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# The Ethereal Promise: Progressive Ideology, Internationalism, and Propaganda In World War II Radio Drama

Steven Kostelecky

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**THE ETHEREAL PROMISE:  
PROGRESSIVE IDEOLOGY, INTERNATIONALISM,  
AND PROPAGANDA IN WORLD WAR II RADIO DRAMA**

**by**

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**BACHELOR OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO**

**THESIS**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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The Ethereal Promise:  
Progressive Ideology, Internationalism, and Propaganda  
In World War II Radio Drama  
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Bachelor of Arts, University of New Mexico, May, 2010  
Master of Arts, University of New Mexico, May, 2013

ABSTRACT

Radio drama in America between the years 1939 and 1945 both reflected the domestic life of its citizens and helped direct it. The United States government, independent organizations, broadcast networks, and individual producers deployed radio drama to promote the entry of the United States onto the world stage both by military intervention in World War II and as a democratic conciliator in shaping the postwar world. My thesis addresses the question of whether radio drama deployed as propaganda during World War II acted solely to reinforce an extant American ideology necessary for the conduct of the war or if it was also to act as a tool of progressive domestic and international reform to reshape the postwar world. Central to the ideology of progressive radio propagandists was the idea of incorporating the national character into an international perspective.

I present an overview of theoretical modes of interpretation applied in modern radio studies and an examination of several historiographical studies of radio's role in the political and cultural lives of Americans. I critique radio plays in terms of text through a deep listening to them. There is a historiographical turn toward considering audiences' reception and interpretation of sounds in historical periods as specific and unique to that period; in the case of radio propaganda, audiences are receptive to political ideas that are unique to the sounds of their time. I argue that if, as cultural theorists assert, the medium is the message, then the nature of radio itself helped to frame the ideology necessary for

the conduct of the war, to determine war aims, and to promote those aims as necessary to the American people.

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## Introduction

The producers of radio drama, the directors, technicians, actors, and sponsors all made manifest the political implications of radio drama by synthesizing the text of poets and playwrights into cultural products that became, over time, cultural artifacts. An historian of the period must consider the text in terms of the writer's message and intent and also through experiencing the broadcast product as a unique moment in time where the efforts of a group produces an ethereal, yet not esoteric, presentation of ideas based on shared common texts. The scope of this thesis is to examine the political ideology—characterized by the self-identifying term “United Nations”—presented in the form of radio drama during World War Two, between the years 1939 to 1945. I argue that progressive producers of radio propaganda in the United States in this period self-consciously deployed a specific type of dramaturgy and texts to promote an ideology to advance the idea of an international imagined community that *transcended* nationalist notions of national identity.

Propaganda is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “[t]he *systematic* (my italics) dissemination of information, esp[ecially] in a biased or misleading way, in order to promote a political cause or point of view.”<sup>1</sup> I define propaganda as the iteration and reiteration of a particular set of political ideas while denigrating or excluding any set of political ideas defined by the producers as in opposition to the political ideas they promote. Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation is that of an “imagined political community... both inherently limited and sovereign... the members... will never know

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<sup>1</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “propaganda,”  
<http://www.oed.com.libproxy.unm.edu/view/Entry/152605#eid28217108>.

most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion...<sup>2</sup> Nations emerged as a result of the popularity of Enlightenment ideas of individual freedom combined with the political reconfigurations of the revolutions of the eighteenth century. The nation is imagined as a horizontal community,<sup>3</sup> the membership of which is both fixed and fluid, dependent on political, social, economic, and cultural interventions. A large part of my argument involves the deployment of specific texts by propagandists to reconfigure the element of Anderson's definition regarding the *limited* aspect of national identity to imagine a community without limitations, without borders, which does not *segregate* national identity, but *integrates* this identity into an inter-national community. In this schema, nations do not lose their sovereignty, which is peculiar to each nation's ideal of freedom as reflected in their political culture and institutions, but become part of a greater international aspiration toward maintaining freedom.

When the United States joined the Allied nations in the fight against fascism, the government called upon cultural producers to produce propaganda that expressed themes that self-identified "progressive Americans" had already been promoting in the pre-war years. Radio propagandists employed the rhetoric of nationalism during the war to attempt to both transcend the idea of the nation while at the same time utilizing it to promote the idea of cultural and civic internationalism. In terms of nationalist discourse, progressive Americans promoted a "civic" form of nationalism, defined by David Brown as "the belief that residence in a common territorial homeland, and involvement in the state and civil society institutions of that homeland, generate a distinctive national

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983), 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



character and civic culture, such that all citizens, irrespective of their diverse ancestry, comprise a community in progress, with a common destiny.”<sup>4</sup> The producers examined in this thesis promoted the idea that the “common territorial homeland” of peoples of the world encompassed the entire earth, and that, through the rhetoric of human rights, the ideology of the United Nations, and the intervention of international “state and civil society institutions,” a “distinctive” international “character and civic culture,” had been initiated, an imagined “community with a common destiny.”

To pursue the war aims of the United States, American producers radio of propaganda during World War II had to: 1) create an imagined community in reactive terms; that is, to define the enemy and place an imagined community in opposition to it; 2) create an imagined community of allies based on a commonality of humanistic and political ideology; 3) create a rhetoric of internationality that transcended the nation-state and universalized nationhood; and 4) promote the idea that a civic nationhood, an international imagined community manifested in civic institutions such as the United Nations, must continue after the war in order to avoid the perceived mistakes of the international community in the interwar years between World War I and World War II.

Examining the work of American radio propaganda producers in terms of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s idea of the culture industry and political economics, the relationship between network broadcasters and independent producers became fluid with the outbreak of war in 1939, with the United States government becoming a greater actor and intervener in the production of programming intended as pedagogical propaganda. The poets, playwrights and producers, many of whom had previously worked under the auspices of the Works Project Administration’s (WPA) Theater Project,

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<sup>4</sup> David Brown, “Are There Good and Bad Nationalisms?” *Nations and Nationalism* 5, no. 2 (1999): 283.

turned their attention to subjects particular to the war aims of the government. Radio broadcasters, program sponsors, and the Roosevelt Administration caused a shift to occur in broadcast relations; corporate control and the economic mission of national media fused symbiotically with the political structures of government during wartime.

Applying John Armstrong's cultural studies definition to specific producers of radio programming working within the parameters of corporate and government control, I argue that media content produced at this particular moment in history reflects both the dramatic and political concerns of producers and their deployment by the government to contextualize America's place in an international community and to promote its war aims. Radio producers, working with both the tacit and explicit approval of the United States government, produced a propaganda that promoted a nationalist ideology that transcended nationalism and made progressive ideals the vehicle for an internationalist ideology that would manifest itself in the United Nations organization.

This paper examines, using Jürgen Habermas's theories of the creation of the liberal bourgeois public sphere in Europe and Lawrence Levine's theories about the oral transmission of texts in the United States, how, through the technological intervention of radio, a unique form for the pedagogical presentation of ideas using drama, as theorized by Bertolt Brecht, and the fluid relationship between producers, broadcasters, and the government, an effective propaganda was produced for a particular moment in world history: the Second World War. I argue that radio producers had agency to act within fluid power structures between the approximate years of 1939 and 1947 to promote an internationalist rhetoric that, as the power politics of the postwar progressed, turned increasingly nationalistic. This turn is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is necessary

to acknowledge that the world the progressive radio propagandists envisioned did not come to pass. I would argue, however, that the propagandists' work examined here were successful in promoting an *idea* of an imagined community of United Nations to the American public at a time when internationalist rhetoric was needed to fight a world war.

## **PART ONE: HISTORIOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL THEORY**

### **Radio as a Public Sphere**

In America in the early twentieth century political discourse thrived, practiced largely through oral transmission, the common, selected texts produced in newspapers, and by orators in public meetings. The advent of national radio in the early 1920s and talking motion pictures later in the decade provided new common texts upon which to build a national dialogue, and to contested constructions of meaning transmitted by oral transmission through the human voice, movie theater speakers, and the ethereal sphere of radio. The synthesis of new technology, new theories of dramaturgy, and domestic and international political and economic considerations made radio a venue for what Jürgen Habermas calls the “transformation of the public sphere” in the United States in the 1930s.

It is important to recognize that, as Habermas asserts, there was *reproducible* ongoing debates in taverns, coffeehouses, salons, and *Tisgesellschaften* (“table societies”), predominantly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in France, Great Britain, and Germany. These venues provided a public space for a “literate educated public” to discuss cultural products.<sup>5</sup> These groups met regularly, and read and discussed regularly published material which established an anticipation of debate, an expectation that, because of its regularity and reproducibility, helped individual persons to contextualize themselves as a group. As cultural products became commodities, the issues discussed took on the nature of “general [interest] in both significance and

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<sup>5</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1991), 36.

accessibility.”<sup>6</sup> Private people had accessibility to cultural products not through admission to elite institutions such as the church or academia, but by purchasing them. It is the regularity of the discussion and the commodification of cultural products that concerns us regarding radio in that the public looked to radio as a reproducible source of information and discussion, one that engaged with them as consumers of both programming and sponsors’ products. Radio’s interactivity was limited, but, as with the debate conducted in public space, there was a continuity of thought that helped to create the idea of an imaginary public space in which debate occurred, and a sense of being a part of the public that participated in that debate.

Habermas asserts that public space was too constricting to contain the scope of the debate. Popular periodicals reproduced oral public debates as texts and created an interplay of text commenting on oral debate and vice versa. The world of letters formed the basis of the public sphere,<sup>7</sup> yet it was the continuity of the oral form, with its transformative impact on the world of letters, that helped to create the imaginary community of the public sphere. There was a continuity of the oral form reconstructed in text, reproduced, regularly published, *broadcast*.

According to Habermas, the production and transmission of text by bourgeois producers created the liberal bourgeois public sphere. In the case of radio, however, there was a technological intervention that allowed the plebian public access to text through oral transmission. The issue becomes one not so much of a “literate” and “post-literary” public, but of the *orality* of the engagement of the public in receiving text produced by bourgeois producers. Radio messages are not exclusive in regard to class.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 42.

The messages broadcast may be “oriented toward the intentions of the bourgeois sphere,”<sup>8</sup> however, the interpretation of those messages always remain open to the individual audience. The audience has agency. Audiences are not merely passive consumers; they have interpretive powers influenced by personal experience, contemporary culture, historical imaginings, and the receptive venue. Audiences both interpret and *alter* meaning; producers assess the effectiveness of the message through audience response as gauged by letters and telephone calls to networks and broadcast stations, ratings, and audience surveys.

David W. Conroy and Lawrence Levine portray an arc of the construction of the bourgeois liberal sphere and the oral transmission of political and cultural ideas in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Conroy cites the tavern in pre-Revolutionary America as the venue for the considered reception of political ideas via newspapers and pamphlets that merged with the oral tradition when read aloud to the illiterate public. This pedagogical method occurred in public space in Puritan New England; it was the beckoning comfort of the tavern, a warm, comfortable space for consideration of political ideas, along with the comforts of alcohol, which transformed the public sphere into a pedagogical space. Conroy asserts “any reader could claim membership in the public represented in print by reading it not only himself but also aloud to the illiterate, making the latter a member of the public also.”<sup>9</sup> The public space of the tavern created a venue for debate based upon the transmission of text without regard to literacy. This drew the illiterate into the public sphere by way of oral debate, engaging with shared texts.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, xviii.

<sup>9</sup> David W. Conroy, *In Public Houses: Drink and the Revolution of Authority in Colonial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 178.

Lawrence Levine posits the idea that a fusion of text and orality were paramount in constructing a peculiarly American culture in the nineteenth century. In his studies of slave culture he cites the oral transmission of selected Bible passages as a text for illiterate slaves to create an imaginary community beyond their economic, social, and cultural exclusion from the world around them. The Bible became the common text from which meaning was constructed. Levine says, "...the sacred world of the slaves was able to fuse the precedents of the past, the conditions of the present, and the promise of the future into one connected reality."<sup>10</sup> It is significant to note that the Bible's moral authority was *selectively* used by preachers, reproduced in spirituals, and *altered* both interactively, for example in meetings and Bible study groups, and, afterward, reflectively, in debate and in working songs. This phenomenon points to the agency of both producers and audiences in the transmission and reception of text. The Bible, a sacred text, held moral authority, and, as a shared text, used as a pedagogical tool on which to base discussion and debate by slaves about their lives.

The works of William Shakespeare were texts familiar to many Americans through broadcasting in the nineteenth century. Producers winnowed Shakespeare's work to reflect local contexts and tastes regardless of economic or social class or levels of literacy. Producers transmitted these shared texts orally through performance and readings in venues as diverse as theaters, saloons, and mining camps as America expanded westward, and up and down the Mississippi via riverboats. Shakespeare's texts were secular but as meaningful to audiences as the slaves' sacred Biblical texts; they held

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<sup>10</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 54.

a “respectable” authority as literary texts much as the Bible held a moral authority.<sup>11</sup> Audiences and producers also altered Shakespeare’s texts in “after pieces” which were performed after the main body of selected texts was performed. The performance venue contextualized these pieces by integrating literary, “respectable” texts with audience reaction,<sup>12</sup> often “profaning,” as Habermas asserts,<sup>13</sup> Shakespeare’s texts by including references to local persons, locales, and events, giving “private” meaning to “public” texts. Levine argues that it was the *orality* of these presentations, the agency of producers and audiences in *altering* the texts that were essential in integrating Shakespeare into American culture. America in the nineteenth century “remained an oral world in which the spoken word was central.”<sup>14</sup> It is important to note the role of the transmission of common texts to this centrality.

With the second wave of Eastern and Southern European immigration, non-English speaking ethnicities had less accessibility to, and familiarity with, Shakespeare as a common text and his work was relegated to study by the academic and cultural elite. There were an increasing number of American dramatists, and a native theater as an institution developed, introducing different themes and cultural tropes. Literacy rose and, with it, a proliferation of newspapers that appealed to various ethnicities, classes, and language and political groups.<sup>15</sup> I argue that along with the rise of literacy came the transmission of specific texts in the form of newspapers and popular literature by literate first generation immigrants in mother tongues, and, in English, by second and succeeding generation children of immigrants. The literate acted as selective producers of meaning

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>13</sup> Habermas, 36-37.

<sup>14</sup> Levine, 156.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 162.



to the illiterate, continuing the tradition of oral transmission of common selected texts. The oral tradition continued. Common texts were not *exclusive* of the oral tradition, but *integrative* of it.

Habermas asserts that the “transforming device” of newspapers early in the nineteenth century excluded the vast public of the illiterate from political discourse, and the “optically effective,” less literarily demanding transmission of information through photography and illustrations led to the demise of critical discourse in the public sphere; a commodified press synthesizing text and image promoted “psychological facilitation,” or personal identification, which became an end to itself, creating a passive audience of consumers.<sup>16</sup> Levine posits that at the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries the oral tradition was in decline in the United States. Immigrants “constitute[d] a ready audience for the rise of more visual entertainments such as baseball, boxing, vaudeville, burlesque, and especially the new silent movies.”<sup>17</sup> Yet both Habermas and Levine look upon the consumption of visual information as coeval to the aural transmission of text.

Even with the influx of immigrants to America in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, with a multiplicity of national and ethnic groups, there was a cultural commonality in what Levine, citing the anthropologist Robert Redfield, calls the “style of life... [in which] diverse languages, religions, customs, and institutions may still share an emphasis on certain virtues and ideals...[and] ways of looking at the world which give them a similar life style.”<sup>18</sup> Producers of radio propaganda in World War II gave this commonality several names such as democracy, freedom, liberty, human rights, and the

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<sup>16</sup> Habermas, 168-169.

<sup>17</sup> Levine, 163.

<sup>18</sup> Levine, 56.

idea of “the common man;” they promoted the alliance of the United Nations, and the institution of the United Nations organization, as manifestations of a common international imagined community.

### **Radio and Dramatic Theory**

Bertolt Brecht, the German poet and playwright, introduced innovations in theater technique via the Epic theatre method; thematic content of dramaturgy, by placing the historical past into the contemporary moment; and theorized that radio should be a communicative, not a passive experience for audiences and assayed to demonstrate the theory by producing radio drama. Brecht arrayed these elements beneath the proscenium of the theater and then dismantled the proscenium. Brecht’s idea of the *Verfremdung-Effekt*, the “Alienation- Effect,” was central to his theory of the Epic theater. Brecht’s theatrical intent was to engage the individual utilizing the A-effect, “taking human social incidents to be portrayed and labeling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation is not to be taken for granted, not just natural...to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view.”<sup>19</sup> An important aspect of the A-effect is the “alienation” of the audience from the action on the stage, to disabuse the notion of identification with character, to see theatrical production as a critical window onto the natural world. The audience is to see the performance as a pedagogical storytelling exercise, to be aware of the mechanisms of the theater so that he or she can critique the message theater producers intend. The A-effect exists intrinsically in the relationship between the individual and radio producers. With radio, an audience looks

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<sup>19</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* edited and translated by John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 125.

across the room to a voice emanating from an electronic face composed of switches, dials, and speakers and the A-effect is manifest.

The technological innovation radio brings to Epic theater is that there *is* no proscenium to dismantle— there is no barrier between producers and audience. The flick of a switch invites radio into the lives of audients. An audient of radio production can direct as much or as little of his or her attention as desired within physical space and time, in the home, the work place, and public space. The visual media of theater, film, and television rely on increasingly complex imagery to allow the audience to engage in a pedagogical experience, the magic of the theater writ large and far beyond what Brecht and his contemporaries could have imagined. Radio, like the written word, relies on an engagement of ideas as a prerequisite to the pedagogical experience. The magic is in the thought, the word, and the workings of the imagination.

Radio as a technology was originally an aural form of communication that was interactive. The difference between aural communication by radio and by telephone is that radio travels the air, sans wires; it can reach across borders, it can span time, space, and distance without interruption. The British acknowledge this unique ability by referring to radio as “wireless.” Since at first voices could not be broadcast, one had to learn its language to communicate, the dots and dashes of Morse code. This left communicating by radio in the hands of technicians and amateur enthusiasts, whose legacy lives today in the network of ham radio operators that span the globe and are at the call of governments in times of crisis when there is an interruption of other forms of communication. When radio began to speak, it utilized the text of poets and playwrights;

it took the medium out of the exclusive milieu of the technicians and created a mass medium.

Brecht's production of *Der Flug der Lindberghs* at the Baden-Baden Music Festival in 1929 served as a bridge between modern theater and the technical and pedagogical aspects unique to radio. In his article "Radio as an Apparatus of Communication" Brecht calls for a return to the interactive nature of the medium, "to change this apparatus over from distribution to communication. The radio would be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes,"<sup>20</sup> as, arguably we have today in the World Wide Web. The intention of *Der Flug der Lindberghs*, which combines music, libretto, spoken dialogue in three languages, sound effects, and audience participation, is an example of pedagogy intended to reach into classrooms via radio. In performance, the piece utilizes text on oversize "cue cards" for audiences to sing out, "following the music with his eyes as printed, and contributing the parts and places reserved for him by singing them for himself [sic] or in conjunction with others (school class)."<sup>21</sup> I posit that there is a conscious interactivity occurring between the producers of a broadcast theatrical piece that asks (and in the venue of a classroom expects) its audience to participate in the production, acknowledging the audience's agency.

Producers of theater in the United States during the 1930s appropriated some of Brecht's method, particularly in agitprop productions of communist companies, and, under the auspices of the Theater Project of the New Deal, in its Living Newspaper productions, which used oversize blocs of text onstage as a part of the dramatic action.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 32.

As radio developed commercially in the U.S. its ability to act as a transmitter as well as receiver consisted of a complex relationship between producers of radio programming, all of whom had particular messages and intentions, and listeners, who had particular expectations they wished to have fulfilled. Writers, actors, composers, producers, directors, and sponsors were part of an economic machine that relied on satisfying those desires as an overriding consideration for its very existence. The audience has agency in the transmission-reception relationship. However, the economic basis of broadcasting in the U.S., as opposed to the government patronage Brecht enjoyed in Germany, made producers of radio drama alter their dramaturgical method. The pedagogy of commerce forced producers to employ a naturalistic method of dramaturgy that utilized radio's peculiar techniques to fashion their message. For producers, this meant using drama as a method for audience identification, whether for selling toothpaste, conveying social commentary, or, as was often the case, both. Yet radio retained some of Brecht's intent, if not his conscious method, by utilizing radio's ability to present social commentary and political messages in a fashion that promoted thoughtful consideration as well as emotional identification.

### **Cultural History and Electronic Media Theory**

Radio programming was not monolithic; it was the creation of a variety of producers with differing agendas. By the 1920s, the dominant form of political discourse was print, with an audience complexly divided by class, ethnicity, and other social groupings. In the United States there were newspapers for Republicans, Democrats, Communists, Trotskyites, immigrant groups, some in the mother tongue, others in the language of commerce and the political sphere, English. Radio gained a voice in the

1920s that reflected the same diversity. Technological developments cast the voice beyond the reaches of the human vocal cord. It could be “cast broad,” to allow messages to be transmitted to anyone with ears to hear them. Radio listening in its early days was often a community experience, not unlike early television. The ubiquity of radio receivers in bars, in workplaces, in the living rooms of families, leveled considerations of class: many people heard messages from one receiver, one message received at first through curiosity at the novelty of voices traveling over the air. As radio became more sophisticated it became a part of the dialogue of American culture; it became a part of American life.

Radio in the United States moved into the fore as a public sphere at a critical time and, utilizing parable, allegory, and the method of Epic theater, told America’s story in a new public context, sans proscenium. Producers with differing agendas told stories within the larger context of the public sphere, as aspects of the larger story of America. Radio producers used drama to epitomize the public characteristics of Americans, with rights and responsibilities but also as social, political, cultural, and economic actors. However, the nature of radio programming precludes its use as purely Epic theater. The Epic method used by Brecht in *Der Flug der Lindberghs* was limited to special broadcasts that included texts read, considered, and critiqued by the audience. The sheer volume of programming across the United States precluded this aspect of Epic theater and fused the Epic method with the naturalistic. Radio drama speaks to audiences both in public and private space utilizing elements of both. Consciously pedagogic transmissions become naturalistic in reception in different venues. An analogy of reception is the use of sound and film. Image and sound combine in predictable and unpredictable ways, in

contrast and in sync. An audience may experience in terms of dramatic storytelling and in terms of the surroundings in which he receives the transmission—as pedagogical or naturalistic commentary.

Historians and sociologists studying media provide shifting perspectives regarding audiences, producers, and broadcasters. John Armstrong, in his article “Applying Critical Theory to Electronic Media History,” cites the work of the sociologists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno from the Frankfurt School of Social Research as being pioneers in developing a theoretical base for media studies.<sup>22</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno coined the critical term “‘culture industry’ [and] ...emphasized the importance of corporate control and [the] economic mission of media... [and the idea that] to study media was to study power in a modern industrial society.”<sup>23</sup> Two research methods apply this approach: *cultural studies* and the history of *political economy*. Armstrong defines cultural studies as what “media content...reveal about a culture at a particular moment in its history and...what role [the media] play[s] as people make sense of their world.”<sup>24</sup> The political economy of media “denotes the structure, control, economics, and regulation of media industries.”<sup>25</sup> The general mode of electronic media studies follows one or the other of the threads or, sometimes, combines the two.

Armstrong shows the shift between a “monolithic,” that is a top-down approach to history, epitomized by the Frankfurt School, to a bottom-up approach as practiced by British cultural historians influenced by E.P. Thompson, who see “marginal” groups in

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<sup>22</sup> John Armstrong, “Applying Critical Theory to Electronic Media History,” in *Methods of Historical Analysis in Electronic Media*, Donald G. Godfrey, ed. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 148.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 149.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 150.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 152.

society as having historical agency. These scholars see media messages as objects of interpretation, or “texts.” These marginal groups sometimes contest the intended message of media producers.<sup>26</sup> The challenge for cultural historians is to find empirical evidence of audience response if they are to determine how these marginal groups interpret texts and how they directly affected them. This brings up the question of the efficacy of the written record of audience correspondence, listener ratings, studio audience response forms, corporate or producer memoranda, and critical appraisal in reflecting audience response. I argue that it is also valid to analyze audience response by viewing radio as a public sphere, by accepting the idea that there is a reciprocal relationship inherent between producers and audiences.

The historian Gerd Horten examines radio propaganda in political economic terms. Central to his argument is the idea that radio propaganda in World War II continued the trend begun in the 1930s to shift production of programming from the networks to advertising agencies working for large corporations. Becoming more pronounced during the war, propaganda became “privatized,” both in its production and in its message. He characterizes business’s goals as a “pro-business mobilization,” promoting “a corporate-led, consumer-oriented ideology and the construction of a new—and increasingly privatized—public sphere.”<sup>27</sup> Armstrong’s definition of political economy as concerned with “the structure, control, economics, of media industries” applies here. He continues his argument by asserting that radio propaganda produced by the government, and broadcast by networks on a sustaining basis, that is, without

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 150-51.

<sup>27</sup> Gerd Horten, *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda during World War II* (Berkeley, California, University of California Press, 2002), 4.



sponsorship, “always faced an uphill battle” against “established popular, commercial radio programs”<sup>28</sup> that promoted a “pro-business” message.

Even though radio worked to promote a consumer culture, it is in a deep reading of the rhetoric of radio program producers that its significance lays. The progressive messages by writers such as Arthur Miller on the DuPont-sponsored *Cavalcade of America*, or Orson Welles for Lockheed in *Ceiling Unlimited*, worked to contest corporate messaging. Corporate sponsors acknowledged the efficacy of the message of progressive producers of radio programming by establishing blacklists in the postwar that prevented many progressives from working in the industry. Horten provides a salient argument regarding why programming changed in the postwar, but, more significantly, how progressive producers ceased having the same access to produce work for the networks that they had during the war. Producers *did* broadcast progressive rhetoric nationally during the war. The relationship between producers, corporate sponsors, and the government changed in the postwar, and it is arguable that pro-corporate, consumerist content began to dominate programming during the war, but the role dramatic radio played during the war represents a unique moment in time. I argue that it was the special broadcasts, which held the *imprimatur* of government sanction, paid for in network time, in some cases, by the four major networks, that had a tremendous impact on Americans’ perceptions, and presented an important progressive rhetoric independent of corporate messaging. Progressive writers, acting as individuals within corporate structures and government institutions, had agency.

Integrated commercial messages had long been incorporated into the storylines and dialogue of comedic and variety programs. During the war it was as likely to find

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 6.

Fibber McGee and Molly encounter Harlow Wilcox, the Johnson's Wax spokesman, talk about the product as it was to hear him pitch for the Third War Loan drive, or Lum and Abner talk with each other about sacrificing luxuries to buy War Bonds as they followed a serial storyline. However, the format of sponsored dramatic programs differed from that of comedy and variety programs. For example, the *Cavalcade of America* presented its message from the DuPont Corporation at the beginning, middle, and end of the show. Dramatic texts presented messages separate from, not seamlessly integrated into, the program.

Horten asserts, ironically: "The American war effort, which helped preserve democracy as a viable alternative abroad, simultaneously weakened the foundation of this very same democratic process within the United States for the decades to come."<sup>29</sup> The "core discourses of the ideological strategy of wartime and the postwar period," according to Horten, were "[p]rivatization, commercialization, and the return to a more traditional vision of gender relations."<sup>30</sup> Whether or not this was the implied or explicit intent of sponsors of radio programming, I argue the producers of progressive radio propaganda did not promote, but, rather, contested these notions.

Howard Blue, in his book *Words at War*, named for a World War II propaganda show, asserts many radio propaganda producers "shared a common set of concerns... a pro-union, antifascist, internationalist-minded, and racially tolerant orientation that sought to create social and political change."<sup>31</sup> He, too, points to the difference between sponsored and sustaining programming, and the importance of programs like the

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<sup>29</sup> Horten, 183.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 182-183.

<sup>31</sup> Howard Blue, *Words at War: World War II Era Radio Drama and the Postwar Broadcasting Industry Blacklist* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2002), 12.

*Columbia Workshop* and *The War of the Worlds* in pioneering both dramatic, in terms of subject matter, and technical, in terms of presentation, methods used in the prewar and deployed during wartime.<sup>32</sup> Blue argues that, while they “worked directly on the war effort,” propaganda writers “simultaneously advanced a progressive agenda,” that America was “not prepared to accept,” and suffered for their wartime work in the postwar industry blacklist of progressives in the radio, film, and television industries.<sup>33</sup>

What made writers like Archibald MacLeish, Orson Welles, Norman Corwin, and Arch Oboler’s work “progressive” is precisely their contesting the boundaries of radio content imposed by networks’ and sponsors’ neutrality policy and avoidance of “war talk” in the prewar years,<sup>34</sup> and their promotion during the war of a world guided by a consideration of human rights in the postwar. They sustained a rhetoric of the personal, the communal, the national, and the international all during the war. Yet, American democracy, like its culture, is a fluid thing. Imagined communities all over the world are never static. To present a trajectory of inevitable decline of democratic institutions at the hands of corporatists, as Horten does, is to underestimate the ability of the citizens of nations to determine their own destinies. This notion is the antithesis of the message presented by progressive producers of radio propaganda during the war. In postwar American culture there was a popular conflation of progressivism with Communism, and Communism with Nazism as coequal totalitarian political and ideological systems. The conflation of Nazism with Communism in the postwar may have reflected the need for *realpolitik* answers over ideological ones in popular culture, and the industry blacklist an

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 76.

attempt to rein in progressives whose ideas might lead to structural changes in economic and political institutions.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to speculate as to the motives of the broadcast networks, advertising agencies, their corporate clients, and government institutions in sponsoring progressive radio propaganda during World War II. It is the motives of the producers of this propaganda, the writers, directors, and artists I attempt to delineate, and its efficacy as a part of an ongoing continuity of American thought broadcast from taverns, to mining camps and showboats, to the living rooms of American homes through various actors and media. Their motives are transparent. They reflect a thread that weaves through American thought: a fundamental belief in democracy. That is what the progressive propagandists appealed to, and what made them effective. They were calling out to Americans, and Americans responded.

### **True believers during the interwar years**

While theater draws distinctions between “highbrow” and “lowbrow” culture, it is the spatial element of the reception by audiences and audiences that is paramount. Theater producers such as John Houseman and Orson Welles sought to erase the cultural lines between “highbrow” and “lowbrow” culture. Their concerns were both dramatic and pedagogical. When presenting Shakespeare for the Federal Theatre Project it was necessary for Houseman and Welles to recontextualize the bard in terms of costumes, sets, and a selective editing of the text for their purposes. Their “Julius Caesar,” dressed in fascist mufti, and retitled, simply, “Caesar,” might appropriately have been titled “Duce;” their “Macbeth” was set in Haiti and cast with black actors playing out themes of the interplay of race, imperialism and demagoguery. Their dramatic concerns fused with

their pedagogical intent. Their productions conserved Shakespeare's texts while historically contextualizing them in the present day, giving them a political meaning in the first case of the fascist challenge to democracy and, in the second case, to preconceived notions of race, class, and imperialism. This contemporary contextualization helped to bridge the perceived gap between "highbrow" and "lowbrow" culture by presenting images that were familiar to the audience regardless of economic and class considerations. The audience produced meaning in terms of individual identification, by placing them naturalistically in an historical milieu, and pedagogically in terms of the specific political and social context presented by the producers.

The physical space of the theater, with the directed attention of the audience toward the stage, the synthesis of sound, costume, text, and acting, are crucial to the production of meaning for the audience. Radio drama, by dint of its dramatic form, its technological presentation and transmission, differs from the theater in the way it produces meaning for audiences. It is dependent on a deeper consideration of the text to produce meaning. It reaches out into the physical space of audiences, the text contextualized by the physical and temporal space in which audiences experience it as well as by the context presented by producers. In 1938, when Houseman and Welles began producing drama for the radio under the auspices of the *Mercury Theatre on the Air*, they depended on selectively editing Shakespeare's text in the context of contemporary political events, in the case of "Caesar," the ongoing Munich Conference, to provide a deeper meaning for its audiences. In their choice of material they alternated so-called "highbrow" cultural productions with popular "lowbrow" cultural genres such as espionage potboilers, horror stories, movie adaptations, social farces, and historical

reimaginings which gained specific meanings in the context of the time. Their production of H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* in October, 1938, gained meaning in terms of its broadcast the day before Halloween, but also in terms of the ongoing crisis in Europe, specifically the occupation by the Germans of the Sudetenland after the signing of the Munich Pact.

Habermas speaks to this contextualization of drama with current events when he posits that, as newspapers became entertainment-oriented in their search for more readers, stylistically the line between news and entertainment became blurred. Texts presented clichéd characters interacting in public life, using easily recognizable stereotypes. The “palatable alternate reality” presented actually reduced the critical distance between readers and newspaper text, placing them under the “tutelage” of producers rather than engaging them in a dialogue of reciprocity.<sup>35</sup> Radio producers used this pedagogical form to present news events overtly in programs such as *The March of Time*, which dramatized news stories from *Time* magazine, and tacitly in themes and characters in dramatic programs. The pre-war years served as a proving ground for the techniques radio producers would utilize in producing propaganda during World War II.

### **Nationalism, ideological themes and texts**

Poets in the pre-war years, such as Bertolt Brecht, Archibald MacLeish, Stephen Vincent Benét, and Norman Corwin were all poets who utilized both verse and narrative forms to produce radio drama that contextualized the pull of the local, the regional, and the national toward the international. The poet's strength lies in his or her use of words as tools of inclusion, of a distillation of meaning for a pedagogical, visceral, and emotional evocation that asks the reader and audient to engage with the inner world of

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<sup>35</sup> Habermas, 170-171.

thought while observing the world around as full of meanings that are not exclusive, nor purely individual, but universal.

Works of progressive American propaganda in World War II represented deep-seated ideas regarding the place of the United States on the world stage. Michael Lienesch asserts that, at the time of the formation of the United States republican Americans had a “millennial vision to include the export of republican liberty leading eventually to the creation of a universal republic.”<sup>36</sup> While this vision had both religious and political dimensions, it was the application by “early nationalists” of “enlightened rationalism” that “inspire[d] their internationalist visions.”<sup>37</sup> Over the next one hundred and fifty years, the political culture of the United States encompassed enthusiasm for both interventionism and isolationism, yet the idea remained that the country was exceptional and had a mission in world affairs.

When the United States committed itself to fight the Axis in 1941, it faced the task of determining both how to conduct the war and of creating a set of postwar goals acceptable to its allies and the American people. Hovering over debates by American policymakers was what Elizabeth Borgwardt calls the “ghost of Woodrow Wilson.”<sup>38</sup> Borgwardt argues the Roosevelt Administration took the negative example of President Wilson as a lesson on what to avoid when formulating its postwar policies. On the domestic level, one lesson was to include both friends and foes of the Administration in the planning process “at as early a stage as possible...based on the signal failure of Woodrow Wilson to fold Republican perspectives” into planning. The second lesson was

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Lienesch, “The Role of Political Millennialism in Early American Nationalism,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1983): 449.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2005), 14.

to plan for the war's end while the war was still underway, as bargaining with victor nations when hostilities concluded meant that "negotiating positions tended to harden quickly...and nations soon turned inward once victory was assured." Concomitant with pursuing these policies, the Administration prioritized swaying public opinion<sup>39</sup> toward the necessity of the United States' involvement in the war and its role in shaping the postwar world.

American radio propagandists deployed the rhetoric of nationalism to help Americans to see what was unique about its civic institutions, the multiplicity of its cultural life, and the historical implications of what was at stake in the war. Eugen Weber proffers the notion that, from the nineteenth century until the beginning of World War I, "political propaganda was chiefly verbal; it was through oral means that the "language of politics"<sup>40</sup> was assimilated by the public. The technological innovation presented by radio in the middle twentieth century did not supplant the overwhelming dominance of newspapers as disseminators of political information and opinion, but it was unique in its ability to transmit ideas across national borders. Radio was able to penetrate national spaces during wartime, when national borders were strictly controlled and when the possession of written material, especially in occupied countries, could result in arrest and imprisonment, or death.

Mark Mazower, in his book *Governing the World: The History of an Idea*, argues that the modern movement of internationalism is historically connected to the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century. He sees the origins of internationalism as largely a reaction to the Concert of Europe in 1815, which, in turn, formed to counter Napoleon's

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 266.



nationalist mission after conquering much of Europe. Mazower asserts, “internationalists embraced nationalism...and assumed nationalism and internationalism would go hand in hand to make the world a better and fairer place.”<sup>41</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century political radicals, organized labor organizations, and professionals of all stripes, held “Internationals,”<sup>42</sup> formal bodies that both asserted national interests and a self-conscious sense of the “internationality” of groups with common purpose.

In the twentieth century, some “Internationals” formed increasingly complex institutional structures, such as the Communist International. The League of Nations acted as a congress where national and international “ideas meshed with power politics in unpredictable ways.”<sup>43</sup> Indeed, it was Woodrow Wilson’s failure to deal with the realities of domestic politics that led Congress to reject the United States’ membership in the League. In international political bodies such as the League of Nations or the United Nations, national interest always works in tension against “universal ideas and the rhetoric that emanate[s] from them.”<sup>44</sup> This tension lays at the heart of both the foundation of international political bodies and in their function.

When Franklin Roosevelt coined the term “United Nations” to characterize the Allied war effort against the Axis, it held a self-conscious echo of the “United States,” asserting the dominance of the United States in conducting both the war and the peace. The end of the war presented the United States, as the major founder of the United Nations organization, with a unique opportunity to “combine universalism and exceptionalism to an unprecedented degree...in a way that mostly served its core interests

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<sup>41</sup> Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012), xiv.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv-xv.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

and generally exempting itself from those rules its legislators disliked.”<sup>45</sup> That the United States acted in this way illustrates how its leaders sought to avoid Woodrow Wilson’s mistakes after World War I. At the same time, Mazower insists “[s]incerity was the essential lubricant of the entire mechanism [of the United Nations organization], that the values of American liberalism were identical to the interests of the world at large.”<sup>46</sup> While this points to an attitude of American exceptionalism, it also shows the inherent tension of the universal and the national in international political bodies.

Progressive American rhetoric in this period promoted continuity with the New Deal and its application to the world with nations acting in consort as guarantors of the welfare of its citizens and as interventionists against human rights abuses. The rhetoric of nationalism, combined with internationalism, such as that employed by progressive radio propagandists in World War II, may, as Mazower argues, “have underestimated the political challenges posed by the power of the modern state, the tenacity of diplomacy, and the belligerence of nationalism.”<sup>47</sup> Yet, by 1943, he admits the “Roosevelt administration appeared to be on the way to winning the domestic public opinion battle, and polls indicated strong support for the idea of joining a postwar world organization.”<sup>48</sup> Radio propagandists played a significant part in swaying public opinion toward American participation in what would become the United Nations organization. Polled in November, 1945, shortly after the war ended, Americans were asked “‘which of these do you think did the best job of serving the public during the war—newspapers, moving pictures or radio broadcasting.’” A full two-thirds (67 percent) of the respondents put

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, xvi.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, xvii.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 203.

radio on the top of their list...<sup>49</sup> While part of a larger propaganda program, radio and its propagandists, as part of the dominant medium in the United States, promoted an internationalist ideology effectively.

The ideology of the United Nations, as formulated by Franklin Roosevelt, Henry Wallace, and Wendell Willkie, was the basis for the cultural production of progressive American propagandists during the conduct of the war. Propagandists did their work under the aegis of the government, the networks, and private sponsors, in a fluid interplay of political, cultural and economic institutions. Contemporary intellectuals and writers working for the war effort sought to define their roles in producing what they perceived as a benign kind of propaganda. In the introduction to a 1945 posthumous collection of some of the poet Stephen Vincent Benét's radio plays, the poet and playwright Norman Rosten spoke of how Benét's work indicated how cultural producers must view the practice and nature of propaganda during the conduct of a war against fascism:

Propaganda is no longer a literary problem. It is the Idea which fights. Benét wrote: 'I am neither afraid nor ashamed of the fact that American writers are speaking out today for a cause in which they believe.' Propaganda was nothing new to him. He was always selling Americans the idea of America...<sup>50</sup>

The key themes of progressive propagandists centered on moving from the national to the international. Democratic President Franklin Roosevelt, with his Four Freedoms State of the Union speech, the Anglo-American Atlantic Charter, and his characterization of the conduct of the war against fascism by the term "United Nations"; Henry Wallace, the Democratic Vice President who proposed the idea of the universal Common Man; and Wendell Willkie, the Republican presidential candidate whose

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<sup>49</sup> Horten, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen Vincent Benét, *We Stand United and other Radio Scripts* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1945), v-vi.

bestselling book *One World* provided Americans with an internationalist ideology, reconfigured a nationalist ideology, through bi-partisan configuration, to sell the internationalist idea. Their texts focused on the American national identity as exceptional, yet representative of universal aspirations. They promoted the idea that there are inter-nations held together by ideological, not political, concerns. This is the heart of the internationalist idea.

President Roosevelt, in his “Four Freedoms” State of the Union speech of January, 1941, professed his intention that America would no longer pursue an isolationist foreign policy. He argued a moral imperative to make enumerated human rights

secure... everywhere in the world... a world founded upon four essential human freedoms: ... freedom of speech and expression... freedom of every person to worship God in his own way... freedom from want—which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants... freedom from fear—which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor... That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation. That kind of world is the very antithesis of the so-called new order of tyranny which the dictators seek to create... To that new order we oppose the greater conception--the moral order.<sup>51</sup>

This is the rhetoric applied by American propagandists of World War II.

Defined in cultural terms, the first two freedoms are what Isaiah Berlin calls “positive liberty” or “the internal factors affecting the degree to which individuals or groups act autonomously;” in civic terms, the third and fourth freedoms are defined in terms of “negative liberty,” or “the degree to which individuals or groups suffer

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<sup>51</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Our Documents: Four Freedoms,” Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, <http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/od4frees.html>.

interference from external bodies.”<sup>52</sup> The first two freedoms are the rights “of,” to act as individuals; the second two assert the rights “from,” the right of groups to intervene to assure that individual rights are not abridged. The Four Freedoms speech, contained in a State of the Union address, was directed at the American people, but Roosevelt’s reiteration of the phrase “everywhere in the world” after every asserted right illustrates that it was his intention for the United States to intervene in world affairs to protect human rights.

In August, 1941, President Roosevelt and Britain’s Prime Minister Winston Churchill devised the Atlantic Charter, “to make known certain common principles in the national policies of their respective countries on which they base their hopes for a better future for the world.”<sup>53</sup> This document intended to make manifest an imagined community of nations built upon ideological and political principles, furthered by the special relationship the United States maintained with Great Britain based on the colonial ties of the past, a common language, and the economic and military aid the United States provided Great Britain in its fight with the Axis. It was an attempt to apply Roosevelt’s and Churchill’s assessment of the contemporary situation while considering the failures of the recent historical past and with an eye toward the end of hostilities. It contains elements of Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms human rights rhetoric combined with the economic and political goals the nations’ leaders felt necessary to formulate to successfully conduct the war.

The United States entered the war on December 8, 1941. Roosevelt conceived the term “United Nations” to characterize the community of nations that would conduct a

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<sup>52</sup> Ian Carter, "Positive and Negative Liberty," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/liberty-positive-negative>.

<sup>53</sup> “Atlantic Charter,” The Avalon Project, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp>.

war against the Axis. *The Declaration by United Nations Subscribing to the Principles of the Atlantic Charter*, and signed by representatives of twenty-six governments on January 1, 1942, with other signatories added until 1945, codified this idea.<sup>54</sup> The document states that this community of nations,

[b]eing convinced that complete victory over their enemies is essential to defend life, liberty, independence and religious freedom, and to preserve human rights and justice in their own lands as well as in other lands...are now engaged in a common struggle against savage and brutal forces seeking to subjugate the world” and that “[e]ach Government pledges itself to employ its full resources, military or economic, against those members of the Tripartite Pact and its adherents with which such government is at war.”<sup>55</sup>

This commitment to “preserve human rights and justice *in their own lands as well as in other lands*” [my italics] asserts national intentions that transcend borders.

Progressive American radio propagandists used the form of drama, in particular a combined pedagogical and naturalistic dramaturgy, to present both a civic and a cultural form of American national identity both domestically and internationally. Weber states that, in nineteenth century France, “[o]nly when interpreted and translated into familiar terms could... political language... carry positive attractions,” and, therefore, the “role of interpreters was crucial.”<sup>56</sup> American producers of radio propaganda in World War II served as translators and interpreters of political ideas consonant with Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms, the Atlantic Charter, and the Declaration by United Nations, presented in familiar terms, to the American public.

The argument of many propaganda producers was that the historical intervention of another world war presented the opportunity for the “common man” to assert universal human rights that transcended nationalist concerns. The ideology of progressives

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<sup>54</sup> “Declaration by United Nations,” Ibiblio, <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1942/420101a.html>.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Weber, 266-267.

encompassed the notion of civic and cultural identities working together to ensure basic human rights. The common man was an ideological construction that represented humanity as both a cultural and civic entity. Culturally, human rights applied to the common man as an individual pursuing his or her destiny. Viewed as a citizen of the world, individuals had a civic obligation to protect human rights and the expectation of protection from an abridgement of their rights. This was the mission of the soldiers of the United Nations.

Henry Wallace's speech "The Century of the Common Man" was a cornerstone of American wartime ideology. Wallace was Secretary of Agriculture in the Roosevelt Administration and some saw Wallace's Agriculture Department as the embodiment of New Deal policies. Later, as Vice President, some saw him as a likely successor to Roosevelt.<sup>57</sup> Wallace acknowledged divergent world views in conflict and asserted his position as an internationalist his 1934 pamphlet *America Must Choose*. In this pamphlet Wallace lays out "three paths" toward a controlled agriculture industry in America:

internationalism, nationalism and a planned middle course... My own bias is international...I have very deeply the feeling that nations should be naturally friendly to each other and express that friendship in international trade. At the same time we must recognize as realities that the world at the moment is ablaze with nationalist feeling...<sup>58</sup>

Using American agriculture as an example, Wallace presents an internationalist ideology.

Wallace became Roosevelt's Vice President in the 1940 election. On May 5, 1942, after the United States's entry into the world war, he acknowledged the importance of radio in an address to the National Association of Broadcasters. Regarding their role

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<sup>57</sup> Henry Wallace, *Current Biography*, August, 1940.

<sup>58</sup> Henry Wallace, *America Must Choose*, excerpt from Henry A. Wallace, *Democracy Reborn* (New York, 1944), edited by Russell Lord, p. 78. Web site New Deal Network <http://newdeal.feri.org/wallace/haw08.htm>

in the “home defense effort” he said: “A home front includes every kind of service and high on the list is the service of entertainment, information and inspiration that is provided by the radio,” he said. He urged local broadcasters to work with the government to “...help the people to understand what is going on and where their service is most needed and how they can find the greatest satisfaction in the responsibilities of citizenship.”<sup>59</sup>

Three days later Wallace delivered his “Century of the Common Man” address to the Free World Association and to the nation in a national broadcast on May 8, 1942. In an allusion to Henry Luce’s famous coinage, Wallace said, “Some have spoken of the ‘American Century.’ I say that the century on which we are entering—the century which will come out of this war—can be and must be the century of the common man. Perhaps it will be America's opportunity to suggest the freedoms and duties by which the common man must live.” In his speeches Wallace frequently quoted the Bible and interpreted its messages as reflective of that of modern “Progressive Independents.”<sup>60</sup> “The Century of the Common Man” combines progressive liberal ideas, Biblical reference, and an ambivalent American exceptionalism regarding the role of the United States in conducting the war and its postwar aims.

Wallace saw the war as part of a revolutionary “march of freedom for the common man.” His “idea of freedom... [was] derived from the Bible with its extraordinary emphasis on the dignity of the individual. Democracy is the only true political expression of Christianity.” His argument combined the moral, the political, and the national: “The prophets of the Old Testament were the first to preach social justice.

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<sup>59</sup> Henry Wallace, “Speech to National Association of Broadcasters,” CBS, May 5, 1942.

<sup>60</sup> *Current Biography* entry.



But that which was sensed by the prophets many centuries before Christ was not given complete and powerful political expression until our nation was formed as a Federal Union a century and a half ago.”<sup>61</sup> Establishing an historical thread of continuity between the founding of the United States and the contemporary war against fascism, he posited the notion that

...the past one hundred and fifty years has been a long-drawn-out people's revolution. In this Great Revolution of the people, there were the American Revolution of 1775, The French Revolution of 1792, The Latin-American revolutions of the Bolivarian era, The German Revolution of 1848, and the Russian Revolution of 1917.<sup>62</sup>

Wallace asserted that the international aspiration for democracy was an important war aim, and that common men, in their pursuit of freedom, held “...as their credo the Four Freedoms enunciated by President Roosevelt in his message to Congress on January 6, 1941. These four freedoms are the very core of the revolution for which the United Nations have taken their stand.” He held the view that one of Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms, the Freedom from Want, was of paramount importance. Until the “average man” had achieved this Freedom, “the revolution of the past one hundred and fifty years has not been completed, either here in the United States or in any other nation in the world. We know that this revolution cannot stop until freedom from want has actually been attained.” In the postwar,

The peace must mean a better standard of living for the common man, not merely in the United States and England, but also in India, Russia, China and Latin America — not merely in the United Nations, but also in Germany and Italy and Japan.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Henry Wallace, “The Century of the Common Man,” *Vital Speeches of the Day* 8, no. 3 (1942), 482.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 483.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

Wallace's ambivalence toward the United States' role in rebuilding the world in the postwar proffers a warning that "[t]here can be no privileged peoples. We ourselves in the United States are no more a master race than the Nazis. And we cannot perpetuate economic warfare without planting the seeds of military warfare. We must use our power at the peace table to build an economic peace that is just, charitable and enduring."<sup>64</sup>

Wallace's speech contains many of the elements of progressive ideology that American radio propagandists employed during the war. He presents a Biblical context for the morality of individual liberty; asserts aspects of the national identity in the exceptional quality of the American Revolution as an exemplar of a universal impulse for freedom, manifested in the United States's political system, and historically contextualizes this impulse as ongoing in revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth century, culminating in a war between fascism and democracy. Ultimately, he argues, the aim of the war should be to meet the needs of the "common man." Without a revolutionary remaking of economic and political structures as part of postwar planning, Roosevelt's Freedom from Want would remain unaccomplished, and true individual freedom would remain unfulfilled.

Wendell Willkie's book *One World* became part of a thread of wartime ideology that included the goals expressed in the Atlantic Charter, Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms, and the Dumbarton Oaks Conference. The bestselling book, which became the third American nonfiction book to sell over a million copies,<sup>65</sup> represented a particular strain of progressive thought that sought an end to colonialism, an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of nations through democratic ideology that

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 484.

<sup>65</sup> John M. Jordan, "A Small World of Little Americans: The \$1 Diplomacy of Wendell Willkie's *One World*," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 88, No. 3 (September, 1992): 197.

was expressive of and responsive to the cultural, political, and economic needs of each country, and the establishment of an international political organization that, unlike the League of Nations, would have the power to intervene in transnational disputes. These ideas were to become synonymous with Willkie and his book.

*One World* is the story of Wendell Willkie's trip as a good will ambassador appointed by Franklin Roosevelt to visit United States' allies in August, 1942, accompanied by two press representatives affiliated with the Office of War Information (OWI), the official US government propaganda arm. Roosevelt's choice of Willkie, a prominent Republican who had run against him in the Presidential election of 1940, served several domestic and international political purposes. It showed Americans that the mission's intent was non-partisan, and sent the message that Roosevelt was reaching out to Republicans that had been largely non-interventionists less than a year before. It also demonstrated something of the American democratic character to foreign nations. When the Axis radio complained about his presence in Turkey, Willkie told Turkish reporters: "Invite Hitler to send to Turkey, as Germany's representative, his opposition candidate."<sup>66</sup>

Willkie used his book to reinforce the idea of American exceptionalism abroad and at the same time critique what he saw as inconsistencies in domestic policies at home. He saw America's works around the world as a "reservoir of good will... that [n]o other Western nation has... [and] that must be maintained... as a sacred responsibility."<sup>67</sup> He was virulently against continuing the system of British colonialism after the war. Britain was one of the United States' greatest allies, and it is significant that Roosevelt

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<sup>66</sup> Wendell Willkie, *One World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1943), 45.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 161.

did not send Willkie to India at a time when the nationalist movement there was gaining strength. Willkie posited that it was unconscionable for Americans to expect Britain to dismantle its colonial construct in India while “we have practiced within our own boundaries something that amounts to race imperialism... [the] attitude of the white citizens of this country toward the Negroes... [contains] a smug racial superiority, a willingness to exploit an unprotected people.”<sup>68</sup> This perspective is consonant with progressive goals to use the crisis of wartime to address issues of domestic and international human rights and of democratic reform as wartime goals.

He argued that the Atlantic Charter contained a basic fallacy in configuring the postwar political world. Churchill stated that the Atlantic Charter had “in mind primarily the restoration of the sovereignty, self-government, and national life of the states and nations of Europe now under the Nazi yoke” and would not affect any other parts of the British Empire. The implication was that Europe would return to the prewar *status quo*, a perception expressed in many of the countries Willkie visited where “[n]umberless people asked me whether [Churchill’s statement] meant the Atlantic Charter was to be applied only to Western Europe.” The popular view of the Atlantic Charter as Eurocentric led peoples of what some refer to as the Third World toward nationalist identifications that, as after World War I, had placed state and ethnic divisions at the center of the political order, “with the consequent manipulations of power politics that made impoverishment and war inevitable.”<sup>69</sup> Willkie saw a division along racial,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 190.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 173-174.

economic, and political lines<sup>70</sup> between “first and second class” war aims and postwar goals decided upon by the Allies.

Willkie looked for “common aspirations” between nations and between national leaders, governments, and their people. He included a consideration of the physical space of the countries he visited and related the land to the people he talked with in order to map out the political cultures he encountered. Willkie’s characterization of the commonality of earth, space, dimension, and outlook among nations identified both Americans and the people in other countries as similar in many ways. This would become manifest in the many translations of the book that appeared soon after its English publication and, significantly, when the book became a best seller in Germany after the war.<sup>71</sup>

Reviews of the book were generally positive, with Malcolm Cowley, in the *New Republic*, saying that the Indiana native Willkie “shows us a more appealing side of American democracy: the underlying notion that fixed classes are wrong, that people are pretty much alike in all countries and that they ought to be good neighbors, just as they were in Ellwood, Indiana.”<sup>72</sup> Hugh McCarron, in the magazine *America*, placed him squarely in the Midwest, titling his review “Hoosier Global Thinking.” Yet he correctly pointed to Willkie’s main point, “his belief that the United Nations... must form now, while fighting, definite principles and purposes of worldwide cooperation; that, if we wait, even if we win, we shall produce a more complete chaos than the ruins of the last peace.”<sup>73</sup> In the *Nation*, Reinhold Niebuhr looked forward to the postwar world and back

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<sup>70</sup> Wendell Willkie, Radio Address, October 26, 1942.

<sup>71</sup> Jordan, 197.

<sup>72</sup> Malcolm Cowley, “Last Man Around the World,” *New Republic*, 108 no. 16 (April 19, 1943): 513.

<sup>73</sup> Hugh M. McCarron, “Hoosier Global Thinking,” *America*, 69, no. 8 (May 29, 1943): 215.

toward the interwar: “he seems a little too much of a Wilsonian libertarian... It must be admitted, however, that he has a broad program for world order. ...he wisely observes that ‘nothing much of importance can be won in peace which has not already been won in the war itself.’ This recognition of the organic character of historical processes would, if more fully developed, surely modify his more abstract libertarian conceptions.”<sup>74</sup> *Time Magazine* noted, with a rather left-handed compliment: “For two decades, praise from U.S. Communists has been a political kiss of death. Last week the leader of U.S. Communists gave the leader of U.S. Republicans a somewhat condescending, but firm, bussing. Said Earl Browder of Wendell Willkie's new book, *One World*: ‘Mr. Willkie's main thesis, that the Axis can be destroyed only by waging real coalition war against it, is entirely sound...’<sup>75</sup> These reviews give some idea of the self-consciousness of American intellectuals who were weighing their options about how to approach the victory and its aftermath, and that Willkie’s hugely popular book promoted an argument that largely corresponded with theirs.

It is in examining the rhetoric employed in propaganda works, specifically the dramatic pedagogical form promoted by Brecht, combined naturalistically with the voice of poets and storytellers that I illustrate the uniquely American vision of internationalism contained in the ideas presented by Franklin Roosevelt, Henry Wallace, and Wendell Willkie. I first examine the radio career of Orson Welles and his involvement in some of the seminal propaganda productions of the war, and then look at the productions of three important propagandists deployed in the war effort: Archibald MacLeish, Arch Oboler, and Norman Corwin.

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<sup>74</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, “Mr. Willkie’s Two Odysseys,” *Nation*, 156, no. 17 (April 24, 1943): 605.

<sup>75</sup> “Red Kiss,” *Time*, 41, no. 18 (May 5, 1943): 26.

## **PART TWO: PRODUCERS**

### **Orson Welles**

Orson Welles's voice, as the playwright Arthur Miller astutely phrased it, was a "format" in itself.<sup>76</sup> Between the years 1939 and 1945 he used his voice in the furtherance of his career, in the service of his country, and in the promotion of world democracy. It was his voice that made his message unique. His voice was highly recognizable in an era in which the aural medium of radio presented a great many voices that were listened to in public places and in the intimacy of the home. It is a testament to the quality of his voice that it distinguished itself from the infinite number of voices that Americans heard every day for decades. Franklin Roosevelt had such a voice and his use of the radio married elements of trustworthiness and leadership in a time of national crisis. It is not too big an assertion that Welles's voice became, like Roosevelt's, identified with authority, with a sense of the historicity of democratic ideals and the strength of conviction that was necessary to promote an ideology in the conduct of a world war.

Welles's career was unique in terms of its arc. It did not take him long to move from playing second and third tier parts in Shakespeare on Broadway, to working in the radio trenches without credit, to producing his own radio programs and theater productions. The Federal Theatre provided a forum that was conducive to experiment, that was not at the mercy of financial backers, and that provided access to theatergoers that had had no experience in the theater previously. With the demise of the Federal Theatre Project, Welles's Mercury Theatre sought to continue producing shows for much the same audience with the same experimental imperative.

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<sup>76</sup> "Notes on the Lockheed Program," Welles Mss, Box 9, Folder 40, Lilly Library, Bloomington, Indiana.

The perception that radio and the press worked to some extent in the public service allowed Welles the freedom to present political ideas on the radio with less interference than in the medium of film. The film industry was a private enterprise, subject largely to the interests of studio heads and stockholders. With the historical intervention of the United States' entry into World War II, Welles's relationship to the power structures of radio network broadcasters and the government became fluid—he had agency as a producer of programming funded by independent sponsors, the networks, and the government. His programs introduced his own political ideas and also presented the messages of sponsors, the networks, and the government. Welles was adept at navigating these entities, as well as exhibiting a talent for producing programs broadcast to a national audience which utilized historical contextualizing of contemporary political issues. It was the historical intervention of the war that gave him a national audience, yet these entities also deployed his voice to promote their own interests and agendas.

Orson Welles's political and professional life serves as an exemplar of the pursuit of the goals of the Popular Front movement of the 1930s. Throughout his work he promoted progressive ideas concerning race and civil rights, the historical precedence of participatory democracy, and Pan-Americanism. Welles saw the role of culture as a mixture of the entertaining, the educational, and the political. He effectively combined these elements as both spokesperson and historian for a number of private corporations, the United States government, and in his own productions. In World War II, he saw as a necessary war aim the formation of an effective universal organization of like-minded democratic governments, forged from the lessons learned in the years between world



wars. This idea reflected the rhetoric of President Roosevelt, Henry Wallace, and Wendell Willkie, all of whom he cited in his writing.

Welles was a political actor, an active participant in the political life of America, an acknowledged political figure in his time. For the purposes of this study, Welles's significance lies in his relations to the structures of power, both with privately owned broadcast networks and in conjunction with the government. Welles also helped to reflect the cultural life of the country, to move from classical and historical evocations of abstract political ideas to exigent wartime propaganda. For Welles, the Popular Front became the Home Front.

Welles put his boundless energy toward nothing less than remaking American theater and radio drama by infusing them with a political and social conscience. His goals were consistent with other artists of the Popular Front, but unlike some of his contemporaries, he did not curtail his independent nature by a dogmatic adherence to any one ideology. For Welles, combining art, education, and politics was the formula for making culture meaningful. One of his first plainly political theater parts was in Archibald MacLeish's verse drama *Panic* in 1935, which addressed the Wall Street crash.

Another important role for Welles was as the Studio Announcer in MacLeish's 1937 verse radio drama for the Columbia Workshop, *The Fall of the City*. Archibald MacLeish was a Pulitzer Prize winning poet, active in progressive political circles, especially advocating intervention in the Spanish Civil War. At this time he wrote two highly influential radio verse plays: *The Fall of the City* in 1937, and *Air Raid* in 1938. He saw radio drama as an underutilized opportunity for "...every poet with a dramatic

leaning... [who] should have been storming the studios for years”<sup>77</sup> as he phrased it in his introduction to a pamphlet that contained *The Fall of the City*. MacLeish argued that the aural was evocative, the eye reactive, and that, with radio verse plays:

There is only the spoken word—an implement which poets have always claimed to use with a special authority. “[The ear] believes at once: creates and believes. It is the eye that is the realist... With the eye closed or staring at nothing verse has every power over the ear... The ear is the poet’s perfect audience, his only true audience. And it is the radio and only radio which can give him public access to this perfect friend.”<sup>78</sup>

The technological intervention of radio, he believed, was an important tool to revitalize poetry and drama—the audience was much larger and this would spur the poet to produce his “strongest work.”<sup>79</sup> The demand for poets’ “strongest work” came with the intervention of the war, which motivated writers of all types to produce propaganda as a part of the war effort. Progressive writers in the 1930s exhibited much the same motivation, though they certainly addressed smaller audiences than the propagandists of the war years. The exception was MacLeish, whose *Fall of the City*, produced for the Columbia Workshop on April 11, 1937, was cited, in 1939, as “the first [radio play] to exploit the potentialities of radio for activating the imagination of the listener.”<sup>80</sup>

It is significant that MacLeish, who had worked with him before, gave Welles the part of the Announcer. MacLeish saw this role as pivotal both in radio dramaturgy, and in “the ordinary, commercial technique” of radio, one of its “tools [that] could not have been more perfectly adapted to the poet’s uses had he devised them himself... The

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<sup>77</sup> Archibald MacLeish, *The Fall of the City: A Verse Play for Radio* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1937), ix.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>80</sup> *Columbia Workshop Plays*, Douglas Coulter, ed. (New York: Whittlesey House, 1939), 349.

Announcer is the most useful dramatic personage since the Greek Chorus. ...his presence...restores to the poet that obliquity, that perspective, that three-dimensional depth without which great poetic drama cannot exist.”<sup>81</sup> Welles would adapt the same technique, using a fictitious studio announcer to describe the action, in 1938 for his adaptation of the *War of the Worlds*, though he would not take the part himself. This technique illustrates again the breaking of the “fourth wall” of the theater, and, by self-consciously addressing the audience, showed the influence of Brecht’s Epic theory.

*The Fall of the City* was a warning about “a conqueror” from the East that masses his troops at the walls of the unnamed city. MacLeish uses the characters of two Messengers to signal his approach, and, to respond to the impending danger, orators and priests, signifying the use of rhetoric to placate the terrified denizens of the city. The orator, the voice of the intellectual, urges the crowd to: “Let this conqueror come! /Show him no hindrance! /Suffer his flag and his drum! /Words...win!”<sup>82</sup> At first, the crowd accepts the comfort of what are termed “liberal minds,” but when the second Messenger comes, the crowd rejects the efficacy of words in meeting the Conqueror. The priests say: “In the day of confusion of reason when all is delusion: /In the day of the tyrants when the truth is for hire: / In the day of deceit when ends meet: /Turn to your gods!”<sup>83</sup> A General urges the crowd to fight, but they are too terrified to listen. They shout: “The city is doomed! /There’s no holding it! / Let the conqueror have it! It’s his! /The age is his! It’s his century! /...He’s one man: we are but thousands!”<sup>84</sup> The Conqueror enters

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, xi.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 29.

the city and he is revealed as merely an empty suit of armor; the citizens lie prostrate, unseeing. In the denouement, the Announcer excitedly proclaims:

“The people invent their oppressors: they wish to believe in them.

They wish to be free of their freedom: released from their liberty:--

The long labor of liberty ended!

...

Look! It's his arm! It is rising! His arm's rising!

They're watching his arm as it rises. They stir. They cry.

They cry out. They are shouting. They're shouting with happiness.

Listen! They're shouting like troops in a victory. Listen—

“The city of masterless men has found a master!”

You'd say it was they were the conquerors: they that had conquered.

The city has fallen...”<sup>85</sup>

*The Fall of the City* is an important precursor to the methods and themes some World War II propagandists would later use. Its classical form, its timelessness, belied its contemporary allusions. At this time, with the ongoing Spanish Civil War and the impending *Anschluss* of Austria, MacLeish insinuates the fascist threat in Europe. The character of the Conqueror, who comes from “the East,” who raises his arm in the fascist salute, whose century this is, who is unstoppable because the people have no master, and because, absurdly, “He's one man: we are but thousands!” MacLeish points to the absurdity of the power of fascism in its hollow core that relied on the charisma of one man, and the tragedy of historical determinism. Yet, the power existed, was acknowledged, was undeniable: *Time* magazine would not name Hitler “Person of the Century,” but it would name him “Man of the Year” for 1938. Welles acts as the thread that holds the narrative together, commenting on the rise and fall of enthusiasms of the

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 30.

crowd, using the radio technique of the commentator, acting as the editorial voice, but also reflecting aurally the excitement, fear, and joys of the crowd.

The themes of the play became familiar to audiences during the war years. It laid out the historical narrative propagandists used: the fascist threat met with confusion, indifference, rhetoric, and, above all, fear, by the peoples of the world. The fragile interwar peace was a hollow one; the indifference of the democracies to the fight for democracy in Spain showed that inaction was as great a threat as the fascists who took advantage of the opportunity to increase their influence; ultimately, the democracies had to fight to preserve their freedom or lose it to charismatic leaders who undertook the role of “master” in a world where what was needed was the individual to act in consort as its own “master” or be “masterless” and conquered. The network broadcast another version of the play on September 28, 1939, after the war began; significantly, the network also published the play in pamphlet form, preserving the text for consideration and discussion.

On October 30, 1938 *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* presented an adaptation of H.G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* which created a nationwide sensation and became one of the milestones of broadcasting history. Using a script by Howard Koch, Welles employed elements unique to radio to present the story of the destruction of the world by an outside force, told from an American perspective. In MacLeish’s *The Fall of the City*, in which Welles was the Announcer, the commentator, man’s own ideological confusion and inaction caused the destruction of the world; in *The War of the Worlds* Welles was the voice of scientific reason as well as the Everyman, and it was outside forces that destroyed America. Howard Blue argues that the recent Czech crisis contextualized the broadcast in contemporary political terms and “the precedent it set gave it an important

role in the creation of war drama.”<sup>86</sup> The idea of a radio broadcast galvanizing a large part of the nation, combined with Welles’ use of “radio bulletins that repeatedly interrupted regular American programming,”<sup>87</sup> both for news developments in Europe and Martian invasion in America, pointed to the efficacy of swaying public opinion through radio drama when the United States entered the war three years later.

The notoriety of the *War of the Worlds* broadcast made Orson Welles a celebrity. In December of 1938 Campbell Soups became the sponsor of *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* and renamed it *The Campbell Playhouse*. In May, 1939, the *Playhouse* presented “The Things We Have or An American Cavalcade.” In the opening, Welles describes “Its subject: the great American dream of liberty and independence.” This was Welles’s first broadcast that dealt with many of the themes he pursued in his wartime broadcasts: that democracy was part of a universal democratic impulse and that the Founding Fathers played a significant part in forming that ideology. It also served as a reminder that democratic ideology served as an expression of the liberty of individual, that, as MacLeish would have it, Americans were not “masterless,” but were “masters” of their own destiny.

In “The Things We Have” Welles uses as a framework the story of an American couple, James and Mary Scott, who adopt a boy named Simon Lang, one of the many European refugees fleeing the coming conflagration. The drama asks the audience to look at America through the eyes of a small boy buffeted about by the threat of war. James tells Simon that all Americans came to the country seeking “...just about the same thing: freedom.” Welles contextualizes historically and politically the various threads

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<sup>86</sup> Blue, 8.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

that define the word “freedom” for Americans and the reasons people immigrated to America. Welles shifts the focus of his drama to the founding of democratic institutions in America, presented as a fight for independence, a fight that must always continue if America is to retain its freedom.

What is particularly significant about the broadcast of “The Things We Have” is that a commercially sponsored network radio program, one whose premise was presumably for entertainment, spent an hour presenting political ideas. Welles was to excel in just this kind of entertainment and would find in the war years the opportunity to produce or participate in many shows of its type. This play illustrates that he felt it was important to reexamine where Americans came from, what it means to be an American, and the universality of its democratic ideals just four months before the outbreak of war in Europe and fully two and a half years before America was to enter into the war. He presented a portrait of American nationalism while turning attention to the world stage at the same time. His efforts did not demonstrate prescience so much as a finely-tuned sense of the concerns of the nation. As with other artists in the era of the Popular Front, Welles addressed contemporary issues by presenting American history as that of a nation moving toward egalitarianism and the inclusivity of groups that had been neglected by its institutions.

Welles went to Hollywood and signed with RKO Pictures in July of 1939. With the celebrity brought about by the *War of the Worlds* broadcast and with his theater work, it was inevitable that Hollywood studios would offer Welles the opportunity to move into the medium of film. Commuting between Hollywood and New York for the *Campbell*

*Playhouse* broadcasts, Welles began developing film projects and became active in the progressive Hollywood community.<sup>88</sup>

While in Hollywood, Welles joined The Free Company, a group of writers organized by the novelist James Boyd. In the introduction to the collection *The Free Company Presents...*, Boyd stated that the group would produce radio plays by great American writers whose purpose would be “[n]ot to exhort, still less to prescribe, but by their power of the word to remind, no more than that, our people of their possessions. ... Those possessions can be, and often are, grouped together under the vague phrase of the American spirit, or way, or ideal.”<sup>89</sup> The writers of the Free Company included: Pulitzer Prize winners Maxwell Anderson, Stephen Vincent Benet, Marc Connelly, Paul Green, Archibald MacLeish, Robert E. Sherwood, William Saroyan (who refused the Pulitzer in 1939), Sherwood Anderson and Welles. By any standard, Welles was in the company of great American writers. It is interesting to note that James Boyd, in listing those who had helped the group, singled out “...above all...Miss Dorothy Donnell, who has charge of the radio division of the Department of Justice and whose fertile mind and generous enthusiasm were invaluable in the inception of the idea.”<sup>90</sup> This implies a tacit endorsement of the group’s efforts by agents of the government, pointing again to the fluidity of relations between government structures and private groups.

The Free Company broadcasts began in January, 1941, and Welles’s contribution, “His Honor, The Mayor,” broadcast on April 6. It examines the issues of free speech and assembly for unpopular, or even dangerous, ideas and groups. The setting of the play is

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<sup>88</sup> Orson Welles and Peter Bogdanovich, *This is Orson Welles*, Jonathan Rosenbaum, ed. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), 353.

<sup>89</sup> Free Company, *The Free Company Presents ...: A Collection of Plays About the Meaning of America* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1941), vi.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, ix.



the town of Benton, on the Mexican-American border, and the story centers around its mayor, Bill Knaggs. Welles acts as narrator, and in his introduction says “Right here I want to say that this broadcast isn't intended to be uplifting or inspirational; it hasn't any moral at the end of it, or any message. You can draw your own conclusions and I hope you do. I'd like to know what you think of Mayor Knaggs' problem, and if you think he solved it the right way.”<sup>91</sup> By breaking the “fourth wall,” Welles invites the audience into the proceedings, gives them agency, and promotes consideration and discussion of the text.

The play addresses the Right to Free Assembly guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. Welles's story shows how a local problem has both national, and international, political implications, and also illustrates that intolerance and racial hatred are undemocratic and inimical to American ideals. Mayor Knaggs faces a challenge: the White Crusaders, a racist, anti-Semitic organization wants to hold a rally to show their opposition to allowing “Mexicans” the right to vote. Nearly everybody in the town, including the American Legion, is against allowing the group to meet. Knaggs garners public opinion from everyday folks he meets, from the aged town “Communist,” and from his priest. He has already decided to allow the meeting. A crowd gathers outside the rally hall and he defuses the tense situation by filibustering until the meeting is over. The meeting breaks up without violence and the White Crusaders and the crowd outside go home. With his filibuster, Knaggs defends the rights of the racist group to assemble while his rhetoric denigrates its message, which touches on the universal problem of anti-Semitism, and racial hatred as displayed by the Crusader's characterization of those disenfranchised in Benton as “Mexicans.” Welles's play was consistent with the goal of the Free Company,

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 144.

which was to remind Americans of its “possessions,” its freedoms as laid out in the Bill of Rights. Then, as James Boyd phrased it, “What the people would then do with those possessions was another matter, a matter for them and their leaders...”<sup>92</sup> The Free Company wanted to provoke consideration and discussion of its oral text as well as in print when it published the book *The Free Company Presents...*

Late 1942 marked Welles’s entry into national political life. His celebrity as a member of the Hollywood community presented access to the national political stage. Welles broadcast regularly on national radio, made speeches around the country, and wrote occasional pieces for newspapers. In December, 1941, RKO stockholder Nelson Rockefeller approached Welles about going to Brazil on a good will mission.<sup>93</sup> Welles was to work with the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA), a Presidential office whose function was to promote “increased hemispheric solidarity and inter-American cooperation, especially in commercial and economic areas.”<sup>94</sup> Welles made several broadcasts from Brazil during this time while shooting footage for a documentary, to be titled *It’s All True*, that was never completed.

On December 15, 1941, Welles performed the role of Narrator in Norman Corwin’s *We Hold These Truths*, also known as *The President’s Bill of Rights*, broadcast on the four major networks. Broadcast eight days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the urgency of presenting an ideological core for Americans’ fight ahead is evident in the show and President Roosevelt’s appearance at the end of the show gave it an official imprimatur. In July of 1942 Norman Corwin produced *Between Americans*, discussed

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, vi.

<sup>93</sup> Lawrence French, “Orson Welles’ IT’S ALL TRUE – memos and notes – part I – July, 1941 to March, 1942,” *Wellesnet: The Orson Welles Web Resource*, <http://www.wellesnet.com/?p=165>.

<sup>94</sup> Records of the Office of Inter-American Affairs [OIAA]. *The National Archives: Archives.gov*. <http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/229.html#229.2>.

later in this study, for CBS's Columbia Workshop. The program had been well-received and William B. Lewis, director of the radio division of the Office of Facts and Figures, asked Corwin to develop a program on the Bill of Rights which would become *We Hold These Truths*.<sup>95</sup> Having a large-scale, fully realized production ready at such a crucial time proved fortuitous—war and the meaning of American democracy were much on the minds of Americans. Viewed in the context of Horkheimer and Adorno's theory of both cultural and economic studies, this broadcast illustrates the fluidity of the structures of radio producers, the networks, and the government working together to take advantage of a propitious congruence of events, cultural production, and technological wherewithal to fulfill a perceived national need. The text of the play appeared in pamphlet form shortly after the broadcast.

Referring to “the people of the Federated States” in the introduction to the play, Corwin places the presentation in historical time, pointing the imagination toward the beginnings of the United States. The setting brings the audience right into contemporary Washington D.C., utilizing the editorial voice of A Citizen seeing the city through the eyes of the tourist. This is a physical space that “belongs to all the people of the States.”<sup>96</sup> This places the audience in the moment; the temporal and historical context is eight days after the Pearl Harbor attack. The play uses the historical national memory to place the audience into the past, through the present.

The character of the Citizen points out that there were no celebrations when the Constitution passed around the States for their approval. He debates with a suspicious

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<sup>95</sup> R. Leroy Bannerman, *Norman Corwin and Radio: The Golden Years* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1986), 74.

<sup>96</sup> Norman Corwin, *We Hold These Truths: A dramatic celebration of the American Bill of Rights, including an address by Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York: Howell, Soskins, 1942), 11.

blacksmith, a farmer, and a widow, who say the document needs a guarantee of rights, like the British, their model for democratic institutions, enacted with their Bill of Rights during the Glorious Revolution. George Mason, Constitutional Delegate, says, “Without a Bill of Rights this government will end either in monarchy or a tyrannical aristocracy.”<sup>97</sup> The Citizen asserts that all the states ratified the Constitution, but specified amendments; it was during the debates on the amendments that the institution of government was established: “Now Congress may begin...may call itself ‘First Congress’...may go to work...may tackle the new job of running a democracy.”<sup>98</sup> Corwin dramatizes the elements of the debate by including martyrs for free speech, religious persecution, political martyrs, and Jesus Christ; he alludes to both sacred texts and to Enlightenment ideals, combined to establish a foundation for the new country. The Citizen says: “Had He not died because the rulers of a realm denied free speech? ...He, the Son of God, was He not executed over an issue of the Rights of Man?”<sup>99</sup> Corwin argues that the founders created a living document, one that had contemporary significance and addressed the issues of the day, including intolerance, racism, and the need to fight the threat to democracy posed by outside forces. He argues that the document reflects the national character. The Narrator intones:

The Congress of the thirteen states, instructed by the people of the thirteen states, threw up a bulwark, wrote a hope and made a sign for their Posterity against the bigots, the fanatics, bullies, lynchers, race-haters, the cruel men, the spiteful men, the pessimists, the men who give up fights that have just begun.<sup>100</sup>

When the Citizen introduces the President in the afterpiece to the play, he says, “Ladies and gentlemen: The President *of the People* of the United States [author’s

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 29.

italics];” this is self-conscious rhetoric that promotes the need for unity and also emphasizes the agency of American citizens as participants in the life of the nation. President Roosevelt addresses his audience as “Free Americans,” and characterizes the American Bill of Rights as “a declaration of human rights,” the “mother charter” for democracies around the world. The document’s “validity,” he argues, was “accepted everywhere, at least in principle... prior to the year 1933,” when Adolf Hitler came to power. He presents the fascists “entire program and goal” as “nothing more than the overthrow throughout the earth, of the great revolution of human liberty”<sup>101</sup> which is embodied in the goals contained in the document. Roosevelt’s rhetoric is of a piece with Corwin’s play, first setting out the Bill of Rights as an expression of the ideology of the Founding Fathers, of its universal influence, and, finally, the need for Americans to mobilize and fight to preserve an ideology at odds with fascist notions. It is significant that Roosevelt focuses almost exclusively on Hitler and the fascists as ideological equals to democracies, albeit with oppositional world viewpoints. Japan had attacked a territory of the United States eight days before this broadcast, yet in the President’s address only oblique allusion is made of them. I argue that it indicates the perception that the Japanese were culturally, politically, and racially outside the boundaries of Western civilization—propagandists often used only the racial epithet “Japs” to refer to the Japanese—and it was less necessary to engage them in ideological debate, indeed it was impossible to do so.

Finally, the President asserts that the American people “covenant with each other *before all the world* [author’s italics] that, having taken up arms in the defense of liberty,

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 44-45.

we will not lay them down before liberty is once again secure in the world we live in.”<sup>102</sup>

The President’s rhetoric alludes to sacred texts in referring to a “covenant” between the people of the United States and also, importantly, with the world. During the war the President would make many such declarations, but the significance of *We Hold These Truths* is that the President of the United States *contextualizes* his message in reference to a work of fiction produced by an individual, sponsored and broadcast by the four major radio networks, to speak for the government to American citizens and to the world. All these actors working in consort, listened to by “half the population of the United States,”<sup>103</sup> illustrates that radio was a public sphere with fluid parameters, that an intervention by individuals and institutions into the lives of the public, into the intimate space of the home, makes the private public.

Roosevelt presents the contemporary as part of an historical continuum that began with the American Revolution, informed by the ideology manifested in the texts of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, practiced in the institutions of the government, and sustained by the will of the citizens of the United States. This speaks to the idea of an imagined community of like-minded citizens. It is a nationalistic notion. When Roosevelt speaks of the “issue of the war in which we are engaged” as an ideological battle against “the aggressive dogmas of this attempted revival of barbarism,” which “the free nations of the earth have long ago rejected,”<sup>104</sup> he is speaking of internationalism. This ideology was central to the viewpoint presented by radio propagandists.

I argue Welles’s pivotal role as the Narrator, the editorial voice in a dramatic presentation heard by a vast American audience that included the participation of the

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>103</sup> Bannerman, 73.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 46-47.

President, helped audiences associate Welles with the Administration. In 1942 Welles was near the height of his celebrity. It was at this critical juncture that he ascended into public political life. In the next five years he made speeches on current issues, campaigned for Roosevelt, sold War Bonds, and participated in international political conferences. He had an acknowledged skill for contextualizing and presenting political and historical ideas and events. He produced radio shows for the U.S. government and corporations such as DuPont and Lockheed. At the same time, both the public and political groups perceived Welles as a politically astute observer to whom they could turn for help in bringing attention to racially charged incidents such as the Sleepy Lagoon trials in Los Angeles.

In September, 1942 Welles began an association with DuPont's *Cavalcade of America*, on which he had appeared in New York many times unbilled in the 1930s. In his book *The History of the Cavalcade of America*, Martin Grams suggests that the American public in 1935 thought of the DuPont Company as "a gunpowder manufacturing gargantuan, making goods of destruction." The idea behind the program was to promote DuPont as creating "better things for better living through chemistry,"<sup>105</sup> and this motto was prominent in the broadcasts. It presented biographies of historical persons and events, and attracted famous Hollywood stars. Welles's first production for the show was a verse play by the future Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Arthur Miller called "Juarez: Thunder from the Mountains," which paralleled the lives of Benito Juarez and Abraham Lincoln. This play, while not written by Welles, contains many of the elements that characterized his work in general and, specifically, his concerns at this time

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<sup>105</sup> Martin Grams, *The History of the Cavalcade of America* (Kearney, Nebraska: Morris Publishing, 1998), 1.

about race and Pan Americanism. It is representative of the progressive liberal viewpoint of many of the radio writers of the time. Welles narrated and played both Juarez and Lincoln.

Miller tries to show that Juarez and Lincoln contemporaneously faced the same crucial questions posed by domestic wars that would ultimately decide whether democratic institutions would survive in their respective countries. Though the conflicts differed in that one was a war of foreign occupation, in the case of Mexico, and internal division, in the case of the United States, the message was that democratic institutions equally face threats from outside as well as by internal forces. The need for national unity was paramount.

Miller and Welles present a story that reached back more than a century using the metaphor of the “spine of our continent” to emphasize the geographic consanguinity of the Americas, the Mexican people’s ties to its ancient Indian past, Pan American political solidarity, and the contemporary need to conduct a war and, if necessary, to execute tyrants that threaten modern democratic institutions. An international democratic impulse transcended the nationalist message. The message of “Thunder from the Mountains” is that the Americas of a specific historical time had a lesson to teach both the European powers of the time and the contemporary world as a whole.

Welles became active in promoting this message by producing and co-writing a special Columbus Day *Cavalcade of America* program titled *Admiral of the Ocean Seas*, translated into Spanish and Portuguese and rebroadcast to Latin America by the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs.<sup>106</sup> At the same time Welles pursued his professional career as a money making vehicle in balance with his public service pursuits.

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<sup>106</sup> Welles and Bogdanovich, 373.



He prepared two shows, one, *Ceiling Unlimited*, for the Lockheed Corporation, and *Hello Americans*, in coordination with the Office of Inter-American Affairs. They would run twice a week from November, 1942 until February, 1943.

The theatre figure Norris Houghton and the playwright Arthur Miller developed *Ceiling Unlimited* with Welles. In a letter to Welles dated October 18, 1942 and titled “Notes on the Lockheed Program,” Miller commented:

First, about the format...I feel sure of one thing. You don't want any. Your voice is a format. The only two things that must be heard at the beginning of the show every week are your voice and Lockheed Vega. They alone and by themselves do everything any format can possibly do. Your voice, if I may say so, portends much.<sup>107</sup>

The show presented dramatizations of aviators and aircraft as well as profiles of corporate entities such as Pan American Airlines and stories with general wartime themes such as the Battle of Bataan and the lives of war workers. The fifteen minute program was an entertaining brew of propaganda that presented workers in wartime America with the idea that they were working side by side with industry in battling fascism.

*Hello Americans* utilized an anthology format, presenting full-length profiles of significant Pan American events and figures, and an “A-B-C” of the Caribbean. It began with the program “Brazil,” broadcast on November 15, 1942. Welles used music prominently in the series to present the idea of a larger, culturally united Pan America. For example, the program presented the story of the samba, a popular dance at the time, illustrated with long musical interludes.

With the last show, “Bolivar’s Idea,” he capped the series with a retrospective of the Mercury’s work with the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs “gathering the material for these broadcasts... Stories and music, poetry and jokes, all

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<sup>107</sup> “Notes on the Lockheed Program.”

the mediums we can work in, all the languages we know are obediently yours in the service of a big idea called Pan Americanism.” Welles spoke specifically about the “gulf wider and deeper than the Rio Grande” that existed between the Americas in terms of his personal experience as a good will ambassador in South America. The stereotypes propagated by books and movies shaped his initial perceptions of Latin America; he hoped with *Hello Americans* to deny those stereotypes and promote a message of friendship through tolerance.

In the half hour of “Bolivar’s Idea,” Welles presented ideas of international unity, commonality of democratic institutions, the conduct of a world war and postwar world democracy in progressive liberal terms. In the final moments of the program, Welles reads a message from Vice President Henry A. Wallace that states: “The new democracy looks to ... the rich soil and bright sunshine of America for strength.” This message would become more and more dominant in Welles’s postwar radio work as well as in his political life. He focused on problems in the United States that he felt were antithetical to the mission he saw for the country after the war; his voice became more and more an editorial voice rather than a dramatic one. He concentrated on political activism in the realm of civil rights and the mission of the United Nations organization and not in presenting political issues dramatically. As a political advocate, his voice was one among many in the public sphere. Before and during the war, as a Popular Front dramatist and an actor, he was able, for a short period of time, to gain the ear of the public. In the postwar, as a political editorialist, he became less and less able to promote the United Nations as an ideology or civil rights as an important part of the war effort. The United Nations became an international political institution, segregation and Jim

Crow national ones and he withdrew from the public sphere that discussed and debated these issues.

### **Archibald MacLeish**

Archibald MacLeish had an active life in public service. President Roosevelt named him the Librarian of Congress in 1939 and, shortly before the war, in October, 1941, appointed him to the Office of Facts and Figures (OFF), an agency whose mission was to

formulate programs designed to facilitate a widespread and accurate understanding of the status and progress of the national defense policies and activities of the Government; and advise with the several departments and agencies of the Government concerning the dissemination of such defense information.<sup>108</sup>

The agency was one among many the government utilized to spread information, and it was later supplanted by the Office of War Information (OWI). MacLeish had already produced some work for radio and in the OFF he worked closely with radio networks and advertising agencies in both a censorship capacity and in developing government information programs.

In April of 1941, The Free Company, the same writer's group for whom Orson Welles had produced "His Honor, the Mayor," produced a play MacLeish wrote called "The States Talking." Both at the beginning and, for the benefit of listeners who had missed it, at the end of the broadcast, the Narrator of the play, Burgess Meredith, read "... a statement that told fully the purpose, the problems, and the principle of The Free Company." This statement points to America as exceptional, saying that

The members of The Free Company have dedicated their talents to the proposition that we have in this country a way of life that is unique and precious and

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<sup>108</sup> Scott Donaldson, in Collaboration with R.H. Winnick, *Archibald MacLeish: An American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 349.

something to be infinitely proud of. It's the American way of life. In the spring of 1941, with all our flaws and all our problems, still it is the best way of life on earth.

Yet, even with its nationalist focus on America, the play asserts that the strength of the

country lies in its diversity. The Narrator says the play "began to put itself together in [MacLeish's] mind a couple of years ago when people abroad...people way off the other side of the Rhine... began saying that the States were cross-bred, mixed-blooded... it was the pure-bred nations of the old world who would do what had to be done... who would run the world..."<sup>109</sup> One of the recurring metaphors MacLeish uses in *The Fall of the City, Air Raid*, and "The States Talking," is that of "the East" as a metaphor for coming danger. The East is the old world risen, threatening the new. Like other radio playwrights, he utilizes radio's ethereal qualities to evoke geographical area, to create an imaginary geographic community, not tied to one direction. The states speak as regional representatives in counterpoint to the voice of Hitler, which is played in undercurrent to the Narrator and the voices of the states as each makes its appearance.

The title of the play literally evokes the framework MacLeish uses to respond to this notion.

Hitler doesn't like mixed blood, and the states realize he is talking about the women they married and the children they have produced. The states are incredulous. The voices of the states are masculine—they evoke in dreamy voices the women they have married and their characteristics. Women sing underneath. MacLeish uses the perspective of individual love in the voice of a man remembering his love, an interpersonal focus combined with the national, with states wondering what problem

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<sup>109</sup> Free Company, 221.

Hitler has with them. “Aren’t they men?” they ask, emphasizing the fact that the women they have married are “foreigners,” all with different, desirable attributes. The states speak about the strength and beauty of their children. They talk about the people from the East as the people “who stayed behind,” who claim to be superior people. They make the point that the new world is not for the “pure bred;” the so-called new ideas of racial superiority are but the old ideas they, as immigrants, have left behind. The states laugh uproariously as they scorn Hitler’s voice ranting underneath. They hear only talk, empty blood and thunder. As the debate subsides, MacLeish again evokes the land as talking metamorphoses into the sounds of the land, the permanence of the American earth.

It is important to note that the Free Company printed scripts and sent them out for the price of a dime—an emphasis on printed text in a time when, without the intervention of recording technology, audiences could not hear the shows again—they were rarely rebroadcast; if they were performed again there were inevitable cast and script changes. The experience of audiences was never exactly reproducible. In comparing radio scripts with transcriptions of the actual broadcasts it is possible to see that changes were sometimes made either to meet broadcast requirements regarding time, or those of the Standards and Practices departments of the networks who enforced a code of conduct for broadcasters; at other times there were editorial changes made by the authors and producers.

### **Arch Oboler**

Radio propagandists were not all poets. Many were pure storytellers, pulp magazine scribes who kept radio programs populated with beasts and ghouls, and were adepts at evoking the morbid fascination of the campfire tale. These storytellers played

to the strengths of the medium, often urging listeners to “turn your lights off now,” to facilitate the unleashing of the imagination. Yet, they bridged the darkness of pre-history by placing the arcane and the occult into the modern day, giving the mundane world of everyday life deeper meaning by placing characters into life and death situations that defied easy explanations.

One such writer was Arch Oboler, a pulp fiction writer who turned his hand to writing radio programs in the 1930s. He was one of the most prolific of the propagandists, and networks called on him as a fill-in writer for many special wartime programs. He wrote scripts for and produced many series of his own during the war, including *Arch Oboler's Plays*, *Everyman's Theatre*, *Plays for Americans*, *Keep 'em Rolling*, *To the President*, *Free World Theatre*, and *Everything for the Boys*. In a 1940 *Time* magazine profile, he is likened to Popular Front playwright Clifford Odets, “his opposite number in the theatre.” Oboler is characterized in the article as “cocky, a man who asserts ‘I have...a larger audience now than Shakespeare ever had.’ However, he seemed sincere when, asked how he managed to convince microphone-shy Hollywood celebrities such as Alla Nazimova to appear on his programs, he said, ‘They realize...I have a respect for the medium I am working in.’”<sup>110</sup> His *Current Biography* entry credited Oboler with “having developed the monologue and the stream-of-consciousness story for radio use.”<sup>111</sup> In a 1943 review of a collection of his radio scripts, Edgar Johnson first acknowledges radio drama’s weaknesses and strengths, asserting that, though it is a “youngster among our art-forms,” with unique limitations, yet, “by seizing

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<sup>110</sup> "Busy Wunderkind," *Time* 36, no. 23 (December 2, 1940): 58. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost.

<sup>111</sup> "Oboler, Arch." *Current Biography* (March 1, 1940): Biography Reference Bank (H.W. Wilson), EBSCOhost.

boldly on these very limitations...the radio dramatist can turn them to instruments of power. No writer for radio has shown a keener recognition of these facts than Arch Oboler, one of the ablest technicians of the radio theatre. ...his plays are conceived for and in terms of their medium.” Johnson argues that radio presented the interior monologue, one of Oboler’s trademarks, better than did films.<sup>112</sup> Oboler was an acknowledged master of the medium.

Oboler’s writing style was direct, but full of moral ambiguities regarding human motivation and the intervention of forces that were beyond human understanding. He presented an alternate universe that interceded into the affairs of ordinary Americans, oftentimes without rational explanation. As in one of his stories, how to explain the motivations of a “dark” that turns humans inside out? What metaphor was he reaching for when writing of the absurd, mutated “chicken heart” that metamorphoses into an ever-expanding, grasping, physical menace that literally brings about the end of the world?

When Oboler wrote anti-fascist propaganda he was no less gifted at giving menace a face than he was at portraying occult threats. The motivation for characters facing a monster of the imagination was an unambiguous struggle for survival. For Oboler the fight against fascism was much the same—there was no moral ambiguity. The difference lay in “turning the lights on” rather than off, and facing the enemy, an enemy that sought to destroy the physical and spiritual lives of the people of the world. Oboler’s propaganda is perhaps the type popularly associated with propaganda produced during

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<sup>112</sup> Edgar Johnson, “Radio Theatre and Its Medium,” review of *Plays for Americans: Thirteen New Non-Royalty Radio Plays*, by Arch Oboler, *New Republic* 108, no. 2 (January 11, 1943): 61.

World War II. It is starkly black-and-white. The enemy has dripping fangs; its appetites are venal, inhuman.

An example of this type of play is Oboler's "This Precious Freedom," broadcast as part of his *Everyman's Theatre*, on October 11, 1940. Oboler wrote, produced, and directed several series, and he sometimes had conflicts with the network. In 1945 he asserted "[a]t the beginning, the complaint was that I was 'prematurely full of ideas,' that radio wasn't ready for anything but entertainment. Later on I was accused of being 'prematurely anti-fascist.'"<sup>113</sup> Oboler wrote several plays about the "fascist menace" before the war, and "This Precious Freedom" was one of them: "...the network took one quick look at the script and announced it could not be broadcast. Why? We were not at war with Nazi Germany. I insisted that every decent human being in the world was at war with Nazi Germany..." When Oboler insisted that "unless 'This Precious Freedom' was broadcast as written, [he] would withdraw the program from the air... The cancellation of a single play was of small concern to the network; the potential loss of six or seven hundred thousand dollars of network time was another kettle of kilocycle fish."<sup>114</sup> The network broadcast the play, but in doing so under duress it shows that the networks were seriously concerned about being controversial in the prewar years. In his verse plays Archibald MacLeish had written on similar subjects, but in the oblique terms of the *Cassandra*, intimating what Oboler makes explicit.

Oboler uses the plot device of a takeover of part of the country by fascists as almost a supernatural occurrence, bringing the horror of fascism into Americans' lives.

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<sup>113</sup> Arch Oboler, *Oboler Omnibus: Radio Plays and Personalities* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce), 1945, 1.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p. 157-158



The story concerns a businessman, John Stevenson, who has been out of touch on a vacation in the woods for a few weeks—he hasn't read a newspaper or heard the radio in all that time. His plane crash lands in a farmer's field and he encounters several suspicious, scared, and tight-lipped people as he tries to get back to the city and his life there. With a growing sense of frustration, Stevenson gets the feeling something is wrong. As is typical with many horror stories, his feelings turn from frustration, to dread, to fear. After several more disconcerting encounters, policemen at his home knock him unconscious and take him away. From a visitor he learns that parts of the United States Constitution have been "taken out." Stevenson is unbelieving, thinking the visitor is deranged. An official known as an Examiner wants to know where Stevenson has been and what he has been doing. The Examiner acts as the voice of the fascist in power. He presents three major themes: one involves America's lack of military preparedness, another is its indifference to the threat posed by fascists from abroad and the third is the country's taking for granted the rights they have enjoyed, specifically freedom of speech, of due process, and of speedy trial. The Examiner explains how fascists were able to conquer the United States utilizing a well-planned "overt subterfuge":

...the plan—always it was there, and always we followed it! We poured our propaganda in on you—yes, we used your own sentimental democratic weaknesses against you! We cried out, "Let us speak! It is our right!" How simple it was to use your rights against you!<sup>115</sup>

Oboler uses the tropes of the pulp horror story to present a political message, one that is

highly moralistic, with an Everyman who is vulnerable by dint of his own stubborn refusal to face the reality of the world around him. Oboler's cardboard cut-out villains to

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 171.

him are real, and he asks audients to listen to their rhetoric in terms of its ramifications for Americans, not as merely another set of voices in the political dialogue. He asks audients to make a decision regarding a world built on fascist ideology versus that of the United States Constitution. His message is less open to interpretive meaning, though it is still provocative and appropriate for discussion by audients. It is a direct propaganda lacking nuance, presented without apology.

In the introduction to the 1944 collection of plays from the *Free World Theatre* series, the Nobel Prize-winning author Thomas Mann confronts the issue of the nature of propaganda and the writer who produces it.

What [the plays in the book] offer is propaganda in the best and purest sense of the word. ... I have used the word "propaganda" on purpose and without reluctance because it deserves to be freed from the suspicious connotations which it has assumed in our day. ... Indeed it has come to a point where one uses the word for the purpose of deprecating ideas which one dislikes. ... [The book] is good propaganda insofar as it is effective, absorbing and entertaining. And it is good propaganda insofar as it awakes our hearts which are so much inclined to drowse in indifference, and summon them to hate evil and to believe in a better world as the fruit of victory.<sup>116</sup>

Like *The Free Company*, the *Free World Theatre* was produced under the auspices of a writers' group, the Hollywood Writers Mobilization, "a voluntary joining together of the writing guilds on the West Coast for the winning of the war and the peace to come..."<sup>117</sup> and also "in co-operation with the Blue Network, the Hollywood Victory Committee and the Office of War Information."<sup>118</sup> This again illustrates the fluid relationship between individuals, organizations, networks, and the government in

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<sup>116</sup> Arch Oboler and Stephen Longstreet, *Free World Theatre: Nineteen New Radio Plays* (New York: Random House, 1944), x-xi.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 265.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

producing and disseminating propaganda. What made the *Free World Theatre* unique was that, since “this is a war not only of men, but of ideas,” the plays were “based upon ideas suggested by such world personalities as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Mr. Thomas Mann, President Manuel Quezon, Vice President Henry Wallace, Mr. Arthur H. Compton, President Avila Camacho, and many other outstanding statesmen, writers and philosophers of our time.”<sup>119</sup> Some of the plays utilize the text of these prominent men, while others merely use simple comments by them as a springboard for dramatic adaptation. The series is significant in its goal of using the ideas of contemporary political figures, including Adolf Hitler, to present ideological text as parables, stories meaningful in the conduct of the war and looking toward the postwar.

Arch Oboler directed the series and contributed several scripts. His play “The People March,” broadcast on February 21, 1943, was based on Vice-President Henry A. Wallace’s speech “The Century of the Common Man” and his radio address “World Organization,” broadcast on the 86<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Woodrow Wilson’s birth, December 28, 1942. Oboler uses the framework of radio as an international transmitter of political and ideological rhetoric put to different uses by audients. In America, The Man, characterized in the script as a typical American Babbitt,<sup>120</sup> receives Wallace’s speech in a political context, as yet another politician “shooting his mouth oil on that after-the-war stuff!”<sup>121</sup> His cynical response to Wallace’s call for postwar planning, heard in a transcription behind The Man’s comments, is what Oboler perceives as an Everyman on the Home Front response, the subject and object of the lesson Oboler wants to impart:

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 3-4.

<sup>120</sup> Oboler and Longstreet, 3.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 4.

Those politicians! ...I ask what the devil's the use talking about what's going to be after the war's over, when the war's still going on? ...I'll bet they got it beamed all over the world, but I'll bet you that the only ones listening are a lot of our fatheaded sentimentalists! But the average man (Reaching) — the—the common man they're always making speeches about, he can't listen—or he won't listen—or, if he is listening, as usual he doesn't know what he wants and what it's all about! (Music hits hard.)<sup>122</sup>

As with MacLeish, Corwin, and Welles, in this play Oboler uses radio's ability to create the illusion of transcending temporal and spatial limits to show how audiences in differing contexts react to a single text. First, the reaction of occupied people in Holland and Poland, where listening to foreign broadcasts is against Nazi law, with severe consequences, then to Russia, a country fighting the Nazi invasion, and, finally, the reception by a wounded soldier and his pal in the South Pacific. Outside the American political context, each receiver looks upon the text as an ideological evocation of both war and postwar aims, presenting the argument that the people whose everyday lives are a struggle to fulfill the democratic impulse find inspiration in rhetoric that asserts that they do not fight alone and that leaders are planning for a better life after the war.

The first group from Holland publishes an illegal newspaper, Wallace's message remembered and transcribed for dissemination, the text preserved for discussion and debate. To them, the text contains "[w]ords about a new world for all of us. Can there be any better words?"<sup>123</sup> The second Dutch group perceives the message as a call to action, and convinces a father, who fought in World War I and feels the fight was useless because of the uneasy peace it created, to join his sons in secretly travelling to England to join the Free Dutch Forces. After listening to the broadcast he says, "A little while ago a voice—a strong voice—said what I have been waiting to hear! That if we fight, and die,

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 5-6.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 8.

we will not be cheated in our death! That this time they know their responsibility to us who fight.”<sup>124</sup>

In Poland, Jewish listeners receive the text as a comment on the dignity of the individual, with allusions to both Biblical and Jewish sacred texts. Wallace argues that the basis for American freedom is a Biblical assertion about the dignity of man. The Nazis plan to display captive Polish Jews in a humiliating display in Berlin. Though offered poison by a woman who has heard the broadcast, the elder Jewish captive decides to retain his dignity by standing up to the Nazis. He quotes the Psalms:

God of my fathers, Thou art my light and salvation. Then whom shall I fear? God of my fathers, Thou art my stronghold of life; Before whom shall I tremble? Thou has lifted me up, Thou has brought up my soul; Thou has called me to life/From the depths of the grave!<sup>125</sup>

Reading the same text, these receivers interpret and react in differing ways by privileging different parts of the text.

The text in the next section, taken from Henry Wallace’s “World Organization” radio speech, addresses “what to do with the defeated nation.”<sup>126</sup> Wallace asserts, “This time we must make absolutely sure that the guilty leaders are punished, that the defeated nation realizes its defeat and is not permitted to re-arm,” but adds that, as part of a psychological realignment of the defeated countries, the United Nations must institute “[s]upervision, or at least inspection, of the school systems of Germany and Japan, to undo so far as possible the diabolical work of Hitler and the Japanese war lords in poisoning the minds of the young.”<sup>127</sup> Two Russian women, Korshunov, an older

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 11-12.

<sup>126</sup> Henry Wallace, “World Organization,” *New Deal Network: Selected Works of Henry A. Wallace*. <http://newdeal.feri.org/wallace/haw18.htm>.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

woman, and Polushka, her subordinate, listening to the broadcast, have widely differing interpretations. Polushka hears only Wallace's words concerning punishment; in her eyes this means revenge on the Nazis. She says, "What he said on the wireless is right. When the war is over, we must hang them—every one—down to their children!"<sup>128</sup> Korshunov says,

I hate every Nazi soldier and every mother who bore one! ... But when their soldiers lay down their arms in defeat, and know why they have been defeated... —I will no longer hate them. I will pity them, for those that live will have the memory of what they have done. ...their children will know what they have done—that they, workers, took guns in their hands and went into a country of workers, and killed, and burned, and destroyed what workers had built with the years of their lives for the good of all men! ... I will help them—once they know their defeat and their shame.<sup>129</sup>

Korshunov has taken in the entirety of Wallace's message while Polushka selectively takes the message to mirror her emotional response.

When the scene shifts to an army hospital in the South Pacific, the audience is brought full circle from American to American. There is an exchange between buddies listening to Wallace's speech "Century of the Common Man" that reflects the Everyman reaction, in the character of Joe, and that of an audience involved with the text, in the character of Sam. Both men hear the message with the perspective of those wounded by the war, as did the damaged people we have heard from Holland, Poland, and Russia. Joe is practical; he lives in the moment and wants distraction from the pain of his wounds. Engaged with the words, Sam tries to get Joe to talk about the reasons they have found themselves wounded on an island in the middle of the Pacific. A doctor interrupts and, to distract himself from the pain of the doctor changing his bandage, Sam talks to Joe.

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<sup>128</sup> Oboler and Longstreet, 13.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 14.

[it was] the mistakes they made after the last war that brought us here! ... That's what that fellow on the radio was sayin'. Yeah, I'll bet you right now back home there's somebody listening to him on the radio and calling it baloney! That's not an answer for all the—the plain ordinary people who are working with everything they got and fighting with everything they got and dying willingly to win the fight! They, and we, have got to learn something out of this war!  
 ... if I get outta this war I'm not goin' back to a world where guys gotta stand around with their hats in their hands askin' for a chance to make a livin'. Joe, that's gotta be a part of the law as much as the right to say what you think is right, or pray to the God you want to pray to!<sup>130</sup>

In this program Oboler, constrained by a text he finds meaningful, leaves behind the

monsters and bogeymen; the only encounter with the enemy occurs in the shape of a leering Gestapo man in the first Holland sequence. What he portrays is a myriad of notions that comprise the ideology of the United Nations. He reproaches Americans who refuse to engage in the larger meaning of the war, its implications for those fighting and dying, as well as for themselves and their children when the war is over. It is a simplistic notion, yet one of the strengths of propaganda is its direct evocation of ideas—in this case Oboler uses the text to lay out the political, economic, and moral questions involved in the conduct of the war—and finds the attitude of many Americans lacking.

Propagandists like Arch Oboler must share some of the blame for this attitude. It is easy to stir up visceral feelings of hatred for the enemy, but it is much harder to face the monster of indifference inside ourselves.

### **Norman Corwin**

Norman Corwin produced his radio play “Between Americans,” broadcast on July 6, 1941, as part of his CBS series *Twenty-Six by Corwin*. Corwin produced this program as part of an anthology program and he perceived the subject as appropriate to the tenor

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 14-17

of the nation; as he phrased it in the play: “The People are thinkin’ about their country pretty hard these days, some of them for the first time in their lives.”<sup>131</sup> Echoing the dramatic structure Archibald MacLeish utilized in “The States Talking,” Corwin begins the program with a “roll call” of people who come from towns all over the country with names like “Tokyo, Texas,” and “Stockholm, South Dakota.” Corwin uses the names of places as a metaphor for the universality of America—he sees the variety of names as indicative of America in the world and the world in America. In this introductory scene he expresses a nationalistic notion of American Indians as the “real” Americans that belong to the imagined community of America as a nation. The idea is again that of the national with the international.

The tone of the play is anticipatory. It illustrates the perceived inevitability of the United States’ entry into the war. The first peacetime conscription began in September, 1940, and Corwin presents a play that anticipates, or perhaps reflects, popular opinion. As he phrases it, “Men are being called on to get ready to defend America, if need be. A lot of them are thinkin’ in terms of what there is to defend.”<sup>132</sup> The main theme of the play is an attempt to dramatically portray the American character in political and social terms, in the form of a folksy Narrator carrying on a dialogue with everyday people. In trying to define that character, Corwin, like Orson Welles, emphasizes the geographic consanguinity of North and South America as being part of a national, and international, character:

we’ve got a nerve calling ourselves Americans all the time when we’re really only United Staters. ... You know that a citizen of Punta Arenas on the Straits of Magellan has just as much right to sing ‘America the Beautiful’ as you have? ... if any of you folks are hearin’ this down in Mexico or Honduras or Salvador or Argentina or even if you’re an Eskimo

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<sup>131</sup> “Between Americans,” *Twenty-Six by Corwin*, broadcast Columbia Broadcasting System, July 6, 1941.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*



in the Arctic, we hope you'll overlook our callin' ourselves Americans as though we were the only ones in the Hemisphere. We do that just 'cause it's so much easier to say than anything else, and, also, because it sounds so good.

This strain of Pan Americanism promotes the idea that a cultural as well as geographic community exists throughout the Americas.

The body of the program focuses on what the idea of "America" means to its citizens. Corwin posits that it is the smells, tastes, and everyday experiences that evoke "Americanness," a deeply humanistic vision. He then focuses on what draws immigrants to the country, an especially pertinent topic when many intellectuals, Jews, and political opponents of totalitarian states were coming to the United States. What attracts exiles to the country is "the spectacle of nearly a hundred and fifty million people trying to live up to the expectations of a handful of great men who lived and died two [sic] hundred and fifty years ago," men who "wrote a new Constitution for themselves and their children...a democratic Constitution that's never been topped before or since." There is an emphasis on the primacy of the text in making a country a nation, in forging an imagined community with mutual interests.

Corwin is especially creative in returning again to evoking the land of America itself, and uses anthropomorphic hyperbole as a way of illustrating the land's disapproval of Americans who violate its promise:

"Did you ever see the way its mountains frown down sometimes? Do you know what they're frowning at? There's some rumors they heard about petty intrigue, about political bosses and shysters and fakers and grafters and guys who make a business of gypping the people. Ever see the way the skies suddenly get black—the thunder roars and the lightning starts throwing itself around? That's the restless spirit of the country saying what there is to say about a lynching. Ever see a storm whooping it up across the Great Lakes? That's how the American winds feel about anybody who denies anybody else a fair trial or free speech, or the right to assemble, or the right to worship as one sees fit."

Ultimately, Corwin says the idea of America is too big, its people too diverse, its manifold experiences too far-reaching and personal, to allow for a “working definition” of America. In the end, “America is not a map, a poem, a post of Legionnaires, an almanac, a mural, a building in the heart of Washington. It’s a territory possessed by people, possessed by an ideal.” “Between Americans” is significant in its insisting that a dialogue concerning the future of the United States is necessary to successfully conducting the coming conflict. Corwin reproduces the reflective impulse of Brecht’s Epic theater, and combines it with Habermas’s idea of the “public sphere” as a place for debate and discussion, working more as a model of discourse rather than an actual interactive community in real time, as the Internet might provide today.

In the late winter and early spring of 1942 *Time* magazine ran several articles that give an idea of the place radio programming creators, and Corwin in particular, played in the public sphere and of their relationship to the networks and the government. A piece concerning the formation of a Radio Directors Guild, “including four of the biggest: Norman Corwin, Arch Oboler, Irving Reis [creator of the experimental *Columbia Workshop*], [and] Orson Welles,” is instructive in showing the goals of the group: “1) to improve radio entertainment; 2) to lend more effective radio assistance to the Government's war effort; 3) to establish the professional prestige of those who call the tune and set the pace for the mass entertainment of Americans.”<sup>133</sup> Making one of its main aims to aid the government in time of war reflects the group’s intention of continuing its efforts of working with the government producing works in the public interest. Interestingly, the article comments, “[u]nofficially, members gave their approval to an interesting but as yet barely perceptible trend: greater program control by the

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<sup>133</sup> “Director's Guild,” *Time* 39, no. 19 (May 11, 1942): 78. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost.

networks, less control by advertising agencies,”<sup>134</sup> illustrating the perception that networks were more flexible in allowing creative control to creators than sponsors, as well as a self-consciousness about the fluid nature of their relationship to government and private enterprise.

In a piece on Corwin’s series *This Is War!*, the magazine points out that the program, which was produced in conjunction with the OFF was unique in that, like the program *We Hold These Truths*, the “four major networks and many independent stations—some 700 stations in all—contributed the time,”<sup>135</sup> but in this instance for a thirteen-week series. This provided unprecedented air time to present messages from producers and the government. Significantly, the article points out, “[t]his message actually went out to the world. Played by separate casts in Spanish and Portuguese, the program was broadcast by short wave to South America that night. Done by other casts in other languages, it goes out this week to the peoples of the East and West,”<sup>136</sup> presumably by shortwave broadcast. This points out the importance the government placed on directing its message not only to the nation, but to the world.

The article mentions that the program was prefaced with an introduction by President Roosevelt read by OFF Director Archibald MacLeish who, along with William Lewis, Director of Radio Programming for OFF, had urged Corwin to produce the series. “When he went to work with OFF,” the article states, “Corwin was in sympathetic company. OFF’s chief, Archibald MacLeish, has written radio plays himself... With the desire these men have for excellence and truth in ‘propaganda’ programs, Corwin

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> “This Is War!,” *Time* 39, no. 8 (February 23, 1942): 62. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

devoutly agrees.”<sup>137</sup> Another article shows how the government explicated its expectations and coordinated its propaganda efforts with both network and local broadcasters. The article begins: “Radiomen and Government men last week came out of their huddle with what looked at last like real team play”:

To radiomen the best thing that happened last week was a half-hour talk to them on a unique closed telephone network (i.e., not on the air) by OFF's Director Archibald MacLeish. Coherent and down-to-earth, Mr. MacLeish dispelled apprehensions, cleared up the "What can I do?" question and told the broadcasters what kind of guidance they could expect from his office henceforth. Among matters soon to be set right by OFF and a Broadcasters' Victory Council in Washington: excessive bunching and repetition of appeals, pep talks, [and] the national anthem.<sup>138</sup>

This quotation illustrates a perception that radio producers and broadcasters *needed to*

coordinate their efforts to effectively inform the American public. Interesting too is that the program *The United Nations Speak*, whose first speaker was Assistant Secretary of State Adolf A. Berle Jr., would “be followed by representatives of the other 25 nations, short-waved to their native lands, long-waved to the U.S. by Mutual when ‘applicable to English-speaking people,’”<sup>139</sup> effectively funneling access to messages to one language group and excluding others.

In the spring of 1942, Corwin was asked by CBS and the OFF to travel to England and produce a series of programs that would promote greater understanding of Great Britain. The program would be produced CBS’s London correspondent Edward R. Murrow and broadcast to both countries. Corwin produced a policy memo regarding his approach to producing the broadcasts, including an assertion of complete creative control.

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> "Team Play," *Time* 39, no. 10 (March 9, 1942): 60. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

In it he states, “the author-director and the producer shall not be answerable to American or British governmental or any other agencies on aesthetic or other grounds, beyond the ordinary and reasonable requisites of military necessity and good taste...”<sup>140</sup> For his text, Corwin would travel around England, exploring its cities, towns, farms, and factories, and use the words of England’s inhabitants and those of Americans and other allies of the United Nations that were preparing, ultimately, to invade Hitler’s Europe. He titled the series *An American in England*, and in it he used the character of The Narrator, acting as his proxy, to place himself in the physical space of the country and to act as the editorial voice, and a combination of actors and actual participants for his presentation.

In *An American in England* Corwin focuses on portraying the United States and Britain both as nations and as *inter-nations* that interact culturally and politically, through personal, social, and government institutions. In January, 1942 there were 4,000 American service members in Great Britain and by the end of the year there were 135,000.<sup>141</sup> In order to prepare American troops for a protracted stay in a foreign country, the U.S. Army provided a pamphlet called “Britain: For All Members of the American Expeditionary Forces in Great Britain.” In the program “The Yanks are Here,” Corwin uses text from the pamphlet, read aloud by a putative American soldier and the Narrator. The pamphlet’s text presents some of the major themes Corwin presented in *An American in England*. Of foremost importance, the pamphlet asserts, “[w]e can defeat Hitler’s propaganda with...plain, common horse sense: understanding of evident truths.”<sup>142</sup> In the play, Corwin sets out an agenda to utilize a “strategy of truth” in the service of the

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<sup>140</sup> Bannerman, 101-102.

<sup>141</sup> “History—World War II,” U.S. Army Europe, <http://www.eur.army.mil/organization/history.htm#wwii>.

<sup>142</sup> Norman Corwin, “The Yanks are Here,” *An American in England*, Internet Archive, <http://archive.org/details/AnAmericanInEngland>.

United Nations. He argues that the difference between the Axis' and United Nations' propaganda is illustrated by the fact that "[w]e've never had to jam [to block the enemy's message by broadcasting noise on the same wavelength] the ether so our own people couldn't hear the news."<sup>143</sup> To further his argument, he says, "Jamming...is an Axis monopoly. Lord Haw Haw [William Joyce, an Englishman working for the Germans as a propagandist] can babble all night on the Allied air if he's a mind to. Nobody here or in the States would waste a transmitter's time and energy smudging out the bray of an Axis ass."<sup>144</sup>

Another theme emphasized in the series is that of the importance of the solidarity of nations. The pamphlet emphasizes cultural and civic commonalities between Britain and the United States, but acknowledges differences as well. "Evident truths," or cultural and civic commonalities, are placed in opposition to the efforts of Hitler's "propaganda chiefs," whose first duty is to "separate Britain and America and spread distrust between them."<sup>145</sup> The rhetoric of the text argues that both nations "believe in freedom of worship, freedom of speech, but each country has minor national characteristics that differ... You defeat enemy propaganda not by denying these differences exist, but by admitting them openly and then trying to understand them."<sup>146</sup> The pamphlet's text urges troops to transcend national characteristics by focusing on larger ideological and cultural commonalities.

One of the central themes of Corwin's series builds upon Wallace's idea of the "common man." The people of England, America, and the United Nations "share the

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

hopes and fears and aspirations of the common people of the world... for the first time since Adam a common enemy has made common friends of the common man in all quarters of the globe.”<sup>147</sup> The medium of radio presented the opportunity for “the common man in all quarters of the globe” to send and receive ideas with an immediacy that the printed word, whether by correspondence, newspaper, telegraph wire, by oral message via telephone, or the visual medium of film, could not. These media contributed to the creation of a public sphere, but radio’s ability to “cast broad” its message to millions of people simultaneously was unprecedented.

Of course, the “common man” did not have access to radio broadcasting facilities and the broadcasting wavelength is limited by the tuning-in capacity of the dial contained in commercial radios. Radio propagandists, newswomen, and newsmen sought to give voice to what they perceived as the concerns of the “common man,” to craft a message that was inclusive of the peoples of the world. Although not deployed by the government of the United States, Corwin decided to present his interpretation of the ideology formulated by the created community of the United Nations, funded and broadcast by a privately-owned corporation. There was a fluid relationship at play between the government, private enterprise, and producers of radio drama.

Corwin and the producer of *An American in England*, Edward R. Murrow, were true believers in both the ideology of the United Nations and the efficacy of radio in disseminating information and promoting political ideas. Murrow’s broadcasts from London during the Blitz, the sustained bombing program of the Germans on London between September of 1940 and May of 1941, had electrified American interest in the war. In one memorable broadcast, Murrow stood on a rooftop of a building in central

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

London during a bombing raid. For Americans, Murrow's voice was authoritative on the subject of Britain during wartime.

In the episode titled "An Anglo-American Angle," the Narrator visits the broadcast facilities of the BBC, and his unnamed friend, played by Murrow, broadcasts to America. He situates England, America, and the world itself in space and radio bridges the gulf:

For three minutes he speaks across an ocean that is half in daylight and half in night. And then he calls in Cairo... Cairo comes in and a capsule world is there for Kansas and Missouri, and for the lounge of the Beverly Hills Hotel... you listen to shows coming from the States... there's a songstress singing 'Johnny Doughboy Found a Rose in Ireland.' And you wonder whether every last broadcast from the States would reward listeners in occupied countries who tune in at the risk of their lives?<sup>148</sup>

Here Corwin critiques American radio's dual role as both entertainer and informer in a time of war.

Corwin conflates radio's failures, as well as its strengths, with what he feels is the indifference of Americans to the plight of the British. Americans sometimes seemed to not grasp what was at stake in the war for the British people, an ally with a special relationship to America. Germans were reaching into England. Corwin wanted England to reach into America. A man the Narrator meets in a pub longs for "the good old days" of the Blitz: "There was a spirit then," the man says, "we were in the thick of the fight. Everything we did took on a kind of importance because it might have been the last time we did it... being up to one's eyebrows in war can be inspiring."<sup>149</sup> To himself, the Narrator wonders

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<sup>148</sup> Corwin, "An Anglo-American Angle," *An American in England*, Internet Archive, <http://archive.org/details/AnAmericanInEngland>.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.



whether your fellow Americans will need the stimulus of danger and fire from the sky to drive them to the greatest possible exertion... if your people at home would stand for any sniping or beefing if they were raided as a matter of routine twice daily or if the enemy was besieging Pittsburgh. Would they still put up with papers that attack their allies, newspapers that not long before Pearl Harbor were urging that we give China to the Japs and, even now, are suggesting that we leave Russia to the Germans and that we better beware of Britain's intentions after the war?<sup>150</sup>

To Corwin, those safe at home could undermine the unity between America's allies equally well as German propagandists.

Corwin argues that "next to separating the United States and Great Britain [Hitler's] greatest hope has been to separate Russia and Great Britain." An English newspaperman asks the Narrator, "Tell me, are there any quarters in America that are still hostile to Russia?" The Narrator assures him there are, "scattered, of course, but there. Tory press, mostly." Corwin's use of the term "Tory press" as characterizing purveyors of anti-Russian sentiment points to the necessity of jettisoning what he perceived as the long-standing political biases of some Americans, using an antiquated word for an antiquated concept. The newspaperman replies, "You know, that's something I can't understand. We consider it extremely bad tactics, from a military as well as a moral point of view, to criticize an ally or to cast suspicion on him, especially if he's doing most of the fighting."<sup>151</sup> Again, Corwin seeks to emphasize that Americans should keep the sacrifices made by the allies of the United States uppermost in their minds.

If the conduct of the war meant discarding divisive political opinions it also required reconfiguring the relationship between economic and social classes. Industrialists and workers had to sacrifice gains made during peace time that impeded production during wartime. The Narrator talks to the Welfare Officer at a tank factory.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

She asks, “Is it true that some industrialists are fighting the government and labor as though they were the enemy instead of the Axis? ...can a worker quit an essential war job in one city to make more money doing non-essential work in some other city?” The Narrator assures her that was so. “That seems strange to me,” the Welfare Officer says. “The unions [in Britain] made great sacrifices when they allowed their workers to be tied down, but it’s a sacrifice they made willingly because they know that under the Axis labor can look forward only to permanent serfdom...” The Narrator asks if industry also had to make sacrifices. “Have you seen the excess profits tax? ...Here take a look at it... British industry and labor long ago realized that neither stood a chance of surviving unless both made mutual sacrifices,” the Welfare Officer answers.<sup>152</sup> Corwin argues that a mutuality of interests between labor and industrialists is acknowledged in England in the extraordinary circumstances of the war, and posits the same should be a goal in the United States, presenting an international model for what is nominally a national economic relationship.

Beyond the rhetoric of the mutual sacrifice of industrialists and workers, Corwin implies another important player important to production in England in 1942: the civic institution of the government. Corwin says there is little romance in wartime England except

the romance of powerful trade unions waiving their hard-earned rights for the duration and the government guaranteeing that they’ll get them back; the romance of an excess profits tax with real teeth in it; the romance of price control and rationing and conscripted women and workers that aren’t allowed to quit a job or be absent from it or late for it...<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

The government must intervene to ensure that mutual sacrifice remains mutual, that workers work and industrialists do not profit overmuch when those profits are needed to conduct a war of survival.

The question for the “common man” became one of trust, of whether the governments of the nations of the world would come through with the promises they made during the exigencies of war. Corwin invested the hopes for a postwar future in the “common man.” “There are a lot of ‘typical nice guys’ on this planet... Is it beyond reason that common people can strike up a lasting friendship—something more permanent than a military alliance? Are the people going to let diplomats decide whether they shall be the same fast friends in peace as they are in war?” Corwin asks. The British are

proud people... They’ve been through fire and they’ve been tempered by it. But, so are we Americans proud people... We’re a good deal farther from the flame, and we, therefore, temper slower. But, fire is fire and it’s spreading on the earth—and whether it’s to be the funeral pyre of all freedom or the forge in which is shaped the hopeful new world of the common man is what good, common men are dying for tonight.<sup>154</sup>

Yet, Corwin was also “impressed... [by] the democratic attitude of the heads of our Allied nations.”<sup>155</sup> Attending a concert at the National Gallery, he notes the Queen “was sitting in the audience like everybody else.” The war helped to make class distinctions fluid and the ideology of the United Nations promoted a “democratic attitude” among its leaders, as exemplified by “[t]he King and Queen of England eating hot dogs in Hyde Park, Mrs. Roosevelt riding in the New York subway, Joe Stalin taking two hours out of a busy war with the Hun at the gates of Moscow to talk to the editor of a

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Corwin, “Home is where you Hang your Helmet,” *An American in England*, Internet Archive, <http://archive.org/details/AnAmericanInEngland>.

liberal American newspaper named *PM*.”<sup>156</sup> The common man carried out bulk of the fighting, but all classes of the people of the United Nations made sacrifices. “The Duke of Kent was killed on active duty. Stalin’s son helped to smash the Germans on the Central Front. Churchill’s daughter is in the ATS. The Roosevelt boys [are] scattered around the earth.”<sup>157</sup> If there was to be trust between classes in the postwar, it was necessary to show that wartime sacrifice was a matter of belonging to the nation, and the international community, not on deference to class.

Corwin spent two months in England. He returned on a Pan American Clipper airship and, upon arriving home, decided that

America had gone abroad. There was a boy from almost every family either in a foreign land or getting ready to go, and the hearts of the home folks were in every zone of time and every latitude from one pole to another. ‘Yes, the world has shrunk,’ I told myself. America is not just forty-eight united states and her territories. America today is every country where free men are fighting, where people of good will hang out.<sup>158</sup>

Yet, had the world really shrunk, or had Americans simply stepped out into it?

Corwin struggled to put into a few words the sum of his observations and his experiences in England and of his journey there and back. In a closet in his house, Corwin finds a framed quote written by Benjamin Franklin. Corwin feels Franklin put into words what he had attempted to convey in hours of sound effects, music, and dramatic text: “God grant that not only the love of liberty, but a thorough knowledge of the rights of man, may pervade all the nations of the earth, so that a philosopher may set his foot anywhere on its surface and say, ‘This is my country.’”<sup>159</sup> In the end, Corwin saw

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Norman Corwin, “Clipper Home,” *An American in England*, Internet Archive, <http://archive.org/details/AnAmericanInEngland>.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

the lesson of his travels as reaffirming an American commitment to human rights that lay in the foundation of his country. This commitment was based on a combination of cultural and civic ideology. In 1942, in the midst of a world war, Corwin saw in the ideology of the United Nations the aspirations of the common man combined with a necessary intervention by civic institutions to ensure their expression.

A review in *Time* magazine shows something of the reception of *An American in England*. It characterized the episode “Cromer,” as emphasizing

the small talk of people in the middle of a big war—only 20 minutes flying time distant from a Nazi aerodrome.... [t]he 30-minute sum of such unimportant bits added up to a quiet, detailed, richly evocative piece of radio reporting. U.S. radio listeners could cheer Corwin's assumption that they were adult enough to understand common adult speech, could therefore be spared the painful explanations that often accompany radio's attempts to inform.<sup>160</sup>

Corwin’s ability to combine the pedagogical with the naturalistic lessened the need for exposition-heavy dialogue, which is antithetical to effective radio technique.

Norman Corwin wrestled with a seemingly impossible task, the job of dramatizing the plight of the world in a time when the weight of words might have seemed slight compared to the massive events of a world war. Yet CBS, who had the ear of America with the voice of Edward R. Murrow, felt it was important to present a cultural perspective on the war to help Americans better understand what it was fighting for. Murrow was a gifted journalist who could tell the news and present the political and military implications of the war. Murrow strove to present a “human angle” to his stories. However, Corwin was a poet and dramatist who could tell a story and create a narrative of what Americans in the world were fighting for. He was trained in the

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<sup>160</sup> “Cromer Is A Town,” *Time* 40, no. 24 (December 14, 1942): 87. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost.

discipline of utilizing rhetoric in dramatic form. He deployed his talent in the service of an ideology based upon basic human rights.

Betsy Hutchison, in a review of a collection of Corwin's scripts in the *Nation*, is perceptive in critiquing both radio drama and Corwin's wartime work. She argues that radio writing and production had matured by producing a form specific to the medium with creators identified with specific styles and strengths. She posits a critical history and state of the art when she says: "...radio has been moving away from the dramatic and nearer to the narrative and even the critical idiom. ...it has divided into two schools: the highly compressed drama of suspense, of which Arch Oboler is the chief exponent...and the literature of ideas, whether expressed in dramatic, narrative, essay, or poetic form. In this second field Norman Corwin is the acknowledged leader," and cites Orson Welles as "pioneer[ing] the revolutionary idea that a narrator should be used for narration. From that point on the author had a voice of his own, and radio became a worthy vehicle for the expression of ideas."<sup>161</sup>

In fact, Corwin's many technical and dramatic innovations meant "...So much attention has been given to Corwin's form that the content of his writing has sometimes been overlooked... His plays are shot through with social criticism..." and she characterizes Corwin's "war plays" as "debates, dramas, and symposiums" which "exhibit a brand of antifascism which is decidedly 'premature,' chronologically and otherwise," a criticism which was applied to many Popular Front era progressives, such as Arch Oboler. However, she found the wartime plays "variable in quality," citing *We Hold These Truths* and programs in the *This is War!* series as effective, while "[i]n some

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<sup>161</sup> Betsy Hutchison, "Winged Words," review of *More by Corwin: Sixteen Radio Dramas by Norman Corwin*, *Nation* 159, no. 2 (July 8, 1944): 48-50.

Corwin loses his spontaneity in an exaggerated effort to persuade; in others he appears to be fumbling for adequate expression of a theme which overwhelms his creative powers for the moment...” This illustrates the mistake of assuming a worthy theme will make for worthy drama—Corwin’s reach sometimes exceeded his grasp, a perhaps not uncommon pitfall in the literature of ideas.

In August, 1944 CBS vice-president Douglas Coulter asked Corwin to begin preparing a play for the anticipated Allied victory in Europe.<sup>162</sup> An estimated sixty million Americans listened to the remarkable broadcast.<sup>163</sup> The combined interventions of the war, radio as a public sphere, the fluid relationship between radio producers, the networks, and the government, and the use of radio drama as propaganda in the war effort, all contributed to making this broadcast the single most concentrated effort at radio production directed at the American people. Producers of radio programming all wanted to reach the greatest audience possible: radio producers working for sponsors, networks with sustaining (unsponsored) programs, and the government all directed their programming toward listeners with the hope that their work would yield large listenership. However, it was the combination of all of these institutions and individuals that made up the public sphere that was radio, and the record-breaking audiences that listened to radio during World War II took special productions, such as those produced by Corwin, as a part of the national life, and as a central element necessary to understanding the world around them. Americans heard the news every day. Programs like *We Hold These Truths* and *On a Note of Triumph* were dramatic evocations of the ideology of the war.

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<sup>162</sup> Bannerman, 138.

<sup>163</sup> “On a Note of Triumph: Norman Corwin's Radio Classic, 60 Years Later,” NPR, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4668028>.

Corwin's "Between Americans" and *We Hold These Truths*, conceived as independent productions, differed from *On a Note of Triumph*: devised for broadcast on a specific occasion, Victory in Europe Day, or VE Day, the stakes were higher. Corwin had the job of writing to evoke larger meaning from what was already a large event, the largest event in the memory of many listeners. "Between Americans" reflected his personal ruminations about the meaning of America's national life; *We Hold These Truths* took shape with the United States' entry into the war, and repurposed as a reaction to it. *On a Note of Triumph* had to encompass the effect of the war on Americans as well as looking forward to America's place in the postwar world.

He structured the play around the questions of "a private first class in an army of one of the United Nations."<sup>164</sup> It is significant that Corwin chose to place the questions in the voice of a soldier participating as part of the United Nations, not solely in the Army of the United States, placing America as part of the efforts of the greater world, whose war aims Americans shared. Corwin brings us full circle from *The Fall of the City* eight years earlier when he characterizes the voice of the soldier as "that of the Conqueror..." The Conqueror in this case is not an empty shell that represents a nameless threat brought about by indecision and fear as in MacLeish's play, but that of the common man, an exhausted youth tried by fire. The soldier's questions mean to reflect the questions of the audience: "... who did we beat? How much did it cost to beat him? What have we learned? Is it all going to happen again?"<sup>165</sup> In answering these questions, Corwin encompasses much of the ideology presented by propagandists during the conduct of the war: the seeds of World War II were planted in the peace crafted at the end of World War

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<sup>164</sup> Norman Corwin, *On a Note of Triumph* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), 19.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid*, 21.



I; indifference to the Cassandra warnings of the pre-war years; the idea of the common man; that isolationism was impossible, and that the war had taught “the value of allies in a world where any war is sooner or later a world war.”<sup>166</sup> These were reflective questions, leading to the greater question of what type of peace would need to be constructed to avoid the mistakes of the past.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the play has to do with some of the progressive rhetoric used, first contrasting the common man against Nazi self-identification: “The superman of tomorrow lies at the feet of you common men this afternoon;”<sup>167</sup> and “...the Century of the Uncommon Aryan opened up ahead, And Germany was promises,”<sup>168</sup> which references both Henry Wallace’s “Century of the Common Man” and Archibald MacLeish’s 1939 poem “America was Promises,” which urged Americans to action in the face of fascism, to “Believe unless we take [the promises that comprise America] for ourselves/Others will take them for the use of others!”<sup>169</sup> These references to works familiar to Americans that had heard them read on the radio, printed in newspapers, in Wallace’s case, in MacLeish’s printed in a widely-read liberal publication, helped place the program into the ideological and intellectual dialogue of Americans. Another rhetorical device Corwin uses is a “folk song” called “Round and Round Hitler’s Grave,” which sounded like authentic doggerel from the nineteenth century but was composed by the Almanac Singers for the program.<sup>170</sup>

We’re gonna tell the postman,  
Next time he comes around,  
That Mr. Hitler’s new address

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>169</sup> Archibald MacLeish, “America was Promises,” *New Republic* 101, no. 1301, (November 8, 1939): 48.

<sup>170</sup> Bannerman, 153.

Is the Berlin buryin' ground.

Round and around Hitler's grave,  
 Round and around we go,  
 We're gonna lay that feller down  
 He won't get up no mo'.<sup>171</sup>

This song is a recurring *leitmotif* that places the play firmly into American folk culture, evoking America's past while placing the issues it address in the present. It echoes Levine's theory regarding a repurposing of popular cultural forms to fit the needs of listeners.

In answering the soldier's question, "What do we do now?" the Narrator says "Why, the war goes on... Shall those of us who never quite believed that war could come/Now hasten to believe it over?"<sup>172</sup> Next, Corwin asks the audient to travel across the world via microphone, a shift of focus peculiarly effective on radio. First, the audience visits several American soldiers on guard duty around the world, spreading the news of the Nazi defeat and then, chillingly, down below the water to the sea bottom, where a Navy submarine lies inert, unresponsive to pounding on the hollow hull, those inside dead to the news, "who've been out of touch of any but the deep-sea angels of the Lord's leviathan reserves..."<sup>173</sup> The message is clear: sacrifices would continue until the war in the Pacific was won, and celebration at the present time was callously premature.

Looking forward to the true end of the war, when the Japanese are defeated, Corwin points to the role the soldier will play as a civilian:

Soldier, when the sweet morning comes, and you are mustered out...  
 You must not forget to take along your homework in the barracks bag,  
 For there is no discharge in the war.

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<sup>171</sup> Corwin, *Triumph*, 11.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, 53-54.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

You're on probation only—you and the faces you have dreamed about, and all the rest of us.

Henceforward we must do a little civic thinking every day,  
And not pass up the front page for the sports page as we did before.<sup>174</sup>

... Listen: To win is great, to learn from winning, greater: but to put the lessons learnt from winning hard to work, that is the neatest trick of all.<sup>175</sup>

... Soldier: Don't you feel in your bones that we can keep it from happening again, that we're smarter now we've learned some lessons and stronger now we've made some friends?<sup>176</sup>

For reply, the young soldier says to himself: "I hope to God it won't happen again. I hope they plan better this time."<sup>177</sup>

*On a Note of Triumph* is a reiteration of the ideology Corwin and other propagandists deployed throughout the war. There is, however, urgency in the production. The war continued, but the postwar had, at least incrementally, arrived. When the first news of the Japanese surrender arrived on August 14, 1945, Corwin, asked by CBS to present a suitable remembrance for Victory in Japan, or VJ Day, titled his program, eponymously, *Fourteen, August: A Message for the Day of Victory*. The program is a verse recitation "spoken by Orson Welles" and lasts about sixteen minutes. The victories in both theaters of war were of a vastly different character and the rhetoric Corwin employs reflects this difference. In Europe, a conventional war of bullets and bombs, of tired, muddied men who pushed across the Continent, defeated the fascists. Though in the Pacific, the war, conducted in the same way, the *deus ex machina* intervention of the atomic bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, finished it. Thus, Welles intones, Biblically: "God and uranium were on our side. The wrath of the atom

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 61-62.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 67.

fell like a commandment/and the very planet quivered with implications.” Corwin is overt in his rhetoric regarding universalism, invoking geographic metaphor: “Are we agreed that all is one/That the world’s a single continent?”

### PART THREE: CONCLUSION

Broadcast a single network, CBS, *Fourteen August* ironically seems anticlimactic considering it was the capstone to a conflagration that changed the world. The program was well-received. In terms of audience response, it stood behind Corwin's *On a Note of Triumph* and another of his plays, *Untitled*.<sup>178</sup> Yet, as the intervention of the war opened the door for radio propagandists to gain the ear of the American public, its end would close it. The world turned to reconstruction, the United States to reconversion, and the rhetoric of propagandists faded back into the realm of political discourse. *Time* magazine's review of a collection of Corwin scripts and the book of Corwin's *On a Note of Triumph*, reveals something of the critical reception to his work and about the limitations of radio drama as text and radio drama itself:

...what makes the scalp tighten when backed by sound effects and Bernard Herrmann's excellent score and eloquent silences frequently looks tinselly in type. *Triumph's* unrelieved pounding at its worthy message (internationalism) sometimes takes on the sound of an hour-long lecture; and occasionally, with the best intentions in the world, it is mawkishly patronizing about the little people to whom it is addressed.<sup>179</sup>

The *Time* piece, which appeared mere weeks after the end of the war in Europe, argues the impact of Corwin's written text is less than that of the radio broadcast which dramatized it. This illustrates the problem inherent in critiquing a unique moment in time, an experience, as opposed to a reflective reexamination of text. Radio's moment as the dominant electronic medium in the world passed, as did the war itself. It was during that moment that progressive propagandists seized the opportunity to promote a nationalism that transcended nationalism, a nationalist moment manifested in a world

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<sup>178</sup> Bannerman, 175.

<sup>179</sup> "More by Corwin," *Time* 45, no. 22 (May 28, 1945): 68. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost.

war. These propagandists succeeded in utilizing their talents in contributing to the war effort by arguing that the United States fought an ideological war, appealing to abstract notions of “freedom,” “democracy,” and the “common man.” I argue that radio itself, its dramaturgy and its ethereal nature, its fluid relation to economic structures, along with the agency of producers and audients, using the rhetoric of trusted leaders, effectively combined, broadcast the ideology that an international community existed, composed of people who defined citizenship as larger than the national community. An imagined universal community of the common man fought nationalists created in the aftermath of an unsatisfactory peace after World War I.

This paper traces the arc of radio drama as it matured during the war years. Bertolt Brecht applied his theory of Epic theater to radio drama, introducing self-consciousness, in the form of the Narrator, as a pedagogical, critical dramatic device. Archibald MacLeish’s verse plays moved from a classical, interpretive form to the vernacular, from poetry to poetic propaganda. The prolific Arch Oboler explicitly presented audients with a stark portrait of what was at stake in the war. Orson Welles combined the historic past with the contemporary. Norman Corwin engaged an idea of the American spirit and contextualized it in universal terms.

What makes the propaganda these writers created unique is its very transience, its fixed place in time. As with drama presented in a theater, the effect of radio dramaturgy differs on the printed page. A radio broadcast comprises a transient aural experience that utilizes text to engage the imagination of audients. The vast audiences American radio propagandists addressed during World War II were adept at receiving messages and constructing meaning from aurally transmitted texts. Jürgen Habermas suggests visual

imagery superseded much of the text in print newspapers, changing the construction of meaning by readers. It is beyond the scope of this work to examine all the ramifications of the advent of television as the dominant medium in the United States, nor the Internet's tremendous effect on the construction of meaning for their audiences. I argue, however, that during World War II various actors working together crafted effective propaganda for network radio that constructed meaning from texts shaped by radio as a technology, and dramaturgy as a tool for the transmission of ideology.

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