



Scroop, D. (2016) Greening the Red, White, and Blue: The Bomb, Big Business, and Consumer Resistance in Postwar America. By Thomas Jundt. Oxford University Press. 2014. xii + 306pp. \$34.95. History, 101(347), pp. 649-651.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/144605/>

Deposited on: 25 July 2017

Thomas Jundt, *Greening the Red, White, and Blue: The Bomb, Big Business, and Consumer Resistance in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), \$34.95. 306pp. ISBN 978-0-19-979120-0

In the 1940s big business recovered much of the power and prestige it had lost during the Great Depression. Business conservatives—for so long held back by Franklin D. Roosevelt's dominating presence—developed powerful networks as part of an increasingly potent backlash against the New Deal, leading to Republican Party gains in the 1942 and 1946 midterm elections. Liberals, meanwhile, adopted a cautious posture. As Alan Brinkley showed in *The End of Reform*, by the mid-1940s many elite New Dealers had given up on the idea of altering the basic structures and institutions of US capitalism. Instead they increasingly focused their efforts on preparing for a new consumer-oriented world. FDR himself underlined this shift when he announced just after Christmas in 1943 that “old Dr. New Deal” had been replaced by “Dr. Win-the-War.” At the war’s end, therefore, the New Deal state and the business community were primed to deliver on their promises of social security and material abundance. A new age of mass consumption, backed by big business and an expanded state, beckoned

The idea that the political, economic, and social settlement that emerged from the war was friendly toward big business and geared chiefly toward satisfying the wants of American consumers is powerfully entrenched in the historiography of the immediate post-war decades. Thomas Jundt’s new book, *Greening the Red, White, Blue*, is important because it contests—and substantially complicates—that version of the period from the 1940s to the 1960s. It does so by showing that many Americans rejected the consumers’ republic bequeathed to them at the end of the War, and that many more of them were anxious and discomfited by the dominant position of big business in post-war American life. Jundt builds effectively on earlier studies of consumer politics, activism, and thought such as Daniel Horowitz’s *The Anxieties of Affluence* and Lawrence Glickman’s *Buying Power* to show not only that

consumer and environmental politics were intimately intertwined but that they emerged in their modern form as a moral and intellectual response to large-scale capitalism. In the 1940s and 1950s, consumer and environmental activists created and then occupied one of the very few spaces in post-war US political culture from which it was deemed legitimate to question and criticise capitalism. *Greening the Red, White, and Blue* makes this argument persuasively.

Jundt's study is organised into two parts. In the first he traces the origins of environmentalist in citizens' responses to the atom bomb and the Second World War; in the second he explores the various ways in which those responses came to enter the mainstream of US politics and culture, culminating in the Earth Day extravaganza in April 1970. In addition to its clear organisation, *Greening the Red, White, and Blue* is notable for its wide cultural range. Its account of the development of consumer and environmental activism is enlivened by references to music, movies, and poetry, as well as to works of technical and popular science. It combines social and political history, drawing skilfully on the correspondence and official documentation of campaigning organisations such as the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), Women Strike for Peace (WSP), and the Sierra Club. In addition, its careful analysis of key texts in the history of post-war America, such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*, will help students, scholars, and other readers to reinterpret these familiar works. Jundt's readings of major political speeches with a bearing on consumer and environmental politics, such as Lyndon B. Johnson's May 1964 address on the Great Society at the University of Michigan, are thoughtful and assured.

For this reader, however, the outstanding feature of Jundt's book is its meticulous charting of the efforts of individual American citizens who laboured in the shadow of the bomb to bring their concerns about the quality of the air they breathed, the water they drank, and the soil they tilled to public attention. Figures such as J. I. Rodale—an avid promoter of organic

farming—Fairfield Osborn—a director of the New York Zoological Society who linked atomic power to environmental degradation in public speeches as early as 1946—and William Longgood—an early advocate of green consumption—emerge from this book certainly as pioneers, and perhaps even as heroes, especially because their attempts to publicise the potential dangers of chemical pesticides, industrial pollution, and atomic power—which in many respects were well-founded—were so often dismissed as unscientific quackery.

Greening the Red, White, and Blue is essential reading for historians with a teaching or research interest in consumer and/or environmental politics. All historians of post-war American life will profit from exposure to its argument about the function of these arenas of social and political action as spaces of dissent in a profoundly constrained ideological climate and historical context. This is a major study of the possibilities and limits of consumer resistance.