How Norman Rockwell Became An Essential Part Of American Culture

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HOW NORMAN ROCKWELL BECAME
AN ESSENTIAL PART OF AMERICAN CULTURE

BY
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Chapter 1 - Introduction and Overview

Introduction

Norman Rockwell (1894 – 1978) is one of the best-loved American artists. He is an illustrator in a class of his own. Rockwell provided sentimental story-pictures idealizing small town America and enjoyed creating average people doing average things. He worked in a seemingly innocent realist style and he painted happy soldiers and honest presidents. Many artists laughed at him, but the public loved him. And no one can argue his talent of producing paintings that told stories without using a single word.

Background

Norman Perceval Rockwell was a pale, skinny, eight-year-old. The kids called him “Mooney” because of his thick glasses. They made fun of his black wool coat – a hand-me-down from his grandfather. They laughed at his awkward gait. His older brother, Jarvis, was a natural athlete and that made Rockwell even more self-conscious about his clumsiness. There was not much he could do about that, but as quickly as he could, he burned the heavy coat with its black velvet lapels, and he dropped the middle name of Perceval, even though his mother told him it had belonged to an English hero. (Gherman, Beverly. Norman Rockwell: Storyteller with a Brush. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, pages 1-4)
Somehow Rockwell was able to forget about all of his physical deficiencies each night when his father picked up a novel by Charles Dickens and began to read. His father's voice may have been monotonous, but it didn't prevent Norman's imagination from soaring. He began sketching the characters like Fagin and Sikes, the Artful Dodger, and Oliver himself from Oliver Twist. (Gherman, page 3)

Every summer his father took the family to stay on a farm in upstate New York near the Catskills. There, he and Jarvis swam in ponds, fished in lakes, searched for bullfrogs, and went on hayrides. They also helped with milking and picking crops. For Rockwell the chores never seemed like hard work because he was so happy to be in the country. He would later capture that sense of joy in some of his paintings like No Swimming. In this piece, three boys and their dog are racing for their lives in front of a No Swimming sign. The dog's fur is flying and so are their clothes. Although they are worried about getting caught, the boys are also exuberant as they race throughout the country setting. (Gherman, page 3)

Rockwell felt those summers influenced his later work because he gained a sense of freedom and an appreciation of the natural work while he lived in the country. He soon learned that cities could be dangerous places. He was only seven when President William McKinley was assassinated in front of a large crowd in Buffalo, New York. (Gherman, page 4)

His mother didn't encourage him to become an artist, even though his maternal grandfather had been a portrait painter and his father was able to draw well enough to copy illustrations in magazine. Draw for a hobby, but find a respectable way to earn a living, she counseled.
But despite his mother's pleas, Rockwell knew he could not ignore his talent. So at the age of fourteen, he enrolled in art class at the New York School of Art. There he hoped to study every aspect of drawing and to learn all the technical aspects he would need to become a successful illustrator. Two years later, he left high school to study art at the National Academy of Design. He soon transferred to the Art Students League, where he studied with Thomas Fogarty and George Bridgman, both who taught him a great deal that would later bring him fame. (German, page 4)

Norman Rockwell found success early. He painted his first commission of four Christmas cards before his sixteenth birthday. While still in his teens, he was hired as art director of Boy's Life, the official publication of the Boy Scouts of America, and began a successful freelance career illustrating a variety of young people's publications. (German, page 4)

At age 21, Rockwell's family moved to New Rochelle, New York. There, he set up a studio with the cartoonist Clyde Forsythe and produced work for such magazines as Life, Literary Digest, and Country Gentleman. In 1916, the 22 year old painted his first cover for The Saturday Evening Post, the magazine considered by Rockwell to be the "greatest show window in America". Over the next 47 years, another 321 of his works would appear on the cover of The Post.

Although the covers were the most difficult work Rockwell did, they were also his favorite. The editors of the magazine made sure that the covers were not controversial or upsetting. They wanted the art to be in good taste and to not offend a single reader. Rockwell thought up several ideas and did rough sketches. When he went into the office to show them to the
art editor, he often acted them out, showing what each character would do. After the editor approved his ideas, Rockwell went to paint the actual covers.

*The Post* was read in millions of American homes. It printed thousands of extra copies of the magazine when Rockwell’s covers appeared because the public loved them. Many people remember waiting eagerly for the weekly magazine to arrive to discover if it had a Rockwell cover. If so, they carefully tore it from the rest of the magazine and pinned it to the wall. It touched their emotions and reminded them of youth, home, and the good life they were living.

In 1916, Rockwell married Irene O’Connor. They would divorce in 1930. When the United States declared war on Germany in 1917, Rockwell joined the Navy and was sent to Charleston, South Carolina. He was on the staff of the base newspaper because he was not strong enough to join military action in Europe. They quickly recognized his artistic ability and put him to work drawing portraits of the men to send home to their wives or girlfriends. He was discharged in November 1918 and went home to New York.

In 1927, when Charles Lindbergh became a national hero after his solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean, Rockwell decided to paint the handsome young pilot as a pioneer of the skies, just as the early explorers and pilgrims had been pioneers on the ground. But this was a rush job. He had only one day in which to complete the painting and get it to the magazine before it became old news. Quickly he found a model and an aviator’s cap and worked around the clock for 26 hours.
Norman was 47 when WWII broke out, which was too old to serve. But war was in his thoughts, in everyone’s thoughts, because young men were being drafted, food items were being rationed, newspapers and rubber products were being recycled for the war effort, and there were frequent air-raid drills. He wanted to reflect the mood around him, but he did not want to draw covers concentrating on battle scenes. (Gherman, page 28)

He decided there was another way. He could tell the story of the war through the experiences of a fictional young man who just enlisted into the Army – Willie Gillis. Norman painted scenes of him at the USO, reading the hometown newspaper when he should have been peeling apples on KP duty, sitting solemnly in church, and getting food packages from home. In a later cover, he painted portraits on the wall of six generations of the Gillis men in their uniforms from the time of the Revolutionary war right through to present day Willie wearing his helmet. Thinking they were real, readers wanted to know what happened to Willie after the war, so Norman painted him as a college student using a grant under the GI bill to pay for his education, as so many young men did. (Gherman, page 29)

The 1930s and 1940s are considered to be the most fruitful decades of Rockwell’s career. In 1930 he married Mary Barstow, a schoolteacher he met while visiting friend in California. The couple had three sons: Jarvis, Thomas and Peter. The family moved to Arlington, Vermont in 1939, and Rockwell’s work began, more consistently, to reflect small-town American life. The whole town soon became involved in modeling for Norman or in helping him find props, make props, or get anything else he needed. (Gherman, page 18)
Norman built a studio out of a converted barn in front of the house, and the boys were in and out of the studio, offering their opinions, sometimes posing for Rockwell, sometimes trying to get him to come out and play ball with them.

But Rockwell’s studio burned down in the summer of 1943 just a few nights after he had completed four major works and taken them to the Post. He lost his original artworks, including many Post covers, all his brushes and paints, other artist’s work, all his costumes and props, and the sketches he had been working on for FDR and the White House. As sad as he felt, Rockwell was still able to make a humorous vignette of drawings called My Studio Burns, showing the events of that July night.

In 1953, the Rockwell family moved from Arlington, Vermont, to Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Six years later, Mary Barstow Rockwell died unexpectedly. In collaboration with his son Thomas, Rockwell published his autobiography, My Adventures as an Illustrator, in 1960. The Saturday Evening Post carried excerpts from the best-selling book in eight consecutive issues, with Rockwell’s Triple Self-Portrait on the cover of the first.

Rockwell continued to do covers for the magazine for the next 35 years, averaging seven a year. There were a total of 321 covers, all of them telling an emotional and universal story about the way Americans lived. His great talent was that his paintings told stories without using a single word. (Gherman, page 17)

In 1961 Rockwell married Molly Punderson, a retired teacher. Two years later, he ended his 47-year association with The Post and began to work for Look magazine. During his 10-year
association with *Look*, Rockwell painted pictures illustrating some of his deepest concerns and interests, including civil rights, America’s war on poverty, and the age of space.

In 1963, Rockwell made a major decision to leave the *Post* after almost half a century of working for the magazine. It meant giving up the security of that long relationship, but he was ready for a change. (Gherman, page 45)

*Look* Magazine immediately offered Norman a new challenge – go out into the world and show our readers what you find. He had always been concerned about social problems, and yet had never been able to express that concern in his *Post* covers (Gherman, page 45).

In 1973, Rockwell established a trust to preserve his artistic legacy by placing his works in the custodianship of the Old Corner House Stockbridge Historical Society, later to become the Norman Rockwell Museum at Stockbridge. The trust now forms the core of the Museum’s permanent collections. In 1976, in failing health, Rockwell became concerned about the future of his studio. He arranged to have his studio and its contents added to the trust. In 1977, he received the nation’s highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, for his “vivid and affectionate portraits of our country”. He died at his home in Stockbridge on November 8, 1978 at the age of 84. (*The Artist: A Brief Biography of Norman Rockwell*, The Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, MA, 2001)
Research Question

The author is researching the question: "How did Norman Rockwell become an essential element in American culture?"

Purpose/Need for the Study

The world has drastically changed since the days when The Saturday Evening Post displayed Rockwell's latest idea. But have people really changed that much? Or have many of the events, traditions and feelings of the past stayed with us into the twenty first century? The author will examine how some of the basic values from the era of Rockwell's popularity can be credited for his timeless success. The author will look at why his work is still drawing crowds of people from all areas of society. What makes people gaze at his barbershop scene, his doctor's visit, and his Thanksgiving dinner? Is there simplicity in American society that really stretches across generations?

Whether one likes or dislikes Rockwell's work, there is no argument that he represented everything the serious art world hated. How many 18 year olds worked as a commercial illustrator and then went on to make a handsome living producing advertisements for Ford, Coca Cola and the enormously popular Saturday Evening Post? He provided sentimental story-pictures idealizing small town America by working in a seemingly innocent realist style. The snobs laughed but the public loved him.
Anyone with their eyes open will see that Rockwell was an illustrator in a class of his own. But was he more? A man who suffered most of his life from a lack of confidence and depression, Rockwell was able to create political works that voiced outrage at intolerance, a sentiment that still stir the same reactions today as it did back then. (Moreover: “Exile on Main Street”, The Economist, London, December 4, 1999, page 81)

**Definition of Terms**

“commissioned” – custom made; made to order

“war bonds” – a type of US savings bond last sold during WWII, when they helped pay for the war effort, focused on civilian’s patriotism, and kept inflation down by removing money from circulation

“drafting” – the creation of drawings that represent the various aspects of an object’s form, show the object projected in space, or explain how it is built. Drafting was done with precision instruments until computerization revolutionized production methods in architectural and engineering offices.

“illustration” - picture

“freelance” – self-employed
"Photoshop" – professional image-editing software that helps you work more efficiently, explore new creative options, and produce the highest quality images for print, the Web, and anywhere else.

"Winslow Homer" – American artist (1836-1910) born in Boston who grew up at a time when the city was filled with abolitionist debates and controversy. He was apprenticed in a lithography shop before taking up work as a freelance illustrator. He trained as a fine artist at the National Academy of Design where he exhibited his work the following year.

"NC Wyeth" – American illustrator and muralist raised on a farm in Massachusetts. He learned drafting and illustration in Boston before studying with the master illustrator, Howard Pyle. His first works depicted the American West. During his career he contributed his memorable illustrations to more than 100 books, like Treasure Island, Kidnapped, Robin Hood and King Arthur. He also produced numerous murals in public buildings.

"Edward Hopper" – American painter born in New York who was initially trained as an illustrator and later studied painting with R. Henri. In 1913 he exhibited in the Armory Show but spent much of his time on advertising art and illustrative etchings.

"Guggenheim" – museum in New York City housing the Solomon R. Guggenheim collection of modern art.
"lithograph" - a print made by drawing design with an oily crayon or other greasy substance on a porous stone or later a metal plate. The design can be transferred easily in a press to a piece of paper. The technique was invented in 1796 by Alois Senefelder and quickly became popular.

Limitations

The author will study the artist Norman Rockwell only. Concentration will be on Rockwell's influence on American society, not other societies. The opinions researched will be from people in the United States who may or may not know a lot about art.

We begin with some insight from artists who are familiar with Rockwell's work. Their opinions and experience allow the reader to begin to understand who Rockwell was and what he represented. As the author discovered, Rockwell's work is often used by other artists as a tool to explore areas of illustration that modern technology has almost made distinct.
Perspectives from other Artists

For Rockwell, recognition by his fellow artists and acceptance into the art world were of vital importance. His deepest drive was to earn a pat on the head from the authorities. But he never saw that in his lifetime. It was only after his death that artists began to appreciate his contributions and talent. The art critic, Robert Hughes, who had nicknamed Rockwell “the Rembrandt of Punkin Crick” during his life, sensitively eulogize him at his funeral. Time magazine would mourn his passing, ranking him with Margaret Mead, Hubert Humphrey and Golda Meir as among the most noteworthy people to have died in 1978.

Four of the nation’s leading illustrators were invited in 2001 to reflect on Rockwell’s influence on the field of illustration and their own artwork.

Here the author presents the opinions of four American artists on the work of Norman Rockwell. Each artist is unique, in their responsibility to their audience and in their mission as an illustrator, yet all share a common view of his contribution to the art world and to American culture.

Teresa Fasolino

The first critic, Teresa Fasolino, teaches aspiring illustrators about narrative image making. A freelance artist for more than 25 years, she has created artwork for major magazines, publishers, and advertising agencies. She has collaborated with architects and interior

Fasolino grew up in Porcher, New York, not far from New Rochelle, where Norman Rockwell lived when his first Saturday Evening Post cover was published in 1916. Norman Rockwell was the only American illustrator she knew of. She believes he had such an acute sense of gesture and facial expression that she did not think any other artist can touch him.

Fasolino paints in oils on canvas and was heavily influenced by her Italian-American heritage. But it was eventually European old master paintings that would become her major influence. Her work has changed from its earlier emphasis on concepts to a more narrative style. Each painting starts with an idea – like Rockwell – followed by thumbnail sketches, photo references, and a preliminary drawing.

It is as a storyteller that Rockwell had an impact on her work. Fasolino describes him as a master storyteller in a narrative tradition, and she feels that her own illustration is part of this tradition, which goes back to the Renaissance. They are not just portraits of people, animals or landscapers; they hope to tell a story.

Fasolino feels things have changed and now are very strange and does not think art directors have the same relationship they once did with illustration. There are areas, like advertising, where illustration is very underused. She thinks designers are king these days. If you want to be an editorial illustrator, then you have to turn it around overnight. That's a huge
change. Artists have to find other ideas, other venues. They have to use more imaginative thinking.

Fasolino is so impressed when she sees Rockwell’s paintings in person. She says we all work for print, but he was an artist. Fasolino doesn’t think anything can compare to seeing the originals, the amount of effort that has gone into his surfaces, the compositions.

Tim O’Brien

The second critic, Tim O’Brien, has illustrated hundreds of book jackets and created images for many advertising clients. First recognized by the Society Illustrators as a student when he was included in their Student Scholarship Competition, he has been regularly included in their annual exhibitions and has received many professional honors and awards. His work appears regularly in such publications as *Time, Newsweek, New York, Entertainment Weekly, Atlantic Monthly, Forbes, Premiere* and *Mad.*

In addition to Rockwell, O’Brien considers CF Payne to be a significant influence in the illustration community. He occasionally tries his hand at caricature-style portraits similar to those for which Payne was so well known. He has tried to deal with portraits, realizing that as the deadlines got shorter and the money got tighter, there were fewer illustrators doing the kind of work he does.

O’Brien recalls long overdue library books he borrowed as a high school junior – one was a Norman Rockwell book. ‘This is about the extent of his career research. After reading, he
decided that maybe he was better suited to be an illustrator someday. So he is ready to return the book.

O'Brien is amazed that Rockwell can make a scene so lit and still have you look where he wants you to look. He has not figured that out yet. What he learned from his work is how to cast the role. It is so important in these illustrations. Because Rockwell's footprint is so big and deep and his style is fairly close, he tries to stay out of the footprint. It would be easy to be pigeonholed as a Rockwell clone, which in our industry is a scary thing to be pigeonholed as, because you can't beat Rockwell, unless you vary it.

O'Brien talks to a lot of students about painting, and a surprising number of students believe that you cannot use oil in illustration. They report that you can't send it and art directors don't want it. Thank God Rockwell didn't believe it. O'Brien thinks when he delivers a painting in person and opens it up before an art director, when that waft of oil and turpentine goes across the nostrils... the romance! After all, who does this anymore?

Rockwell is for many the on-ramp to art. O'Brien is used to talking to illustration students and Rockwell is just something we all understand. He says we don't have to talk about Rockwell. He is the blood that we all have shooting through our veins.

Wendell Minor

The third critic, Wendell Minor, is a painter, illustrator and graphic designer, whose images have graced the covers of almost 2,000 best selling novels, biographies, mysteries, cookbooks, gardening references, histories and anthologies. The creator of award-winning
children's books, the artist has documented space flight for NASA and designed North Dakota's centennial stamp. Minor served as a president of the Society of Illustrators, and educated thousands of aspiring illustrators. More than 200 professional awards and honors celebrate his accomplishments.

Minor was influenced by the Brandywine School, and considers Winslow Homer to be one of his favorite artists.

He not only illustrates covers and children's books, but also designs and packages them as well. He uses the computer as an aid for presentation. He will scan preliminary drawings and sometimes finishes them in Photoshop. He can push values and so forth. He can put them into a layout and print them out. So although it used to take him four weeks to do a complete picture dummy, he can now do it in five days. It's been a really strong facilitator.

Minor's first introduction to art was at Shafer's Drug Store in Aurora, Illinois. After he delivered his papers on a Friday afternoon, he would get a Cherry Coke and go to the newsstand to admire one of these wonderful magazine covers. Not knowing how he would ever do it, he knew he wanted to be an artist and Norman Rockwell was his vision of what an artist should be and today he still is.

Most of the things that Minor paints are classical themes: portraits, landscape, still-life, animals in nature... and he thinks that that's one of the things that he too garnered from those early Post covers - the simplicity of life that is often overlooked.
Minor went to Ringling School of Art and Design and during the 1960's it was considered a cardinal sin to copy photographs. You should only work from life, or not at all or make it up. Well, when he got Susan Meyer’s book, Rockwell’s People, in 1981, he saw the process with which he worked and his ability to work with models and react and literally act out scenes. He decided he would start trying that. Minor has done it for the last few years and now he is having a ball looking through his town for the right model for the right piece. It has really been a tremendous help.

Minor said that Rockwell used to spend sometimes months on a cover painting. Today, people want things faster. Things are produced digitally and things have to wrap around a drum scanner. So your art has to be flexible and it shouldn’t be anymore than 22 inches long. The large paintings that you see in the Rockwell Museum are a luxury, because unless you shoot a transparency, which you have to pay for yourself, painting large is almost an option that we don’t choose anymore.

Minor feels the art form of the illustrator is growing. And he thinks it’s growing because it’s an inseparable part of our popular culture. He predicted that the Rockwell exhibit goes to the Guggenheim, he thinks that’s going to change everyone’s public perception of what this art is, that is illustration is illustration and fine art is fine art. Try to buy an NC Wyeth or a Winslow Homer or an Edward Hopper. You can’t do it, because the prices are absolutely out of sight. So the value of the original is intrinsically very valuable, and he thinks in the future it will become even more so. There’s always room for excellence, there’s always room for creativity, and Minor believes that come hell or high water, as long as there’s ink on paper, he’ll be there.
CF Payne

The fourth critic, CF Payne, is an illustrator who employs the art of caricature in this work. CF Payne's portraits of the famous and infamous are found on the covers and pages of many leading American publications. His striking images have been commissioned by such publications as Esquire, People, Time, Entertainment Weekly and Rolling Stone and a long roster of advertising clients. The recipient of many professional awards and honors, he chairs the Society of Illustrators' museum committee and teaches at the Columbus College of Art and Design in Ohio.

One of the things he tried to do in his work is to push the boundaries of caricature of what somebody may look like. Push it as far as he can, but yet still make it look like it's a living, breathing, existing human being.

Payne acknowledges that his work is influenced by the artists of the gold age of illustration, including Rockwell.

The Public's Perspective

Here the author describes dialogue from people who knew the artist or are very close to his life and works.

Mary Immen

Mary Immen was 15 when Rockwell's wife picked her up from high school in a wooden station wagon one morning to come pose for the famous illustrator, who was a close family
friend and neighbor in the tiny Vermont village where they all lived then and Mary now remains. The $5 Mary was paid to pose for Rockwell seemed like a fortune then. All Mary had to do was stand there for a morning pretending that she was part of a big family welcoming a son home from college for the holidays. The models posed separately, alone, with Rockwell describing the scene in his mind's eye and mimicking the expressions he wanted on their faces. A photographer snapped pictures and Rockwell later copied them on to his canvas. (The Guardian, The Washington Post, May 21, 2000, Tamara Jones, page 17)

On this particular morning, the painting was *Christmas Homecoming*, which would run on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* on Christmas Day 1948. It was never one of his more celebrated pieces.

Mary Immen Hall, now 66 says *Christmas Homecoming* turned out to represent life not as she knew it, but as she willed it to be. Ironically, Mary's mother could not have more children, so she often played alone. She admits she was lonely for brothers and sisters. Holidays in her household were therefore small, cozy affairs. But Mary herself would someday have six children of her own, and ten grandchildren.

About Rockwell, she says you have to remember, he was living in Arlington, Vermont, and life was simpler there. Nobody locked their doors and probably most people didn't even have keys. Rockwell said his pictures grew out of the world around him, the everyday life of his neighbors. He didn't fake things anymore. He just painted the things he saw.
Mary Immen Hall remembers a time and a place of innocent fun. As a teenager, she would take her date home after the dance for a soda and a slice of the chocolate cake her mother, Dot, would have baked from scratch. Dot posed for Rockwell, too. She was the wholesome Mom in advertisements he painted for a life insurance company. Mary was just 5 when the artist first asked to paint her. Today people ask her if her mother always went with her when she posed for Rockwell. And this startles and in a way saddens Mary, this silhouette of danger against cloudless skies. Of course not, she tells them. She was safe. The world was safe. They don't understand.

Long after the Rockwells left Arlington, an old stone church became a gallery honoring Rockwell's work, and Dot Immen went to work there part time as a guide. Fifteen years ago, Mary did the same. The job has made her grow as a person, she explains, because of all the different people who wander through, wanting to know how life was lived here back then. Mary is only too happy to tell them.

Charles DeBevoise

Charles DeBevoise is currently the head librarian at The Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. A retired engineer from General Electric who grew up in Massachusetts, Charles is a lifelong admirer of Rockwell's work. He appreciates how the artist can tell stories through pictures and allow the average person to see warmth and compassion in them.

Among Charles' favorite works are the Four Freedoms. He believes they represent the four essential aspirations of the world and are illustrated for everyone to understand, regardless of
country origin, ethnicity, language or religion. It is no wonder they were the most reproduced works of all time.

Charles comments that although he regularly sees Rockwell's work in person, every time he leads a tour and shows them a piece, he finds something new in it and learns something from it. Nobody "steps over the frame and brings the viewer into the picture" as well as Rockwell.

Charles informed the author that Rockwell left most of his money to the museum and it's efforts to preserve his works and teach students, artists and the public about illustration. Although he lived a comfortable life, he was not as wealthy as an artist today with the same success would be. Charles regularly meets with Peter Rockwell, who is very involved in continuing his father's legacy and narrates a documentary film about his father that can be viewed at the museum.

Maureen Hart Hennessey

Maureen Hart Hennessey is the current Curator at the Norman Rockwell Museum. She especially appreciates how Rockwell celebrates the common place and can capture the tradition of the American spirit. Maureen remarks that Rockwell created many works illustrating the rights of passage - like dating, running away, getting married, leaving home for the first time, and going off to war. But Rockwell also tried to keep up with the times. He drew new technology - like television, automobiles, airplanes, and space shuttles that were suddenly entering the lives of Americans.
Maureen finds Rockwell's contributions to American society hard to match. Few people know that he painted for Kellogg's Corn Flakes, Mass Mutual Life Insurance Company, Post Cereal, Newsweek, AT&T, The Boy Scouts of America, Colgate, Sun Maid, Hienz Baked Beans, Hallmark, McCall's, and others. In total, he created advertisements, posters and calendars for more than 150 companies – all by hand.

Maureen credits much of Rockwell's success to how well he paints pictures that focus on human relationships. After all, no matter where we live, what we do for a living, or what we look like, we all have human relationships. Therefore, we can all see something in each of his paintings, although the message they tell us may differ. And that is the beauty and originality of Rockwell.

**Self-Portrait: Rockwell's Perspective of his own Work**

Rockwell once said, "Without thinking too much about it in specific terms, I was showing the America I knew and observed to others who might not have noticed." He says that he painted the world not as it was, but as he wished it could be. The response of the American people led him to believe he was not alone in his wishes. His work appeared in books, on cereal boxes, on magazine covers, seasonal calendars, advertisements and story illustrations. Most of his work included people in his life - he liked having his family, friends, and neighbors as the subjects of his work.

For more than sixty years, Rockwell's paintings captured the ordinary and extraordinary moments of life in America - from a forbidden swimming hole to astronauts landing on the
moon. His complex images depict the stories, events, personalities and values of a changing nation. His work spanned over decades and often changed as society changed. The legacy of America's favorite illustrator can be found in his paintings of both the commonplace and controversial moments of the 20th century.

Author's Personal Perspective

The author believes that Rockwell was progressive and definitely ahead of his time. When purists insisted that Freedom of Speech was inauthentic because women didn't participate in local politics, Rockwell gently held his ground, saying simply, "Someday they will." And how right he was.

Rockwell also foresaw the changing role of American women. His women emanated a brash strength that predated feminism, from the tomboy sporting a shiner to Rosie the Riveter and her hard-muscled biceps, grimy face and unmistakable pride. Rockwell women never flinched. This was true even of the models. Young Mary had a sprained ankle when she posed for Christmas Morn. Remembering this, she utters not a word about how painful it must have been standing there for hours that morning. Instead, she gleefully notes the tiniest strip of surgical tape peeping out over her bobby sock, and marvels at Rockwell's passion for authenticity.

When art and image and sensibility fit exactly right, what is then captured is a moment that transcends time. And that is what Rockwell did so well.
Review of Literature

Rockwell's interest in self-reference was grounded only partially in philosophical questions about looking, being looked at, and the painter's relationship to his audience, especially pertinent as those ideas were for someone whose artistic mainstay was producing covers for The Saturday Evening Post. His less theoretical text in the pictures spoke to the need for tolerance, for capaciousness, for an awareness that as soon as we judge others, we will find ourselves coming up short as well.

The connection he shared with his own rather browbeaten father lacking as it was, came through their early shared love of telling stories through the pen and palette. Art and family, painting and love, loss and renewed: not the conventional dialogue of an illustrator. But for Rockwell, they were the very substance of his life and his career. (A Life – Norman Rockwell, Laura Claridge, New York, 2001, Random House, page 11-12)

Beyond the legendary status that he had already achieved nearly four decades before his death in 1978, Norman Rockwell was a remarkable painter, a gifted storyteller, and a masterful technician who conveyed a distinct, personal message. Rockwell created images that described universal human experiences within a particularly American context. His ability to reveal deeper meaning in commonplace situations captivates audiences to this day.

Rockwell’s impact on popular culture and his influence on generations of American illustrators was enormous. Working in the tradition of such great illustrator story tellers as Howard Pyle and NC Wyeth, Rockwell set the standard for commercial artists who used
narrative realism to illustrate books, magazines, and advertisements from the 1920s to the 1950s. A seminal figure in the evolution of American illustration, his work spawned a shift by the next generation of illustrators and designers, who embraced a modernist aesthetic.

The illustration marketplace has undergone a major change since Rockwell's time. While no longer the primary visual mechanism of mass media, illustration still serves to stimulate the intellect and emotions and speak to the joys and challenges of our world. Credit this to the inspirational work of illustrators following in Rockwell's footsteps and those taking the art form in bold new directions. At this unique turning point in the continuum of illustration, Rockwell's artistic accomplishments stand out as an important link from the outstanding visual communicators of the past to those of today. (www.normanrockwell.org)

His commonfolk, humorous and brave and spiritual to the core, became icons to generations. Yet a lifetime's work – nearly 4,000 smartly rendered pictures – never brought Rockwell acclaim in the inner circles of art that embraced everything from Cubism to Abstract Expressionism to Pop Art during his long career. But for all the overexertions of the catalog's scholarly essays to transform Rockwell from influential illustrator to grand artiste, he remains what he will always be: our deftest draftsman of democracy's dreams. And that should be enough. ("The Art of Autumn", Time, New York, September 6, 1999, Norman Rockwell Retrospective, page 68-80)

It is important to remember that in pre-television times, Americans got their images from the printed page, where they could linger over them as long as they wanted. For both sentimental impact and delicious detail, there was no printed-page artist like Norman
Rockwell. ("Norman Rockwell Revisited", *Newsweek*, Peter Plagens, November 15, 1999, page 84-86)

Rockwell once said, "Boys batting flies on vacant lots; little girls playing jacks on the front steps; old men plodding home at twilight; umbrellas in hand -- all these things arouse feelings in me. "Feelings" meant a desire to paint such warm and fuzzy stereotypes, and Rockwell's undeniable talent made these characters real right down to the stitching in their coats. No wonder he's collected by H. Ross Perot and Steven Spielberg. And it's not surprising that as we're bombarded with relentless techno-worship and cyber vulgarity, the record auction price for a soothing Rockwell original recently reached $937,500.

But Rockwell had a cantankerously liberal side. His renowned civil rights pictures, "The Problem We All Live With", was painted when much of his constituency still thought schools ought to be run the way the locals wanted, constitutional quibbles or not. And during the Vietnam War he snapped at a reporter, "I don't think we're helping the Vietnamese to live better lives, do you?" For the most part, however, The *Saturday Evening Post* and its most famous illustrator stayed far away from the barricades of social justice. History professor Neil Harris even writes in the catalog that there's a "faint association of the poster-like good looks and rural charms dominating Rockwell's pictures, with images favored by Nazi information engineers. In other words, there's nothing intrinsically American or democratic about Rockwell's technique; it's merely a tool that has been applied to some pretty unsalutary causes."
Rockwell hit his popular peak just as the graphic culture of which he was so much a part detailed magazine illustrations, patriotic posters, simple, direct package design—was going out of style. His best period—when his pictures were more subtle than editorial cartoons, and fully furnished from edge to edge was relatively brief. From the mid-1940s to the late 50s. The decline began when Rockwell set aside genre scenes in favor of honorific portraits of Ike and JFK. We could see their faces well enough, thank you, on television. It was television, not modern art, that did Rockwell in. The paradox of the High's retrospective is that, like modern art, Rockwell now must be so exhaustingly explained.

Can you take seriously an artist who illustrated 50 years of the Boy Scout calendar? The answer of course, is how can you not take him seriously? Even when you see every one of his 321 covers for The Saturday Evening Post spread out across one gallery of the show and notice that more than a few of them really are little precious you had to admit to Rockwell's ingenuity. What the original canvases for those covers make plain is that he was a painter of great if anachronistic gifts. He carried into the 20th century the ancient pleasures of visual storytelling and fine-grained description. These happen to be the same enjoyments that art has largely turned over to photography, movies and television, none of which can offer back the visual world with anything like the mouth watering delights of paint.

Rockwell also helped create the image of Coca Cola in America. His original oil paintings, commissioned by Coca Cola in the 1930s, were reproduced for window displays in drugstores where Coke was sold and on calendars as part of promotional giveaways.
“It’s another way for people to connect to the classic quality of a Norman Rockwell image and with Coke Classic”. The auction began just five days after Coke launched a new global ad campaign that is an attempt to convey life’s simple pleasures and how the soft drink enhances them.

Each image portrays a slice of Americana. The first, *The Barefoot Boy*, from 1931, depicts a rosy-cheeked boy leaning against a tree, a Coke in his right hand. In 1932, Rockwell painted *The Old Caker Bucket*, which shows a smiling boy sitting on the side of a stone wall from which he has apparently pulled a bucket of Coke bottles. *Carry Me Back To Old Virginia*, from 1934, depicts an elderly father and his adult daughter on a porch. She is perched on the steps playing a mandolin, a bottle of Coke at her feet. *Out Fishing* from 1935, shows a boy sitting on a tree stump with a fishing pole and a bottle of Coke. (“Coke to Auction Off Vintage Rockwell Prints”, *Adweek*, New York, April 23, 2001, Kathleen Sanpey, page 3)

We are saying grace for Norman Rockwell, for his century is gone and he seems free at last. Now he is released from the burden of being the American Creator, the figure who perhaps more than any other, more than Walter Cronkite or Johnny Carson or Frank Capra or Walt Disney, more than FDR or Ike of Jack Kennedy or Ronald Reagan, offered Middle America a common sense of historical identity and idealized purpose throughout the modern mess of the 20th century existence.

Rockwell is undeniably political – political themes run consistently through his work, at times yielding to overt propaganda – yet there is something non-ideological about him nonetheless. His is the politics of gentleness, the quaint tradition of liberalism. Ideology
tends to require a palpable evil force that can be reviled and destroyed. Rockwell left the human manifestation of evil almost completely off his canvas, attacking it indirectly, killing it with kindness.

Rockwell was a perfectionist and workaholic who retreated to his studio every day. He was obsessed with his work, worried about his reputation, prone to bouts of depression, beholden to the unending deadlines of The Saturday Evening Post covers, year after year. He became the most popular and popularized artist in American history, beloved by the masses, ignored by the elite, satirized by the hip, always searching for the ideal while knowing that the world was more complicated, painting on until 1978, when he died in his New England town in his 84th year.

No other 20th century American artist can boast Norman Rockwell’s popularity with the vast majority of Americans. By 1945 it was estimated that people around the country glanced at least 1.6 billion times every day at the calendars Rockwell did every year for the Boy Scouts of America. He also did magazine covers for Jello-O, Crest and Ford. Long before he died in 1978, the year after he had received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Jimmy Carter, Rockwell easily was the best known and most widely loved artist of his time by everyone but the art world itself, who all too sophisticated denizens sneered at him and his values almost from the beginning.

Many art critics called his work cornball sentimentality. It's not the kind of stuff that should grace halls of major museums or the homes of those who know what good art is. Also at
fault was Rockwell's simple love for things American, when anti-American feelings of all sorts were rampant.

Rockwell is a storyteller of genius. The last great poet of American childhood and as the artist who portrayed a world in which the minimum conditions of democracy are made visible. A world where decency, tolerance and basic goodness are manifested and lived daily by the plain folks Rockwell portrays. His images had to do with America's political traditions and how they worked out in everyday life.

Norman Rockwell believed in painting as an expression not only of cultural values including in his case, patriotism, community, and ordinary decency — but also as a means of telling quiet stories about life, and his huge body of work reflected his belief that "the idea itself probably is the most important element of the entire illustration." (Kirkus Reviews, August 15, 2001, Norman Rockwell, Laura Claridge)

Finally, here's another interesting project Rockwell did for the war cause that many people don't know about. Early 1943, at Fort Benning, Georgia, he wanted to do a two-page centerfold on some unusual aspect of being in the Army. He asked if it were true that in the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment that we had a 90-pound boxer dog named Max who had his very own parachute and jumped with us. They did. Rockwell came and sketched the scene of them jumping out of the C-47. That two page layout established a special consciousness in American about the 505th, which became the premier unit of the 82nd Airborne Division. They were chosen to be the surviving airborne division after the war and on January 12, 1946, participated in the Victory March in New York City, representing the

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more than 15 million men and women of the armed forces in World War II. ("Rockwell Honored the 82nd With Special Consciousness", *Insight on the News*, March 20, 2000, page 3, Colonel Barney Oldfield)

The reader now has an understanding of the type of person Rockwell was, the time he lived in, and the subjects of his work. The author will begin to describe in detail some of his most famous works and their influence on the American public. This influence may have begun over half a century ago, but as the author describes, it is still very much alive today.
Chapter 3 – A Look at the Artist and His Work

Art Interpretation

In this section, the author conducts an analysis of individual pieces of Rockwell’s work. She examines how he captured the events of his day and what it meant at the time. She takes you from his early days at The Saturday Evening Post to his later days with Look magazine, observing the changes in subjects and styles.

"The Four Freedoms"

In 1942, Rockwell had heard President Franklin Roosevelt give a speech explaining that the free world was fighting the war to protect every individual’s right to freedom of speech and worship, as well as freedom from want and fear. But the present had used works that were so “darned high-blown”, Rockwell couldn't figure out a way to show them.

Rockwell made many sketches for each of the Four Freedoms illustrations and took them to Washington, DC, trying to convince government agencies to sponsor his painting for the war effort. No one was interested, and at first Rockwell felt very discouraged. Then he decided to take his sketches to Ben Hibbs, who was then Post editor. He loved Rockwell's sketches and told him to forget about doing covers or advertisements for the time being, just concentrate on the Four Freedoms.
Freedom of Speech

Rockwell thought it would be easy. He began with Freedom of Speech and drew his neighbor standing up at the town meeting to speak his piece. But the first attempts didn’t work. He had too many people in the scene. You could’t tell what the man was doing. He tried again and again, until he finally realized the only way to capture the power of the moment was to have one man become the focus of the painting (page 31).

There he is. Standing tall, with the town’s annual report in his jacket pocket, an earnest look on his face, a sense of silence in the room as his neighbors listen intently to his words. There may be a whole roomful of neighbors, but Rockwell shows only a few. Behind the speaker is a start, empty blackboard, taking up almost half of the canvas and powerfully framing the man’s figure.

Rockwell used himself in the painting, as he often did. It’s difficult to spot him because there is only a tiny bit of his face, one ear cocked to hear the words, on eye attentive to the speaker.

Freedom of Worship

For Freedom of Worship, Rockwell struggled again. Then he thought of the quote “Each according to the dictates of his own conscience”. And he realized he could show a group of people worshiping by creating a montage of heads and praying hands. One woman is holding a rosary, a man wearing a Jewish yarmulke, or skullcap, on his head, another man holds a small Bible. There is no background setting or story connected with the praying people, but it gives a powerful sense of respect for the differences in our society.
Freedom from Want

For Freedom from Want, Rockwell painted a family gathered around a Thanksgiving table. Grandmother brings a well-browned turkey; Grandfather has his carving tools handy. The colors of the scene are all subdued. Grandfather's dark suit pulls our eye into the painting, while the dishes and tablecloth are white. The bowl of fruit on the table blends in with the brown tones of the family's hair. Their smiling faces form a border around the painting, some of them looking toward the viewer.

Such a picture stretches over generations of American life. How many Americans celebrate Thanksgiving each year by gathering around a table with an abundance of food to thank God for all they have? Regardless of which God people worship or what types of food are on the table, many Americans can relate to this piece of art, which reminds us how fortunate many of us are.

Freedom from Fear

In Freedom from Fear, two parents are checking on their sleeping children in what appears to be quiet, peaceful scene. Only the newspaper in the father's hand gives us a clue to the larger story. An upside down headline, partially visible, read: Bombing ki... Beneath that headline is another barely readable heading: Women and children slaughtered in raids. Now Rockwell's point is made. (page 32)

London was constantly being bombed by the Germans during WWII, and British parents could never put their children to bed without fear. Instead of painting a scene of devastation
and death, Rockwell chose to interpret FDR's freedom from fear by showing that all parents wish they could keep their children safe from outside danger.

It took him more than six months to complete these four large paintings. The Post used them inside the magazine, each painting next to an essay about the subject, and they were so successful that the government at last decided to sue the paintings, and nearly $133 million in war bonds were sold. He felt he had made a positive contribution to the war effort.

_The Problem We All Live With_

Although Rockwell proposed painting a black person for the cover of _The Saturday Evening Post_ as early as the 1920s, the editor, George Lorimer, didn't think middle-American readers were ready to be confronted with race. Rockwell's first cover images of blacks were not painted until the 1960s.

_The Problem We All Live With_ appeared in Look magazine in 1964. This image of a young student's courageous steps upon entering a newly desegregated school captures the essence of the civil rights movement. After the Supreme court ordered an end to unequal and inferior education, similar scenes occurred for many years across America, in countless schools and colleges, large, small, rural, and urban.

Even after almost 40 years, this scene grips our imaginations. Rockwell carefully evokes the look and feel of a pivotal period when black Americans brought their struggle for equal rights into the minds of white Americans. People often notice that Rockwell, who painted faces with such care, chose not to show the heads of the US Deputy Marshals in the picture.
The Problem We All Live With could have been taken from 1960s news headline. The late 50s and 60s were a time of great unrest, from civil rights activism to the movement to end the war in Vietnam. The decade that began optimistically with the election of a young president saw the assassination of that president and other national leaders, both black and white. At the same time, Civil Rights Act - as well as court actions - pushed America towards racial equality.

This powerful picture reminds us of the human side of a difficult time. Rockwell shows how one young child was both a symbol and a target in the struggle to overcome discrimination. Look closely to find what Rockwell puts in this scene as clues towards racial attitudes.

Rockwell used many artistic elements to catch the audience’s eye, including contrast, line, and rhythm. The first thing one notices is the girl, because Rockwell painted her dress, sneakers, and socks white to contrast with the dark brown of her skin. Contrast is a way to gain attention in art. Notice the lack of contrast on the marshals - they almost blend into the wall. Rockwell also draws our attention to this girl by his use of lines. Look at the sidewalk cracks. If you follow them further, they point right to her.

The rhythm of repeated shapes ties this painting together. The shape of a loose fist is repeated throughout the picture, and there is a rhythm in the position of the legs. The graffiti is very disturbing and full of emotional force.
The little black girl, Ruby Bridges, with a white ribbon in her hair, who walked into a newly desegregated school in New Orleans 40 years ago escorted by US marshalls, recently became an honorary US marshal herself during ceremonies in Washington DC. Ruby Nell Bridges Hall, now 46, took the oath at the Corcoran Gallery of Art against a projection of Norman Rockwell’s famous painting of the scene. Rockwell painted the work *The Problem We All Live With* in 1964, fours years after the historical event. Deputy Attorney General Eric Holder bestowed the honor upon Ms. Hall and said, “She exhibits the qualities of a US marshal. She is bold, she is brave, she is filled with courage.” (“Ruby Bridges Whose Integration of New Orleans School was Captured in Famed Norman Rockwell Painting, Named Honorary US Marshall”, *Black History*, page 20, September 4, 2000)

*Rosie the Riveter*

Following the United States’ entry into World War II in 1941, millions of American women answered the government’s call to enter the work force and fill traditionally male jobs left vacant by those who had gone off to fight. Above all, women’s labor was urgently needed to help fill shortages created by the expanded wartime economy, especially in the production of military hardware. These women who wore hard-hats and overalls and operated heavy machinery represented a radical departure from the traditional American feminine ideal of housewife and mother.

In 1942, a popular song about a patriotic female defense worker called “Rosie the Riveter” provided the name that became synonymous with this new kind of American woman. Painted for the cover of the May 29, 1943 edition of *The Saturday Evening Post*, Norman Rockwell’s *Rosie the Riveter* gave visual form to this phenomenon and became an iconic image.

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of American popular culture. Rockwell portrayed Rosie as a monumental figure clad in overalls and a work-shirt with the sleeves rolled up to reveal her powerful, muscular arms. Seated against the backdrop of a rippling American flag, she is shown pausing for lunch, with a riveting machine and a tin lunch box balanced on her substantial lap, her visor and goggles pushed back on her head and a ham sandwich clasped in her hand. Despite her massive bulk, sturdy work clothes and the smudges on her arms and cheeks, Rosie's painted fingernails, lipstick and the tidy arrangement of her bright red curls wittily convey her underlying femininity. Pausing between bites, she gazes into the distance with a detached air of supreme self-assurance, while casually crunching a tattered copy of Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf under her feet.

Rockwell found the model for Rosie in Mary Doyle (now Mary Keefe), a nineteen year old telephone operator in Arlington, Vermont. Mrs. Keefe recalls meeting Mary Rockwell, the artist's wife, when she came in to pay her telephone bill. Like many other residents of the small town, Mary eventually became acquainted with the artist and readily accepted when Rockwell called and asked her to pose. Mrs. Keefe remembers arriving at the studio, where Rockwell had assembled her costume, which originally included a white shirt and saddle shoes. She sat for several photographs (all of which were destroyed when Rockwell's studio burned to the ground during the summer of 1943), but had to return for a second session with the artist when he decided he wanted Rosie to be wearing a blue shirt and penny loafers.

Mrs. Keefe saw the final composition for the first time during a trip to a newsstand in Bennington, Vermont, where she happened to see a poster advertising the May 29, 1943
edition of The Saturday Evening Post. She remembers being rather shocked by Rockwell's transformation of her slim figure into Rosie's overly muscular physique, but adds that the artist later called her to apologize for his exaggerated enlargement of her size.

Many Post readers quickly observed that Rockwell found the source for Rosie's monumental dignity and classical enthronement in Michelangelo's depiction of the prophet Isaiah from the Sistine Chapel ceiling. American audiences were generally amused and delighted by the connection, which was first revealed to the public when the Kansas City Star ran images of Rockwell's Rosie and Michelangelo's Isaiah side by side. Just as Isaiah was called by God to convert the wicked from their sinful ways and trample evildoers under foot, so Rockwell's Rosie tramples Hitler under her all-American penny loafer. Righteousness is described throughout Isaiah's prophecy as God's "strong right arm," a characterization that must surely have occurred to the artist as he portrayed Rosie's muscular forearms.

As a final touch, Rockwell has painted a halo floating just above the visor pushed back on Rosie's head. The artist's tongue-in-cheek canonization of Rosie clearly intended to signify the rightness of her cause, although as a New Testament phenomenon, sainthood would not have been available to the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah. As in many of Rockwell's most memorable World War II paintings, the playful, slightly irreverent humor expressed in "Rosie the Riveter" is combined with a more serious, patriotic message.

During a critical period of the war, Rosie reminded Americans, in a message that still resonates today, of the need for all to do their part in the war effort and to take pride in the work involved. Rockwell's unique ability in the context of 20th century American art was his
talent as a communicator and by the end of the Great Depression, the artist had dispensed with some of the occasionally cloying sweetness of his earlier work, allowing the force of his images to come across with a new potency. Judy Larson and Maureen Hart Hennessey have pointed out that, "Rockwell's pictures often honored the American spirit. Particularly during times of crisis, Rockwell created images that communicated patriotism and unquestioned allegiance to the United States" (Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People, New York, 1999, p. 53).

Despite the humor apparent in the painting, Rockwell's 
Rosie the Riveter is also a testament to the indomitable strength of the American spirit during one of the most challenging times in the nation's history. Rosie's cool self confidence, sheer physical might and unwavering support of her country parallel the strength, determination and patriotism of the American people. In the years since it was painted, Rosie the Riveter has become an iconic image of American culture and a part of Rockwell's enduring legacy.

In 1943, The Saturday Evening Post donated the painting to the United States Treasury Department's Second War Loan Drive. Between 1941 and 1946, the United States Treasury Department conducted eight War Loan Drives, which promoted the sale of war or "victory" Bonds to finance America's contribution to World War II. The incredibly successful drives were overseen by the War Finance Committee and were publicized by advertisements and promotional materials created by government agencies—such as the posters featuring the Four Freedoms, which promoted the Second War Loan Drive—as well as private companies.

"Seeking to stir the conscience of Americans, [the government advertising campaigns] invoked both their financial and moral stake in the war. The sale of war bonds provided a
way in which patriotic attitudes and the spirit of sacrifice could be expressed, and became the primary way those on the home-front contributed to the national defense and war effort" (*Brief History of World War II Advertising Campaigns: War Loans and Bonds*, Duke University, Digital Scriptorium).

Like the *Four Freedoms*, Rockwell's *Rosie the Riveter* was taken on a nationwide tour to promote the sale of war bonds during the Second War Loan Drive. Mrs. Keefe remembers her cousin James Martin, Jr. coming home to Arlington while on leave from the United States Navy in 1943 and describing his visit to the Fifth Avenue Merchant's Association, where the traveling exhibition accompanying the Second War Loan Drive was on view. The exhibition included several familiar faces for Mr. Martin; upon entering, he recognized his father, James [Jim] Martin, Sr., as one of the models for all four of the *Four Freedoms* and was amused to see a monumental version of his cousin Mary being exhibited as *Rosie the Riveter*. The tours included paintings by several artists, including Rockwell's close friend the illustrator Mead Schaeffer. They stopped at popular destinations in cities around the nation, where paintings were sometimes raffled off as a way of generating excitement and attracting additional publicity for the War Loan Drives. (Norman Rockwell's painting of *Rosie the Riveter* was auctioned by Sotheby's on May 22, 2002 for $4,959,500.)

*Girl in the Mirror*

Jane Russell's glossy photograph places this picture firmly in the 1950s, but the antique doll and chair give the image an old-fashioned feeling. Even the composition alludes to the pictorial tradition of depicting a young woman contemplating her beauty in a mirror. Such reassuring signs of the past balance the uncertainties of the modern era, suggesting that old-
fashioned values will carry the girl safely into adulthood, just as they would guide Rockwell's audience safely into a new age.

Mary Whalen Leonard posed for Norman Rockwell's *Girl in the Mirror* in 1953. She also posed for *Day in the Life of a Little Girl* in 1952 and *Girl with Black Eye* in 1953. She was Norman Rockwell's quintessential American girl. She read all she could about Clara Barton and Florence Nightingale. ("The Role Model", *The Washington Post*, May 21, 2000, Liza Mundy, page 8)

*Saying Grace*

By nothing less than an actual vote among *Post* readers, *Saying Grace* was Rockwell's most popular canvas. In a flyblown city restaurant, a boy and his grandmother bow their heads to pray while everybody else looks on. If the picture is about the secular world making space for the spiritual, which is plainly is, it's also about the larger notion of every tribe in American society making space for every other. *Saying Grace* is an ode to tolerance and hope and making one's way whatever life brings. It is saying grace for the American people. ("American Beauty", *The Washington Post*, May 21, 2000, page 6, David Maraniss)

As the author has shown through analyzing some of Rockwell's better-known works, he was an essential part of the lives of millions of Americans for decades. He was a household name during good times and bad times and he carefully chose what images he brought into these homes. As a gifted artist, he felt it was his personal responsibility to cultivate his talent. As an American, he felt it was his civic duty to use that talent in a manner that would benefit his country. He wanted his work to serve as a vehicle for people to think, to learn,
and to eventually act. In the next chapter, the author will share some data that supports the
theory that Rockwell accomplished his goal.
Chapter 4 - Survey Conduct and Analysis

Survey

The purpose of the survey conducted by the author was to gather a variety of opinions on Rockwell’s work and examine the similarities and differences among them. As seen in Appendix G, the survey consisted of questions about Rockwell, his illustrations, the historical significance of his contributions to the United States, as well as questions about the person completing the survey. There was a brief explanation of the thesis project and contact information. Finally, the survey showed some of Rockwell’s better-known illustrations.

Methodology

The surveys were distributed in two ways. Some were mailed with self-addressed stamped envelopes and others were handed out in person and collected upon completion. The audience consisted of a variety of people, from ones who knew little or nothing about art to ones who held a PhD in art. The author recorded their comments, analyzed the data and summarized the results.

Results

The author determined that 86% of the surveys were completed and returned.
Of those responding, 71% strongly agreed that they knew who Norman Rockwell was. Almost as many, 65%, strongly agreed that they could probably recognize one of Rockwell’s works. This could very well be due to the commercialization of much of his work. Figurines, plates, mugs, calendars, prints, stationary and postcards are just some of the items people can buy that depict Rockwell’s work. It is found all over the United States and often at affordable prices. That is also most likely the reason why 88% of those surveyed stated that they could recognize his work.

58% agreed that when Rockwell’s paintings reflected current issues like civil rights, school segregation, and the Vietnam War, he was uniquely recording American history. And 49% agreed that Rockwell was just as much a storyteller as an artist. That means that nearly half of those surveyed can tell a story based on his illustrations. We know now that such was Rockwell’s intention when created them. He would be proud of that accomplishment.

On the other hand, only 41% agreed that they could personally relate to the stories and events depicted in his art and 35% were neutral on the issue. Perhaps many Americans today cannot relate as much to his work as those who saw them when they were first created because society has changed so dramatically since the Rockwell era. For example, the families he depicted in his illustrations consisted of children with a mother and father who were married and all live together. The fact is that today, less than half of American children live in a household with both their biological parents. Many children are being raised by their grandparents, foster parents, or guardians other than their birth parents. And many do not even have a relationship with both their biological parents. And the happy, stable homes
we see in Rockwell's painting also confuse those who spend their weekends and holidays traveling back and forth to the different residences where their parents live.

Finally, 90% of the respondents felt that Rockwell was just as much a storyteller as an artist. This is important to note because it is what the author was setting out to learn in conducting the thesis project. Rockwell became an essential part of American culture because of his ability to tell stories without using a single word. And stories are passed down from generation to generation, which is why his work still attracts people from all different ethnic backgrounds, ages, socio-economic statuses, etc. His work proves timeless.

Survey Conclusions

It is easy to gather from the survey data that the majority of people liked Rockwell's work. They appreciated how he could tell a story, capture emotion and make you feel like you were part of what was happening in the picture. One person even noted they could taste and smell the Thanksgiving meal in Freedom from Want. Many felt he captured the innocence of youth, the values of families, and the human spirit.

It was interesting to learn that looking at Rockwell's work caused many people to think about what today's American family is like and how much it has changed. They began to question tradition and what that really means. Some commented that they could not fully conceptualize what Rockwell depicted, because the diversity in American society today has changed that. However, if people looked beyond the surface and stepped into the painting, they could see a lot more.
For example, look at Seeing Over in Appendix F. Instead of seeing a restaurant near a train station in New England filled with white Americans bowing their heads in prayer before eating as just that, the audience could look deeper. Do they bow their heads in prayer in public? Do they know someone who does? How do they want people around them to react? How have they seen people react? What kind of respect would they show others that bowed their heads in prayer in public? When questions like these are asked, the audience begins to think, possibly learn, and maybe even act, as a result of viewing the work. Again, that was Rockwell's intention when he created it.

Finally, the author was surprised that the respondents, who held a PhD in Art, were the ones who disliked Rockwell's work the most. Perhaps this is because they were better able to compare it to a variety of works by other artists or because they have read more criticism of it than the average American. Either way, respondents consistently commented that they liked how Rockwell captured family events, seasons, emotions and people so well, that they felt they were looking at a photograph.

In the next chapter, the author draws some conclusions based on the research conducted that may encourage the reader to ask some intriguing questions and want to learn more about Rockwell.
Chapter 5 - Summary and Conclusions

Rockwell was one of the most well known and much loved artists of his time. That is why so much has been done to save his work for future generations. In 1973, Rockwell established a trust to preserve his artistic legacy and placed it under the custodianship of the Old Corner house in Stockbridge, MA. This trust formed the core of the permanent collection of the Norman Rockwell Museum at Stockbridge. In 1976, Rockwell placed his Stockbridge studio and all its contents in trust to the museum. Visitors today can see his paintings, sketches, studio, and props much like it was when he was alive.

That same year, the town honored Rockwell with a huge parade down Main Street. There were floats representing his famous Saturday Evening Post covers, some with the actual models he’s used. There were marching bands and antique fire engines from the local communities (page 47).

In 1977, Rockwell was presented with perhaps his highest honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, for his vivid and affectionate portraits of our country. This was a special occasion for him because he was a patriotic American who tried to show much of the positive images of life in America in his work throughout his long career. Receiving the medal made him feel he accomplished just that.

Even in his eighties Rockwell continued to go to his studio every day, sometimes in a wheelchair, but he rarely painted. Instead he was cheered by visits from neighbors or
friends. He died in November 1978 "of being eighty four". On his easel there was an unfinished canvas.

It is often said that you can tell a lot about how a person is thought of after they are gone. And Rockwell was a prime example. Thousands of people attended his funeral in Stockbridge. Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts lined the entrance to the church to honor the man who had painted their annual calendars for over fifty years.

During the service a poem was read about a man who loved his fellowmen above all. That was a fitting tribute for Rockwell, who loved both young and old and was sensitive to their innermost feelings. He understood a parent's fear, a child's joy and longing, even a pet's loyalty.

As an illustrator, Rockwell mirrored people's emotions. He also painted American social history, beginning with idyllic country scenes, couples riding in horse and buggies, then carriages and finally, Model-T Fords. He painted the latest inventions, from electricity to radio to television. There were scenes of war on the home front, portraits of world leaders and president of the US. And in his later years he gave Americans pictures about the civil rights movement, school integration, and the Peace Corps.

Rockwell was proof that an illustrator "can show what has become so familiar that it is no longer notices". And when we as a society look back at the enormous legacy of his work, we are able to vividly relive those years and observe the enormous changes. The only thing that
didn't change was Rockwell. "He never lost his belief in the fundamental decency of his fellow human beings."

His work touched and still touches chords of emotional response, a reminder of an earlier time when life was simpler and better, as the past always seems to be – a time when Americans cared about our country, our family, and the neighbor down the street. That was what Rockwell epitomized – that kind of caring. His paintings will continue to be meaningful even if the models do wear dated clothing and ride around in old-fashioned automobiles. Their emotions remain universal and timeless.

But the author worries that people may not always look back in time, for fear of seeing things they don't understand or are perhaps uncomfortable with. But isn't it through understanding the past and where we have been that can we measure how far we have come or determine where we are going?

Rockwell's paintings evoke feelings of joy, laughter, and pride in country, family and community. His work is alive with vignettes of small town life and portrays a nation that stands for hope and humanity. His memorable images depict humor, generosity, dignity and courage that speak of shared traditions. Rockwell is remembered as a chronicler of his times. He was in a unique position to cover everyday and historic events throughout most of the twentieth century. In illuminating the lives of Americans he created works of universal and enduring appeal. (Storyteller with a Brush, Publisher's Weekly, New York, January 17, 2000, Diane Roback, Jennifer M, Brown, Cindi DiMarzo, page 57-58)
Rockwell held the role of a recorder and celebrant of 20th century American culture. He explored the themes and iconography that shaped his narrative imagery and gave his work such resonance with the American public. His poignant compositions of children at play, families at holiday time, adolescent rites of passage, the simple pleasures of courtship, and late in his career, the subtle but insidious effects of prejudice, were constantly accessible to the average American. People who would never think of visiting an art museum looked forward to the publication of each Rockwell picture.

In a century of rapid social change, economic disparity, war, and technological advances, Rockwell's pictures gave Americans a sense of connection to the reassuring constants of their heritage. The cumulative effect of his decades of work is an appreciation of the emotionally rewarding details of life that are often overlooked. ("Books and Art: Painting for numbers: Art Illustrators", The Economist, London, November 3, 2001, page 88)
A Final Word

It was not long after September 11, 2001, that the author decided to spend a cold, dreary, Sunday afternoon in New York City. The New York Times advertised a special exhibit of the works of Norman Rockwell at the Guggenheim Museum. The article that accompanied the advertisement said that New York’s art scene was one that always found a direction, that it had always prided itself on being able to articulate the nation’s mood. But that was no longer. As the city shivered under the long shadow of September 11, it was unclear how that new sensibility would make itself felt.

When the author arrived at the Guggenheim, she found hundreds of people in a line that wrapped around nearly the entire building. She could hear different languages being spoken from the diverse group standing in line waiting their turn. She began to wonder why so many people would stand and wait in below freezing temperatures to see the work of an artist often criticized for being too “warm and fuzzy”.

As it turned out, in planning the retrospective at the Guggenheim, the curator was just hoping for a gentle reappraisal of the rosy American view of itself in the mid-20th century. But by the time it opened in November 2001, the focus had dramatically shifted and Rockwell's work took on a whole new meaning.

The war pieces were no longer quaint period pieces by key contemporary icons. While the whimsical renditions of innocent America seemed irrelevant, muscular Rosie the Riveter, liberated by the chance war had given her to work in a factory, gave a look of confident
disdain. As she chomped on a sandwich, her riveting machine on her knee like a weapon, her feet planted on Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, while the American flag fluttered behind, she was a symbol of the government which made it all happen for her.

Although female muscles are more likely pumped in a gym today, big government is back in charge in the US and the flag has taken on the same totemic role as it did when raised at Iwo Jima. How many times have we seen the picture of the firefighters at Ground Zero raising the American flag among the rubble that was once the icon of America's financial strength? The author believes that Americans are more self-contemplative today than at any time in her lifetime, and everything is up for re-examination.

Since Rockwell’s paintings are easy to understand, they often bring a smile people's faces. And on that bitter November day in New York City, the author believes that is exactly what so many desperately needed. Rockwell’s work is filled with recognizable characters that chronicle American life. From his paintings of the First World War and the Second World War to the astronauts landing on the moon in 1969, Rockwell told an American story. Perhaps looking back at such events that shaped our nation and our lives allowed people to find comfort in the present and hope in the future. Seeing again what struggles Americans have overcome gave confidence to many that we could it again.

Rockwell’s paintings showed his real affection for common folk, his deep patriotism, and the ordinary and extraordinary moments in American life and history. Perhaps Americans needed to be reminded of this. And maybe we need to be reminded more often. Perhaps
his images offered Americans a way to understand themselves, their country, and their experiences, particularly in turbulent times. The author thinks they do.

It was only at the Louvre Museum in Paris that the author had ever see such large crowds of people from all over the world anxiously trying to get a glimpse of a painting. And in her humble opinion, seeing *Rosie the Riveter* was much more rewarding than seeing the *Mona Lisa*.

What began as a dreary autumn day in New York City turned out to be a warm one. It was a day the author used for observing others. It was a day that the art of an ordinary New Yorker helped so many others reflect on the past, the present, and the future. It was a day of renewed hope.
The Four Freedoms

"Freedom of Speech"

"Freedom from Fear"

Appendix A
The Four Freedoms

“Freedom from Want”

“Freedom of Worship”

Appendix B
"The Problem We All Live With"
"Rosie the Riveter"
"Girl in the Mirror"
"Saying Grace"
This survey is being conducted for a Thesis project in order to receive a Master of Arts in Corporate and Public Communications. The research topic is how Norman Rockwell became an essential part of American culture.

All survey responses will be kept confidential. If you wish to know the results of this survey, a presentation of research will be given on May 1, 2003 in the Walsh Library at Seton Hall University. If you are unable to attend, please contact me at (212) 490-9000 ext. 7058 and I will send a copy of the Thesis to you.

Please return the completed forms to:

MaryEileen Aldana
TIAA-CREF
730 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10017-3206

Thank you for your assistance. Your participation in this project is greatly appreciated.

“Triple Self Portrait”

Appendix G
Please rate the following statements using the key:
SA = strongly agree   A = agree   N = no opinion   D = disagree   SD = strongly disagree

1. I know who Norman Rockwell was.  
   SA   A   N   D   SD

2. I could probably recognize one of Rockwell's works.  
   SA   A   N   D   SD

3. Rockwell had the ability to create facial expressions better than most other artists.  
   SA   A   N   D   SD

4. When Rockwell's paintings reflected current issues like civil rights, school segregation, and the Vietnam War, he was uniquely recording American history.  
   SA   A   N   D   SD

5. Artists today don't capture the human spirit and emotions of the American family like Rockwell did.  
   SA   A   N   D   SD

Comments

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

“The Surprise”
6. When Rockwell was commissioned by FDR in 1942 to create the "Four Freedoms", thereby raising $133 million in war bonds, it was probably a patriotic gesture on his part.

7. I can personally relate to the stories and events depicted in Rockwell's art.

8. The "ordinary" look Rockwell created in his illustrations is timeless. People in 2002 America can appreciate them just as much as those who saw them when they were first created.

9. Rockwell was just as much a storyteller as an artist.

10. Rockwell should be considered in the history books as one of the great American artists.
Optional Questions:

Male ____
Female ____

Age  20-30  30-40  40-50  50-60  60-70  70+  

Level of Education ________________________________

Occupation ________________________________

Do you have a general interest in American art? _________

Generally speaking, do you like Rockwell’s work? _________

Rate your level of art expertise  1  2  3  4  5
(low)  (high)
Survey Results

I know who Norman Rockwell was.

I could probably recognize one of Rockwell's works.

When Rockwell's paintings reflected current issues like civil rights, school segregation, and the Vietnam War, he was uniquely recording American history.

I can personally relate to the stories and events depicted in Rockwell's art.

Rockwell was just as much a storyteller as an artist.

Appendix H