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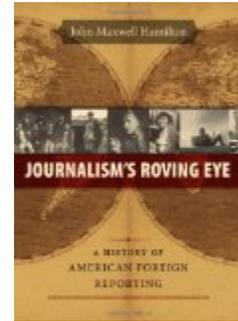
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John Maxwell Hamilton. *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009. xvi + 655 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-3474-0.

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Next Stop Lisbon (or London or Lahore): A History of Foreign Correspondents

Launched in September 2009 at the National Press Club, *Journalism's Roving Eye* landed on Slate.com's Best Books of 2009 and will no doubt gather many more well-deserved honors for its richly detailed exploration of this most elite and yet most vulnerable form of journalistic reporting. Crossing the "eras in the natural history of foreign news-gathering" with episodic chapters focused around rich biographical anecdotes, John Maxwell Hamilton meticulously chronicles the evolutionary path of foreign correspondence in American newspapers, drawing on numerous archival collections, books, memoirs, interviews, and personal correspondence (p. 459). Readers who commit through to the final narrative pages will reap the greatest benefit, whether their interest is in general journalism history; the political role of foreign reporting in shaping U.S. policy; or the colorful cast of correspondents, editors, and owners who helped shape our view of the past two centuries.

Those seeking context for contemporary global news gathering will also be rewarded: Hamilton carefully traces, for example, how foreign reporting has always adapted in response to new technologies, from transatlantic ships bearing news from London to transformations wrought by cable, radio, and television, offering crucial depth for considering the impact of digital technology. Readers gain enlightening comparisons to today's celebrity-saturated media personalities through the profiles of intrepid reporters who dashed around the globe—the Henry Morton Stanleys, Richard

Harding Davises, Nellie Blys, Richard Halliburtons, and their imitators. Perhaps more importantly, Hamilton retrieves significant figures forgotten in the "bog of history," among them Paul Scott Mowrer, Vincent Sheean, and Jack Belden (p. 487). He recounts the courage of the black press in covering World War I and World War II, even though it was frustrated in its pursuit of justice and citizenship for African Americans. The book spotlights a handful of significant women correspondents, drawing some—like Mary Marvin Breckinridge, who became the Amsterdam correspondent for CBS in the early 1940s—back from oblivion, alongside the better known, like Dorothy Thompson. But most of all, the book is a celebration of the devotion and risk taking by farsighted publishers and owners as well as the correspondents themselves, that arguably bequeathed journalism its most prestigious moments, its heroes, and its "golden age," and it does this credibly and well. Yet, reading this history of foreign correspondence through the inevitable lenses of geopolitics and the capital that drives it, one cannot help but conclude that for all the many laudatory accomplishments, journalism itself has failed to nurture within the American public a sustainable interest in news of the world, one that goes beyond the spectacle of wars, disasters, and adventurist scientific explorations. That story, too, though not one Hamilton undertakes to tell directly, seeps through between the pages of this important book (and receives further reflection below).

In an effort to present a multidimensional history

of foreign news gathering, Hamilton makes several methodological choices. For example, he spotlights landmark news organizations that have enjoyed little analysis to date, such as the *Chicago Daily News*, whose editor, Victor F. Lawson, established the first foreign news service, in addition to the so-called prestige media. He takes a long historical view, reaching back to journalism's earliest use of foreign news in the colonial era. Finally, Hamilton draws intentionally on scholarship by political scientists as well as journalism historians. The result is an erudite yet fluid study that reads like a collection of biographical narratives while delivering something like an in-depth course on the history of international reporting and its myriad implications for today.

While many of the reviewers and interviewers discussing the book have focused on the strong personalities revealed within its pages, Hamilton suggests "the primary purpose in introducing them is to illuminate the major currents and crosscurrents that have shaped foreign news-gathering" (p. 5). He begins with Benjamin Franklin, because "the high-water point of foreign news—as measured by the amount of space given to it—was in the eighteenth century when America was a colonial appendage" (p. 11). Franklin's self-fashioning of his own character perfectly mirrored the *Pennsylvania Gazette's* fashioning of the rebellious new nation, and affords us the first glimpse of "technology" in how foreign news was obtained (the publication of letters by travelers, and the reprinting of news from London papers carried by ship). From its inception, news that was foreign to Americans was always delivered through particular frames of interest: a century after Franklin, Benjamin H. Day's innovative business model keenly merged the expectations of the emergent urban middle class with the new technology of a steam-powered press. This produced a cheaper paper delivering "all the news of the day" to *New York Sun* readers, rather than "catering to narrow commercial [and political] interests" (p. 36). By 1835, Day's competitor, James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald*, won the era's circulation war by expanding on that model and going "after foreign news, rather than waiting for it to come to him" (pp. 36-37). Not long afterward, Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* was receiving posts from abroad that reflected the publisher's interest in social and political movements as well as literature and the arts by a notable group of correspondents that included Margaret Fuller; Karl Marx; Henry James; Charles A. Dana; George William Curtis; and, not least, George Smalley, who became what we would today call the first foreign bureau chief, stationed in London in the late 1860s.

Another device Hamilton uses is the reproduction of facsimile pages from newspapers and memoirs, allowing readers rich glimpses into the correspondence itself. One excerpted article from April 1949's *Saturday Evening Post* reveals Edgar Snow's deep knowledge of Communist China in asserting it would not become a "Russian satellite" (p. 360). Similarly, an excerpt from Harrison Salisbury's landmark story, dateline "Hanoi, North Vietnam, December 24, 1966," conveys the tension of foreign news gathering in that difficult period (p. 393). Salisbury, the first U.S. journalist to report from North Vietnam and to challenge the Johnson administration's assertion that civilians were not being targeted by American bombs, also paid a price for such accomplishments, including accusations of giving comfort to the enemy and denial of a Pulitzer that year. These archival gifts are spread liberally throughout the book, in addition to editorial cartoons, photographs, and boxed sidebars containing pertinent tables and graphs.

Hamilton, who himself filed stories as a foreign correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor* and *ABC Radio* and who served in the U.S. Agency for International Development during the Carter administration and on the staff of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, is currently dean of the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University. He has written several books on related subjects, including a biography of foreign correspondent Snow (who is also the subject of an important chapter in the current book), and U.S. relations with the third world, in addition to numerous articles and book chapters.

Hamilton suggests in the book (and in interviews) that the so-called golden age of foreign reporting ended after World War II, eroded by Cold War fears, a more hostile climate for American reporters abroad, the transfer of media ownership to corporations and shareholders who thought with bottom-line mentalities, and tighter control over correspondents by wary editors (among other factors). While he laments the closing of foreign bureaus and the trend toward media consolidation, Hamilton also points more optimistically to the rise of international news services, such as Bloomberg News, acknowledging that the survivors in foreign news gathering increasingly tend to focus on economic news more than any other genre. The book concludes even more optimistically, turning back to its evolutionary metaphor and positing that it is "not the end," because those who are "entrepreneurial, principled and courageous" have always managed to adapt and find new ways to serve their audiences (p. 487).

Still, the book shies away from exploring directly why even during the heady days of foreign news gathering, Americans did not embrace the need for a *continual* understanding of world affairs. While that failure cannot be blamed on journalism alone, it is difficult not to see it in relation to the news establishment's participation in red-baiting during the McCarthy era or its generally unquestioning support for the wars in Korea and Vietnam, until division among elites within Washington made dissent a "legitimate" story.[1] Thirty years later, journalism had not conveyed to Americans the depth of resentment in the Muslim world over U.S. foreign policy initiatives in the Middle East until the horror of September 11 made that anger abundantly clear. The story of media complicity in the Bush administration's invented case for war against Iraq is now tragically well known. Americans still have too little understanding of how global capitalism functions, how the world's natural resources continue to be exploited in the race for greater corporate profit, and how the global trafficking in women and children not only inflicts tremendous suffering but also destabilizes the social fabric of the na-

tions involved. Hamilton's book assists readers in thinking through these disturbing questions by presenting a complex, definitive history of a long-standing model of professional foreign news gathering, its foundation in American exceptionalism, and its gradual erosion. What we do with that history could determine how Americans think of themselves in relation to the rest of the world for decades to come.

Note

[1]. Hamilton relates University of Chicago president Robert Hutchins's 1955 "scolding" of American newspaper editors at their annual meeting: "And what of freedom in the garrison state? Since most of you take the official line that the only important fact of life is our imminent dangers from the international conspiracy, most of you have watched the erosion of freedom without a twinge." He also quotes Henry Luce's biographer, W. A. Swanberg: "'Probably more than any other single force, the Lucepress channeled the groping and disorganized emotion of American distress into McCarthyism'" (p. 364).

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