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BOOK NEWS

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History Contributes to Ongoing Debate about Government PR

Promoting the War Effort: Robert Horton and Federal Propaganda, 1938-1946, by *Mordecai Lee*

"An outstanding example of lesson-drawing from administrative history that can assist practical understanding as well as shape potential responses to twenty-first-century challenges of governing."—Richard J. Stillman II, former editor in chief of the *Public Administration Review*

Baton Rouge, LA—Though historians have largely overlooked Robert Horton, his public relations campaigns remain fixed in popular memory of the home front during World War II. Utilizing all media—including the nascent technology of television—to rally civilian support, Horton's work ranged from educational documentary shorts like *Pots to Planes*, which depicted the transformation of aluminum household items into aircraft, to posters employing scare tactics, such as a German soldier with large eyes staring forward with the tagline "He's Watching You." Iconic and calculated, Horton's campaigns raise important questions about the role of PR in government agencies. When are promotional campaigns acceptable? Does war necessitate persuasive communication? What separates information from propaganda? *Promoting the War Effort* traces the career of Horton—the first book-length study to do so—and delves into the controversies surrounding federal PR.

A former reporter, Horton headed the PR department for the U.S. Maritime Commission from 1938 to 1940. Then—until Pearl Harbor in December 1941—he directed the Division of Information (DOI) in the Executive Office of the President, where he played key roles in promoting the New Deal, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's unprecedented third-term reelection campaign, and the prewar arms-production effort.

Promoting the War Effort recovers this influential figure in American politics during a time when questions about how facts are disseminated—and spun—are of greater relevance than ever before.

Mordecai Lee is the author of *The First Presidential Communications Agency: FDR's Office of Government Reports and Congress vs. the Bureaucracy: Muzzling Agency Public Relations*.

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