

Introduction

Legacy of the Postwar Commercial Fallout

Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev: “In another seven years, we shall be on the same level as America. . . . In passing you by, we shall wave. We can stop and say: If you want capitalism you can live that way . . . we feel sorry for you.”

Vice-President Richard M. Nixon: “You may be ahead of us . . . in the thrust of your rockets. . . . We may be ahead . . . in our color television.”

Khrushchev: “No, we are up with you on this too.”

Nixon (pointing to a panel-controlled washing machine): “In America, these are designed to make things easier for our women.”

Khrushchev: “A capitalist attitude. . . . Newly built Russian houses have all this equipment right now. In America, if you don’t have a dollar you have the right to [sleep] on the pavement.”

Nixon (showing the Russian a model American house): “We hope to show our diversity and our right to choose. . . . Would it not be better to compete in the relative merits of washing machines than in the strength of rockets?”

Khrushchev: “Yes, that’s the kind of competition we want. But your generals say: Let’s compete in rockets.”¹

On the cold war’s commercial front, a free enterprise outlook invaded the Eastern Bloc. Throughout the 1950s, overseas trade exhibits packaged democracy and capitalism as the best tools for accessing higher standards of living. Objects of persuasion—that is, privately owned suburban houses, chrome-bumper automobiles, streamlined kitchens, and electric appliances—were meant to engineer consumer envy among the beleaguered subjects of Communism. By displaying the material advantages of capitalism, U.S. business and government leaders implied what the Communists lacked, thus attempting to weaken the Red stronghold through the management of commercial and class symbols.²

The 1959 U.S. Exhibition held in Moscow stood out from other parades of cold war “symbol management.”³ What distinguished this trade exhibit from its contemporaries was a lively conversation between Vice President Richard M. Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. The usual tensions between the postwar superpowers erupted into a paradoxical competition in which household labor-saving aids were used as testaments of national strength and, implicitly, as justifications for military dominance. This time a cold war political confrontation entered the annals of history as the “kitchen debate.”⁴

While touring a model house filled with every conceivable amenity, yet supposedly priced to fit the average American’s wallet, Nixon and Khrushchev argued over whose economic philosophy offered a better standard of living, one that included emancipation from drudgery.⁵ Although capitalists and Communists both pursued “liberty,” the West’s concept of emancipation derived from free market competition, limitless consumer choice, and an abundance of leisure time gained from using a variety of labor-saving conveniences. This concept was buttressed by the American ideal of individualism: pursuing a business or consumer initiative without government restrictions and without having to share the comforts or profits—a sacrosanct tradition lauded as the “American Way.”⁶ The Soviets’ understanding of liberty, at the opposite end of the spectrum, was based on collectivism and was overseen by the heavy hand of government regulation.⁷ Despite Khrushchev’s protestations that Communist liberty was more highly evolved than capitalist liberty, Nixon claimed superiority over the Soviets, not by measuring weapon power but by extolling the hallmarks of American liberty: democratized comfort, convenience, and expanded leisure time.

The American free enterprise system had long been recognized as a catalyst for social mobility and democratizing technological progress. To “democratize” basically meant making a commodity, affectation, or experience “affordable for the masses.” This assumption was based on the notion that goods produced en masse accorded more people easier access to amenities and symbols of class status because they were less expensive.⁸ Following World War I, free enterprise in tandem with mass production and mechanization gained credit for gradually but steadily democratizing a middle-class standard of living, and as a result, mass-produced labor-saving designs and devices were seen as instrumental for increasing political, economic, and social liberty.⁹ During the 1920s and 1930s, the material “proof” of democracy in action centered on the rational kitchen. According to this domestic paradigm, which intensified after World War II, modern technology and streamlined design in the home exempted the American middle-class housewife from irrational drudgery, making housework more hygienic and efficient and virtually effortless. Identified more closely with the corporate elite than with the blue-collar labor force, she was elevated to the status of manager in household affairs. Overseeing electric servants, she found her chores reduced to the push of a button, which lent her housework a glamorous rather than an arduous aura. With “free” time on her hands instead of calluses, she was hailed as the apex of civilization.

At the 1959 U.S. exhibition in Moscow, comfort, convenience, and expanded leisure time were emphasized because such “liberties” stressed the disparities be-

tween Communism and the American Way. It was boldly argued that, at least in the standard of living race, the capitalists were way ahead. Echoing Nixon's inferences in the "kitchen debate," the American media covering the fair dramatized the Soviets' lower standards of living as an indirect way of applauding the precepts of capitalism. American reporters highlighted the contrast between the democratic and Communist systems by focusing on the peasantlike Soviet woman and her primitive surroundings: "[Moscow, a] city of many aspects—poorly dressed, tired-looking people . . . jerry-built apartment developments . . . boasts of Sputniks, but makes no attempt to conceal its reliance on the primitive abacus as a means of figuring. It is a city of women—hard-working women who show few of the physical charms of women in the West. Most Moscow women seem unconcerned about their looks."¹⁰ Obviously, middle-class priorities on "keeping up appearances" were the first of many "freedoms" to go when the Communists took over.

Drudgery, brutish women, and poor-quality housing were signs of not only totalitarianism but also national and social inferiority. Measuring a country's evolutionary worth by comparing its women and standards of living helped reassert the moral authority of capitalism and, especially, middle-class propriety, which, to Americans, the Russians significantly lacked.¹¹ But certainly such assumptions did not spring forth overnight—nor could they be unique to this particular trade fair. What were the justifications for such attitudes, and what experiences helped shape them in the collective American conscious?

The 1959 U.S. Exhibition in Moscow was more than a trade fair; it also functioned as an illustrated narrative of progress, a story line indicative of a larger commercial and political agenda. Although displays of American consumer products were intended to spread the capitalist version of democracy, the fair's rhetoric of hygiene and efficiency congealed into another form of ideological attack on Communism. Judging the Soviets through a contemptuous middle-class, managerial lens may not have been a conscious objective of the American participants at the Moscow fair. Planned or not, the underlying message in the "kitchen debate" and in the promotion of consumer goods was that "nature" had accorded Americans not only the inborn abilities to innovate technologies for a superior standard of living, but also the managerial intelligence to profitably democratize these conveniences. The fair's more overt message suggested that abundance, cleanliness, and drudgery's absence were the automatic by-products of capitalism. The more covert, and condescending, message implied that a hygienic and efficient household (that was also affordable and effortless to run) reflected the intellectual, genetic, and moral strength of a nation. If the Russians lacked the comforts and conveniences of modern civilization, were they not more primitive than Americans? If they were backward and inferior, didn't such a disparity justify U.S. military dominance?¹² Nixon's conflation of cold war political rhetoric with a middle-class domestic paradigm was nothing out of the ordinary. By 1959, America's cold war defense ideology was intricately entwined with assumptions about the moral authority of hygiene and efficiency. Indeed, throughout the 1950s, attitudes such as those expressed in the "kitchen debate" were the norm.¹³

This cultural belief in the symbiosis between military standing and standards of living raises two questions this book will address: What *was* the ideological role of modern comforts and conveniences that made them symbolic markers of national military superiority, and how did such concepts evolve into a marketing strategy deployed during the early cold war years? *From Submarines to Suburbs* traces the path of this ideological development back to the iconic role ascribed to modern comforts and conveniences illustrated in American commercial propaganda of World War II. In wartime advertising and promotional literature, the cultural territories of military superiority and middle-class domesticity did not simply overlap but became intricately allied. This book explores how and why modern comforts and conveniences functioned as barometers of both domestic and military superiority during World War II and why this new archetype of progress became infused with corporate America's political marketing agenda.

From Submarines to Suburbs is a study of both the symbols identified with progress in World War II-era commercial propaganda *and* the management of those symbols. For this study, I have relied heavily on the pictorial displays—the visual idioms—illustrating narratives of progress created in the context of war. The narratives I trace are often a mix of factual information and advertising fiction, and no matter to what extent they may be true or pure hype, these story lines are heavy with symbolism concerning Western civilization, especially America, advancing along a presaged trajectory toward a technological and socially harmonious utopia. Visual idioms illuminate these narratives of progress and shed light on these stories' underlying symbolism. I am especially interested in those idioms derived from consumer merchandise (such as labor-saving devices) and architectural designs (houses and kitchen interiors) published in a commercial or marketing context. These visual idioms were part of an established lexicon of cultural symbols and possessed a recognizable iconic role in American society. Vance Packard in his 1957 critique of “the new world of symbol manipulation,” *The Hidden Persuaders*, wrote that consumer goods are translated into “socially approved symbols” related to status seeking.¹⁴ Our inquiry into wartime narratives of progress will thus involve an examination of the symbolic value attributed to the social appearances of progress; that is, we will be reading the surface meanings of housing styles, kitchen interiors, and labor-saving merchandise and how these signifiers functioned as critical ingredients for negating social stigma with an armature of hygiene and personal betterment.

A full study of the symbolic values within wartime narratives of progress involves exploring the rhetorical strategies used to structure arguments of persuasion. Due to the propagandizing function of all print media during World War II, articles and editorials published in business, industry, design, and advertising trade journals; women's magazines; general-circulation magazines and newspapers; as well as promotional literature published as books, booklets, or pamphlets possessed persuasive communication qualities and intentions similar to advertisements.¹⁵ I have therefore chosen to regard such propagandizing material as part of the broad category of “persuasive media,” and I will often generalize references to these commercial narratives of progress under the broad labels of “advertising” or “commercial propaganda.”

There are two main themes found in World War II-era commercial propaganda—*mobilization* (preparing for or converting to war) and *reconversion* (post-war planning). This pool of persuasive media was created and disseminated by a variety of symbol managers in design, architecture, advertising, marketing, and public relations as well as by magazine and newspaper columnists writing for businesses or consumers. Shaping the war's commercial propaganda, then, was not the prerogative of a single profession or business group. Therefore, I chose to categorize these symbol managers as “commercial propagandists.” Whenever the theme of commercial propaganda shifted to a focus on reconversion and the future, the reader will find that I labeled such wartime symbol managers as “forecasters,” most of whom can also be considered “commercial propagandists.” Apart from these variations, I found several journalists and columnists who did not quite seem to fit the commercial propagandist mold. Their intentions were to criticize the political, social, and economic status quo, rather than to promote a brand or corporate ideology. The arguments articulated by these authors, many of whom wrote for African American newspapers, definitely had a persuasive edge to them, but it may be that the term “symbol manager” would not be seen as an appropriate title in such cases. Certainly, these authors did not function as commercial propagandists, but their insights would have indeed influenced public perceptions about the war.

Many of the war's symbol managers were professional “consumer engineers.” The term was first coined by the advertising executive and pioneer Earnest Elmo Calkins and popularized in 1932 by Roy Sheldon and designer Egmont Arens in their book *Consumer Engineering: A New Technique for Prosperity*. Consumer engineering encompassed a broad category of experts and, according to Sheldon and Arens, was an attempt to create a “science of finding customers,” “making customers when the findings are slim,” and taking over “the job to be done in converting those millions who have stood in the bread line into consumers with money to spend.”¹⁶ Indeed, members of both the advertising and design fields were considered “consumer engineers” with tools to rationalize the consumer through efficiently targeted psychological appeals.

Although consumer engineers played an important role in wartime propaganda, this study will focus on the visual and verbal *messages* released through print media venues and their persuasive content, more so than examining the historical unfolding of any particular profession's (or medium's) participation in the war. Advertising, marketing, and “consumer engineering” topics have attracted much scholarly attention in recent years. As a complement to these investigations, historians' focus on the dynamics of home front consumer issues has grown.¹⁷ However, commercial imagery and content found in persuasive media (especially advertising) have remained largely on the periphery of these histories, and conspicuously absent is a thorough assessment of the variety of commercial icons illustrated in the print media of World War II.¹⁸ The fact remains that a consumer culture existed and the influence of commercial media espousing a consumption ethic flourished in America during the war.¹⁹ This book illuminates how a consumption ideology played a significant role in determining the content of American wartime propaganda.

What is interesting to note about World War II-era media is that the government propaganda machine and the corporate world were not sealed off from each other. Therefore, the distinctions between propaganda, war information, and advertising were completely obscured. In his 1948 book *Warlords of Washington*, Bruce Catton, who served in the Information Division of the Office for Emergency Management, confirms these fluid boundaries: “Democracy drew its war cries from the philosophy of the salesman. . . . When government wanted to explain to the people the need for this, that, or the other thing required by the exigencies of war . . . it simply turned the job over to the advertising profession.”²⁰ And, indeed, it did. Through advertising imagery, advertising channels, and marketing techniques, corporate America helped the government shape wartime media policies, and it offered many of its publicity services for free. Much of the “free” war information in the United States was thus formatted and disseminated in the form of advertisements and marketing literature.

Advertising became the engine behind this particular business/government/war dynamic. But the advertising industry did not enter the war that way. Well before Pearl Harbor, advertising agencies, copywriters, and art staff feared that if they found no practical role for their industry in wartime, a war-minded New Deal administration might stifle their work for the duration.²¹ Moreover, years of economic hardship had inspired liberal reformers to inveigh against the wastefulness and chicanery they saw as the by-products of a corrupt and selfish capitalism. Consumer engineers in the advertising profession bore a large share of these attacks.²² As a result of this doghouse dilemma, many in business surmised that the ad industry might not survive into the postwar future if it could not justify advertising’s purpose for the war effort. Because advertising was considered in business circles as a monument of American democracy, many businessmen believed the profession was well worth preserving. If the ad industry became a casualty of mobilization, so might the American Way and private enterprise:

The burden of . . . the attack on wartime advertising seems to be based on the assumption that when there is little need to stimulate current consumption, there can be little need for advertising. . . . The really vital reason why every business should continue and if practicable increase its advertising during the war is to help preserve the framework of the American economy. That is what we are fighting for—at least what most of us are fighting for. But the collectivists have other war aims.²³

Business Week’s ominous reference to “the collectivists” represents a callous dig at liberal reformers and the New Deal administration. The remark reveals how wartime America inherited the political battles left over from the Depression. Fear of advertising censorship by a federal “collectivist” regime and its liberal supporters sparked the creation of the corporate-sponsored War Advertising Council (WAC). The WAC was designed to absorb the country’s propaganda needs by cooperating with the government on behalf of the business community. One of the reasons the WAC was formed was to create a self-governing mechanism for wartime

advertising to avoid strict limitations that might be imposed by the New Deal, especially if advertising had no officially defined wartime purpose. As a result of the business community's inherent profit motives, much of the "free" advertising the government received was very much self-serving on the part of manufacturers, who were anxious to hold on to their company's public recognition for the duration. The WAC thus felt the need to curb advertisers who were too eager to capitalize on the conflict. Using the established corporate advertising and marketing infrastructure, the WAC helped standardize "useful" and "sanitized" information about the war and how Americans at home could help win it. The WAC wrote advertising guidelines, instructing businessmen about the degree to which they could safely inform the public about war-related products they were manufacturing without leaking critical details. The WAC's publications explained how to properly convey concepts of patriotism and sacrifice to the American citizen, providing manufacturers, store owners, and other businessmen with ideas for war-related advertising that could be appropriately "tied in" to government-sponsored campaigns for rationing, recruitment, scrap salvage, Victory Gardens, and war bonds, among other similar concerns. Such guidelines also explained the amount a business could spend for war-related advertising and still deduct the expenditure from the federal taxes it owed, thus including a financial incentive for appropriately formed wartime advertising.²⁴ The Office of War Information (OWI), a *government* bureau in charge of disseminating war news, provided guidelines for media professionals, such as editors, journalists, scriptwriters, publishers, broadcasters, movie producers, and so on. These guidelines functioned much like the ones the WAC wrote for businessmen. Bearing in mind the constitutional right to free speech and freedom of the press, the OWI made strong suggestions to media professionals about the appropriate messages they could convey to a country involved in total war. Working with the WAC, however, the liberal OWI was eventually overrun by businessmen from advertising and public relations.²⁵ The disbandment of the OWI left the propaganda field wide open for disseminating postwar "information" tinged with a business, as opposed to a New Deal, agenda. Naturally, abuses abounded in this new relationship between government bureaucracy, advertising, and the business community. *From Submarines to Suburbs* argues that their "cooperation" was not about the war, but rather a thinly veiled competition over which entity would control and define the course of the postwar economy.

Why did such competition exist between the New Deal and business, especially big business, at the opening of the war? It is important to take a moment to explore this question in depth because the history of the New Deal/big business dynamic plays a key role in the contours of this study. Champions of laissez-faire economics during the 1930s felt threatened by the New Deal's legislative reforms giving government an unprecedented active role in administering certain aspects of the nation's economy.²⁶ Ironically, an examination of the bureaucratic mechanism of liberal reform as it emerged in the 1930s shows more of a correlation between the New Deal and the modern corporate system of managerial organization than we might expect, given the animosity between the business and political worlds at

that time. As Alan Brinkley points out in his 1995 book *The End of Reform*, political thought of the post–World War I years adapted many of the methods, traits, and attitudes cultivated by giant aggregates of economic and mechanistic power with a penchant for systemization—that is, the modern techno-corporate order. A steadily rising pace of mass production and mass consumption after the turn of the century dominated and directed business dynamics, which were “scientifically” organized and deployed through massive bureaucratic channels. Corporate authority felt its way through the “mass” (whether in the factory or in the marketplace) by making a “scientific system” out of producing, managing, and selling.

Individual workers and consumers were dealt with in an assembly-line manner, and this method intensified after World War I. But the autocracy upholding the modern corporate-capitalist order grew dependent on these masses—massive amounts of cooperative labor and consumer spending. A dependence on unpredictable, irrational human behavior put the techno-corporate order in a vulnerable position, and so in its usual adaptive mode, it developed “scientific” systems of psychological persuasion to rationalize and standardize the masses of flawed humans, keeping them docile, but functional, in order to sustain corporate dictates and desires. The concept of studying consumers and developing ad campaigns according to “fixed principles” and “fundamental laws” was articulated by the advertising pioneer Claude C. Hopkins in his 1923 book *Scientific Advertising*.²⁷ These communication systems were influenced by a human-engineering mindset that believed that in order to make a mass of buyers (or workers) function more predictably and precisely like machines, they should be treated and engineered as such. Predicating action through the lens of an assembly-line mentality, corporate authority became more mechanistic itself in order to transform the unruly masses into a manageable machine.²⁸

The idea that irrational flaws could be cured and perfected through industrial managerial methods of “scientific” aloofness and “engineered” efficiency seeped into political thought during the Progressive Era.²⁹ Although political “machines” had existed before, the new emphasis in Progressive political practice was to adapt and “retool” the (supposed) rationality of modern industry to effect social change. Society, once conceptualized as a machine with interchangeable, standardized parts, could be planned and fixed to run more efficiently. Such human-engineering reform practices thus challenged and reorganized (if they did not completely supplant) the power structures of the political machines from the past.³⁰ Not only did social reform techniques begin to mimic managerial methods and systems in the industrial sector, but government bureaucrats and social planners began to conceive of the individuals under their tutelage as a “mass”—especially as a mass of consumers.³¹ Because government bureaucrats and social planners had begun to adopt the logic, language, and organization of modern business, Progressive social reform issues began to be perceived in terms of consumer orientations or resolutions. Labor unrest was a consumer issue; unemployment was a consumer issue; substandard housing was a consumer issue. This shift in perception also influenced the dynamic between reformers and the public. Just as business sought to rationalize the unpredictable and imprecise mass public mind through “scientifically”

designed psychological persuasions, so too did politicians. Government and social reform by public relations methods mediated the relationship between political advocates and their constituents.

The New Deal was an offspring of the human-engineering impulse that arose in the reform politics and the techno-corporate order of the Progressive Era as much as it was a reaction against the excesses of the 1920s free market. It is ironic that a universal complaint of business leaders during the 1930s was that the architecture of government bureaucracy, as embodied by the New Deal, had grown too pervasive, too powerful, and too intrusive. Surely big business should have recognized (if not admired) its expansive corporate self in the flourishing managerial hierarchy that systematically sought to reform the country's irrational flaws with an engineer's sense of order.

The New Deal's reform policies were influenced by the British economist John Maynard Keynes, who realized the intimate connection between government spending and the health of the private sector. Eschewing romantic ideals about the sanctity of a free market economy, Keynes advocated federal spending, even to the point of creating a deficit. He argued that this practice would actually stimulate growth in the private sector during periods of economic stagnation. Keynes's theory, unlike conventional economic thought, recognized that balanced government budgets did little to assist the economy, especially in times of crisis. Keynesianism, and other related forms of federal intervention in economic affairs, were sometimes referred to as "state capitalism." No matter the moniker, such concepts were not unanimously appreciated or accepted throughout the business community.³²

The historical record shows that businessmen expressed a variety of responses to Keynesianism, revealing that corporate America was not monolithic in its outlook. A single, unanimous mindset did not characterize members of the New Deal administration and their liberal supporters either. Many New Dealers and liberals were anti-big business and used their party's power to rally against capitalism. But others, such as President Franklin Roosevelt, sought only to fine-tune the American Way. Roosevelt himself was not interested in antagonizing the business community or replacing America's free enterprise system. However, the increasing infiltration of government into everyday life (especially during the war) and the socialist-like proposals behind certain New Deal programs were hard for stalwart capitalists to swallow. Therefore, Roosevelt, the New Deal, and liberal reformers in general were perceived by many conservative business leaders as antithetical to the American Way.

Roosevelt's primary plan for pulling the country out of the Depression was to revive consumer spending and enhance the average American's purchasing power by "promoting work and security."³³ Part of the "security" Roosevelt envisioned involved rights to fair treatment on the job, including legislation that forbade child labor, imposed a minimum wage and maximum labor hours, and protected the right to organize unions.³⁴ The New Deal's intention was to create an industrial and business environment in which consumerism could prosper. But some of the means toward this end involved restrictions that many business leaders denounced

as “un-American” because they perceived any economic controls from the public sector as a disregard for the “sacred” tenets of free enterprise.³⁵ Limits, such as those imposed by the New Deal’s Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) and the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), were received with bitterness. The AAA, for example, sought to regulate agricultural overproduction by demanding that certain crops be plowed under and livestock slaughtered. NIRA regulations, through the National Recovery Administration (NRA), aimed to jump-start production, competition, and thus consumption by establishing various codes to control prices, industrial output, and trading practices. Despite their goal of creating a fairer and healthier economy, New Deal reforms were blocked or counterattacked by conservative corporate organizations nearly every step of the way throughout the 1930s. When America entered World War II, both moderate and conservative business leaders were convinced that a wartime economy would strengthen the New Deal’s regulatory powers. The emergency of the war years and the uncertainty of the postwar future helped unify business leaders from both ends of the spectrum, uniting them in opposition against the New Deal. Thus the war lent the New Deal’s enemies reinforcements and bolstered conservatives’ conviction to destroy it.

From Submarines to Suburbs uncovers an ideological debate that reveals big business’s motives behind wartime narratives of progress, and explains how the rhetoric and symbols woven into advertising and promotional literature were shaped by business leaders’ political and economic agenda. Wartime narratives of progress were invested with two basic scenarios: producing for war and preparing for peace. Narratives about producing for war were largely accolades about the mobilization process. Such propaganda was geared to shore up the public’s confidence in industry’s ability to fight a global war, despite the fact that its managers had not been able to avoid economic depression. Although many mobilization narratives were designed as “official” government information, their sponsorship was predicated on the fact that most manufacturers of durable products (and even nondurable, fast-moving consumer goods, such as Brillo cleansing pads) had virtually nothing to sell the wartime consumer as a result of industry’s conversion to produce specifically for war. America’s involvement in the war signaled the total subordination of the country’s raw materials, distribution lines, and industrial infrastructure to the government’s military needs. Furthermore, factories were converted to manufacturing matériel specific to the military, thus eliminating or severely restricting the mass production of most consumer goods. This meant that goods and services essential to the war effort—priorities—were removed from the civilian market or at least significantly reduced. Mobilization narratives conceptualized this transition process in advertising and war information literature, explaining how a given product or industry was harnessed for war and suggesting how consumer goods and war matériel were symbiotic parts of the same equation that would naturally add up to victory. Wartime narratives about mobilization harbored a potluck of social and political sentiments pointing to the American industrial success of the past and its potential for even better things in the future. *From Submarines to Suburbs* explores the prevailing symbols found in mobilization

narratives and reveals the extent to which modern comforts and conveniences were credited with helping the Allies' efficient military buildup and ultimate victory.

The reversal of mobilization was reconversion, that is, postwar planning. However, reconversion messages were published in tandem with those related to the mobilization process. American business leaders began anticipating postwar prospects and plans well in advance of America's formal entry into the war. The months preceding America's declaration of war against Germany and Japan, roughly late 1939 to December 1941, were usually referred to as the "defense period." The years following Pearl Harbor and before the Japanese surrender in 1945 were considered the "war period."³⁶ Though mobilization narratives were more numerous than reconversion tales before 1943, both types can be found throughout the war years. It was as if the defense period prompted business leaders to start looking ahead.³⁷ Because both reconversion and mobilization narratives exist pretty much simultaneously from the defense period through the end of the war, this overlap encourages a thematic approach to studying wartime propaganda and makes following a chronological history a less enriching process of inquiry for this context.

Postwar planning narratives, found in advertisements and promotional literature, were *built* on mobilization messages. Such narratives about the future harbored the hidden agenda of strengthening consumer faith in corporate authority and the free enterprise system. *From Submarines to Suburbs* explores the ways in which wartime marketing strategies defined the postwar world by "positioning" the war in the public mind as a sanitary instrument for the betterment of America.³⁸ Wartime forecasters describing the "world of tomorrow" encouraged Americans to believe they were fighting for a utopian life generated by the war. The argument behind postwar planning narratives followed a logic cut from the ideological fabric of American Way dogma. If free enterprise, industry, and big business could win the war, then they could also democratize progress and build a successful bridge to higher standards of living. Clearly, visions of a utopian postwar world built on the progress of wartime industry were not only about selling Americans the business of victory, but also about enticing them with the consumer benefits of capitalism, as opposed to the state-controlled economic plans of the New Deal. Such a strategy would not only pay off in the postwar economy by demonstrating the patriotic "sacrifices" of manufacturers, but also serve a propagandistic purpose by reinstilling public confidence in the power of the American Way and its corporate/industrial infrastructure.

Historians' attention has focused on corporate America's wartime paternalism and its ulterior postwar intentions. Yet the emphasis has *not* been on the interplay between *advertising content* produced during the war and corporate calculations to undermine the New Deal.³⁹ As a case study of conservative wartime corporate motives and strategies, *From Submarines to Suburbs* looks to the wartime campaign directed by the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), which encouraged its members to deploy advertising messages about postwar progress as weapons to (1) undermine the New Deal and (2) regain public trust in a capitalist economy run solely by the techno-corporate order. *From Submarines to Suburbs*

reveals the correlation between reconversion narratives about the postwar future and the NAM's ulterior purpose. It also demonstrates how wartime advertising was structured to habituate consumers to the idea that victory *and* postwar prosperity were achieved by big business, not the federal government—especially the New Deal.

Two top members of the industrial design profession possessed a similar political and economic agenda. The inclusion of this consumer engineering profession in its synthesis of the New Deal/big business battle distinguishes *From Submarines to Suburbs* from other studies that touch on this topic. Designers, like their clients and the ad industry, often felt threatened by New Deal policies and wartime regulations. Some specifically sought to secure a sound footing for capitalism—and their own firms—in the postwar world. Toward this end, many designers wrote articles for the manufacturing trade, attempting to persuade potential clients that they needed to lay plans well before the war ended in order to secure a competitive niche in the postwar market. The industrial design profession helped stimulate corporate visions of the postwar world by seducing (and sometimes intimidating) manufacturers into publicizing unrealizable ideas for reconversion, which thus, in turn, helped raise the public's expectations for postwar progress with images of an unrealistic, fantastic future. Prominent designers Walter Dorwin Teague and Raymond Loewy, especially, were involved in the conservative business community's wartime mandate to undermine the New Deal and reestablish consumer confidence in capitalism. Examining designers' and corporate leaders' complementary postwar planning agendas helps us understand the business motivation behind speculative forecasts for postwar America and the extent to which derailing the New Deal played a tremendous role in shaping wartime marketing aims and strategies.

Because official government war information, like commercial messages, was largely formed and managed by members of the business community, the war and home front duties were explained using the language of business and commercial metaphors tied to America's consumption ethic. *From Submarines to Suburbs* examines war bond advertising as a case in which government information became infused with commercial marketing techniques and rhetoric. Other studies of bond drives have shown how government leaders used established marketing methods to sell war bonds.⁴⁰ Sales of war bonds were intended to unite the country while simultaneously building a secure financial bridge toward an individual's material dreams after the war. The marketing "hook" within bond drives also highlights the paradox of the war's loftier moral purpose in that many West Coast Japanese Americans were stripped of their citizenship, their rights, and their material possessions while other Americans were being sold the war as a conduit to greater democratic freedoms, material abundance, and familial/national security. Despite this "fiction of equality," to borrow a phrase from Gunnar Myrdal, the war bond campaign rhetoric coincided with President Roosevelt's aim during the 1930s to democratize higher standards of living.⁴¹ In terms of expanding consumers' purchasing power, business and government were, on the surface, in agreement, yet they definitely diverged ideologically. *From Submarines to Suburbs* looks deep into

this ideological rift to show the extent to which business animosity toward the New Deal lurked in advertising fictions of the postwar world—most of which were tied in to war bond sales and savings.

From Submarines to Suburbs also reveals what factors shaped the ideological construction of progress on the home front during World War II. Many wartime commentators were concerned about the Depression's stagnating standards of living, uneven distribution of technology, and a housing shortage left over from World War I. The housing problems exacerbated by the Depression, and the fear of diminishing hygienic standards and proprieties, dominated wartime discourse, from advertising to presidential speeches. As a result of America's backlog of social problems, the war generated a great deal of speculation about ways to radically improve American society and ignite economic prosperity by harnessing wartime lessons in a variety of growth industries, such as plastics, aluminum, medicines, electronics, prefabricated housing, aviation, shipbuilding, manufacturing, and areas of scientific research. Wartime forecasters claimed that if a given product or industry had withstood the test of war on the battlefield, then it could only benefit the postwar consumer. On the whole, the war was looked to as a remedy for irrevocably solving prewar social dilemmas and for assuaging Depression-era fears as they pertained to class disparities, standards of living, and the home.

Competing idioms of dire poverty and technological salvation surfaced throughout the war years and influenced plans for the "world of tomorrow" on the other side of victory. Because the war was marketed as an agent for revolutionizing civilian domestic life, the majority of postwar planning narratives revolved around the symbolic value attached to the single-family suburban home with its streamlined kitchen. The postwar house and its "revolutionary" kitchen grew to grand iconic proportions during the war because they were perceived as the hygienic locus of American progress and the site from which a prosperous postwar economy would spring. Promotional imagery of the mythic "house and kitchen of tomorrow" was used as a means to rally consumer support for the war effort and ignite consumer anticipation for a revitalized America built with the material progress generated through mobilization for war. However, it was not the new domestic products, kitchens, or house designs that would persuade consumers to embrace the business community's commercial plans for the postwar world. Rather, it was the marketing appeal for maximizing efficiency, raising standards of cleanliness, and facilitating a well-ordered world at an affordable price that captured the public's attention.

War, the 1940s embodiment of modern progress, was perceived as a hygienic instrument of social salvation. In light of this thinking, the postwar "hygienic revolution" became celebrated in wartime narratives as a social evolution. Houses, kitchens, and new or improved domestic products were promoted as symbolic escalators leading to middle-class status. Such markers of progress were identified as the critical ingredients for achieving what was literally called a "better America." The war was considered a catalyst for democratizing this form of progress: elevating the hygienic and, by extension, the moral stature of low-income families by bestowing affordable access to the domestic affectations of the white middle class.

But this trajectory into a higher, healthier, and thus improved hygienic spectrum was more than just a manifestation of social mobility. It was a transformation into the normative mold of the “right” type.⁴² This progress generated by war was not solely perceived in terms of postwar consumer bounty, but also celebrated as the means to invent a more socially hygienic and rationally designed citizenry after the war. War-born progress was thus positioned, and perceived, as the ultimate social reforming tool.

The appeal of a “cleaned-up” and efficiently running society was not new to the World War II era.⁴³ Most wartime visions of a “better America” were peppered with a biological, or genetic, determinist edge, masking a totalitarian desire for social homogeneity and control through various manifestations of hygiene and efficiency. This conceptualization of a “better America,” I argue, is related to the human-engineering mentality that punctuated the social reform rhetoric popularized in the decades prior to the war.⁴⁴ It was during the Progressive Era that engineering and scientific principles were first systematically converted to solving the unhygienic and inefficient foibles of human-made and human-based systems. According to reformers of this ilk, a broad range of human systems were in dire need of a strong dose of rational science and engineering. Adapting scientific and engineering rhetoric legitimized a less than egalitarian impulse to manage the health, hygiene, and efficiency of the social body. Reform narratives were often laden with expressions of an urgent necessity for “betterment,” which could only take place after a purging of “threats,” such as “unfit elements,” “wastefulness,” “irrationality,” “disease,” or “defectiveness.” Industrial, racial, genetic, economic, and social issues were often talked about with “survival of the fittest” analogies in which superior and inferior elements battled for dominance. This human-engineering logic sought to streamline mechanisms, spaces, bodies, or practices, subordinating humanity to a “natural law” of rational and impersonal order—all in an effort to safeguard “health,” “hygiene,” and the “efficient” pace of progress. Reform “betterment” models, such as scientific management, social Darwinism, eugenics, and euthenics, along with related pseudo-sciences used by criminologists, such as physiognomy, promoted “scientific” categorizations of “types” and helped illuminate dangerous differences that could lead to society’s downfall.⁴⁵ Identifying difference through “scientifically” categorized physical traits, heredity, behaviors, and environs provided the leverage to effectuate social change during the Progressive years by regulating, eliminating, or cleansing anything that strayed from the boundaries of the prescribed normal “type.”⁴⁶

From the turn of the century and through the 1930s, virtually every facet of society, the body, domestic life, and labor came under a human-engineering scrutiny and was touched (if not overhauled) by an improvement ethic that, at heart, was guided by the needs of the native-born white middle class. These needs were predicated on middle-class fears that their inherent values were being eroded by the refuse of industrial expansion. Such refuse included the proliferation of unhealthy factories, widespread poverty and crime, dilapidated slums, and epidemics that would often creep into healthy middle-class neighborhoods. Of course the industrial refuse also included the “types” who toiled in the hellish factories and

lived in the filthy slums. Peasant immigrants from the “less desirable” enclaves of Europe and African Americans migrating from the rural South were seen as “great unwashed” types in need of a healthy disinfecting. Despite this bias, many reform initiatives had a humanitarian edge, especially those with a focus on family life. Yet such reforms for “cleaning up” immigrant and migrant family life were largely intended to human-engineer the families of the “great unwashed” and coerce their conversion to the hygienic contours of the middle-class normative mold. Regulations on child labor, for example, kept the “great unwashed” children from a life of disease, degeneracy, and ignorance. However, keeping them in school and out of factories ensured that reformers had a captive audience to propagandize the more “healthy” habits of the white middle class. With America modeled on native-born white middle-class values, the country would not only run smoothly and be squeaky clean, but it would also be easier to police.

Advertising copy and illustrations assisted in propagandizing this human-engineering mentality by playing on assumptions about “types” in a way that resembled the social “betterment” models and pseudo-sciences.⁴⁷ Throughout the book, I will examine the types shaped by a human-engineering mentality that surfaced in persuasive media messages during the war. Human-engineered types were especially prevalent, as we shall see, in any advertising narrative that conveyed a message about hygiene and conforming to the “right” clean type. Such advertising scenarios were popular prior to the war and continued into the post-war years. Commercial representations of women were especially dependent on such classifications of hygiene, the ideal female type, and the ideal domestic space. Weighty social pressures to “measure up” to such standards added to women’s already overburdened days involving caring for home and family and, in some cases, holding down a job. But advertising offered easy solutions for attaining the highest hygienic ideal. Labor-saving designs and devices, as well as cleaning products, were promoted as the sanitary instruments of personal betterment and ensuring one’s evolution into the “right” middle-class type. Household technologies were promoted and perceived as stepping stones to higher standards of living—a social status that *demand*ed in turn intensified standards of cleanliness and, ironically, spending more time on leisure. *From Submarines to Suburbs* examines the rhetoric and symbolism of hygiene and leisure derived from labor-saving designs and devices that were intended to liberate and sanitize. What sets this book apart from other histories of these concepts is its examination of the ways in which the technological progress of World War II became attached to social meanings of hygiene, leisure, and the ideal middle-class type.

One well-known wartime type, that of “Rosie the Riveter,” still exists as a ubiquitous feminist symbol of female strength and women’s capability to perform “a man’s job.” This icon also stands as a popularized testament to women challenging the gender status quo, especially in terms of work both inside and outside the home.⁴⁸ As this book explains, however, *conventional* gender identities were perceived as important for the war effort because they helped shore up a sense of stable home and family, despite the obvious social changes created when many white middle-class women entered wartime factory work.⁴⁹ Wartime advertising

promoted *all* women's reconversion back into the traditional homemaker role and out of the male business of war, even before victory was achieved. Fears concerning the postwar future prompted the same responses. Orthodox gender demarcations were believed to be necessary for a successful postwar reconversion. Such traditional thinking conflicted with the rhetoric of domestic revolution in wartime advertising. New domestic conveniences developed from war-tested products were intended to liberate women from the tyranny of housework—and yet women were *not* expected or encouraged en masse to turn their attention outside the home. This book looks at the commercial representation of women during the war and provides a deep investigation of women's roles in the context of technological progress evolving from the cultural territory of World War II. An extension of this study of women and domesticity involves analyzing criticisms aimed at wartime advertising and promotional literature that marketed the technological revolution geared for the immediate postwar utopia. *From Submarines to Suburbs* explores for whom the visions of effortless hygienic living were an illusion and whether wartime promises for a “better America” came true at all. Well before the war ended, a minority of skeptics questioned and exposed the unrealistic predictions of labor-saving houses and miraculous products intended for the postwar world. Critics in the African American press fell into this category.

New and improved technologies in the hands of a “socially responsible” corporate America were advertised as the key to democratizing progress. Hence, the forecast technological revolution was not simply a domestic one, but a social one as well. Although technology as a galvanizing force for social democracy may have been promised to all, it was not freely given after the war. African Americans found that their country's wartime production “miracle” did not live up to their expectations. The white-dominated business community recognized the rise in the black standard of living during the war, but it never included African Americans in its image of postwar progress publicized in the white mainstream media. Quite simply, blacks did not appear in wartime narratives of progress targeted at white audiences, except occasionally as maids or bellhops.⁵⁰ Because a great deal of wartime advertising promoted products that were convenient and efficient to use, black *servants* were not regularly included in visions of postwar progress. The entire premise of such technologies was predicated on enabling a white middle-class housewife to complete the chores effortlessly, alone, and in no time at all. Thus the postwar domestic revolution presumably would make the black servant obsolete.

While researching this project, I investigated whether advertising geared toward an African American audience included narratives of progress similar to those found in the white mainstream press. Definitely, black progress was recognized and discussed in the black press, because the high employment rate during the war put a majority of African Americans on a better economic plateau than most had previously experienced—although their income and opportunities were not exactly equal to those of whites. However, the available wartime documents do not allow for a parallel history. On the one hand, the sources are not readily available.⁵¹ Moreover, the simple fact of the matter is that the black press was not a mirror of the white mainstream media, nor was it intended to be. The degree of

advertising (and promotional hype) found in the white mainstream media simply did not exist in media geared to black readers—a disparity on which this book will expound. War bond promotions provided an occasional exception. But there again, concepts of black progress were focused on the collective goal of equality achieved through economic emancipation rather than on dreams of an effortless suburban lifestyle.⁵²

African Americans looked to the war as an opportunity to pursue a “Double Victory” (more popularly known as the “Double V”). If the war was being fought, ostensibly, to rid the world of fascist tyranny and make it safe for democracy, African Americans argued that such a fight ought to be first and foremost conducted at home by challenging America’s racist status quo. Black Americans manifested this challenge by asserting the rights they were automatically accorded as U.S. citizens, such as the right to participate in the bounty of wartime production. Both mobilization and reconversion narratives taught the public that the war was democratizing progress at a rate that would soon allow all hard-working Americans an affordable means into the hygienic lifestyle of the white, suburban middle class. Plentiful jobs in high-paying industries, war bond savings opportunities, and a paternal techno-corporate order suggested that America was on a new social trajectory toward limitless abundance and higher standards of living for everyone involved. Although such visions of progress were not *advertised* by large corporations in the black press, such issues were certainly discussed by black journalists. African Americans believed that their wartime sacrifices and contributions gave them the right to assume that these corporate promises were also meant for the betterment of their personal lives, too.

An overview of political and economic issues from the early cold war era reveals the social and global consequences of wartime narratives of progress, and whether or not the promises of a hygienic revolution came true as forecast. *From Submarines to Suburbs* shows how cold war realities helped redefine the social meaning of progress and ideas about the postwar “house of tomorrow.”⁵³ During the 1950s, discourse about American progress heralded the arrival of a postwar commercial fallout in which the efficiency, convenience, and plentitude of household labor-saving devices advanced along with cold war military science and technology. As cold war rivalries mounted, advertisers asserted that domesticity had been even further revolutionized by defense-related technologies. This facet of the postwar commercial fallout, though considerably hyped, had a ring of truth to it. The business press readily admitted that civilian product research and development grew from federally financed defense contracts. The propaganda motifs and rhetoric found in World War II-era advertising were recycled during the cold war, and we can find traces of defense- or war-related themes in corporate advertising that sought to simultaneously stimulate civilian spending and undermine Communism with visions of “super-powered” domesticity. The cold war’s military-industrial complex became celebrated as America’s “winning weapon” that injected greater levels of hygienic progress into the single-family, suburban home. Business *and* civilian consumers alike were encouraged to profit from an economy dependent on the need for conflict.

World War II-era commercial propaganda illuminates how profoundly the current culture of war continues to shape American assumptions about democracy, progress, *and* profits. A recently produced marketing brochure distributed by the company Homeland Investing in 2003 (a rhetorical tie-in with the federal Department of Homeland Security) provides a case in point. Homeland Investing suggests that the *post*-cold war rise in terrorism actually provides consumers with a wealth of personal investment opportunities: “The defense industry is booming,” this multipage brochure explains. “Our government spends more on defense than ever before. Read how you can claim your share of the \$399 billion market opportunity.”⁵⁴ *From Submarines to Suburbs* investigates wartime artifacts professing a narrative of progress, just like the one communicated by the contemporary firm Homeland Investing. And the book does so in order to reveal how modern warfare evolved into a sanitary tool for (supposedly) democratizing wealth and progress. Such a thesis is relevant in light of today’s increasing levels of terrorist threats and heightened levels of defense/security spending.⁵⁵ But perhaps we should be looking *within* as much as we look for conspiracies brewing beyond our own shores. Does technological progress procured from military research and development justify the billions spent, the environmental destruction, the intensified cultural hostilities, and the loss of life in perpetuating a permanent culture of war? Is that the *democracy* for which Americans, and a host of innocent civilians, lost their lives in World War II? What exactly did we “save” from fascism, Communism, and (now) terrorism? When an economy and a government nurtures industries of mass destruction, democracy and freedom are the ultimate casualties. Perhaps exposing a more complete picture of the paradox of war-born progress will reveal how defense and war are ingeniously sanitized, packaged, and justified to the public. It is to be hoped that such an exposure will help popularize the largely ignored critiques of today’s military buildup and interventions.