

James Rorty

OUR MASTER'S VOICE
ADVERTISING

A MEDIASTUDIES.PRESS PUBLIC DOMAIN EDITION

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Dedicated to the memory of Thorstein Veblen, and to those technicians of the word whose “conscientious withdrawal of efficiency” may yet accomplish that burial of the ad-man’s pseudoculture which this book contemplates with equanimity.

About the Author

JAMES RORTY was born March 30, 1890 in Middletown, New York. He was educated in the public schools, served an early journalistic apprenticeship on a daily newspaper in Middletown, and was graduated from Tufts College. Mr. Rorty was a copy-writer for an advertising agency from 1913 to 1917, at which time he enlisted as a stretcher bearer in the United States Army Ambulance Service. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for service in the Argonne offensive.

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Since the war Mr. Rorty has worked variously as an advertising copy-writer, publicity man, newspaper and magazine free lance. He is the author of two books of verse, "What Michael Said to the Census Taker" and "Children of the Sun", and has contributed to the *Nation*, *New Republic*, *New Masses*, *Freeman*, *New Freeman*, and *Harpers*.

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FOREWORD

TWO BASIC definitions will perhaps assist the reader to understand the scope and intent of this book.¹

The *advertising business* is taken to mean the total apparatus of newspaper and magazine publishing in America, plus radio broadcasting, and with important qualifications the movies; plus the advertising agency structure, car card, poster, and direct-by-mail companies, plus the services of supply: printing, lithography, engraving, etc. which are largely dependent upon the advertising business for their existence.

The *advertising technique* is taken to mean the technique of manufacturing customers by producing systematized illusions of value or desirability in the minds of the particular public at which the technique is directed.

The book is an attempt, by an advertising man and journalist, to tell how and why the traditional conception and function of journalism has lapsed in this country. It describes the progressive seizure and use, by business, of the apparatus of social communication in America. Naturally, this story has not been “covered”, has not been considered fit to print, in any newspaper or magazine dependent for its existence upon advertising.

In attempting to examine the phenomenon of American advertising in the context of the culture it became necessary to examine the culture itself and even to trace its economic and ideological origins. This enlargement of scope necessitated a somewhat cursory and inadequate treatment of many detailed aspects of the subject. The writer accepted this limitation, feeling that what was chiefly important was to establish, if possible, the essential structure and functioning of the phenomena.

Since the book is presented not as sociology, but as journalism, the writer felt free to use satirical and even fictional literary techniques for whatever they might yield in the way of understanding and emphasis. The writer wishes to acknowledge gratefully the help and encouragement he has received from many friends in and out

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¹ [Clarifying footnotes from the reprint editor, Jefferson Pooley, will appear in brackets]

of the advertising business. The section on "The Magazines" is almost wholly the work of Winifred Raushenbush and Hal Swanson. Thanks are due to Professor Robert Lynd for reading portions of the manuscript and for many stimulating suggestions; to Professor Sidney Hook for permission to quote from unpublished manuscripts; to F. J. Schlink and his associates on the staff of Consumers' Research for permission to use certain data; to Stuart Chase for much useful counsel and encouragement; to Dr. Meyer Schapiro for valuable criticisms of the manuscript and to Elliot E. Cohen for help in revising the proofs; to the officials of the Food and Drug Administrations for courteously and conscientiously answering questions.