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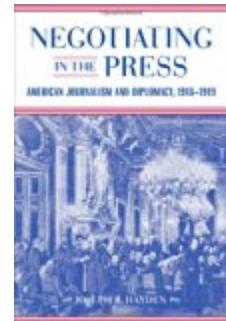


Joseph R. Hayden. *Negotiating in the Press: American Journalism and Diplomacy, 1918-1919*. Media and Public Affairs Series. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010. viii + 313 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-3515-0.

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Journalism and Diplomacy, Post-World War I

On September 25, 1919, in his last speech before suffering a debilitating stroke, President Woodrow Wilson addressed a Pueblo, Colorado, audience to defend the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations from their opponents in the U.S. Senate. Wilson argued that the proposed League would greatly reduce the risk of war among member nations, not through the exercise of diplomatic or military muscle, but through the power of publicity. The key stipulation in the League charter mandated that members headed toward war with one another would first submit “all the documents, all the facts,” to the League of Nations’ Council and “agree that the council can publish the documents and facts to the whole world. In other words,” he argued, “they consent ... to submit every matter of difference between them to the judgment of mankind, and just so certainly as they do that ... war will be pushed out of that foreground of terror in which it has kept the world for generation after generation, and men will know that there will be a calm time for deliberate counsel. The most dangerous thing for a bad cause is to expose it to the opinion of the world.” Wilson demonstrated a deep and genuine faith in the powers of expert publicity and public opinion to foster a just diplomacy.[1]

As Joseph R. Hayden demonstrates in his examination of the role of journalists in the post-World War I peace process, faith in the benevolent power of publicity constituted one of the core beliefs of early twentieth-century American progressives. While the book argues effectively for the progressive faith in publicity and of-

fers an intriguing look at the experiences of members of the American press corps in Paris in 1919, it more frequently presents a series of muddled, contradictory, and unproven arguments.

Hayden asks two questions at the outset of the book: “How do mass media institutions affect the making of peace?” and “What happens when reporters and diplomats cross paths during international summitry?” (p. 1). He comes closest to answering these two questions when he posits vaguely that journalism and diplomacy were “inextricably linked” during the late Progressive Era by a “shared faith in information and expertise” and “a compulsion to serve, and justify themselves before, public opinion” (p. 2). Thus, one might conclude that the Paris conference marked a turning point in the histories of journalism and diplomacy, after which democratic public opinion, as informed by professional journalists and diplomatic publicity, began to increasingly inform world diplomacy. Yet on the same page we learn that journalists and diplomats simply embarked on an “unprecedented” but failed “experiment” in Paris. By page 3, we are told the book analyzes a “peculiar commingling” of journalism and diplomacy unique to the Progressive Era when both professions featured a great deal of “mutability.” The introduction also promises to shed light on such topics as the causes of Wilson’s failure to persuade the U.S. public and Senate to join the League of Nations. So how do mass media institutions affect the making of peace? If, as Hayden argues, their role in Paris was unique in history,

this book cannot answer that question in any satisfying way.

The work is organized into five sections. The first two provide a backdrop and context for the focused examination of the role of journalists at the Paris Peace Conference that follows. It explores the Wilson administration's broader war-era information campaigns and the history of journalism in the Progressive age. We learn relatively little new information from these first eighty pages. The author draws from few primary sources here. He relies on some of the exhaustive secondary literature on these subjects, but without presenting any critique of that historiography. So we get no sense of the scholarly literature's major themes or weaknesses or how an analysis of the press's role in Paris will enhance it. Instead, the author shows a disconcerting tendency to quote from secondary literature as if it is Gospel, even when that literature does not adequately support his points. For example, to argue for the efficacy of the wartime Committee on Public Information (CPI), the author tells us that "one scholar notes, that 'the spirit spread and the home front became giddy, especially during bond drives'" (p. 21). Referring to the footnote, we discover that the scholar is Robert Ferrell and we are hearing from page 203 of his *Woodrow Wilson and World War I* (1985), a work that otherwise has very little to say about the CPI.

Sections 3 and 4 are the book's strongest. In these chapters, the author explores what journalists said, believed, and did during their time in Paris in 1918 and 1919. The chapters are compellingly written, vivid with detail about the experiences of American journalists in the City of Lights during that crucial year in world history. They struggled to gain assignments, find hotel rooms, and even to get a warm bath in the city, all while striving to cover and make their mark on the peace process. These chapters are replete with pithy quotes and charming anecdotes. The reader gains a sense of how journalists saw their assignments as not only a great individual opportu-

nity, but also an opportunity to extend the legitimacy and influence of their profession by shaping the peace process. We feel how frustrating it was for these journalists to be shut out (literally) of negotiations and to initially have to rely solely on official communiqués. Here the author mines primary sources—largely journalists' dispatches and memoirs—that present an interesting alternative to the many accounts of the peace process based on the official and unofficial records of diplomats. In demonstrating how hard journalists worked to become a part of the peace process, and how many of them succeeded in developing working relationships with peacemakers, this section presents compelling evidence for the contention that journalists influenced peacemaking in the aftermath of the Great War. The book's final section introduces a new question, examining the debate over the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles in the United States. The book concludes that lack of active support for the treaty and the League of Nations can be blamed on Wilson's failure to communicate effectively with and through his potential allies in print journalism.

Negotiating in the Press asks a number of interesting questions about journalism, progressivism, and diplomacy. Its major fault is that it asks too many questions and fails to offer direct, well-argued answers to many of them. In the end, one must struggle to determine how this work alters or augments our understanding of the history of journalism. At its best, the book shows that, at least in the case of Paris in 1918 and 1919, journalists sought to play a role in the peacemaking process and that they found some satisfaction among certain diplomats who had developed a sense that publicity and public opinion were important aspects of peacemaking.

Note

[1]. Albert Shaw, ed., *The Messages and Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (New York: George H. Doran, 1924), 1113-1130.

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