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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Derek W. Vaillant. *Across the Waves: How the United States and France Shaped the International Age of Radio.* History of Communication Series. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017. 258 pp. $95.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-252-04141-9.

Reviewed by Richard Kuisel

Published on H-Diplo (March, 2018)

Commissioned by Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

The aim of *Across the Waves* by Derek W. Vaillant, a professor of communication studies at the University of Michigan, is to "illuminate the complexity of international broadcasting and reveal its consequences for cultural affairs and geopolitics" (p. 3). The book begins with the advent of shortwave broadcasting in the 1920s and ends in the 1960s and early 1970s with French English-language programs heard in the United States. He argues that transnational connectivity emerged simultaneously with the development of national radio cultures. Radio, in his view, not only advanced cross-national connections but also raised mutual awareness and shaped transatlantic relations. US-French broadcasting "shook up conventional understanding of national borders, spaces, and cultures" (p. 5). This is an ambitious agenda the book does not fully realize.

Across the Waves is a brief, 160-page, monograph constructed around a few case studies tilted toward French radio rather than a continuous, comprehensive narrative. The study encompasses many topics, including the development and operation of collaborative cross-national institutions, the evolution of the medium's technology, the contributions of such individuals as network managers, the policies of government agencies like the US State Department and the Postes, Télégraphs et Téléphones, and the historical contexts of national and international affairs. There were a large cast of actors, including, on one side of the ocean, private broadcasters like NBC and the government-sponsored Voice of America (VOA) and, on the other side, a mixture of private and public stations, such as Radio Diffusion Française (RDF) before the war and then the state monopoly Office de la Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (ORTF) after 1945. There were also a host of arrangements of mutual support; for example, VOA shared its office with RDF and provided the power boost that allowed the latter's broadcasts to reach all of France.

This is a complicated story and one that is handicapped by meager sources about the content and reception of radio programming. Without sources explaining how the information, ideas, and culture were received, it is hard to assess whether radio was a major geopolitical and cultural influence on transatlantic affairs. And it is this thesis that is likely to interest most readers of H-Diplo.

To its credit *Across the Waves* provides insight into the history of international radio, which has been understudied. Readers may be surprised by the extent of Franco-American cooperation in developing this form of communication. Even

though the two nations, at least in the early post-war years, promoted different "techno-aesthetic" approaches to radio and French officials' interference often frustrated the Americans, the overall picture is one of mutual assistance rather than competition. By the 1950s complex forms of interaction between French and American broadcasters had emerged, which brought French programs about cultural affairs like music, the arts, and history, as well as information about tourism, fashion, sports, and food, to American audiences. They included accounts of the travails of sports personalities like the Algerian-born French track star Alain Mimoun whose career radio used to "draw attention to anti-Arab racial discrimination" (p. 141). Readers will also learn about technological innovations, for instance, sound-on-disc transcription recording. And this monograph verifies the conventional story of relative French technological backwardness between the world wars. French radio lagged behind the United States in its equipment, production skills, and transmission power. It also suffered from inadequate funding that undermined efforts at creating a French presence in the United States both before and after World War II.

There is, however, an analytical weakness to this narrative. The introduction notes that the study is constructed around distinctive "techno-aesthetic" models (pp. 2-3). Americans gave radio the attributes of power, speed, and volume while the French preferred aesthetic quality, deliberate pacing, and limited programming. But these analytic categories of national radios are neglected with the onset of World War II and they tend to disappear in the last half of the study. Vaillant might also have embedded these divergent models in the contrast between French and American interwar cultures commonly invoked by historians: the former celebrating elitist high culture and the latter promoting mass culture. Thus French and American radio mirrored French and American cinema of the 1930s. But this is a path not taken. Indeed, there is no explicit connection between radio and broader transformations like Americanization or globalization.

Vaillant's tendency to assert more than the evidence allows detracts from this otherwise admirable attempt at adding the dimension of radio to transatlantic affairs. He demonstrates that France and the United States worked together to create institutional arrangements to advance international broadcasting. Unfortunately ***Across the Waves*** does not prove that radio disrupted national boundaries, increased mutual awareness among the two publics, or had much effect on either domestic politics or geopolitics.

Mid-century transatlantic radio was a modest effort that had limited reach and it featured culture and information rather than politics. Programs were scarce and audiences were small and confined in the United States to the well-educated residing in a few major metropolitan areas and college towns. Moreover, listeners' responses are mostly unknown or unknowable. And up to the Second World War, networks avoided politics. If the war politicized some international networks like VOA and this coverage continued into the early years of the Cold War, French broadcasts during the 1950s and 1960s, even under state control, tended "to shy away from sensitive topics" like decolonization (p. 99).

Assessing the impact of radio during the Second World War and the Cold War is a major topic in ***Across the Waves.*** But here is where the book's interpretive over reach is most apparent. For the earlier conflict in France, the author argues that radio "helped sustain a semblance of a unified society in the face of military occupation, partitioning, and authoritarian government" (p. 76). "Listening to international radio during the Occupation allowed the French to conjure up an imagined national community when unity in real terms was impossible" (p. 156). It is difficult to validate this laudatory assessment given the fact that listening to foreign stations became a clandestine activity and listeners' responses are virtually im-

possible to document. And this was an audience whose long exposure to propaganda had made it skeptical about "news" via the airwaves. But the principal problem with this account, as Vaillant notes, is whatever success radio had it owed little to the Americans—and his study is about Franco-American radio. Sustaining French morale owed much more to the British Broadcasting Company than to the efforts of the Office of War Information including VOA, which only became engaged in 1943 and had to compete with broadcasts from various French, British, and German networks for listeners.

Another case study examines French broadcasting in the late 1960s and 1970s, in particular some dramatic programs devoted to history, culture, and sports. Here, too, Vaillant tends to over interpret. He retells in some detail the content of specific programs and then concludes that this form of transatlantic broadcasting "helped strengthen U.S.-French relations." But what he means by "strengthen" is no more than that these programs "stimulated U.S. listeners' interest in France" (p. 151). Even for such a stock answer the evidence about audience response is thin.

Similarly, there is no proof that a woman's program, ***Bonjour Mesdames***, from the late 1940s and 1950s, one of the book's major case studies, devoted to fashion, luxury goods, tourism, and the like for upper- and middle-class women, "furthered the agenda of the Marshall Plan and U.S.-French diplomatic relations" (p. 103). This talk show was supposedly "an exercise in gender and societal repair broadly construed" (p. 105). Vaillant strangely assumes that the war had so damaged the image of French women that it was in need of "repair." ***Bonjour Mesdames***, he claims, restored the image of French women and also "pressed against" stereotypes by exhorting American women to become "agents of change in U.S.-French relations through consumption and international travel." But did a fifteen-minute program aired twice weekly to a narrow audience change the stereotype of American women? Did it rehabilitate the supposed tarnished reputation of French women? Or implement the aims of the Marshall Plan—even though the program expressly "ignored international events, news, and politics" (p. 103)? I have my doubts.

Perhaps historians should overlook the author's unfamiliarity with French history but the reader needs to be wary. There are many factual inaccuracies. For instance, Admiral François Darlan, who was de facto premier of the Vichy government in 1941-42, becomes "General François Darlan, a Vichy supporter" (p. 62).

Such reservations aside, political, diplomatic, and cultural historians should welcome the addition of international radio to their purview of transatlantic relations represented by Vaillant's study. As he rightly concludes, Americans and the French "learned to listen to one another in certain ways partly because of radio" (p. 154). "Radio helped breach the physical confines of nation-states" even if it also gave "new life" to the differences in national cultures (p. 158).

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Citation: Richard Kuisel. Review of Vaillant, Derek W. *Across the Waves: How the United States and France Shaped the International Age of Radio.* H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. March, 2018.

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