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Review: *One World, Big Screen: Hollywood, the Allies, and World War II* by M. Todd Bennett

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One World, Big Screen: Hollywood, the Allies, and World War II. By M. Todd Bennett. (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012. Pp. 362. \$ 39.95 cloth)

The United States underwent a remarkable transformation in its outlook on the world during World War II: it turned from a deeply entrenched isolationist country before the war to one which solidly committed itself to an internationalist approach after the end of World War II. M. Todd Bennett's book, *One World, Big Screen*, insightfully highlights the many ways by which Hollywood films and documentaries contributed to this momentous sea change. While his study is very much aware of the multiple factors and reasons contributing to this turn-around, Bennett convincingly argues that Hollywood—in conjunction with U.S. Government's Office of War Information (OWI)—was ideally suited to “frame this one-world philosophy,” which allowed Americans to cross “an intellectual threshold beyond which isolationism and parochialism gave way to internationalism and cosmopolitanism” (p. 14). Building on previous studies which analyzed the role of American movies during World War II, Bennett adds a number of intriguing new insights and perspectives within this generally well-covered area of research.

To readers familiar with the research on this topic, the two chapters on Great Britain will probably seem most familiar. Bennett engagingly tells the story of an emerging “special relationship” between these two trans-Atlantic cousins forged as Americans followed the Battle of Britain and admired both the resiliency of the British people as well as the reassuring demeanor and unforgettable speeches of Winston Churchill. Starting with the popular film *Mrs. Miniver* (1942), Hollywood reaffirmed this “Grand Alliance” through familial and romantic on-screen relationships which figuratively reinforced the ever closer political wartime partnership. But even in these chapters, Bennett adds new perspectives, especially by discussing not just Americans' assessments of these films but by also analyzing British responses to, and at times backlash against, this new cultural American invasion.

This focus on the reception of American wartime films in the countries of US wartime allies is particularly fascinating in Bennett's chapter on the Soviet Union. Similar to the case of Great Britain, the author undertook research in the archives of the Soviet Union and traces Stalin's and the Politburo's reactions to the America's wartime film offensive. While *Mission to Moscow* (1943), one of the most overtly pro-Soviet wartime films, was poorly received by US audiences, for example, Stalin and Soviet officials approved of the positive portrayal of US-Soviet relations and, less surprisingly, the white-washed appraisal of Stalin's policies and the Soviet Union in general. As Bennett highlights, the film was "one of the first movies to receive general distribution in the Soviet Union in well over a decade" (p. 183) and would shortly be followed by nearly two dozen additional Hollywood feature films selected for public screening in the Soviet Union.

Equally intriguing is Bennett's exploration of Hollywood's engagement with the Chinese wartime ally of the United States. Forged in the midst of a reassessment period of the Sino-American relationship, these Hollywood films reflected an awkward mixture of familiar racial stereotypes and new political opportunities. In his nuanced analysis, the author insightfully explains that the yellowface routines of World War II movies, where made-up white actors played the parts of Asian characters, certainly reflected American racist and paternalist attitudes towards the Chinese ally. Yet they also surprisingly opened up avenues to portray the "new China" (p. 233), a China that, according to Hollywood at least, had the potential to develop similar to the United States in many respects.

Bennett's focus on the emerging internationalist American perspective as well as his transnational research provides many new insights into an already well-researched field of study. In doing so, his book provides a welcome and valuable addition to the current scholarship.

Gerd Horten

Gerd Horten teaches American history and international relations at Concordia University—Portland, Oregon. He is the author of *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda during World War II* (2002) and is currently working on a study of American-German relations in the 1960s and 1970s.