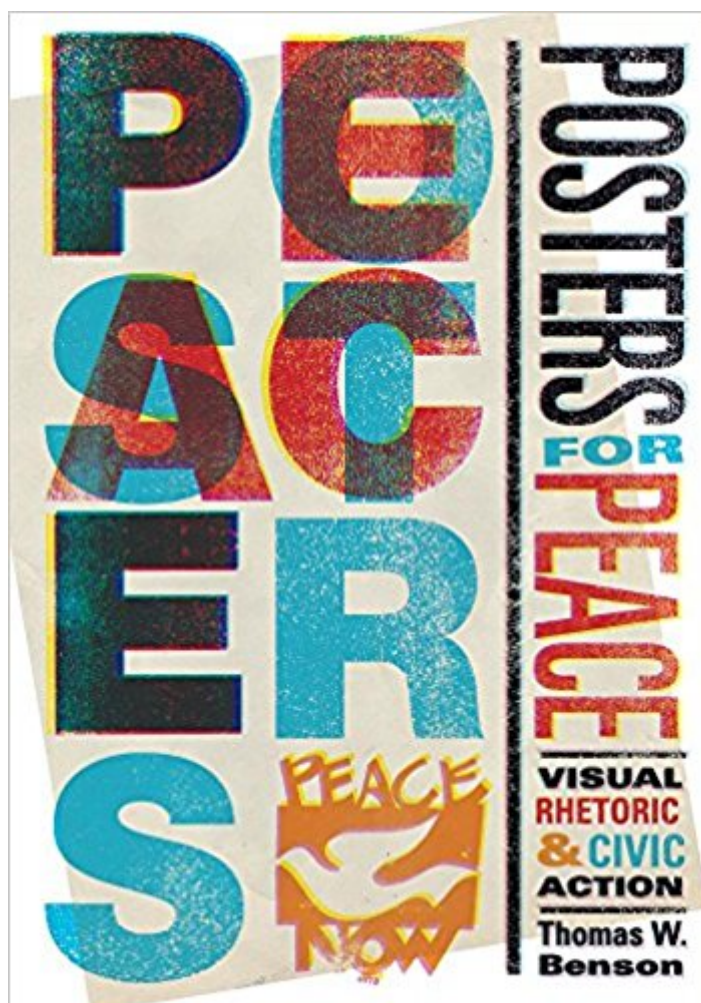


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Posters For Peace: Visual Rhetoric And Civic Action



Synopsis

By the spring of 1970, Americans were frustrated by continuing war in Vietnam and turmoil in the inner cities. Students on American college campuses opposed the war in growing numbers and joined with other citizens in ever-larger public demonstrations against the war. Some politicians—including Ronald Reagan, Spiro Agnew, and Richard Nixon—exploited the situation to cultivate anger against students. At the University of California at Berkeley, student leaders devoted themselves, along with many sympathetic faculty, to studying the war and working for peace. A group of art students designed, produced, and freely distributed thousands of antiwar posters. *Posters for Peace* tells the story of those posters, bringing to life their rhetorical iconography and restoring them to their place in the history of poster art and political street art. The posters are vivid, simple, direct, ironic, and often graphically beautiful. Thomas Benson shows that the student posters from Berkeley appealed to core patriotic values and to the legitimacy of democratic deliberation in a democracy—even in a time of war.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Thomas Benson has rediscovered and shared a treasure of poster art, along with some history, brilliantly told.”—Tom Hayden
“The historical material Benson offers is as valuable as his rhetorical scholarship. The essay gives readers insights into the meanings that the artists and their audiences found in 1970. The plates alone are worth the price of the book, making the volume as a whole valuable for readers interested in art, pop culture, and Vietnam

War’s politics as well as visual rhetoric. J. E. Frost,
Choice “With Posters for Peace: Visual Rhetoric and Civic Action, Thomas Benson
generously shares an archival treasure trove with readers. By itself that might be enough, but
Benson doesn’t stop there. He offers a thoughtful and sophisticated rhetorical analysis of the
posters that reads them in historical context, elaborates the visual traditions from which they drew
their representations, and considers how viewers of the era might have responded to them. In doing
so, he makes a compelling case for the posters’ rhetorical importance, both then and now. The book
skillfully models the practice of visual rhetorical history for students and scholars
alike. • Cara Finnegan, University of Illinois “Long before there was a
subdiscipline called ‘visual rhetoric,’ Thomas Benson was probing the rhetorical
dimensions of visual images. His books on the films of Frederick Wiseman and on political
documentaries set the standard for rhetorically informed criticism of documentary film. Now Benson
has turned his attention to the political protest posters that appeared in Berkeley, California,
throughout the tumultuous year of 1970. Benson was a visiting assistant professor at
UC Berkeley during the 1969-70 academic year, where he witnessed firsthand
the distribution and placement of many of the posters he examines in this book. He places the
posters in their political, cultural, social, and rhetorical contexts, and he engages in a close reading
that uncovers the layers of meaning and significance that were clear to the creators at the time of
production but which now, almost forty-five years later, are often lost in the mists of time. This is a
masterful work of recovery that reminds us anew of that time when the whole world was
watching. • Martin J. Medhurst, Baylor University “Thomas W. Benson’s
Posters for Peace examines numerous political posters that circulated in Berkeley, California, in
1970 during intense controversies over the Vietnam War and racism. Benson’s critical
approach features close examination of the posters in combination with creative comparisons in
order to explore their visual rhetoric in the national scene. To develop his central argument, he
traces earlier sources of consequence pertaining to posters as a rhetorical medium with an
international history. Benson’s book offers his readers a wealth of previously unstudied primary
materials, which are featured and catalogued in the course of his careful history and criticism of the
protest rhetoric. • Lester C. Olson, University of Pittsburgh

Thomas W. Benson is Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Rhetoric at The Pennsylvania State
University.

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