

# H-Net Reviews

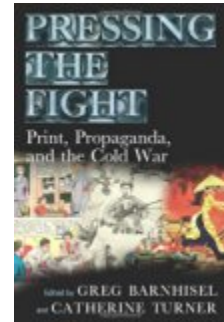
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Greg Barnhisel, Catherine Turner, eds. *Pressing the Fight: Print, Propaganda, and the Cold War*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010. vi + 285 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-55849-736-8.

Reviewed by James Aucoin (University of South Alabama)

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Commissioned by Heidi Tworek



## An Arsenal of Print

This volume pulls together important research on the use of print, including books, magazines, pamphlets, newspapers, and comic strips, as strategic weapons during the struggle between democracies and communist countries for ideological dominance of the globe after World War II. Governments, foundations, special interest groups, NGOs, and ideologically inclined publishers produced a glut of printed materials, issued suggested reading lists, and established libraries in foreign countries.

The editors certainly meet their stated purpose: to show the influence and scope of print culture during the decades following the end of World War II as it related to ideological and political interests. Kristin Mathews of Brigham Young University opens the collection with a well-crafted examination of how leftist organizers in the United States used printed materials to recruit members and expand the influence of their ideas. She focuses on Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and its production and distribution of *The Port Huron Statement*, which appeared in 1962 as a declaration of leftist ideals for America. SDS used this publication and others, including underground newspapers, to propose an alternative to the dominant, centralized political narrative, offering instead one that would be “decentralized, collaborative, and transformative” (p. 33). What was “new” about the New Left, Mathews persuasively argues, was its use of print culture to develop and distribute its ideas. Ironically, as Mathews points out, the FBI mimicked the form and mode of the New Left’s publications,

using pamphlets, letters, and press releases in a relatively effective effort to discredit the movement.

Laura Jane Gifford, an independent scholar associated with colleges in the U.S. Northwest, follows up Mathews’s essay with one that quantifies and examines the anticommunist book culture in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. She documents that politically conservative organizations and publishers waged an ideological battle using and subsidizing primarily paperback books as an alternative library to counter liberal and leftist literature. Conservative groups and publishers created networks of readers who helped spread the conservative ideology to their friends by providing copies of books such as Barry Goldwater’s *Conscience of a Conservative* (1960) and John A. Stormer’s *None Dare Call It Treason* (1964). Prominent publishers involved in the conservative movement were Henry Regnery Co., Liberty Bell Presses, and Devin-Adair, Inc. Special-interest groups such as the Church League of America, the Foundation for Economic Education, and the Heritage Foundation subsidized books to help spread their philosophy. These publishing efforts, it is argued, had shifted conservative ideology into mainstream politics by the 1970s.

In the book’s second section, authors examine the use of books and other printed materials after World War II in Germany, Japan, and in developing countries as the Soviet Union, China, and the United States fought for ideological dominance. Historian Christian Kanig doc-

uments the battle for post-World War II German minds, waged aggressively by the Soviet Union and the United States. The Soviet Military Administration Publishing House carried out the confiscation of fascist and anti-communist books from libraries in the area of Germany it controlled and at the same time printed millions of books in the German language on numerous topics that glorified the Soviet Union or otherwise supported communist ideology. For its part, the U.S. State Department saw books as weapons to attack Soviet propaganda in Germany and, as Japanese English professor Hiromi Ochi shows, to counter Chinese propaganda in postwar Japan. Americans first stocked German and Japanese libraries with Armed Services Editions left over from the war, then added Council on Books in Wartime's Overseas Editions. Most of the books and magazines distributed by the United States extolled democratic ideals or showed the living standards of ordinary Americans. Fashion magazines were particularly popular with Japanese women readers. But, as several of the authors, including Australian historian Amada Laugesen, document, scientific works—books and journals—were in high demand after the war in Germany, Japan, and in developing nations.

Martin Manning of the U.S. State Department takes a look from another direction—the impact of print propaganda from the Soviet Union and China that targeted the United States and other democratic countries. He examines the collection held in the United States Information Agency of confiscated materials mailed or otherwise shipped into the United States from suspect countries trying to sway U.S. opinion. The Soviet Union and the United States exchanged glossy magazines with each other but more problematic were the pamphlets, newspapers, and books sent directly from the Soviet Union or China to fellow travelers or sympathetic sources in the United States. His essay includes a well-reasoned case study of how China targeted the United States with printed propaganda materials.

In the third section, the book examines how domestic publications were used in the United States in an attempt to shape American attitudes about communism, democracy, and the Cold War. Edward Brunner of Southern Illinois University offers a particularly entertaining and illuminating essay on Milton Caniff's Steve Canyon newspaper comic strip as Cold War propaganda. Brunner argues that the visual representation and dialogue of the comic strip assumed that the United States has no ideological message, that its unmediated image was enough to sway people's minds about its superior ideals. With a readership of up to thirty million, the comic strip was a

potent aspect of American propaganda, suggesting that much of what the mainstream, legacy media do can be seen as part of a cultural ideological message to which private companies, citizens, and government contribute.

Two essays, one written by Amy Reddinger of the University of Wisconsin, Marinette, and one written by Scott Laderman of the University of Minnesota, Duluth, competently expand the study of propaganda to two often overlooked genres and conclude the third section of the book. Reddinger looks at cookbooks, particularly corporate-sponsored cookbooks, and how they presented Hawaiian cooking to the mainland. Hawaiian food was framed as exotic but accessible, particularly to women, who were seen by the cookbook industry as more open to new ideas about food than were men. She stresses that the booming cookbook market during the Cold War years was highly gendered, a cultural message to women to stay at home rather than taking on careers and become in-home entertainers to family and friends. In this essay, Reddinger picks up on a subtext of many of these essays that within the larger confrontation between the communist world and the free world, there also was a conscious attempt to define gender roles in the United States and elsewhere. Those roles, according to Cold War standards, were women being homemakers and childcare providers and men providing income for the nuclear family. Laderman, for his part, examines travel guides for South Vietnam at a time when the United States was becoming ever more involved in that country's war with North Vietnam as a substitute for a larger conflagration between the United States and either the Soviet Union or communist China. The travel books' messages were, according to Laderman, that the war was a minor inconvenience that should not stop travelers from visiting the European-style inns and restaurants in South Vietnam's cities, particularly Saigon. The nationalistic uprising against the French that had recently concluded is rarely directly mentioned in the guidebooks that promised a country whose "face is French but whose heart is Oriental" (p. 215).

The last two essays are by Russell Cobb, University of Alberta, and Patricia Hills of Boston University. Cobb provides the history of America's attempt to influence ideology in Central and South America and Mexico by promoting writers who rejected or were at least ambivalent about the revolution in Cuba. This promotion occurred through CIA-subsidized literary journals. However, Cobb argues that it is wrong to look at *Mundo Nuevo* merely as a propaganda tool of the United States. Regardless of the CIA influence, the journal took a nu-

anced approach toward communism and effectively promoted Latin American writers as avant-garde equals to Western writers, thereby moving Latin American writers onto the world stage. Hills's essay concerns Alfred Barr, director of the Modern Museum of Art in New York, and the publication of his hugely influential 1943 booklet "What is Modern Painting." She argues that underlying the rhetoric of the booklet's art criticism is a pro-American Cold War ideology that actually shifts and changes throughout the booklet's many editions. Indeed,

Hills argues, the booklet can be a guide to the shifting ideology of the Cold War's anticommunist rhetoric.

This collection, which is a volume in the University of Massachusetts Press's series Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book, adds to our understanding of how print media (and by extrapolation any media) was and can be used by governments, special interests, and private crusaders to wage ideological battles. All show clear writing, sound logic, and thorough research.

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