In 1942, Zora Neale Hurston wrote, “Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.”\textsuperscript{1} My poking and prying over these past two semesters has led me on a thrilling journey. Late nights and long hours have been marked by the unmatchable excitement of discovering the perfect piece of evidence or crafting a seamless sentence. Proving the impact of the advertising industry on the British Ministry of Information’s propaganda posters in “An Identity of Crisis” has developed my skills as a researcher and increased my confidence as a scholar.

I wanted to research an issue that synthesized my knowledge from both my History and Communications major. This train of thought brought me to the issue of propaganda. I have studied propaganda from both a historical and a rhetorical perspective in my classes; analyzed and attacked scholars, propaganda had an undeniably powerful effect on the course of history. In the past few years, the British “Keep Calm and Carry On” World War II poster has been popularized and satirized on social media platforms. When I first saw this poster, it made me curious. How did the British population react to these types of posters? Were they successful? I was interested in discovering the effectiveness of propaganda posters. However, after talking with several professors, I recognized the difficulty of accurately judging public opinion. I realized that my efforts would be better directed in exploring the creation, rather than the reception, of the posters. Who fashioned these posters? How did they decide on those specific words? What factors went into that decision? Thinking about how I could mold this curiosity into a manageable topic, my initial interest was curbed by the realities of conducting research. All of my classmates were choosing American-based topics. How would I access primary sources for a British issue?

I knew I would need an archive that provided an insider view of the creation of British propaganda. Following the recommendation of a former professor and the tip of a classmate, I discovered “The Cabinet Papers,” a massive online collection of Great Britain’s National Archives. Initially, I had romanticized visions of sitting in dusty, old archives, leafing through stacks of yellowed documents. The Cabinet Papers, however, epitomizes modern research. From the comfort of my dorm room, I could read page after page of scanned government minutes, memorandums, and notes. My eyes lit up at words like “top secret” and names like “Winston Churchill.” I marveled that I, a college student in Philadelphia, had free access to this

\textsuperscript{1} Zora Neale Hurston, \textit{Dust Tracks on a Road} (New York: HarperCollins, 2006 [1942]),143.
wealth of knowledge. Encouraged that my research might actually be possible, I began exploring Temple Library’s online sources. Through the database system, I found the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, an archive that would prove crucial to my research. This source allowed me to read hundreds of transcripts from Parliamentary debates as British politicians argued, joked, and worried about the role of propaganda in their country. Spending hours in these online archives, I quickly honed my search techniques. Early in the process, I would hit dead-ends; my key words would not produce any results or I would get lost in the sheer overwhelming quantity of information. After a few weeks, however, my fingers flew over the keyboard; I became an expert in entering the right key words and using the correct search limits.

In addition to online sources, I utilized all possible methods of acquiring books through the Library systems. Early in the process, I needed a great number of secondary sources to form my base knowledge of the topic. I spent hours wandering the stacks of Paley Library. I viewed these times as a scavenger hunt. Starting with an initial “clue” – an author recommended by my professor, a book I’d come across on the Diamond Catalogue, a title that had been cited in one of my existing sources – I would examine the nearby shelves. Memoirs of leading figures were seminal to my argument; from political cartoonist David Low to Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels, these diaries and autobiographies shaped my research. Finding these sources took me beyond the vastness of Paley’s stacks; I ordered many books through E-Z Borrow and WorldCat. These systems gave me access to fascinating primary sources. My friends made fun of the fifty-some books checked out on my library account, but I viewed each one as significant, as a building block to the argument I was constructing.

One of the difficult aspects of my research was that I found everything fascinating. There were so many sources, articles and books that related to my thesis. My struggle lay in confining myself to a manageable topic. Seeking the advice of trusted faculty proved essential. Dr. Richard Immerman, Dr. Jay Lockenour, Dr. Beth Bailey, and Dr. Petra Goedde of the History Department all provided invaluable advice, guiding me to the works of leading scholars and helping me judge the worth of my sources. Dr. Bailey helped me recognize the importance of seeking the most current secondary sources. Dr. Immerman introduced me to the work of Edward Bernays, a figure that dominates my thesis. Without the help of these professors, I would have been lost.
I thrilled to discover that I, as a Temple undergraduate student, could conduct real research about a British topic. Online archives, library databases, and extensive book-borrowing systems allowed me to construct a compelling, original argument about World War II propaganda. Making full use of available resources was crucial in completing my thesis. The information I discovered is of interest to a broad range of people. I appeal to historians in my claim that British propaganda was a crucial aspect of their war experiences. I appeal to those interested in rhetoric and communication in my analysis of visual posters. Today, in an age dominated by media, when businesses pay millions of dollars for effective advertising, everyone can benefit from thinking more deeply about our current concepts of persuasion and propaganda have been influenced by the past.

Using the Library database, I was able to read a Parliamentary Debate from June 1944. The Minister of Information, Brendan Bracken, ended his speech saying, “I leave it to the historians, if they have a column or two to spare in their histories, to say whether the Ministry have done a good job in this war or not.” Almost seventy years later, my research explores the inner workings of this Ministry. Although, my thesis remains in the draft stages, I can already recognize how much I have benefitted from this process. Writing my thesis has synthesized all of the skills I have developed during college and has deepened my confidence as a scholar. It allowed me to progress from simply answering professors’ prompts to conducting and completing my own research. My long-term goals include obtaining my Ph.D. in history. I know that the experience of researching and writing “A Crisis of Identity” will prove invaluable in my future in academia.