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Walter L. Hixson. *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-61.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. xvi + 283 pp. $33.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-312-17680-8; $90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-312-16080-7.

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The cold war was in many respects a struggle for the hearts and minds of people everywhere. That competition was carried out through massive Soviet and American propaganda campaigns to isolate the respective opponent internationally, win the approval of world opinion, and consolidate the own sphere of influence. Every opportunity from art exhibits to international sports events, and every medium from radio to satellite and computer technology, was used to fight the propaganda war.

In recent years, historians, political scientists, and communication experts have begun to explore the cultural and ideological dimensions of the East-West confrontation. Following the pathbreaking works of Morrell Heald, Lawrence Kaplan, Frank Ninkovich, and Emily Rosenberg, a number of studies have appeared on culture and international relations, the dissemination of American culture and its impact overseas, the rhetoric of the cold war, the role of the CIA, and the function of communication theories in cold war politics. To fully evaluate the propaganda dimension of the East-West confrontation, we are in need of up-to-date surveys of the government's public diplomacy efforts, organizational histories of the United States Information Agency, the Psychological Strategy Board, and the Operations Coordinating Board, and further country studies on the impact of America's overseas opinion management.

Walter Hixson, Professor of History at the University of Akron and author of a prize-winning study on George Kennan has written an important contribution to the study of U.S. overseas propaganda. His new book, *Parting the Curtain*, analyzes American propaganda and cultural infiltration in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union from 1945 up to the end of the Eisenhower presidency. Hixson advances the thesis that public diplomacy was more significant to U.S. cold war strategy than has been recognized so far. He argues that America's psychological warfare and its cultural exports to Eastern Europe succeeded in "parting the iron curtain" and thus contributed to the ultimate breakdown of Soviet hegemony and the dissolution of the USSR itself (p. ix).

Based on a wide range of sources, including recently declassified government documents, intelligence assessments, radio transcripts, and refugee testimonies from Russian and American archives, the author outlines the evolution of the U.S. government's overseas propaganda program. After initial demobilization at the end of the war, propaganda was soon revived as a foreign policy instrument. By 1950, the propaganda build-up reached new heights with the Truman Administration's sweeping review of U.S. foreign and security policies, which culminated in the formulation of NSC-68 and a substantial increase in propaganda budgets. New organizations were founded, i.e. the Psychological Strategy Board, to plan and administer the global information offensive labelled as "the Campaign of Truth."

Radio played a central role in this effort to undermine Soviet hegemony. The Voice of America (VOA) developed from a near-to-death outfit to "the most effective tool in Western efforts to challenge Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe and in the USSR itself" (p. 51). Radio transmissions projected the idea that the "good life" in the West was linked with political freedom, capitalist economics, and democratic politics. The broadcasts challenged the Soviet system directly by pointing towards low living standards, relative economic underdevelopment, scarcity of consumer goods, and lack of personal freedom. The substantial communist efforts to jam VOA and other Western broadcasts attests to their perceived strategic significance. CIA financed radio operations, such as Radio Free Europe, left a deep impression with the Eastern Europeans. Hixson demonstrates the impact of western broadcasts on the popular uprisings in East Germany and Hungary. Ironically, they had to be toned down because their success ultimately provoked popular unrest and with it Soviet intervention. The radio war, and with it the corrosive influence of anti-Communist propaganda, continued for many years up into the 1980s. In

the end, however, the Kremlin proved unsuccessful in preventing Eastern Europeans and Soviet citizens from listening to Western propaganda broadcasts.

With the advent of the Eisenhower Administration in 1953, overseas propaganda received an additional boost. Strengthened by presidential endorsement new organisations were founded and existing programs enlarged. From 1953 on the United States Information Agency (USIA) became the focal point of America's public diplomacy. USIA promoted the image of the United States as champion of peace through programs such as Atoms for Peace and Open Skies and countered Soviet charges that ruling class domination and racism were rampant in America.

By the late 1950s, the relationship between the superpowers improved and from 1958 on Soviets and Americans agreed to cultural and educational exchange programs. Hixson skillfully describes the 1959 American National Exhibition at Sokolniki Park in Moscow, site of the famous "kitchen debate" between Nixon and Khrushchev. He demonstrates the stark contrast between the infatuation of the visitors with the icons of the "American way of life" with the helpless, even ridiculous attempts of the Soviets to contain the corrosive impact of that infatuation. A woman wrote the following in the exhibit's visitor's book: "I really enjoyed the exhibition. We can see that your living standard is higher than ours and the people live better than we do." After she was questioned on site by Communist Party monitors, she added the following comment to the book: "But our government is also taking care of its people and is trying to make our life better" (p. 200).

Parting the Curtain advances the important argument that cultural penetration combined with internal factors resulted in the breakdown of Soviet hegemony: "Modern communications, especially radio, television, and film, provided residents of the Soviet empire with the ability to access Western culture in spite of restrictions on travel and East-West contacts. Increased awareness of a more modern, consumer-driven culture could raise expectations and undermine the authority of the CP regimes" (p. 230). Hixson convincingly suggests how the free flow of ideas and the projection of a popular culture of prosperity slowly undermined the legitimacy of authoritarianism. Although much of this is still speculation, for the period under investigation there can be little doubt that America's overseas propaganda and cultural relations contributed to creating a position of preponderant power. I find myself in complete agreement with the general argument. I do, however, have some qualifications on: 1. the relationship between propaganda, psychological warfare, and cultural exports; 2. the Eisenhower-Dulles relationship; 3. the role of democratization in U.S. cold war foreign policies and the conceptual links between overseas propaganda, world opinion, and national security.

First, Professor Hixson argues that "U.S. national security planners failed to realize the potential of cultural infiltration during the Truman and Eisenhower years. From the outset of the Cold War, an excessive preoccupation with 'liberation' undermined efforts to effect a viable cultural strategy" (p. 223). By juxtaposing cultural infiltration and psychological warfare, Hixson creates the impression that the two symbolized different approaches to public diplomacy. For Washington's propagandists, the difference was largely semantical. Since the activities of the Creel Committee during World War One, Americans were critical about the implications of opinion management for a long time. Many insisted that propaganda carried anti-democratic connotations and should thus be prohibited. By the early 1950s, the term had become accepted again in foreign policy planning and was used interchangeably with information policy, psychological warfare, public diplomacy, and political warfare. Government-directed cultural activities, as opposed to informal cultural exports, were part of what was increasingly called psychological warfare. The militarization of rhetoric accompanied the militarization of society and the new label served primarily budgetary purposes as Truman's Secretary of State for Public Affairs, Edward Barrett, explained: "American Congressmen, like Americans in general, were suspicious of anything that could be labelled propaganda .... If you dressed it up as warfare, money was very easy to come by."

The argument that American planners were so immersed in the liberation strategy that they failed to appreciate the potential benefits of long-term cultural infiltration overestimates the importance of liberation to national security planning. By looking at the larger picture of U.S. overseas propaganda during this time period, it appears that the majority of activities were not conducted to endanger the status quo but rather to shore up an anti-Communist, anti-neutralist global alliance while simultaneously evoking the impression of dynamics. Only a fraction of all the public diplomacy efforts was directed against Eastern Europe or the USSR. Most of time and money was spent on stabilizing Western Europe (the German program alone was at least ten times as large as the one for all of Eastern Europe and the USSR together) and competing for public opinion in newly independent nations.

Liberation was a rhetorical desire to evoke images of credibility, directed at allies and potential allies, just as aggressive liberation propaganda was an expression of a new quality of the cold war. As it became clear that the status quo between both nuclear superpowers and their respective client states could not be altered, liberation propaganda and rhetoric became the preferred instrument to carry out a symbolic confrontation and suggest fluidity where stagnation persisted.

Secondly, in *Parting the Curtain*, Hixson questions some basic tenets of Eisenhower revisionism. He credits the president with a better understanding than most of his contemporaries that the cold war was in essence a psychological struggle for world opinion. He criticizes Eisenhower for lack of leadership and deference to John Foster Dulles. Yes, indeed, Dulles achieved his aim of getting the propagandists out of the State Department. But this reorganization did not reflect a decreased presidential interest and activism in the fields of propaganda and cultural relations. Eisenhower may have given in to Dulles on this question of bureaucratic organization but he ensured that in 1955 USIA became a member of the central planning group for public diplomacy, the Operations Coordinating Board. He also made sure that the psychological dimension of foreign policy decisions became a frequent topic in the National Security Council's discussions. As Saki Dockrill demonstrated in her recent study, psychological considerations played an important role in the New Look. Robert Ivie and others have demonstrated the president's active interest in the propaganda aspects of major foreign policy speeches (i.e. Atoms for Peace) even against reservations of his secretary of state. Finally, Eisenhower appointed his own propaganda advisor to the White House and thus demonstrated the importance his administration afforded the struggle for world opinion. The president tried to balance Dulles' hard-nosed geostrategic priorities with his instinctive comprehension of the importance of public diplomacy.

Thirdly, in his analysis of the USIA's worldwide propaganda campaign, Professor Hixson asserts, "Consistent with the general character of U.S. Cold War diplomacy, undermining communism carried a higher priority than promoting democracy" (p. 122). I would argue instead that America's national security ideology rested on fostering global democratization and supporting anti-communism in whatever form. It is true that Washington kept authoritarian regimes in power as they promised stability. It is also true that American officials felt threatened by popular movements which carried the potential of endangering U.S. strategic interests and thus repeatedly meddled in the affairs of other democratic nations. The conclusion, however, that anti-communism carried more priority than democratization underestimates the powerful conceptual links between national security, democratization, and propaganda.

The conceptual framework of America's ideology of national security consisted of clearly defined core values which envisioned that the peaceful interaction of democratic states, interdependent through free trade and collective security would ensure international stability and thus security for the United States. This vision of order is commonly described as liberal-democratic-internationalism. Since the days of Woodrow Wilson, democratization was a conceptual prerequisite for international stability although tensions existed with an equally strong desire at hegemonic leadership. The Wilsonian redefinition of power, as opinion leadership, created the theoretical justification for overseas propaganda. The pluralism of world opinions, sometimes described as "marketplace of ideas," ultimately became the battleground for the competition between East and West. It was thus only logical to develop skills in international opinion management and follow a course of global democratization. Both components were essential to America's cold war national security. To put it differently, the fact that the United States gave such paramount importance to influencing world opinion is a safe hint at the sincerity of it's democratizationary intentions.

Notwithstanding those comments, intended to enter into a debate about broader ideological and conceptual implications of cold war propaganda to U.S. foreign relations, Hixson has provided us with a well-written, thorough analysis of America's propaganda and cultural exports towards Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. His study considerably enriches the literature on U.S. cold war foreign policy as it widens our understanding of the strategic significance of public diplomacy. Parting the Curtain elegantly combines diplomatic and cultural history and is well-suited for classroom adoption.

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