sold a bill of goods.

Unlike many Lost Generation authors, John Dos Passos did manage to “get over” and lived to regret it. The author recalls becoming desensitized enough to the brutality of war that he was able to eat a can of sardines for lunch, even as a fellow soldier was “having his leg sawed off” not far away (Carr 135). What he never seemed to acclimate to, however, was the way that the establishment had willfully misrepresented the grisly and soul-crushing nature of the war. Says Ronald E. Martin in *American Literature and the Destruction of Knowledge: Innovative Writing in the Age of Epistemology*, "... as he [Dos Passos] saw it, humankind was victimized not only by warmongering, profiteering, and patriotic cant, but by a subtler exploitation and brainwashing, too, by 'this all pervading spirit of commerce -- this new religion of steel and stamped paper (Martin 315)!"

As we have with other authors and thinkers from the era, we see again this revulsion for the commercial aspect of the Great War, this sense that it was being sold
and bought was something that disgusted Dos Passos enough to cause physical illness. The diary that the author kept on the front is full of this sort of sentiment and in one particularly scathing entry, he wrote, "At present America is to me utter anathema -- I can't think of it without belching disgust at the noisiness of it, the meaningless chatter of its lying tongues. I've been trying to read a copy of the New Republic that has come over -- honestly I couldn't get through it. Its smug phraseology, hiding utter meaninglessness -- was nauseous. And away off the guns roar & far & spit their venom & here I lie spitting my venom in my fashion (Martin 316)."

Not surprisingly, this sort of sentiment pervades Dos Passos’ novels which -- unlike the work of Hemingway, Faulkner and Fitzgerald -- are explicit in their anti-World War I bent. Like the aforementioned authors, however, Dos Passos volunteered for the war effort and joined the S.S.U. 60 of the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps (Martin 312). He came away from the experience deeply disillusioned about the war and about his home country, but, as we see in the complaints above, most of his vitriol wasn't directed at the brutality of the war or at the sort of trauma that Trauma Theory tells us can cause one to lose his or her identity. Instead, he targeted the scourge of commercialism and the “brainwashing” administered by the military establishment in conjunction with the advertising industry.

Dos Passos' Three Soldiers is held up by many critics as perhaps the best and most realistic World War I novel to emerge from The Lost Generation, and for all its grisly detail about the inhumane brutality of the war itself, some of its most poignant moments come as we watch soldiers in a supposedly free and Democratic society indoctrinated via propaganda. In Chapter III, John Andrews and his fellow soldiers are
being prepared for the front in training camp, and are fed propaganda in a scene that evokes George Orwell's *1984*. Dos Passos writes:

“The moving pictures had begun. John Andrews looked furtively about him, at the face of the Indiana boy beside him intent on the screen, at the tanned faces and the close-cropped heads that rose above the mass of khaki-covered bodies about him. Here and there a pair of eyes glinted in the white flickering light from the screen. Waves of laughter or of little exclamations passed over them. They were all so alike, they seemed at moments to be but one organism. This was what he had sought when he had enlisted, he said to himself. It was in this that he would take his refuge from the horror of the world that had fallen upon him. He was sick of revolt, of thought, of carrying his individuality like a banner above the turmoil. This was much better, to let everything go, to stamp out his maddening desire for music, to humble himself into the mud of common slavery (Dos Passos 21).”

After Andrews' inner monologue, a fellow soldier turns to him and asks "Ain't this some film?" and then another, who comments, "Gee, it makes ye hate the Huns." It's one of the more disturbing scenes in the novel as we can see how impressionable young men are being misled en masse and how film provides the perfect medium to send the same message to a group of soldiers simultaneously.

In fact, these sorts of films proved so effective at creating patriotic sentiment that George Creel’s Committee on Public Information -- “the world's greatest adventure in advertising” -- quickly adopted a film division which churned out pro-war propaganda pieces, including three feature length films: *Pershing's Crusaders, America's Answer,*
and Under Four Flags. All three were produced in the course of a single year: 1918 (Vaughn 205).

In another Dos Passos novel -- One Man’s Initiation: 1917 – Martin Howe, an ambulance driver during World War I, expostulates on the power of media thusly, “America, as you know, is ruled by the press. And the press is ruled by whom? Who shall ever know what dark forces bought and bought until we should be ready to go blinded and gagged to war? ... People seem to so love to be fooled (Dos Passos 115)."

This sentiment sounds very familiar, as we see Howe’s final statement -- “people seem to so love to be fooled” -- reflected in Andrews’ desire to “humble himself in the common mud of slavery.” Furthermore, the “dark forces” he refers to seem to be a stand-in for the military and their advertising industry counterparts. As we've seen, they did, in effect, "rule the press" and one could certainly argue that they "bought and bought" until a nation was ready to "go blinded and gagged to war."

Like so many others, Dos Passos was a member of the Lost Generation, not because he witnessed an unspeakably brutal war, but because he witnessed the sale of said war under false pretenses. The idiom “once bitten, twice shy” is perhaps the most succinct way to explain the génération perdue and the wonderfully cynical art that it produced. All it took was one big lie by the establishment to get a generation of young people to cast off anything associated with the authority that had misled them, including the flag that served as the banner for such deceit. While Hemingway, Fitzgerald and many Lost Generation Americans chose to expatriate partly for the cultural enrichment that Europe had to offer and the community of artists it provided access to, there was another reason many chose to leave: Their home country had betrayed them.
1.10) Counter-Narrative: The Link Between Advertising and Literature

While we don’t tend to lump them together with literary figures, advertisers and publicists are writers in their own right. They too compose narratives hoping to affect or sway hearts and minds with what they have to say. The real difference, is that what literary figures have to say is organic and is said of their own volition, while what advertisers have to say depends entirely on the product or service they are trying to market.

Today, advertising is often thought of as a mirror held up to American culture, which merely reflects society at large, but this wasn't always the case. By the time the United States entered World War I, the advertising industry was on the doorstep of its golden age: The 1920s (Fox 272). The conflict provided unprecedented access to the public, unprecedented cooperation from government, and was the perfect training ground to test the idea of not just reflecting American culture, but molding it (Vaughn 142). The industry then carried this practice through the roaring '20s but once the decade turned, the landscape changed and it functioned "more as mirror than mindbender, responding to American culture, more than shaping it (Fox 272)."

Not surprisingly, the mirror metaphor is often used to describe literature as well. Fyodor Dostoyevsky once wrote that literature is "both a picture and a mirror, it's the passions, the expression, the subtlest criticism, edifying instruction and a document (Dostoyevsky 42)." Others have taken this one step further and noted its ability to
actively effect, rather than reflect, the course of history. Said Oscar Wilde in his essay *The Decay of Lying*, "Literature always anticipates life. It does not copy it, but moulds it to its purpose. The nineteenth century; as we know it, is largely is an invention of Balzac (Wilde 41)."

Despite some major differences, it's clear that these two disciplines actually share quite a bit of DNA. Yet for some reason, when we think of literature, from any era, we almost never consider the influence that advertising had on what was produced. After all, we’re far more exposed to advertisers’ narratives than those of writers and, during certain eras, those narratives were partly responsible for establishing the cultural norms that literary figures, in turn, reacted to.

Since advertising involves a great deal of written communication, those who work in the industry also tend to have similar academic backgrounds to those of authors. In fact, the advertising industry is and always has been a common landing spot for once-aspiring or still-aspiring novelists. Though the literary crowd tends to dismiss these folks as “sell outs,” we cannot overlook their capacity to shape public opinion, even if we question their impetus for doing so.

In an examination of any literary period, it's essential to contextualize the works being studied. Anything that had a significant effect on the culture of the era in question becomes significant to an analysis of said era. Therefore, as academics, we simply cannot ignore the effect that advertising had on the Lost Generation, and we'd be better served by making it a centerpiece of our study.

1.11) Conclusion: Redefining the Génération Perdue
The work of the génération perdue is perhaps America's seminal contribution to literature. Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and other writers from the era have become iconic figures and the novels, short stories, and essays they produced are discussed and dissected just as actively today as ever before. Despite the substantial energy devoted to the study of this era, however, critics are still divided on how it should be understood. Some attribute the angst, cynicism, and apathy that pervades the works that have emerged from the period to post-traumatic loss of identity and disillusionment. Still others posit that some of the Lost Generation's most famous authors were frustrated and embittered, precisely because they didn't fight in the Great War, citing textual evidence of anger at the military's meritocratic system and the resultant societal shakeup.

Despite the massive and unprecedented effort to "sell" World War I, however, critics have seldom discussed the role that professional propagandists played in informing some of history's most famous literary texts. As we've seen, Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Stallings, Dos Passos, Porter, and a host of other Lost Generation authors were influenced by the large-scale campaign to transform an unpopular war with dubious origins, into a war backed by a broad popular consensus. Without considering this crucial piece of context, it's difficult -- if not impossible -- to accurately appraise many of the era's defining texts.

Knowing that a propagandized and idealized picture of World War I was thrust upon this generation, and that the reality on the ground diverged dramatically from that picture, we can understand the root cause of the moral indignation that critics have been dissecting for years. It was not the bullets, the bayonets or the shrapnel that cut the
deepest, but the lies. A generation, collectively manipulated by the authority figures it implicitly trusts, becomes a generation of cynics, a generation that wants nothing to do with the morals, standards, or even the basic structure of the society that sold them down the river; a generation that spends the next decade reappraising the world around them, counting the few things it can take for granted, searching for meaningful, objective truth in a world full of subjective and self-serving platitudes; a generation defined by the common bond of shared betrayal and consoled only by the best form of revenge: Living well; an extravagant generation, a jaded generation, an outspoken generation, a generation that was not so much lost as fed up, and looking to forge its own way through the world.
Works Cited


41.) “Selective Service System: History & Records” https://www.ssa.gov/Nov21


