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Simona Tobia, *Advertising America: The United States Information Service in Italy (1945–1956)* (Milan: LED, 2008, €33.00). Pp. 323. ISBN 978 88 7916 400 9.

During the last century, "information" was a term often used for American propaganda abroad. The very first public body to organize a worldwide campaign during World War I was called the Committee on Public Information (CPI), a title similar to that adopted by the agency analyzed in Tobia's book. Such denominations not only avoided the embarrassing term "propaganda," but implied also the conviction that "information" about the free, democratic and wealthy society of the US was all that foreign countries might need in order to adopt American models or endorse US foreign policy. From this point of view, the "full and fair picture of the United States" asked for by President Truman in creating the USIS in 1945 was in line with the "simple, straightforward presentation of facts" which was ostensibly the main aim of the CPI's work in 1917 and 1918. The CPI chairman explained the propagandists' attitude thus: "we had such confidence in our case as to feel that only fair presentation of its facts was needed" (G. Creel, *Complete Report of the Chairman of the Committee on Public Information 1917–1918–1919*, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1920, 1). A crusading faith in the superiority of the American system supported US propaganda from its beginnings, and made it the only "gospel" able to counteract the magnetic slogans emanating from Soviet Russia.

A strong grasp of this continuity in US international propaganda throughout the twentieth century is lacking in Tobia's book. As in many studies of the Cold War, the impression is given that the world was born anew after World War II. She dismisses the CPI's work as basically "a campaign of hate against the enemy, which contributed to distorting the perception of war events" (27), while the CPI's message was in fact essentially positive, and its campaign could be seen as one of the first wide-ranging efforts to Americanize the world. Certainly, its impressive network and effective results in Italy could provide a useful standard of comparison for Tobia's analysis.

That said, in all other respects, Tobia's work is perceptive and accurate. She describes the evolution of the USIS's involvement in cultural diplomacy in Italy during the first decade after the war, pinpointing both the intentions of the American government and the extent of its success in obtaining long-lasting results in this country. To this end, besides diverse secondary sources, in part discussed in a lucid introduction, Tobia has consulted a huge range of primary sources, mainly kept in the American National Archives and hitherto largely unexplored.

The USIS consisted of a network of overseas branches promoting the State Department's cultural policies. The Italian branch opened in 1943, working initially in cooperation with the Office of War Information and the Psychological Warfare Branch, and then independently after Liberation. It comprehended various sections, such as the American Libraries and Cultural Centres, the Press and Publication Service, the International Broadcasting Branch (including the Voice of America), the Motion Picture Section and the Cultural Exchange Section (including the Fulbright Program). Its principal aim was "to convince the Italians that the main objective of American policies was peace, firmly rooted in freedom and security, but they also

wished to provoke attitudes and actions in support of the United States' objectives in both the people and the Government" (18). The recurring theme of the USIS's various initiatives – publications, exhibits, television or radio programs – was the exaltation of the American way of life.

The book analyzes the relations between the progression of American cultural diplomacy, Italy's social and political evolution, and the changes in the international Cold War situation. Pursuing these themes, the story of the USIS policy in Italy is divided into three main phases: the first spans the period from the end of the war to the elections of 1948, the second goes from 1948 to the start of the Eisenhower administration in 1953, and the third covers the years of Clare Boothe Luce's mandate as American ambassador in Rome from 1953 to 1956. Luce's mandate marked a turning point in American cultural diplomacy in Italy. In the previous years, the target of USIS policies had been the public at large, and especially the vast audiences of workers most likely to be attracted by the communists: its campaigns were therefore expensive, but largely ineffectual. Luce's activity instead focussed on formers of public opinion, such as writers, journalists and university professors, as well as radio, television and cinema professionals. Increasingly, intellectuals of liberal convictions became invaluable tools of the American propaganda machine, helping to secure much better results for the USIS's relentless efforts to influence Italy's cultural life.

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