

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



John Bush Jones. *All-Out for Victory!: Magazine Advertising and the World War II Home Front.* Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2009. xi + 314 pp. \$50.00 (library), ISBN 978-1-58465-768-2.

Reviewed by Janet Rice McCoy (Morehead State University)

Published on Jhistory (October, 2009)

Commissioned by Donna Harrington-Lueker

Advertising for Victory

The hallway walls of the Veteran's Administration Hospital in Fort Worth, Texas are lined with matted and framed advertisements from popular magazines published during and supporting World War II. Whenever my husband's doctors were running behind schedule, I would wander the halls and admire these tidbits of historic popular culture, thinking they could be the focus of a book. John Bush Jones has beaten me to the punch, however, with his comprehensive and engaging text *All-Out for Victory! Magazine Advertising and the World War II Home Front*.

Jones built an extensive database of over five thousand commercial, rather than government, advertisements for this study. He focused on ten large-circulation general-interest magazines, including *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Life*, *Look*, *Collier's*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Esquire*, *Business Week*, and *Farm Journal and Farmer's Wife*. A wide swath of American popular culture was explored since this database included news and general-interest magazines, one women's and one men's magazine, and one magazine focusing on the business community and another on rural America. The text is organized thematically, then chronologically within each theme. It should be noted the study begins with advertisements printed before Pearl Harbor and the United States's entry into the war.

The first chapter sets the stage by outlining the hierarchy of war advertisement types as defined by the War Advertising Council. Each of the five levels reflected the commercial advertisers' commitment to the war effort, from highest to lowest. The highest level was "All Out" and promoted some aspect of citizen involvement in the war. This was closely followed by "Double Barrelled [*sic*] Job" that supported the war effort while also promoting a product. Jones primarily focused on these two types of advertisements in his study. The next two levels demonstrate less commitment to the war, with "Sneak Punch"

sliding the war message into the copy and "A Plug in a Slug" simply tacking on a tagline to support the war effort (p. 33). Jones occasionally mentions advertisements with taglines, primarily to contrast and compare them with copy demonstrating a significantly stronger commitment to the war effort. Finally, there was the "Business as Usual" category that failed to mention the war (p. 33). (These advertisements had no place in this book.)

After setting the stage, the next eight chapters focus on advertisements with specific themes, including: (1) motivational; (2) industrial support; (3) agricultural support; (4) conservation, scrap drives, and home front efficiency; (5) morale boosting; (6) coping with shortages and rationing; (7) women in war work; and (8) giving blood and buying bonds.

One of the book's greatest strengths is also one of its greatest weaknesses. Because of the style of documentation, this book is easily accessible to the general public. Jones intentionally avoided footnotes, opting instead for textual and parenthetical references based on the Modern Language Association style manual (MLA). Furthermore, the bibliography has thirty-two entries and is limited to two pages. Unfortunately, this bibliographic list omits the numerous advertisements analyzed for the study. Readers would need to check the detailed index, go to a specific page in the book, and then compile their own list of primary sources for the advertisements. This is a disappointing omission in a book published by an academic press. The qualities that make this text appealing to the general reader also limit its usefulness for scholars and diminish its potential as a model for teaching academic writing to graduate students.

Jones uses an analytical style that blends description of the visual elements with a summary of the advertisements' verbal arguments. He does an excellent job of identifying common themes, finding specific ads to illustrate those themes, and weaving the material together

in a logical order with thick description of the advertisements themselves. By his own admission, Jones relies heavily on primary rather than secondary texts for his research. Unfortunately, the author's heavy emphasis on the advertisements themselves occasionally leads to speculation that is not supported by secondary documentation. These uncorroborated claims are scattered throughout the book and are often couched in vague language such as "this program appears to be" (p. 118), and "perhaps among the public at large" (p. 188). The first claim refers to used but usable equipment being recycled from the home front to the war front and the second, to the various definitions of the word "sacrifice" as it related to civilian and military populations. In general, this book would have been stronger if Jones had placed his analysis of advertising's role in supporting the war effort within the larger body of literature on World War II.

Jones uses articles in *Business Week* as the foundation for analyzing the advertisements in the magazine. For instance, he quotes the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as reported in *Business Week*, to analyze advertising trends that sought to recruit women to work outside of the home to support the war (p. 223). In another example he cites an article reporting that in 75 percent of factories studied worker productivity increased between 4 and 11 percent when music was played (p. 82). This information is then used to analyze the music industry's rationale for placing advertisements in *Business Week*. Like the vague and unsupported claims mentioned above, this section of the book would have been stronger if his research had moved beyond the primary magazine texts to build a solid foundation for analysis. Duplication and verification of "facts" from multiple sources that go beyond *Business Week* would have enhanced the book's credibility.

It should be noted that prior to this book on advertising, Jones wrote *The Songs that Fought the War: Popular Music and the Home Front, 1939-1945* (2006). Jones occasionally refers to the previous book in the current book. An excellent example is when songs from World War II are woven into the chapter exploring the impact of commercial advertising on morale, both on the home front and the battlefield. The two texts build upon one another and add to the body of knowledge regarding American popular culture during World War II and the period leading up to the war. Even though more than ten songs are mentioned, like the advertisements, they are included in the index but not the bibliography.

Some notable issues addressed in the text include the changing role of women within American society (pp. 217-241); the treatment of African Americans in advertis-

ing (pp. 176 and 111); and the role of cigarettes in boosting moral and the ethics of cigarette advertising (pp. 83-86 and 166-167). In addition, Jones provides a cautionary note on avoiding the tendency to transfer today's sensibilities and outlook to the cultural milieu surrounding World War II. He notes that today's youth in particular are "ill-equipped to fairly evaluate the expression of emotion and sentiment in war ads" (p. 177). The discrepancy between past and present worldviews makes this an excellent text to introduce today's students to an unfamiliar cultural milieu in which the world was a different place.

This book deserves a place on the bookshelves of popular culture and media historians due to its extensive analysis of advertisements prior to and during World War II. The chapter devoted to women and the war effort also makes it an excellent option for women's history courses. Some historians, however, might be frustrated by the omission of footnotes and lack of a detailed bibliography. With more than sixty advertisements, including eight in color, this text would be useful in the disciplines of advertising and graphic design. Its description of both visual and textual advertising elements also makes it an excellent choice for introductory rhetorical criticism classes. Jones does not identify rhetorical theories per se, but does provide thick description. One assignment could be having students identify the persuasive strategy in an advertisement and then match it to a specific rhetorical theory.

In addition, and perhaps most importantly, primary candidates for readership are World War II history buffs and descendants of World War II veterans who want an engaging text with illustrations so they can explore this critical period in American history. Jones has written an accessible book with the potential to break out of the academy and appeal to the general public. The publication of a more affordable paperback edition would enhance the likelihood of this scenario unfolding. The author's earlier text, *The Songs that Fought the War*, is available as a trade paperback for about twenty dollars. Hopefully the publisher will decide to print *All-Out for Victory!* in that format and price range soon.

Jones and his joint publishers, the University Press of New Hampshire and Brandeis University Press, are to be commended for demonstrating that what we do as scholars has applications and commercial value beyond the walls of the ivory tower. If that means omitting footnotes and an extensive bibliography, so be it. Perhaps, however, academics and academic presses could follow the model used by author Orville Vernon Burton and his publisher Hill and Wang regard-

ing the book *The Age of Lincoln* (2007). To keep the text affordable and accessible, Burton created a Web site that includes both the footnotes and extensive bibliography expected by his academic peers. (See <http://www.ageoflincoln.com/Welcome.html>.) There are additional resources on the Web site, too, such as a bibliographic essay, historical photographs from the period, various reviews of the actual book, a list of the author's upcoming public appearances, and other useful information. This model blends print and digital formats to create an ongoing channel of communication between an author and the readers of a text. As academics, we can learn from those who attempt to bridge the town-and-gown divide so that our work moves into the public sphere.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

Citation: Janet Rice McCoy. Review of Jones, John Bush, *All-Out for Victory!: Magazine Advertising and the World War II Home Front*. Jhistory, H-Net Reviews. October, 2009.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=25450>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.