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Review: *Advertising at War: Business, Consumers, and Government in the 1940s* by Inger L. Stole

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Inger L. Stole. *Advertising at War: Business, Consumers, and Government in the 1940s*. (The History of Communication.) Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 2012. Pp. viii, 263. Cloth \$85.00, paper \$30.00.

For those familiar with the major outlines of the development of American advertising before, during, and after World War II, Inger L. Stole's study bears few surprises. Despite her claim that "advertising and consumer issues that emerged with the war conditions [have remained] largely undocumented" (p. 1), the literature on these topics is actually quite extensive and has traced the main contours of advertising's journey through the war rather convincingly. Earlier literature on this topic includes Frank Fox's *Madison Avenue Goes to War: The Strange Military Career of American Advertising, 1941-1945* (1975) and Robert Griffith's seminal essay, "The Selling of America: The Advertising Council and American Politics, 1942-1960," in *Business History Review* (1983). For more recent literature, see Kathy M. Newman's study, *Radio Active: Advertising and Consumer Activism, 1935-1947* (2004), or John Bush Jones's *All-Out for Victory! Magazine Advertising and the World War II Home Front* (2009).

There is a scholarly consensus that advertising was on the defensive in the late 1930s, and that its usefulness and reputation were questioned during the Great Depression. World War II provided advertisers with an opportunity to redeem their trade, which they utilized in expert fashion. In close collaboration with the government and through the creation of the (War) Advertising Council, they developed effective and patriotic campaigns that united Americans behind the war and simultaneously refurbished the image of American business and free enterprise. This intimate collaboration and effective goodwill advertising extended into the postwar period, although the political focus shifted to the defense of freedom and democracy within the Cold War context while the dissemination of a free enterprise ideology remained the same. The chapters in Stole's book follow this overall outline, and she cites most of the relevant literature and incorporates it into her analysis.

Where her study breaks new ground is in its detailed discussion of the institutional history of the Advertising Council, which for most of the duration of World War II was known as the War Advertising Council (WAC), only to return to its original name after 1945. Based on extensive research of industry trade journals, internal memos, and legislative records, Stole deepens our understanding of the behind-the-scenes politics involved in the WAC's activities. She effectively traces the extensive lobbying efforts that ensured the industry would retain its advantageous tax benefits as well as chronicles the successful congressional battles that protected advertisers' privileged legal status. Chapters on the attempted resurgence of the consumer movement and the failed campaign on educating Americans about the dangers of venereal disease add further depth to her study.

Considering the degree to which the contours of this topic have been covered, however, it is a little surprising that Stole's overall analysis is rather limited. Her study does not delve very deeply into the question of how advertising changed the overall narratives of American politics and culture. Stole's study is also fairly brief, adding up to slightly more than 160 pages of actual discussion if one subtracts the full-page posters and advertisements included in the narrative. But for those looking for additional, and more detailed, information about the institutional history of the War Advertising Council as well as its internal operations and legislative lobbying efforts during the war, Stole's book will provide a valuable resource.

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