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Introduction by Christopher Endy, California State University, Los Angeles

Laura Belmonte. *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, 2010. 272 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8122-2119-0 (paperback, \$22.50); 978-0-8122-4082-5 (hardcover, \$47.50).

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Introduction by Christopher Endy, California State University, Los Angeles

Laura Belmonte's *Selling the American Way* is both "a synthesis and an extension," as David Krugler writes in his review. Belmonte is not the first to study 1950s Cold War propaganda, but no one has done it with so much careful attention to the propaganda's cultural content. In fact, as Jessica Gienow-Hecht argues in her essay, Belmonte's cultural analysis tells us as much about the broader history of American national identity as it does about Cold War policy. That's what Gienow-Hecht means when she titles her review, "Buy One, Get One Free." These accomplishments, along with Belmonte's concise overview of 1950s bureaucratic politics in Washington, make her book an excellent choice for graduate students or others seeking entry into a crowded scholarly field. As the roundtable makes clear, however, we are still waiting for a definitive account of U.S. propaganda in the 1950s. Like earlier scholars, Belmonte devotes relatively little attention to how foreign audiences received U.S. messages. On that issue, the contributors to this roundtable offer a few suggestions that can point to a more comprehensive, truly international history of U.S. propaganda.

Belmonte's first two chapters trace the political contests in Washington that gave rise to U.S. propaganda programs but then left those programs perpetually struggling to justify their modest share of the federal budget. The final four chapters bring a particularly creative approach by focusing on four central themes of U.S. propaganda: democracy, capitalism, gender, and race. Belmonte's thematic treatment earns high praise in this roundtable. Penny von Eschen also finds especially important the book's added attention to religion. Krugler singles out Belmonte's insights on how U.S. propagandists rebutted Soviet accusations against the United States. The reviewers also find a few gaps in the treatment. Nick Cull, for instance, wishes for more coverage of African American propagandists, and Krugler points out that *Selling the American Way* says little on covert propaganda and the role of private organizations in selling "America" overseas. Still, the overwhelming tenor of the roundtable points to the richness and subtlety of Belmonte's research.

Now that we have Belmonte's addition to the literature, what are the pressing historiographic issues that remain to resolve? In one valuable suggestion, Cull calls for scholarship that will push the field out of its 1950s comfort zone and into more recent decades. Beyond broader chronological range, the roundtable points to three other big issues for historians of U.S. propaganda:

1) To what extent did U.S. policymakers, especially Dwight Eisenhower, treat propaganda as a top priority? This question has been a tension in the field going back at least as far as Walter L. Hixson's 1997 book, *Parting the Curtain*. In Hixson's words, "although Eisenhower in particular believed strongly that cultural infiltration would ultimately prove decisive in the Cold War, he failed to follow through on his own perceptions." Instead, Eisenhower favored "militarization as the dominant paradigm."¹ In this roundtable, the

¹ Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), xiii-xiv. For a valuable study that stresses the strategic importance Eisenhower gave

debate continues. Both Krugler and Cull, for instance, call attention to Belmonte's discussion of McCarthyism, noting that Eisenhower waited months before defending U.S. propaganda programs from red-baiting charges. What then should we infer about Eisenhower's priorities based on this episode? More broadly, should we take the relatively small funds dedicated to U.S. propaganda as proof of policymakers' disinterest? Or were the paltry budgets merely a reflection of how spreading propaganda was a lot cheaper than maintaining military bases overseas and developing bigger nuclear weapons?

2) Does U.S. propaganda need to be truthful to work? Belmonte suggests that truthfulness is vital. As she writes in her conclusion, "Selling 'America' will never work if we do not close the gap between how we define ourselves—and how we actually act at home and abroad" (184). When it came to foreign views of American racism, the United States' hypocrisy does seem to have hampered U.S. propaganda efforts, especially in the Third World. At the same time, propaganda's success does not necessarily depend on its factual accuracy. After all, foreign people can have their own fantasies, dreams, and distortions about the United States. While many foreigners no doubt looked carefully at American social and political conditions, foreigners have also used the idea of America as a springboard for their own dream worlds, whether utopian or dystopian.² In this light, U.S. propaganda's success might depend on its ability to amplify pre-existing positive fantasies about Americanness. Along these lines, von Eschen quotes an anthropologist of the Soviet Union, Alexei Yurchak, who describes Soviet citizens' fascination with an "Imaginary West." As Yurchak suggests, historians should remain open to the possibility that foreigners could be less—and more—than literal witnesses of the United States.

3) The idea that foreigners have their own dream worlds brings us to the biggest unresolved issue: the question of reception. Amidst all their praise, the reviewers' most common critique reflects the difficulty of understanding how foreign audiences received U.S. propaganda. In this regard, *Selling the American Way* continues a long tradition. When it comes to scholarship on U.S. Cold War propaganda, the issue of foreign reception is a bit like the weather; as the old saying goes, everyone talks about it, but nobody does much about it. We can even go back to the 1990s, when the first reviews of Hixson's *Parting the Curtain* sounded the same, now familiar lament on the need for more grounding in foreign contexts.³

to propaganda, see Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006).

² Among many works on this theme, two particularly ambitious examples are Philippe Roger, *The American Enemy: The History of French Anti-Americanism*. trans. Sharon Bowman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); and Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).

³ See for instance Emily S. Rosenberg, review of Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, in *Journal of American History* 84 (March 1998): 1576-78.

Part of the problem reflects language training and archival access. U.S. government archives can give us lots of important insights, but they can only reveal so much about the effectiveness of propaganda. We can note, as Belmonte does, that U.S. propagandists carefully customized their messages for each nation, but this in itself does not guarantee success (6). For instance, studies on Cold War France have shown how French audiences could reject U.S. propaganda even when U.S. officials tailored each message to their target audience.⁴

To resolve the problem of foreign reception, the participants in this roundtable offer a few ideas, and I will add one of my own. In her roundtable reply, Belmonte makes an important call for more bilateral studies on foreign reception. At the same time, it is also important to acknowledge how many relevant studies already exist, even if they do not use the phrase “U.S. propaganda” in their title. In fact, these works generally come from scholars who do not define themselves primarily (or even secondarily) as historians of U.S. international relations. Understanding the foreign reception of U.S. propaganda requires scholars to grapple with foreigners’ broader views of the United States, which in turn requires a thorough understanding of the foreign country’s culture, politics, and society. Unfortunately for historians of U.S. international relations, scholars with the requisite language and research skills will likely be drawn to other historiographic debates more central to that country’s own history. Thus, most scholarship shedding light on the foreign reception of U.S. propaganda covers the topic as just one theme in a wider study. The anthropologist Alexei Yurchak, cited by Penny von Eschen below, provides a case in point.⁵ What we need most right now is a wide-ranging historiographic essay that synthesizes this otherwise diffuse body of scholarship.⁶ Like U.S. propagandists at their best, U.S. historians can learn a lot by listening to what those outside the United States field have to say.

⁴ Richard F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Brian Angus McKenzie, *Remaking France: Americanization, Public Diplomacy, and the Marshall Plan* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005); and Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁵ In addition to Yurchak, examples include Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don’t Go Home!: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); David F. Crew, ed., *Consuming Cold War Germany* (New York: Berg, 2003); Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943-1991* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*. trans. Diana M. Wolf (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); and Gérard Bossuat, *La France, l’aide américaine et la construction européenne, 1944-54* (Paris: Comité pour l’histoire économique et financière de la France, 1992).

⁶ Two earlier examples of wide-ranging syntheses on foreign reception are Jessica Gienow-Hecht, “Shame on US? Academics, Cultural Transfer, and the Cold War—A Critical Review” *Diplomatic History* 24 (Summer 2000): 465-94; and Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

Participants:

Laura A. Belmonte is Professor of History and Director of American Studies at Oklahoma State University. She received her doctorate from the University of Virginia where she worked with Mel Leffler. Her current research examines the origins and evolution of U.S. global policy on AIDS. She is also one of the co-authors of the forthcoming transnational U.S. history textbook *Global Americans* (Cengage, 2012). Her other publications include *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda, and the Cold War* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); *Speaking of America: Readings in U.S. History* (Cengage, 2nd edition, 2006; 3rd edition forthcoming); and several book chapters, articles, and reviews.

Christopher Endy is associate professor of history at California State University, Los Angeles, and is the author of *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill, 2004). He is now writing a book on the global politics of multinational corporations and business ethics since the late 19th century.

Nick Cull is professor of Public Diplomacy at University of Southern California where he directs the masters program in public diplomacy. He was educated at the University of Leeds (BA and PhD) and was a Harkness Fellow of the Commonwealth Fund of New York at Princeton. He is president of the International Association for Media and History (IAMHIST) and has published widely on the history of propaganda and media. His works include *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American propaganda and public diplomacy, 1945-1989* (CUP, 2008). His current projects include a sequel to that work dealing with the post-Cold War years and a history of the evolution of popular science fiction cinema.

Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht is professor of international history at the University of Cologne. Her field of interest is the interplay of culture and international relations since the early modern period. Gienow-Hecht's study *Transmission Impossible: American Journalism as Cultural Diplomacy in Postwar Germany, 1945-1955* (Baton Rouge, 1999) was co-awarded the Stuart Bernath Book Prize (best first book in diplomatic history) as well as the Myrna Bernard Prize (best book in diplomatic history written by a woman), both given by the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. Her latest study, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in German-American Relations, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2009) won the Choice Outstanding Academic Title Award and has resulted in several broadcasting interviews. Gienow-Hecht is now working on a study relating to the history of nation branding from 1500 to the present.

David Krugler is Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin--Platteville. His publications include studies of the domestic political difficulties of the Voice of America, Senator Karl Mundt's interest in public diplomacy, and the Cold War's effects on Washington, D.C. His book *This Is Only a Test: How Washington, D.C., Prepared for Nuclear War* appeared in 2006 (Palgrave Macmillan). Currently he is completing a book on racial conflict in the United States after the First World War.

Penny Von Eschen is Professor of History and American Culture at University of Michigan. She is the author of *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Harvard University Press, 2004) and *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Cornell University Press, 1997); and a co-editor of *Contested Democracy: Freedom, Race, and Power in American History* (Columbia 2007) and *American Studies: An Anthology* (Blackwell Press, 2009). She is currently working on a book titled: "God I Miss the Cold War?: Memory, Nostalgia, and Global Disorder Since 1989."

Review by Nicholas J. Cull, University of Southern California

In the aftermath of 9/11 America woke up to the importance of public diplomacy: conducting foreign policy by engaging with foreign publics. Anxious editorial writers across the nation asked ‘why do they hate us?’ and jaded Beltway veterans pondered how a ‘man in a cave’ could ‘out communicate’ the home nation of Hollywood and Madison Avenue. Historians had already identified the niche. The ‘cultural turn’ in diplomatic history and obvious role of communication in the collapse of communism led a small group of historians to begin the process of systematically studying American Cold War public diplomacy and propaganda. At last the activities of the players in America’s information war with Moscow began to receive the same sort of attention previously devoted to intelligence, economic reconstruction or arms policy. Walter Hixson and Michael Nelson led the way and many have followed. Recent additions include works by Ken Osgood on the Eisenhower-era, Giles Scott-Smith on leader visits and a fascinating treatment of Cold War film by Tony Shaw.¹ Belmonte’s book – a reworking of an excellent University of Virginia doctoral thesis begun in the mid-1990s – is a valuable contribution to this discourse. The book has many strengths. It is meticulously researched, consistently well written, disciplined in its construction and succinct in its style. Of its five chapters, the first two provide a useful narrative of the evolution of America’s global information program during the Truman and Eisenhower periods, while the remaining three treat key themes within the content of that work: democracy, family and the representation of African-Americans and their struggle for Civil Rights.

Belmonte’s narrative chapters provide an authoritative pathway through the bureaucratic and legislative tangle around the U.S. information machine. There are a few surprises. Her treatment of the Eisenhower period, which is often portrayed as a Golden Age of a ‘psychological’ perspective within American diplomacy, includes evidence of early prejudice against USIA and resistance to the agency’s participation in foreign policy making. National Security Adviser Robert Cutler is quoted dismissing United States Information Agency (USIA) staff as a “bunch of commies” (p. 60). Against this background the eventual presence of the USIA director on both the National Security Council (NSC) and cabinet seems all the more an achievement.

Belmonte’s thematic chapters are especially valuable. She presents close readings of USIA pamphlets, films and broadcasts, and teases out multiple currents within the agency’s vision of America. The emphasis given by USIA to religion and religious freedom as a major

¹ Books in this field include Walter Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945–1961*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997; Michael Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting and the Cold War*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997; Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*. Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 2006; Giles Scott-Smith, *Networks of Empire: The US State Department’s Foreign Leader Program in the Netherlands, France, and Britain 1950-70*, Brussels: Peter Lang, 2008; Tony Shaw, *Hollywood’s Cold War*, Amhurst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2007. This reviewer’s contribution to the field is Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

element of American life is especially clear. Her account of the use of the family in U.S. propaganda includes a revealing episode in which the information service created a photo story about the life of a typical American family – the Seymours of Falls Church, Virginia – only to be forced to withdraw it when newspapers revealed that both Mr. and Mrs. Seymour were divorcees (p. 151). America's information program emerges as a nexus for debate and dispute over exactly what America was and should be. This is especially clear in the agency's treatment of Civil Rights. While the story of the representation of African-Americans in early Cold War public diplomacy is familiar from the work of Mary Dudziak and others, Belmonte opens up new sources and adds nuance to the picture. One dimension missing from her account is the role of African-American officers within USIA. Partly because of the need to counter the image of American racism, USIA was always ahead of the curve in recruiting African-American officers. It would be fascinating to know more of their perspective on the period.

While this is an insightful study, it has its limitations. The three thematic chapters would have been even more valuable if they covered a longer period of time. The 1950s is now so worked over that it begins to seem rather passé. Moreover, Belmonte leaves out some significant issues and characters. There is little discussion of the development of U.S. public diplomacy in the final months of the Eisenhower period: the commission on the information program headed by Mansfield Sprague and the granting of a charter to Voice of America (VOA), which became the station's defining moment, are not discussed. Sources passed over include the substantial historical collection of the State Department's Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs, which is held at University of Arkansas, and the private papers of the founder of the post-war U.S. information program, Assistant Secretary of State William Benton, which are held at the University of Chicago. The illustrations are of variable value to the book. While some show USIA and VOA staff at work, the relationship of others to the agency is unclear. The book's cover image is from 1961 and so falls outside the scope of Belmonte's narrative. USIA employed numerous photographers, the leaflets Belmonte describes were lavishly illustrated, and indeed, the agency was responsible for bringing the world the most famous photographic exhibition of all time: Edward Steichen's 'Family of Man' show. It should have been possible to do a better job with the agency's visual record and make the provenance and use of the images clearer.

Belmonte's conclusion argues for the contemporary relevance of her research. She vaults over forty years of USIA history and jumps straight into a narrative of the troubled course of American public diplomacy during the War on Terror. She demonstrates that the disjuncture between the ideals and reality of American life, so apparent to the USIA staff during the Cold War, remain. She reminds readers that the struggle to define America is a necessary part of the democratic process. One hopes that this book will not only encourage further scholarship in this sub-field of Cold War history – preferably beyond the late 40s and early 1950s – but also strengthen the hand of those who seek to build a better American public diplomacy for the future.

Buy One, Get One Free

Some fifteen years ago, I was working for a non-profit organization cooperating with the United States Information Service (USIS) on information programs for East German secondary-school teachers. Our goal was to share insights into methods of teaching English as a second language with local school teachers by using “interesting facts” about American society and history in the classroom. One day, I submitted a plan for a week of teacher training titled “Drugs in American History” to the Service, certain that this label would attract an abundance of local instructors. Instead, I received a phone call from a USIS officer in Berlin asking whether it might be possible to review that title. It did not matter, she explained, what exactly we were planning to do in the seminar. Surely, we were welcome to talk about drugs and invite whomever we wanted. But the title chosen might raise eyebrows, incur problems, and endanger future funding. How would we feel about changing the seminar’s title to “Challenges in American History”?

Whatever I knew about the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the United States Information Service (USIS) at the time, I did not realize at the time how sensitive officials in Washington and their colleagues in the field were about their work had to be – and for what reasons. This is exactly the story that Laura Belmonte sets out to narrate in her book, *Selling the American Way*. As her subtitle explains, she wishes to explore *U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* but, as book titles go, her study is about much more. In a total of six chapters, Belmonte explains, first, the genesis of information programs during the Truman and the Eisenhower Administration. Second, she illustrates this genesis by looking at four different themes developed in the course of U.S. information propaganda programs: democracy, capitalism, gender, and race.

Even though the agents described in this book were typically on the payroll of the U.S. government and concerned with foreign relations, Belmonte studies the internal debate over identity in the United States; indeed, one can make an argument that *Selling the American Way* is at least as much a cultural history as a history of international relations. For at the heart of that debate Belmonte finds dissent: dissent over expenses, dissent over messengers, dissent over messages. The history of the information strategists between 1945 and 1960, above all USIA, represents essentially a continuous internal siege. Even though U.S. information experts officially battled communist propaganda abroad, the larger contours of the Cold War remain on the sidelines of *Selling the American Way*. Many U.S. propaganda officials must have grown more grey hair over attacks from members of Congress and private citizens than over the looming threat of communism.

As Belmonte explains, NGOs played a vital part in these debates, not simply as money laundering institutions but also as interest groups and critics defending their own version of the American Way (pp. 41, 161). Such criticism did not stem from one single opponent, side, or position. Instead, the agency constantly walked on a tightrope between conflicting images of what, exactly, defined American identity and the American way of life. Given the

haggling described in chapters one and two, it is surprising that USIA officials got anything done at all. One wonders how they still found the time to define capitalism, democracy, gender issues, and race relations when they found themselves continuously in a war zone of domestic antagonism.

Nowhere, it seems, was that dissent clearer than in the debate over race relations. As Belmonte explains, USIA members found it difficult to promote even neutral reports on lynching when southern representatives controlled both Congress as well as the USIA's budget (p. 166). At the same time, the agency received criticism from the other side as well: in 1957, the *New York Times* attacked the agency for leading foreign audiences to believe that federal legal action automatically implied integration (p. 171). Likewise, African American leaders criticized U.S. propagandists for their lame representation of segregation (p. 173).

One of the key reasons for such dissent was that whatever message U.S. information leaders promoted, they always had to relate to the present state of affairs – not the past and not the future. Belmonte provides a clue when she stresses that often, propaganda officials had a difficult time explaining what, exactly, was so peculiar about the American Way. More often than not, they resorted to nay-saying. The success of any sort of propaganda depends to no small degree on its visionary power: a vision of utopia once all the goals extolled in propaganda have been achieved. Ideally, such goals will never be reached and so the revolution and its propaganda can eternally go on. For U.S. information officials, the problem originated in the fact that most Americans (including many southern Congressmen) believed they had already realized that goal. In other words, U.S. propaganda was always deficient: it had a message but it did not have a vision. The message praised the status quo and in the absence of a utopian scheme; there was no room for improvement. Any debate haggling over definitions of the American Way of Life had to become stalled within domestic concerns precisely because information programs could not convincingly point to the future. This is why U.S. propaganda had the tendency to point its finger to the other side: it stressed the downsides of communism and the advantages of U.S. democracy by selling the American Way of Life -- to people abroad and at home.

The real question behind this book, it seems to me, has less to do with the contours of propaganda in the Cold War than with the ways in which societies develop strategies for self-portrayal and self-representation. The origins of that story go back at least to the American and the French Revolution when nations and people “under stress” throughout Europe and the Americas developed mechanisms and agencies designed to tell both people at home and abroad what was peculiar about their identity and why others should know about them.

In the case of the United States, from the late colonial period, over the nineteenth-century search for a national cultural and political identity à la Tocqueville, over the mid- and late nineteenth-century patriotic debates on national identity, and all the way up to the world of post-9/11, historians of American foreign relations have retold this tale of an obsessive meta-party discourse over self-examination many times, analyzing its multifaceted participants and its demise in the face of changing enemies and inner self-doubt. Self- or

group-appointed Americans have repeatedly defined themselves collectively against “others”, including the British and the Spanish Empire. What is more, the idea, ideal and idealization of “America” has always met with enough resistance abroad -- often called “anti-Americanism” -- to worry influential segments of American society at home, including northeastern elites, policymakers, women’s associations, artists, and intellectuals.

Much of what was said and done in the context of Cold War propaganda as delineated by Belmonte had very little to do with the Cold War. In a recent paper, Wendy Wall retraced the origins of an interfaith movement in the interwar period that won the backing of government officials, business leaders, and cultural elites during the Cold War. All three were attracted by a vision that “could stress America’s democratic diversity without reinforcing potentially divisive loyalties to foreign homelands.”¹ Their vision went back to spiritual ideals and moral values which all Americans shared and which underlined the cohesiveness of American society.

One might wonder, how much of the Cold War – or the perception of the Cold War in the United States – was due to external threats and to what an extent it was a product of domestic concerns, needs, and pressures? What was really different and new about the U.S. response to the threat and the distortions from abroad, after 1945? If the pressure had been on before, including anti-American communist propaganda, why was there such a need to counter foreign propaganda now?

Surely, one peculiarity of Cold War propaganda in the United States centered on the new role of the state. There is no doubt that the Cold War privileged culture and cultural relations in Europe to an unprecedented degree. Never before did governments invest as much money, energy, and thought in the promotion of cultural self-presentation. And never after did so many people around the world enjoy concerts, dance performances, and musicals made in the U.S.A.

But in the context of *Selling the American Way*, it is important to understand that the debates among the participants in the private-public sector were by no means empty exercises in propaganda. Instead, they reflected a vital debate over American identity and consumer capitalism in an international context and a time frame that preceded the Cold War -- and continued thereafter. Much of what USIA officials and their predecessors talked about did not originate in the context of the Cold War; nor was it a superficial discussion in the name of the Cold War. As Mark Selverstone outlined recently, many of the ideas hatched by the private-public Cold War consensus never saw the light of day. Still, the participants cooperated, discussed, and fought over issues that they felt were vital and demanded instant attention.²

¹ Wendy L. Wall at the AHA 2010 Session “Constructing and Deconstructing the Cold War Consensus,” 7 January 2010, San Diego.

² AHA 2010 Session “Constructing and Deconstructing the Cold War Consensus,” 7 January 2010, San Diego, with contributions by Andrew L. Johns (Brigham Young University), Kenneth Osgood (Florida Atlantic University), Marc J. Selverstone (University of Virginia), Wendy L. Wall (Queen's University).

U.S. Cold War propaganda, it seems to me, has much less to do with the Cold War than with the timeless inner workings of American society itself. Indeed, the term might be a misnomer to begin with: Its origins are to be found long before the beginning of the Cold War. And, truth be told, many of the consensual messages forwarded in the 1950s resurfaced in the advertising battles directed at the Middle East after the end of the Cold War. In other words, *Selling the American Way* is less concerned about how effectively the United States countered Soviet propaganda (and who knows how to measure that impact, anyway?) Instead, it probes into the historical analysis of questions such as: Who are Americans? What do they believe, where do they shop, and how do they live? What is American society? And what is *so* good about it that they would like to tell others about it? Most importantly: Who is in charge with answering those questions? *Selling the American Way* tells us more about American identity than about the Cold War.

It seems to me, then, that the Cold War is not the only valuable framework for Cold War propaganda but, rather, Americans' ongoing and multilateral fascination with their own civilization. I do not mean to dismiss the East-West conflict as a conceptual framework or a teleological point of reference. But I do believe that it is time to insert the history of Cold War propaganda into the framework of the twentieth century and the history of the United States in the world at large. At what points in U.S. history did citizens and decision makers collectively begin to worry about a U.S. identity? Is there a raster or a norm that triggered collective, normative and collaborative efforts in an effort to define what it means to be an American?

"Nations", Terry Deibel and Walter Roberts wrote many years ago, "like men, tend to see themselves through the eyes of others, and many feel a need to manifest the national character abroad almost as part of the process of defining it at home."³ USIA's programs reflected how Americans grappled with issues of self-portrayal and self-definition at home more so than abroad. It is this particular perspective of *Selling America* that cultural historians may wish to consult when they collectively grapple with analyses of U.S. culture in the 1950s due to the multicultural and multipolar tension in both that decade as well as our current time.

Laura Belmonte gives us much to think about in this direction; her book is far more than an addition to the surge of literature on U.S. propaganda and the Cold War. Collapsing two seemingly distant topics into one study, it effectively addresses the history of American self-discovery and the history of U.S. communication with the world. Buy one, get one free.

³Terry Deibel und Walter Roberts, *Culture and Information: Two Foreign Policy Functions* (Washington, DC, 1976), p. 60.

Laura Belmonte's *Selling the American Way* contributes to the rapidly expanding body of scholarship on U.S. Cold War propaganda. Although not quite ignored as a subject of study during the Cold War, propaganda rarely received the same attention that power politics, alliances, and nuclear weapons did. The end of the Cold War put a spotlight on the topic, as historians, retired public diplomats, and media scholars evaluated propaganda's contribution to the collapse of communism. So, too, did renewed interest in—and anxiety about—the United States's international image following the 9/11 attacks and the inception of the Global War on Terror. Public diplomats in the twenty-first century, whether consciously or not, framed the nation's new propaganda challenges in Cold War terms. Belmonte cites an October 2001 statement from Charlotte Beers, President George W. Bush's first undersecretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs that could easily have been uttered in 1947: "This is a war about a way of life and fundamental beliefs and values. We did not expect to ever have to explain and defend concepts like freedom and tolerance" (181).

Collectively, post-Cold War scholarship provides a detailed, though far from finished, picture of the apparatus, ideology, output, and effects of American propaganda. In the early 1990s, the essential history of the Voice of America's (VOA) Cold War activities still consisted of a 1970 Ph.D. dissertation.¹ Now the VOA, as well as other radio broadcasters like Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, are the subjects of several works.² Thanks to Nicholas Cull and Wilson Dizard, the history of the United States Information Agency has now been told.³ Assessments of the aims and effects of U.S. propaganda targeting the Soviet Union and its European satellites include the work of Walter Hixson, Scott Lucas, and Gregory Mitrovich.⁴ Kenneth Osgood's *Total Cold War* examines the centrality of

¹ Robert W. Pirsein, *The Voice of America: An History of the International Broadcasting Activities of the United States Government, 1940-1962*, (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1970; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1979.)

² Alan L. Heil, Jr., *Voice of America: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); David F. Krugler, *The Voice of America and the Domestic Propaganda Battles, 1945-1953* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000); Michael Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997); Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington, Kt.: University of Kentucky Press, 2000). It should be noted that the World War II activities of the VOA are the subject of two books: Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942-1945* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1978); and Holly Cowan Shulman, *The Voice of America: Propaganda and Democracy, 1941-1945* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

³ Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Wilson P. Dizard, Jr., *Inventing Public Diplomacy: The Story of the U.S. Information Agency* (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004).

⁴ Walter Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Scott Lucas, *Freedom's War: The American Crusade Against the Soviet Union* (New

psychological warfare and propaganda in the Eisenhower administration's Cold War strategy, explaining how Eisenhower deployed both in a bid to win the Cold War off the battlefield.⁵ Osgood's work is an excellent example of a key purpose of this scholarship: to demonstrate that propaganda, public diplomacy, and psychological warfare were not mere diversions, rather they were essential components of U.S. Cold War strategy.

Belmonte presents *Selling the American Way* as both a synthesis and extension of this body of work. Her main subjects are the message (the multi-faceted "American Way" projected abroad) and the motives of the messengers (the diplomatic personnel responsible for telling other nations and peoples about the United States) between 1945 and 1960. The "American Way," as propaganda, presented the United States as a nation in which democracy and capitalism meshed seamlessly, yielding widespread prosperity, civic engagement, happy families, harmonious relations between capital and labor, and spiritual fulfillment. Though highly idealized, American Way propaganda did not completely ignore or deny tensions, social change, and shortcomings in the United States. Most prominently, the second class citizenship of African Americans, and the regular violence inflicted upon blacks who defied or transgressed white supremacy, proved an especially vexing challenge for propagandists. Belmonte treats a variety of media, using evidence from film, print, exhibits, and radio broadcasts to analyze the formulation and projection of the American Way. She does not include covert and non-governmental propaganda, limiting her focus to openly-sourced U.S. government output.

The book is divided into two parts, though not formally. In the first two chapters, Belmonte provides a chronological narrative of the propaganda program during the Truman and Eisenhower years. These chapters comprise almost half of the book. Chapters three through six treat core themes of the American Way: democracy, capitalism, class, gender, family life, and race relations. Although this structure results in some chronological overlap, it allows Belmonte to first provide a detailed, perceptive history of the nation's propaganda personnel and agencies while reserving a close examination of the output for the subsequent chapters.

Belmonte has a keen eye for the domestic political travails of the agencies responsible for disseminating the American Way after World War II. Truman's decision in September 1945 to continue operation of the VOA and other propaganda programs by putting them in the State Department met with bipartisan Congressional opposition. Reviving criticisms levied against the Office of War Information, conservative Democrats and Republicans denounced the propaganda program as leftist, expensive, and unnecessary. Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs William Benton, an accomplished businessman but a neophyte to politics, struggled to secure funding and enabling legislation for the program, a task made even

York: New York University Press, 1999); Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America's Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1956* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000).

⁵ Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

harder by the Republican takeover of Congress in January 1947. Statements of support from George Kennan and U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union Averell Harriman helped but little. Benton's promise to contract out script writing to private media (to demonstrate a commitment to scaling back the size of the government) failed to win over critics. The program came close to extinction several times, but the intensification of the Cold War, coupled with a Congressional junket across Europe in the fall of 1947, cinched passage of enabling legislation, the Smith-Mundt Act, in 1948. That two conservative Republicans, Senator Alexander Smith (N.J.) and Representative Karl Mundt (S.Dak.), sponsored the law indicates the growing acceptance among erstwhile doubters that America did, indeed, have a story to tell the world (and a myriad of misunderstandings about the nation to correct), and that the U.S. government should take the lead in telling that story.

Many works have already related the troubled early years of the propaganda program, but Belmonte's treatment provides a succinct, engaging account that graduate students and Cold War scholars unfamiliar with propaganda agencies and operations will find especially useful.⁶ One merit of this narrative history is Belmonte's treatment of the sometimes heroic efforts of the propagandists to appease critics while trying to take advantage of Cold War crises or events to sell the American Way. In March 1953, for example, C.D. Jackson, Eisenhower's special assistant for psychological warfare, "could barely contain his excitement" at the chance to exploit Stalin's death for propaganda purposes (55). At the same moment, Senator Joe McCarthy (R-Wisc.) was pummeling the VOA in a sensationalist investigation fueled by dubious, even outlandish, claims of subversion within the agency. Eisenhower and Dulles let the VOA and the overseas libraries, another McCarthy target, fend for themselves for several months before responding with the creation of the United States Information Agency, which took over operation of the propaganda program from the State Department.

Amid these difficulties, the propagandists managed to define, construct, and project the American Way. Belmonte provides a nuanced and often fascinating elucidation of this process and the resulting propaganda. Sharply drawn contrasts of democracy and communism allowed US propagandists to extol freedom and equality, with emphasis on property rights and freedom of worship, assembly, and speech. The American Way thus offers "an invaluable lens for exploring how U.S. policymakers understood and valorized the political culture they represented and defended" (95). More than that: it reveals an under-appreciated component of U.S. national security in the early Cold War. Belmonte rightly criticizes scholars for placing too much emphasis on the military, economic, and political aspects of national security. What were the armies, foreign aid packages, and alliances protecting if not the American Way? Furthermore, because U.S. policymakers believed the American Way had universal appeal and application, its projection and (hopefully welcome) reception abroad were essential to recruiting new allies for the West. If we now know the significant part that propaganda played in the Cold War, we still have

⁶ See, for example, Pirsein, *Voice of America*; Dizard, *Inventing Public Diplomacy*; Krugler, *Voice of America*. Nicholas Cull offers an excellent history of this period in his book which was published the same year as *Selling the American Way*. See Cull, *Cold War*, 22-86.

much to learn about the content of that propaganda, and *Selling the American Way* does an excellent job of closing that gap.

A top goal of U.S. propagandists was to show how American freedom, democracy, and capitalism benefited individual Americans. The task was not always easy, as demonstrated by attempts to explain women's ideal roles in U.S. society and the economy. The United States wanted to depict happy American families, led by doting mothers. At the same time, it wanted to tell the world that women faced few obstacles in finding employment--if they wanted it. This balancing act sometimes resulted in banal output from the mostly white, male propagandists. The film *American Working Women*, for example, remarked that for working mother and wife Hazel Kennedy, a "job is important to her, but not all-important" (154).

America's denial of democracy to African Americans posed a much greater challenge, exacerbated by a steady output of communist propaganda skewering the United States for its treatment of blacks. "People attend lynchings with sandwiches and whiskey," a Soviet periodical wrote in 1947. "No Negro in the South can sleep quietly--and perhaps in the next hour it will be [he or she] who is hanged from a tree" (160). U.S. propagandists tried to use racism and mob violence targeting African Americans to instruct foreign audiences about how a democracy solves its problems: the American people and government, recognizing this shameful national shortcoming, were working hard to grant black citizens the rights and opportunities they were due as Americans. Output relied heavily on stories about prominent African Americans (Edith Sampson, a U.N. delegate, was a popular subject), prompting some propagandists to admit they might have "overdone the atypical prominent Negro" (164). Stories about middle class blacks or growing racial acceptance among American women, however, could hardly offset the damage done to America's image and reputation by the protracted struggle to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. In particular, Latin Americans, Indians, and Indonesians, pointing to their shared colonial experiences, cited racial discrimination as the United States's greatest flaw, and no amount of carefully calibrated, well-intentioned propaganda could budge that impression.

Belmonte might have devoted more attention to foreign audiences' reception of the American Way. To be sure, her focus on the global message itself and the motives of American propagandists justifies this omission: a country-by-country, or even region-by-region, analysis of audience reception of the specific themes of the American Way would require one or more volumes by themselves. As the Little Rock example shows, Belmonte addresses audience reception in select cases, primarily when it affected output. Further exploration of foreign responses might have yielded more insight into the external influences shaping the American Way. As Belmonte observes, U.S. propagandists were "quite good at gauging what aspects of American life and culture resonated most with foreign audiences" and they "carefully tailored their methods and tactics to appeal to different countries . . ." (6). By delving deeper into audience response, Belmonte might have been able to tell us more about this 'tailoring' of the American Way.

Belmonte has much more to say about the response of foreign governments, especially communist regimes. Another strength of the book is Belmonte's sustained explanation of how communist criticisms, denunciations, and counter-propaganda impacted U.S. propaganda. In the early 1950s, when communist propagandists branded the United States as racist, oligarchic, and bent on global imperialism, U.S. propagandists responded by distributing a half-million copies of a book of satirical drawings from famed political cartoonist Herblock (Herbert Block). Another cartoon collection, *Glossary of Soviet Terms*, ridiculed communist phrases such as "classless society" and "democratic elections." (In the latter cartoon, a soldier guards a ballot box labeled "yes.") As Belmonte observes, the satire was more than *riposte*; it was a robust effort to take back the rhetoric of democracy, a core part of the American Way, that the communists were appropriating for their uses. When the Soviets claimed American employers fired female workers who married and became pregnant, the State Department shot back that the sputtering Soviet economy forced Soviet women to work for low wages in dangerous conditions.

Overall, *Selling the American Way* makes a valuable contribution to the scholarship on American Cold War propaganda. Drawing upon previous accounts, it offers a synthetic narrative of the early years of the U.S. propaganda program and its many challenges and difficulties. The book provides the most complete explanation yet of the themes of American propaganda and the motives of its creators. Attention to communist output yields insight into the ways in which the propagandists shaped and revised the American Way to answer communist accusations and criticisms. Hopefully, future studies will build upon the partial evidence Belmonte offers about foreign reactions to provide further understanding of the international impact of the American Way.

Review by Penny Von Eschen, University of Michigan

Laura Belmonte's incisive, lively, and gracefully written *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War*, begins and ends with the post-9/11 moment, with the Bush administration's campaign to sell the image of America to a skeptical world. As the image of Ground Zero haunted the American public, the administration appointed advertising executive Charlotte Beers, a Texan who had built her success on marketing Uncle Ben's rice, undersecretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs. Beers set forth her vision for the task at a Congressional hearing in October 2001: "[W]e need to become better at communicating the intangibles, the behavior, the emotions that reside in such lofty words as democracy.... This is a war about a way of life and fundamental beliefs and values." (181) Intangible, alas, aptly sums up the shortcomings of Beers's campaign, coming after years of official neglect of public diplomacy. That campaign, for Belmonte, illustrates the contradictions and weaknesses that characterized U.S. information and propaganda programs even in their heyday during the Cold War. "Selling America," Belmonte argues, "will never work if we do not close the gap between how we define ourselves—and how we actually act at home and abroad." (184)

Belmonte offers a tightly focused analysis of U.S. propaganda during the Truman and Eisenhower years of the early Cold War, during what Nicholas Cull has described as a "sustained long game of move and countermove against Moscow's propaganda machine."¹ Sympathetically exploring the process through which a diverse group of actors defined and packaged American values for the world, Belmonte also persuasively demonstrates that the limitations inherent in the 2001 words and campaign of Beers had been robustly manifested during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. Selling the American way, Belmonte argues, emerged amidst a virtual battle royal of domestic politics, with Congress and other policymakers locked in a "maelstrom of budget vacillation, organizational deficiency, and political infighting," in which controversies over the role of art and funding disputes often reflected passionate disagreement over the proper relationship between art and politics. (178, 20) Chapters on defining democracy, selling capitalism, and gender and the family offer fascinating insights into how the United States Information Agency defined the values of democratic capitalism, the nuclear family, and religious faith that fleshed out U.S. narratives. Belmonte provides compelling examples reproduced in USIA materials, including anti-Soviet Herblock cartoons, the "People's Capitalism" campaign's appropriation of communist discourse, and cartoons and films depicting communist destruction of home and family life. As Belmonte shows, the USIS was attuned to regional and cultural mores and tailored its messages accordingly, as it grappled uneasily with promoting America as a land of cultural diversity, political freedom, and social mobility amidst international censure of U.S. segregation and mounting criticisms of U.S. foreign policy.

¹ Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge, 2008), p. xvii.

In tracing the development of targeted messages, *Selling the American Way*, illuminates what the historian Axel Schafer has called “the public/private networks that underlay Cold War state building.”² For example, the USIA worked with a wide variety of religious organizations and denominations, and Belmonte’s work suggests further opportunities to explore the importance of organized religion as a vehicle for Cold War propaganda. Historians have recognized the language of evangelical Protestantism for Cold War anticommunism—depicted as a spiritual battle between good and evil – and have explored the deep entanglements of mainline Protestantism and the Cold War state’s subsidization of churches. As Schafer writes, “[t]he federal government’s efforts to strengthen the anti-communist training of army recruits, support for the military chaplaincy and evangelical campaigns, and the promotion of church building on military sites were decisive factors in furthering the evangelicals and establishing contacts between church and state.”³

Another dimension of how U.S. officials enlisted religious organizations in the contest for hearts and minds is found in Melani McAlister’s argument that Christian evangelicals adopted the image of missionaries as symbols of sacrifice and targets of persecution for Cold War trappings. In seeking to combat Godless communism, missionaries were subjected to same kind of martyrdom as that undergone by the early Christians. International evangelicalism, cast as the “suffering church vs. communism,” proliferated in newspaper accounts and popular mass media in concert with “the occasional congressional hearing” such as a 1959 meeting of the House Un-American Activities Committee with ministers from China and Korea.⁴ Belmonte’s accounts of U.S. policymakers’ engagement with communities of faith, including the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington, and the American Baptist Convention, contributes to new scholarship on the Cold War that unsettles the categories of state and non-state actors as it illuminates hitherto unexplored official forays into American life.⁵

Belmonte is also concerned with measuring the reception of U.S. propaganda and the pragmatic attentiveness of the USIA to its audiences. This is evident in directives as well as reports detailing regional and local customs and mores. Indeed the dedicated efforts in the field to chart local responses and modulate the programs accordingly were integral to the USIA’s programs. One might have wished for more extended explorations of these interactions, particularly for instances in which unpopular and controversial U.S. interventions and policies prompted anti-American protests and the burning of USIS libraries. Occasionally, arresting examples of visual propaganda, such as placards distributed in Manila depicting Communist soldiers forcibly separating two women and a

² Axel Schafer, “The Cold War State and the Resurgence of Evangelicalism: A Study of Public Funding of Religion Since 1945,” *Radical History Review*, Issue 99, Fall 2007, pp. 19-50; p.25.

³ Axel Schafer, “The Cold War State,” 25-26.

⁴ Melani McAlister, “The Persecuted Body: Evangelical Internationalism, Islam, and the Politics of Fear,” in Michael Laffan ed., *Fear: An Anthology* (Princeton, forthcoming 2011).

⁵ Ibid.

young boy, with the text “Happy Family Life Cannot Exist in the Communist Scheme of Things,” leave the reader longing for more context or analysis. Perhaps a reading of USIS field reports from Manila would have shed more light on the circumstances of the deployment of this imagery.

Future efforts to build on the scholarship of Belmonte and others must assess the big picture -- taking a panoramic view of U.S. propaganda narratives -- as well as availing themselves of post Cold-War scholarship on multiple regions to focus on particular locales. One modest, albeit large, topic for exploration is the critically important issue of the reception of these narratives in the Soviet Union. Belmonte tracks the specific ways in which the U.S. targeted the Soviet Union, where, in stark contrast to anti-Soviet propaganda aimed at eastern bloc and developing nations, programmers were careful not to criticize the Russian people or the Soviet state. Recent scholarship by historians and anthropologists of the Soviet Union assesses the impact of U.S. efforts through the complex reception of these narratives in the Soviet Union. In *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More, The Last Soviet Generation*, Alexei Yurchak describes the notion of an “imaginary west” that developed among young Soviets during the 1970s and 1980s.⁶ Many people, Yurchak explains, “believed that the communist ideals and values they represented to the world were fundamentally ‘internationalist’ and ‘outward looking’ yet they were also aware that travel to the world outside was in fact impossible.” Exploring the paradoxes of Soviet cultural policy, Yurchak explains that Soviet newspapers along with the state promoted the idea that “a cultured person should speak multiple foreign languages.”⁷

The Soviet censorship of radio broadcasts to the Soviet Union was consistent with this internationalist outlook. Yurchak explains that the Soviet state always blocked those stations considered anti-Soviet that broadcast in Russian and eastern European languages, such as CIA-funded Radio Liberty, and often jammed Russian-language-services of Voice of America (VOA) and BBC. But broadcasts from the VOA in English, the BBC, and Radio France International were never jammed. This “gave Soviet listeners an opportunity to become interested in jazz and rock and to learn foreign languages.”⁸ Belmonte’s work helps us to understand the “symbolic ‘America’” put forth in information and propaganda campaigns. Reading Belmonte’s “symbolic America” alongside the “imagined West” described by Yurchak creates possibilities for dialogue and connective and comparative histories that were unthinkable just a decade ago.

⁶ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, 2006), pp. 158-159.

⁷ Yurchak, p.178.

⁸ Ibid.

Author's Response by Laura A. Belmonte, Oklahoma State University

Let me begin by thanking the reviewers for these thought-provoking and generous responses to my book. I have admired their work for many years and their scholarship has definitely enriched my own.

Collectively, these reviews demonstrate that there is a great deal more work to be done on cultural diplomacy generally and on U.S. propaganda efforts specifically. In the mid-1990s, the Clinton administration embarked on a declassification effort that opened scores of materials pertaining to U.S. cultural and information activities in the post-WWII era. More recently, the National Declassification Center has identified a classified subsection of these records as one of its key priorities for the next year. The release of these new records combined with increased accessibility to foreign archives promises to keep the pipeline of exciting new work on cultural diplomacy humming for years to come.

There are several possible directions future scholars could take. The first would undoubtedly be bilateral studies of U.S. cultural and information exchanges with individual countries. Both the State Department and the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) have elaborate records detailing how American policymakers crafted their overt and covert propaganda efforts for specific foreign audiences. U.S. officials identified audiences deemed essential to successful cultural initiatives and then attempted to gauge the impact of American information campaigns. The reviewers rightly point out that we need to broaden the lens for assessing the myriad ways that foreign attitudes toward Americans and the United States are shaped over time. While I do not believe it is possible to isolate the effects of official U.S. information and cultural overtures from those of non-state actors, the media, tourists, and other transnational movements, there is – as Jessica Gienow-Hecht asserts – a good deal left to learn about “the ways in which societies develop strategies for self-portrayal and self-representation.” Too often, globalization is elided with Americanization and it is more critical than ever to examine the protean, contingent nature of national identity in an increasingly interconnected world. Are official U.S. communication efforts still valuable in the era of social media and YouTube? Is there even an “American” way to export anymore?

The rich array of individuals working in the information and cultural establishment offers a second path for future scholarship. As Nick Cull mentions, we know very little about the African Americans working for the USIA, especially at the height of segregation. How did these individuals square their racial and national identities when USIA’s imperative to “tell America’s story to the world” entailed fashioning narratives that downplayed searing realities about their fellow countrymen? How did the agency’s internal culture evolve in the aftermath of 1960s civil rights legislation?

There is also surely a fascinating story to be told about the female propagandists. In March 2000, 1,100 women won a class-action lawsuit against USIA and Voice of America (VOA), the radio broadcasting arm of the agency. The women claimed that they were denied employment opportunities while working at the agency between 1974 and 1984. After a twenty-three year legal battle, the USIA and Voice of America settled the suit for \$508 million – the largest award for job discrimination in U.S. history at that time. An examination of origins and evolution of this case

– combined with an overlapping assessment of the U.S. government’s changing portrayals of transnational women’s movements – would be a marvelous addition to the burgeoning literature in this field.

Additionally, there are several significant figures in the history of U.S. propaganda efforts meriting biographical examinations. Some possibilities include C.D. Jackson, Dwight Eisenhower’s psychological warfare advisor; Charles Wick, USIA Director in the Reagan years, and Willis Conover, host of the wildly popular VOA program “Music U.S.A.” Other studies could tackle the revolving door of executives who circled in and out of U.S. covert and overt information efforts and top leadership posts at American corporations and media outlets. Emigrés who assumed critical posts as translators, broadcasters, and advisors should also receive scholarly appraisal.

In closing, I’d like to respond to a few of Professor Cull’s observations. There are, in fact, six – not five chapters - in *Selling the American Way*, four of which are thematic. Because William B. Benton’s contribution to the State Department’s cultural and information activities is well-documented in extensive files housed at National Archives II and the Harry S Truman Presidential Library, I chose not to utilize this collection. And, while I do not dispute the incredible value of the State Department’s Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs collection at the University of Arkansas, these documents relate to exchange programs that receive only cursory attention in my narrative. As Michael Krenn, Naima Prevots, and Penny Von Eschen demonstrate on art, dance, and jazz respectively, the programs are worthy subjects for a number of stand-alone monographs.¹ I look forward to seeing this collection used extensively to expand our knowledge of bilateral scientific and cultural exchanges during the early Cold War era.

Finally, in regard to the photo collections of USIA, I accept responsibility for the minor error on the 1961 photograph, the date of which USIA did not identify and which was revealed by Corbis, who inherited the rights to the photo after the previous private agency holding the rights closed in the 1970s, only after the book was in production. I agree that USIA’s photo collections should provide more specific guidance on the provenance of the images, but the reality is that it not always possible, even with a good faith effort to do so. Many of the images were contained in packets targeting specific core audiences and many of them do not include the photographer or date.

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¹ Michael Krenn, *Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Naima Prevots, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and Cold War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998); Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).