Review Essay

Graham Broad. *A Small Price to Pay: Consumer Culture on the Canadian Home Front, 1939–45*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013. xiv + 278 pp. ISBN 9780774823630, $95.00 (cloth); ISBN 9780774823647, $32.95 (paper).

The notion is prevalent within the historiography that the World War II Canadian home front was characterized by extreme sacrifice through rationing, price regulations, and the purchasing of war bonds. In this innovative study of wartime consumer culture, however, Graham Broad convincingly challenges this interpretation. Broad argues that World War II was actually a period of progress in relation to consumer culture, which he defines as "the economic, social, and cultural practices associated with the manufacture, marketing, sale, and purchase of commodities" (2). Using a range of sources, including government statistics on retail sales, trade journals, popular magazines, advertisements, as well as the archival collections of government bodies and women's organizations, Broad interrogates the histories of consumers, retailers, and advertisers to demonstrate that Canadians' home front experiences of consumer culture were far more nuanced than previous accounts have conveyed.

Broad insists that from the beginning of the war, Canadians were highly engaged in consumer culture. This was especially true in the case of female consumers, who were openly encouraged by the federal government and advertisers alike to engage in "patriotic consumerism." Definitions of patriotic consumption changed depending on who was using the term and when it was used, and arguments that thrift would win the war existed simultaneously with assertions that consumer spending would do the same. Consumers responded to both arguments, for, as Broad demonstrates, Canadians not only complied with rationing and purchased war bonds but also spent enthusiastically. As Broad's statistical analysis reveals, from 1939 to 1945, Canadian retail sales actually rose 49 percent, even when accounting for inflation.

Broad also demonstrates how retail sales continually increased, offering important insights into the adaptive strategies used in many industries affected by material shortages and restrictions. Automotive dealers without new cars to sell turned their attention to service,

https://doi.org/10.1017/eso.2017.59 Published online by Cambridge University Press

making showrooms into garages. Hardware and appliance retailers offered new lines, including sporting goods, toys, and household items made of plastic and wood. Jewelers sold estate jewelry and antiques. From the retail perspective, then, it seems that the period should be reconceptualized as one of retail adaptation in which consumer dollars were redirected toward the goods and services retailers were able to offer. When goods were restricted to the point that consumers had disposable income, Broad shows that many turned to leisure activities, with movie theatre attendance increasing continually during the period.

Like their retail counterparts, advertisers also faced considerable challenges that forced them to adjust to wartime conditions. Broad traces these adaptations in a series of three chapters. In the first two advertising-themed chapters, the author provides a fascinating overview of the state of the advertising field in Canada in the early years of the war, including the ways in which advertising agents viewed themselves as Canada's harbingers of modernity. This ideological positioning was challenged in 1941 when the federal government began stressing sacrifice. Determined to remain relevant and solvent, advertisers astutely repositioned goods ranging from Pepsi to Lysol as necessities, treading carefully as to not appear as if they were encouraging superfluous consumerism. The final chapter, focusing on advertising, is reminiscent of Roland Marchand's *Advertising the American Dream*,[1] on which he draws extensively. In it, Broad demonstrates how goods were cast as wartime necessities through the use of various tropes, such as the misguided friend, which were used extensively to demonstrate the importance of (and the dangers of not) purchasing advertised goods. What is more, Broad explores the use of institutional advertising and the benefits it wrought Canadian producers whose civilian manufacturing was restricted. With the exception of Daniel J. Robinson's "The Luxury of Moderate Use,"[2] which examines Seagram's institutional advertising from 1934 until 1955, and Matthew Bellamy's work (published after Broad's), "To Ensure the Continued Life of the Industry,"[3] which explores the public relations campaign of Ontario brewers during WWII, institutional advertising has been an understudied area in the Canadian context. Unlike

1. Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940,* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1985).

2. Daniel J. Robinson, "The Luxury of Moderate Use: Seagram and Moderation Advertising, 1934–1955," in *Communicating in Canada's Past: Essays in Media History*, edited by Gene Allen and Daniel J. Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

3. Matthew J. Bellamy, "'To Ensure the Continued Life of the Industry': The Public Relations Campaign of the Ontario Brewers during WWII," *Histoire sociale/ Social History* 48, no. 97 (2015): 403–423.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eso.2017.59 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the works of Robinson and Bellamy, Broad explores institutional ads from the automotive, rubber, railway, and spirit industries, thereby providing a valuable, more generalized view of how institutional advertising was undertaken and why it was a commonly used strategy in various industries during the war.

For historians of advertising, then, Broad's analysis of the industry during WWII is significant. His work is the first to provide an in-depth, period-specific examination of the inner workings of Canadian advertising and the intellectual world of its practitioners. In integrating industry-based ideological findings with his study of advertisements, Broad also provides insights as to why ads were presented in various ways by looking at advertisers' perspectives. This is an important contribution because while considering the perspective of the advertiser is common in American works (see, for instance, Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*; Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings*; Pamela Laird, *Advertising Progress*),[4] this approach differs markedly from Canadian studies that primarily analyze the consumer milieu when contextualizing advertisements.

Instead of seeing of WWII as a period of blighted consumer culture, *A Small Price to Pay* indicates that it is time historians adjust their perspectives to envision the period as one in which consumer culture was reoriented and refocused in a myriad of ways. There were persistent tensions that existed between proponents of consumer spending and those advocating austerity, which Broad addresses well. It seems that the voices of austerity, however, are those that previous historians have paid most attention to, especially those voices emanating from official government sources. In including these voices and going beyond them by giving serious consideration to sources such as trade publications and popular magazines, Broad places the experiences of consumers, retailers, and advertisers at the center of his narrative. In doing so, he clearly and convincingly demonstrates that WWII Canadian consumer culture was far more complex, adaptive, and vibrant than previously believed.

Kristin Hall
University of Waterloo
E-mail: k4hall@uwaterloo.ca

doi:10.1017/eso.2017.59

Published online February 26, 2018

4. Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*; Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).