

Unrealistic expectations: Americans and international radio in cold war East Asia, 1951-75

by

Roberta Meloni

B.A., Sapienza University of Rome, 2014

M.A., Roma Tre University, 2019

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History
College of Arts and Sciences

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

This dissertation examines four Cold War international radio initiatives that enhanced American economic influence and cultural power in East Asia to bolster the U.S. fight against communism from 1951 to 1975. It does so by focusing on Radio Free Asia (1951-53), Radio of Free Asia (1966-1975), the American Forces Vietnam Network (1962-1975), and Radio First Termer (1971). Altogether, these radio initiatives offer insight into how various American and Korean actors, including CIA officials and U.S. policymakers, the Unification Movement and South Korean President Park Chung Hee, the U.S. military authority and American soldiers in Vietnam, approached radio during two defining conflicts of the Cold War era: The Korean and Vietnam Wars. However, all four initiatives explored in this account failed to achieve their original intent or resulted in unintended consequences because the actors involved did not fully understand or master the complexity of the contexts in which their radio initiatives operated. Blinded by their self-serving interests and unrealistic expectations, they repeatedly oversimplified and misread the several contexts into which their initiatives were situated.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents and my perseverance.

Chapter 1 - International Radio Broadcasting in Cold War East Asia, 1951-75

This dissertation explores four Cold War international radio initiatives that promoted American economic influence and cultural power in East Asia in support of the U.S. fight against communism from 1951 to 1975. It does so by focusing on Radio Free Asia (1951-53), Radio of Free Asia (1966-1975), the American Forces Vietnam Network (1962-1975), and Radio First Termer (1971). Altogether, these radio initiatives offer insight into how various American and Korean actors, including CIA officials and U.S. policymakers, the Unification Movement and South Korean President Park Chung Hee, the U.S. military authorities and American soldiers in Vietnam, approached radio during two defining conflicts of the Cold War era: The Korean and Vietnam Wars. However, all four initiatives explored in this account failed to achieve their original intent or resulted in unintended consequences because the actors involved did not fully understand or master the complexity of the contexts in which their radio initiatives operated.

In truth, the use of radio to expand American cultural and economic power into East Asia was not a trend that originated with the Cold War. It began before World War II, when radio companies, businessmen, missionaries, listeners, and U.S. policymakers developed radio into a mature communications technology aimed at both foreign and domestic audiences by the 1940s. For example, scholarship on American radio in East Asia offered insights into the extent to which the United States tried to harness radio to expand American cultural and economic hegemony in East Asia. In fact, these studies have emphasized that American convictions in radio as a transformative power capable of uplifting and changing “uncivilized” Asian societies not only reflected blind American beliefs in the unmatched power of technology to drive

progress, a notion many proponents of the interwar period espoused. These convictions also shaped those actors' utopian expectations that American radio could effectively "civilize" and, consequently, transform East Asia into a pro-American mold. However, American initiatives seldom matched the initial expectations. Deterministic beliefs regarding the singular power of radio often obscured the myriad societal, cultural, economic, and political influences that shaped the evolution of American radio in East Asia. Ultimately, American radio initiatives fell victim to the actors' miscalculations and oversimplifications of the broader societal and historical contexts in which their initiatives operated, often intensifying the international disputes that characterized the interwar period.¹ As Americans continued to pursue international radio projects during the Cold War, many of the expectations and patterns echoed those evident in this earlier era.

Indeed, societal forces and self-interested objectives of the main actors examined in this work continued to shape the design and implementation of international radio initiatives throughout the Cold War. From 1951 to 1953, the fledgling CIA operated Radio Free Asia (RFA) as a tool to support the U.S. Cold War fight against communism in China during the

¹ Michael A. Krysko, *American Radio in China: International Encounters with Technology and Communications, 1919-1941* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Krysko's work is the most completely developed study concerning American radio in East Asia. However, other important studies are Harry Kirwin, "The Federal Telegraph Company: A Testing of the Open Door," in *Pacific Historical Review* 22, No. 2 (1953): 271-286; Michael J. Hogan, *Informal Entente: The Private Structure of Cooperation in Anglo-American Economic Diplomacy, 1918-1928* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1977); John P. Rossi, "A Silent Partnership?: The U.S. Government, RCA, and Radio Communications with East Asia, 1919-1928," in *Radical History Review* 33, (1985): 32-52.

Korean War. In truth, the CIA designed its covert radio operation to primarily realize the agency's self-serving bureaucratic interest of achieving legitimacy vis-à-vis the State Department and its venerable international radio network, the Voice of America (VOA). From 1962 to 1975, the U.S. military authority, specifically the Department of Defense's Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), harnessed the American Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN) to win the war in Vietnam by exporting American popular culture to minimize the soldiers' discontent and keep them motivated in the fight. Despite any best efforts to contain insubordination within the military ranks, this strategy backfired and generated unintended consequences. In fact, American soldiers often resisted AFVN mainstream programming by establishing illegal radio stations like Radio First Termier (RFT) that openly mocked and challenged the U.S. authority in Vietnam.

However, this work is not just about American radio initiatives and interests in isolation. It also examines how key Korean actors, such as Reverend Sun Myung Moon and South Korean President Park Chung Hee, approached international radio and used Radio of Free Asia (ROFA) to pursue their vested interests from 1964 to 1975. Specifically, they sought to manipulate American popular convictions about the purported power of radio to influence and propel societal change as an appealing trope to penetrate U.S. politics and mobilize U.S. financial support for the Unification Movement and the South Korean government during the Vietnam War. Overall, such self-interested objectives and strategies at the origins of the four radio projects became the reasons that often led to unmatched outcomes and undesired consequences.

The significance of this dissertation thus lies in its effort to demonstrate that the actors' misrepresentations and oversimplification of their target audiences and contexts ensured the outcomes rarely met expectations. Like the American radio initiatives introduced in East Asia by

their interwar predecessors, the case studies examined in this dissertation also speak to unrealistic expectations. However, such unrealistic expectations reflected more than singular faith in the power of radio to force change in the intended audience by simply using radio broadcasting. What made their efforts unrealistic was the misreading and, at times, oversimplification of the contexts in which their radio initiatives operated. In all four case studies, the main actors deliberately pursued strategies that seemingly tried to consider and apply more sophisticated understandings of how media and broadcasting influence could help achieve their goals. Nonetheless, like radio enthusiasts and proponents of a generation earlier, they were still misguided, misinformed, and overly simplistic regarding the strategies and ideas about how international broadcasting might be used to achieve their desired and often self-serving interests.

In fact, enduring American convictions that radio could be a Cold War tool to influence audiences and fight communism in Asia proved limited and short-sighted. Such popular convictions, which reflected culturally rooted and misleading ideas about radio as an all-powerful technology, have a long history that goes back to the early days of mass media research. Drawing on his pioneering study into the effects of wartime propaganda on people, American communication theorist and political scientist Harold Lasswell is often credited with theorizing the direct model of media effects. According to this pre-World War II theory, a media message could penetrate the minds of a passive audience and produce a direct change in views.

By extension, radio propaganda could penetrate the minds of domestic and international listeners like a bullet or a needle, thus changing ideas and attitudes in the targeted audiences.²

These early assumptions, in turn, bolstered historically held and culturally rooted perceptions about the supposed extraordinary power of radio —and communications technology in general— to shape people’s behaviors and ideas. Several historians have discussed how pre-radio communications were often perceived as tools of influence that offered Western and Asian powers opportunities to extend and secure their self-serving interests. For example, Daniel R. Headrick argued that the British submarine cables laid around Africa and Asia between 1850 and 1940 were not primarily intended to facilitate international communication but rather to support and secure British domination and influence in that area of the world. Similarly, historian Daqing Yang pointed out how wireless telegraphy, as well as military and postal communications, became imperial tools through which Japan extended its economic, cultural, and military influence in East Asia from 1883 to 1945. These works on communications technology as a means of achieving cultural, economic, political, and military influence nicely complement Krysko’s observations of American views and interests regarding the introduction of American radio in East Asia. However, what his work underscores is that the U.S. effort to harness radio to extend American economic and cultural influence in East Asia fell short because culturally based and utopian convictions “about what radio was and what it could accomplish for a society”

² For a concise history of media effects, see Porismita Borah, “Media Effects Theory” in *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, edited by Giampiero Mazzoleni, 1st ed. (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: Hoboken, New Jersey, 2015), pp. 2–12.

informed American initiatives and the way Americans approached the development of radiotelegraphy in East Asia.³

Indeed, such unrealistic utterances about the supposed power of communications technologies to influence and achieve a desired outcome obscure how technologies are invariably shaped by a vast array of societal forces that guide their development and use. Historians of technology have long discussed — and often challenged — the idea that technological inventions or machines inherently follow a pre-destined and inevitable path that is outside human control. For example, David Nye underscored that technology should not be merely perceived as a “system of machines” that drive human development and its history but as “an expression of a social world.” Each technology is the product of societal forces and influences that shape their developments and uses across time and cultures.⁴ Such processes, which include cultural expectations, the effects of politics, military strategies, and economic calculations, shaped the development of American radio through World War II. In fact, radio historians Susan J. Douglas

³ For a few studies discussing communications technologies in international relations, see Daniel R. Headrick, *Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 97-137; Daqing Yang, *Technology of Empire: Telecommunications and Japanese Expansion in Asia, 1883-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010); and Krysko, *American Radio in China*, p. 12.

⁴ David Nye, *Technology Matters Questions to Live With* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006), p. 47. Other seminal studies exploring the social construction of technology that offer a corrective to a deterministic understanding of technology are Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch, *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989); Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx (eds.), *Does Technology Drive History? The Dilemma of Technological Determinism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994).

and Susan Smulyan have both called for historians of American radio to analyze the importance of choices, social contexts, and cultural forces in shaping technology in general and radio in particular across time and cultures.⁵

Furthermore, such enduring popular perceptions about radio's purported ability to influence, though they reflected misleading assumptions about media effects, did not necessarily assume a one-dimensional, monolithic view of a passive audience. The naïve vision of mass media as all-powerful vehicles of communication that could persuade receivers how react to a message is, as communication theorist Wilbur Schramm observed, not only limited but also inaccurate. By the 1950s — which is the starting point of this dissertation's analysis — scholars began to realize the limitations of mass media in persuading audiences that were far from being a "sitting target." Listeners were not only able to resist a media message but also to interpret it according to their views, cultural background, and values, which could often end up reinforcing "existing prejudices" rather than triggering an effective change in opinions and outlooks.⁶

⁵ Susan J. Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) and Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

⁶ Wilbur Schramm, "The Nature of Communication between Humans," in *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, edited by Wilbur Schramm and Donald F. Roberts, revised ed. (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press), pp. 8-11. Direct quotes are from pages 10 and 9 respectively. For other important works that have discussed the problematic theory of direct effects of mass media, see Deborah Lubken, "Remembering the Straw Man: The Travels and Adventures of Hypodermic" in David W. Park and Jefferson Pooley (eds.), *The History of Media and Communication Research – Contested Memories* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 19-42; Jefferson Pooley, "Fifteen Pages that Shook the Field: 'Personal influence,' Edward Shils, and the Remembered History of Mass

This insight is evident in the four case studies explored in this account. These initiatives had unintended and unwelcome outcomes because they reflected the main actors' unrealistic expectations about the power of radio. However, these unrealistic expectations were not necessarily grounded in one-dimensional, misguided beliefs in the singular power of radio to effect change and influence, as was the case with their generational predecessors. Instead, they stemmed from overconfidence in these actors' ability to understand and engage with the broader societal contexts in which their target audiences were embedded. It was a way to maximize broadcasting's potential to affect and influence those audiences in the desired direction. In fact, such strategies represented an effort — perhaps at times even a sincere one — to apply more contemporary theories about mass communication and media influence to enhance radio as a foreign and military policy tool during the Cold War. Nonetheless, misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and oversimplifications of those target contexts ensured that the outcomes rarely aligned with the actors' initial expectations.

Indeed, the common thread linking the conception, pursuit, and often unwelcome results of the case studies explored in this work underscores that those actors imperfectly anticipated an important theory of media effects: the propaganda model. This theory of mass media communication, most closely associated with theorist Noam Chomsky and economist Edward

Communication Research,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 608, 1 (2006): 130-156; Porismita Borah, “Media Effects Theory,” *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, edited by Giampiero Mazzoleni, first ed. (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: Hoboken, New Jersey, 2015), pp. 2–12. For a corrective view to the revisionism, see P. R. Parsons, “The Lost Doctrine: Suggestion Theory in Early Media Effects Research,” *Journalism and Communication Monographs* 23, 2 (June 1, 2021): 80-138.

Herman, is particularly well suited to the analysis of the four radio initiatives discussed in this work and their respective outcomes. It acknowledged that governments, interest groups, elites, and corporations relied on media propaganda in an effort to manipulate the target audiences and achieve their desired and often self-serving interests.⁷ Indeed, this account demonstrates that the main actors' failure to effectively manipulate audiences and achieve self-serving objectives was often a consequence of oversimplified and misleading assumptions about how media propaganda and influence could work to persuade the intended audience.

This dissertation thus illustrates that overly simplistic utopian assumptions about the alleged power of radio to influence and drive change may inadvertently obscure contexts and strategies of greater complexity. The four radio initiatives demonstrate the impact public rhetoric and international communications can have on foreign relations. Indeed, they represented a straightforward yet powerful means to express deeply ingrained popular beliefs regarding the alleged power of radio and hopes that it could advance the cultural, political, economic, and military interests among the key players involved in the four case studies. Most importantly, these calculations and societal forces were intertwined with and often driven by the dynamics that characterized the origins and development of the Cold War.

⁷ The model, which is based on the interplay between power and wealth as well as media choices, explains how consent for specific choices or policies is constructed by manipulating the public through five filters: "ownership, advertising, media elite, flak, and the common enemy." For more information, consult Noam Chomsky, "Noam Chomsky: The five filters of the mass media," *publicreading Rooms, The art of politics and vice versa*, accessed April 5, 2025, <https://prruk.org/noam-chomsky-the-five-filters-of-the-mass-media-machine/>.

Indeed, when the United States emerged from World War II as a global power, it began competing with the Soviet Union in their respective search for security and prosperity. Both countries sought to influence the international system according to their ideals and worldviews based on two incompatible systems: the managed economy of communism and free market capitalism.⁸ As historian Walter LaFeber argued in this respect, such competition not only exacerbated mutual misunderstanding between the two superpowers. It also led to a progressive militarization in the name of their respective worldviews and foreign policy goals.⁹

In the United States, this trend began with the Truman and Eisenhower administrations when U.S. policymakers followed short-sighted policies centered on the need to contain communism abroad and at home, hoping it would eventually die out. To support such Cold War objectives and the American postwar vision that international cooperation, free trade, and capitalism would have guaranteed global stability and American influence vis-à-vis the Soviets, both administrations attempted to prevent the dire consequences of a communist victory by relying on military and economic strength.¹⁰ However, such American anti-communist rhetoric,

⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 299, 355.

⁹ Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2006*. 10th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008), pp. 55-71.

¹⁰ Ibidem, pp. 95-96. For a few seminar historians that have discussed the Cold War from the lens of U.S. economic and military interests, see Gabriel Kolko, *The Roots of American Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Power and Purpose* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) and William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*. 50th anniversary ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).

based on the idea that the United States should fight, obstruct, and deter communist regimes internationally, inevitably led to a massive reorganization of the U.S. military establishment and increased defense spending.¹¹

In this context, radio provided not only a relatively cost-effective tool to support the U.S. effort to fight communism abroad, but it was also long believed to be well-suited for realizing the American postwar vision. Specifically, shortwave radio represented an affordable and faster communications technology thanks to its ability to bounce off the ionosphere and use low power to transmit over long distances by relying on fewer antennas, towers, and other broadcasting equipment. Hence, this low-cost technology, which was first invented in the nineteenth century and then widely perfected during the twentieth century, represented a reasonable option over other more expensive military communications systems, such as longwave radio transmissions or cables.¹² At the same time, the utopian visions and predictions that radio could feasibly foster international relations, which long predated the Cold War, complemented shortwave radiotelegraphy's technical and technological advantages.¹³ Indeed, shortwave radio offered a

¹¹ Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1953* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), pp. 121-126.

¹² For more on the history and the economic advantage that shortwave represented as opposed to longwave and cable telegraphy, see Daniel R. Headrick, "Shortwave Radio and its Impact on International Telecommunications between the Wars," *History and Technology* 11 (1994), p. 21, 24-26; Smulyan, pp. 48-49.

¹³ For a few studies discussing utopian ideas about how radio and international communications could facilitate the flow of information, thus ushering a new era of cooperation and understanding

viable solution to realize the American postwar vision at a time when the American federal budget spending dramatically expanded during the Cold War, passing from 4 billion dollars during the interwar period to 85.5 billion dollars by the end of the Truman administration.¹⁴

This strategy became especially significant when Truman's successor, President Dwight Eisenhower, enunciated his New Look doctrine in 1953. Indeed, the New Look emphasized the necessity to fight the Cold War vigorously by reducing American military and defense spending.¹⁵ As historian Marc S. Gallicchio observed in this regard, the interplay between the need to pursue an aggressive military policy and balance budgetary expenses during the Eisenhower administration reflected a "genuine tension between the cold war assumptions of the Eisenhower administration and the budgetary implications of the New Look."¹⁶ This statement was especially true in Asia, where the development of the Cold War in the late 1940s took an

among disparate peoples that informed this dissertation, see Daniel R. Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunication and International Politics, 1851-1945* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 12-14; Krysko, *American Radio in China*, pp. 8-13.

¹⁴ For more information about the U.S. federal budget from 1932 to 1952, see Yaneek Mieczkowski, *Eisenhower's Sputnik Moment: The Race for Space and World Prestige* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), p. 86.

¹⁵ Richard V. Damms, *The Eisenhower Presidency, 1953-1961*. 1st ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2002), pp. 28-32.

¹⁶ Marc S. Gallicchio, "The Best Defense Is a Good Offense: The Evolution of American Strategy in East Asia, 1953-1960, in *The Great Powers in East Asia*, edited by Warren I. Cohen and Akira Iriye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 64.

unexpected turn, forcing American policymakers to shift their attention from Europe, which was the primary focus of the U.S.-Soviet confrontation, to China, Korea, and Vietnam.¹⁷

The common denominator among these three countries was an internal struggle between communist and capitalist forces, although each arrived at a point of schism in different ways.¹⁸ Among them, China represented the first country that triggered a major crisis in the postwar era.¹⁹ Having been a U.S. ally in the fight against Imperial Japan during World War II, American policymakers had initially hoped China would be the economic anchor of Asia for security and stability after the war. However, U.S. policymakers understood the fallacy of this vision well before World War II ended.²⁰ In fact, despite the massive financial aid that China received from the United States to remain in the war, years of resistance against Japan contributed to the rise of

¹⁷ Warren I. Cohen, *The Asian American Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 14.

¹⁸ There are, however, exceptions to this simplistic characterization of the Cold War, which underscore that communism was far from being a monolith. For example, the diffusion of nationalism in China, of which Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek embodied the ideal of nationalist capitalism, often hampered the success of American internationalism. Indeed, a few historians have framed the Cold War period as the product of deep contentions between Nationalist-Capitalism and Marxist-Leninism, as well as the diffusion of communism against Christianity. For more, see Parks M. Coble, *The Collapse of Nationalist China: How Chiang Kai-shek Lost China's Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), and Allan R. Millet, *The War for Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning* (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 2005).

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War*, pp. 95-96.

a communist movement in China. As it turned out, the country eventually split between the Communist forces who took control of the mainland in 1949 and the Nationalist forces who retreated to the island of Taiwan.²¹

After the Civil War in China, the struggle between communist and capitalist forces continued in Korea. The country was divided into two competing spheres of influence at the end of World War II when the Soviet Union and the United States could not agree on a unified government. As a result, the Soviet Union established a communist regime in the North, and the United States installed a capitalist government in the South. However, this artificial division of Korea teetered just one year after the communist victory in China when Soviet-supported North Korea invaded U.S.-backed South Korea in June 1950.²² Indeed, the outbreak of the Korean War, according to East Asia and International Relations scholar Michael Yahuda, signaled another major Cold War crisis that further marked “a sharp demarcation line in Northeast Asia between the communist countries on one side, and the so-called ‘free world’ on the other.”²³

Following the Korean War, Vietnam represented another hotspot of the communist-capitalist rivalry after the Vietnamese communists defeated the French in 1954. Specifically, French colonialism in Indochina became part of the Cold War struggle against communism in Asia. Nonetheless, the French defeat at the hands of Ho Chi Minh’s forces offered the United

²¹ For more information, see Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-50* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003) and Robert P. Newman, *Owen Lattimore and the “Loss” of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

²² Cohen, pp. 16-17.

²³ Michael Yahuda, *The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific, 1945-1995* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 26.

States an opportunity to intervene in Vietnam and establish a pliant non-communist government that could be manipulated, as opposed to direct control. As a result, Vietnam was temporarily divided into North and South until elections were set to unify the country in 1956.²⁴ However, despite years of fighting and strenuous U.S. attempts to aid a non-communist government in South Vietnam, the North, supported by the Soviets and Chinese, eventually prevailed by 1975. As historian Warren L. Cohen posited in this regard, the ultimate communist takeover of Vietnam would have occurred sooner, for instance, after the Vietnamese defeated the French in 1954, had not the United States intervened by deploying U.S. troops and channeling money to support Ngo Dinh Diem's and his successors' corrupt and unpopular regime in Saigon.²⁵

It was in this historical context that the United States designed international radio projects to support U.S. foreign policy in Asia. The interplay between military and soft power is indeed crucial to understanding how the United States harnessed radio in Cold War East Asia as a tool to promote internationalism and projecting U.S. "global supremacy" (to use the words of historian Stephen Wertheim) while supporting an assertive foreign and military policy that sought to contain communism.²⁶ In fact, from the 1950s to the mid-1970s, shortwave radio

²⁴ Michael H. Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945-1968*. 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), pp. 13, 18, 41.

²⁵ Cohen, *The Asian American Century*, pp. 20, 22.

²⁶ For more on soft power in international relations, see Craig Hayden, *The Rhetoric of Soft Power: Public Diplomacy in Global Contexts* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2012) and Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). For more on internationalism and the projection of

broadcasting became one of the many tools that contributed to the U.S. effort to realize the American postwar vision by extending its economic, political, military, and cultural influence to fight the expansion of communism in East Asia. The communist takeover of China, along with the subsequent conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, simply increased the urgency to develop cost-effective U.S. strategies for engaging in the Cold War. Indeed, from President Truman onward, international radio initiatives offered a strategic and money-saving tool to support an aggressive U.S. foreign policy against international communism while seemingly maximizing the chance of success in eradicating communism in Asia.²⁷

This dissertation thus intends to build on the historiographical foundation in the fields of U.S. foreign relations, radio studies, and the history of technology to explore how international radio initiatives became interconnected with exporting U.S. culture and politics in East Asia to fight communism. This trend was, however, not new in the history of the United States.

American official radio in Cold War Asia continued a historical pattern that began in World War

U.S. hegemony, see Stephen Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 2020).

²⁷ Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 94. For other seminal Cold War studies that have influenced this dissertation, see John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War*. 1st ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Justin Andrew Falk, *Upstaging the Cold War: American Dissent and Cultural Diplomacy, 1940-1960*. 1st ed. (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010); Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (London, UK: Penguin Random House, 2018).

II with the Voice of America (VOA). VOA was a venerable U.S. international radio network created in 1942 to fight Nazi propaganda, which played an essential role in extending the reach of American culture and hegemony worldwide. In truth, evidence shows that VOA accomplished this outcome not only by the strength of its signal but also by speaking about ideas, issues, and content that resonated with its respective audiences.²⁸

Self-congratulatory VOA reports of enthusiastic listeners in East Asia were not necessarily exaggerations. For example, letters from overseas fans eager to learn English praised VOA's programs "English 900" and "International Trade" in the mid-1970s, others VOA's commitment to "building a great bridge of friendship and cooperation" between Asians and Americans.²⁹ The overall body of evidence suggests that VOA enjoyed some success in engaging foreign audiences in East Asia. However, VOA was not necessarily the unqualified success story that surface appearances suggested. For instance, VOA's inability to reach and engage discontent

²⁸ For the most important works that have informed this project, see Holly Cowan Shulman, *The Voice of America: Propaganda and Democracy, 1941-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); David E. Krugler, *The Voice of America and the Domestic Propaganda Battles, 1945-1953* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000); Alan L. Heil, Jr. *Voice of America: A History* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2003); Jeremy E. Taylor, "Voice of America Chinese-Dialect Broadcasting and the Chinese Cultural Cold War, 1949-1953," in *Chineseness and the Cold War: Contested Cultures and Diaspora in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong*, edited by Jeremy E. Taylor and Lanjun Xu (London and New York: Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Asia, 2022), pp. 110-132.

²⁹ "Letters from listeners, 1974," Records of the U.S. Information Agency, Records Relating to Voice of America (VOA), 1971-1999, RG 306, Box 1, Folder Effectiveness 1974 - Listener Comments 1974, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

North Vietnamese listeners, including intellectuals, students, officials, and peasants, fell short of American beliefs that the power of VOA's radio propaganda alone could sway Hanoi to end the war in Vietnam. In fact, political scientist Gary D. Rawnsley noted that VOA's effort to win "hearts and minds" in Vietnam provided lessons about Americans' blind confidence in broadcasting's ability to influence target audiences through ideas, values, and policy objectives that mainly reflected U.S. interests, rather than the complexity and diversity of the contexts at hand. Similarly, in surveying VOA China in the 1970s, political scientist Andrew Nathan argued that Chinese listeners remained skeptical of the United States and VOA. Existing worldviews and beliefs shaped how Chinese listeners interpreted VOA's message and, knowing VOA's official affiliation with the U.S. government, they were not inclined to take what they heard at face value.³⁰

Building on these observations, this study seeks to offer new insights and perspectives on American Cold War radio in East Asia. In fact, Asia remains an under-explored field of inquiry in the historiography of Cold War radio. Few works have explored the interplay between American radio and foreign relations in the Cold War period. The relatively few exceptions include studies by Wei Lei, LaDonna Aiken, Lonán Ó Briain, Min Yen Ong, and Hey-jung Park. These accounts show how U.S. commercial and military networks affected Cold War

³⁰ For more information, see Gary D. Rawnsley, *Radio Diplomacy and Propaganda: The BBC and VOA in International Politics, 1956-1964* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 158-161. Nathan's book is primarily centered on notions of Chinese democracy. However, he also offers a brief discussion of VOA in the 1970s. For more, see Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1985), pp. 171-180.

broadcasting's evolution in China, Japan, Vietnam, and Korea.³¹ These studies, however, do not prioritize international radio as a focus of their analyses. For studies that do prioritize exploration of international radio during the Cold War, the vast majority of attention has instead been placed on the perceived successes of VOA and its offshoots, Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL), in their efforts to export purportedly universal American values of freedom, democracy, and progress in Western and Eastern Europe.³²

This dissertation aims to add depth to the understanding of U.S. foreign relations and American radio history in Cold War Asia. It does so by considering how cultural and historical contexts — as well as social, political, military, and economic forces — shaped the conception and pursuit of RFA, ROFA, AFVN, and RFT. In each instance, these projects often did more to exacerbate the misleading miscalculations among the primary actors. Such conclusions, in turn,

³¹ For the historiography on radio in Cold War Asia, see Wei Lei, *Radio and Social Transformation in China* (New York: Routledge, 2019); LaDonna Aiken, “The Far East Network Okinawa: Impact, Influence, and Personal Stories from the First 50 Years” (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2015); Lonán Ó Briain, *Voices of Vietnam: A Century of Radio, Red Music, and Revolution* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2021); Hye-jung Park, “From World War to Cold War: Music in US-Korea Relations, 1941-1960” (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2019); Lonán Ó Briain and Min Yen Ong, *Sound Communities in the Asia Pacific: Music, Media, and Technology* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).

³² The literature on VOA and RFE/RL is massive. Eugene R. Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener: An Assessment of Radio Liberty and Western Broadcasting to the USSR During the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2007); Richard H. Cummings, *Radio Free Europe's “Crusade for Freedom”: Rallying Americans Behind Cold War Broadcasting, 1950-1960* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 2010).

reflect a convergence of and contribution to the overarching themes, including how communications technology became an instrument to expand American cultural and economic hegemony in Asia, which have long infused historical writing on U.S.-foreign relations, the history of technology, and radio studies. Consequently, this project will be attuned not just to the American contexts shaping priorities and policies but to the various and diverse Asian contexts that these radio projects targeted.³³

In truth, this dissertation's reliance on American sources leaves the understanding of the Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese perspectives incomplete. A research trip to Asia proved difficult to accomplish primarily because of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which not only delayed the genesis of this work but halted any potential trips outside of the United States to consult archival material. To overcome potential research gaps, this study complemented American sources about radio during the Cold War with the literature on the cultural politics of radio in China, Korea, and Vietnam. For example, secondary sources discussing the role of radio in the Cold War China and Korea underscored how radio was a political tool to strengthen the state.³⁴ The literature on American radio in Vietnam, including oral history and radio studies on

³³ Foundational secondary sources on which this work relied to understand and analyze the diverse East Asian contexts are Jian Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997); Ian Buruma, *Inventing Japan: 1853-1964* (New York: Modern Library, 2003); Neil Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

³⁴ Yu Wang, "Listening to the Enemy: Radio Consumption and Technological Culture in Maoist China, 1949-1965," *Twentieth-Century China* 47, No. 2 (May 2022): 154-170; Guo Zhenzhi, "A

U.S. broadcasting standards during the Cold War, not only revealed how radio became a psychological tool to help American soldiers survive their tours in Vietnam. It also underscored the crucial role that radio played for the G.I. antiwar resistance as it became an instrument of participatory citizenship and rebellion during the Vietnam War.³⁵

This dissertation is thus divided into four chapters that collectively span the early 1950s through the mid-1970s, beginning with an exploration of Radio Free Asia (RFA). Chapter 1

Chronicle of Private Radio in Shanghai,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 30, No. 4 (Fall 1986): 379-392. For other studies on the uses and developments of radio in Maoist China, see Martha Kuhnhenh, “Media Liberalization” Control and Consumption of Foreign Media in North Korea, China, and East Germany,” *International Journal of Communication* 14 (2020): 1421-1437.

³⁵ For the most important works, see Meredith H. Lair, *Armed with Abundance: Consumerism and Soldiering in the Vietnam War*, 1st ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 133; Michael J. Kramer, *The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture* (Oxford, London: Oxford University Press, 2013); Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In Radio and the American Imagination*. 1st University of Minnesota Press ed. (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), especially chapter 10, “The FM Revolution,” pp. 256-283; Ian Punnett, “The Mixed Dish: Harry Shearer and the Golden Age of Radio Satire,” *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 22, No. 2 (2015): 148- 163; Christina Dunbar-Hester, *Low Power to the People: Pirates, Protest, and Politics in FM Radio Activism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2014); Lawrence C. Soley, *Free Radio: Electronic Civil Disobedience* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999); Douglas J. Bradley and Craig Hansen Werner, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War*, edited by Christian G. Appy and Edwin A. Martini (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015); Lydia Fish, “Informal Communication Systems in the Vietnam War: A Case Study in Technology, Folklore and Popular Culture,” *New Directions in Folklore*, Issue 7 (2003): 1-2.

explores this CIA radio operation that sought to duplicate and outmatch VOA as an anti-communist propaganda tool that targeted mainland China during the Korean War.³⁶ The CIA argued that RFA could be harnessed as a foreign policy tool to expand U.S. influence into communist China and achieve better results than VOA. According to the CIA, VOA was not encouraging communist defection because it bore an explicit affiliation with the U.S. government that hampered its credibility in the eyes of targeted audiences. Although the execution of the RFA initiative was poor, the CIA argument reflected how understandings of international communications had developed in the early 1950s. Indeed, the CIA claimed that radio had the power to influence, but only if deployed effectively, taking into account an audience's perspective and assumptions. For this reason, the CIA insisted that a covert operation such as RFA, stripped of any governmental links that might hinder its effectiveness in engaging potential Chinese listeners, was therefore needed. Eventually, RFA's termination in 1953 was a combination of several factors. The CIA's poor strategy and execution of its initiative led to the CIA-State Department rivalry, which was one turf in which RFA was a symbol. Altogether, these factors contributed to RFA's end after only three years on the air.

Building on the story of RFA, chapter 2 focuses on Radio of Free Asia (ROFA) during the Vietnam War. ROFA was a South Korean radio project intentionally modeled after RFA to create the impression that ROFA was an American radio initiative trying to project an image to

³⁶ An earlier version of this chapter was published as an article on Taylor & Francis Online. For the Version of Records, see "'This is Radio Free Asia': The Story of a Failed CIA Radio Operation to Disseminate Anti-Communist Propaganda into Communist China During the Korean War," Roberta Meloni, *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, © copyright # [2024], reprinted by permission of Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Taylor & Francis Group, <http://www.tandfonline.com>.

disseminate anti-communist propaganda in China and Korea as a cover for its true objectives. From 1964 to 1975, Unification Church (UC) Reverend Sun Myung Moon, UC member and Moon's right-hand Bo Hi Pak, and South Korean President Park Chung Hee shaped ROFA into a lobbying tool that targeted Americans. Indeed, ROFA tapped into Americans' fears of communism and inflated expectations about the power of radio to influence in order to penetrate U.S. politics and ultimately mobilize U.S. financial support for Moon's Unification Church and Park's regime. Thus, this chapter hinges on another example where a foreign power, South Korea, tried to use radio and ideas about its potential to influence, with the only difference being that Americans are the intended target in this case study. Eventually, the South Korean effort unraveled in 1976 when the "Koreagate" scandal exposed South Korean machinations surrounding ROFA and the political lobby in the United States.³⁷ Nonetheless, the strategies through which Korean actors played on U.S. domestic politics and Cold War fears to achieve their self-interests again reflect the more sophisticated understandings of up-to-date theories about mass communication and how to influence target audiences.

³⁷ Koreagate was a political scandal involving U.S. Congress members and South Korean politicians accused of bribing for South Korean objectives in the United States. For more information, see Shelley Sang-Hee Lee, "The Party's Over: Sex, Gender, and Orientalism in the Koreagate Scandal of the 1970s," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 39, No. 3 (2018): 1-28; Bruce Cumings, "Bringing Korea Back In: Structured Absence, Glaring Presence, and Invisibility," in *Pacific Passage: The Study of American-East Asian Relations on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Warren I. Cohen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 337-374; Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), pp. 445-447.

Chapter 3 shifts to how the American Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN) intertwined with the American military presence in Vietnam. This chapter, which is further enriched by the first-hand experiences of U.S. veterans, AFVN deejays, and radio engineers, details how the U.S. military sought to export American consumer culture to Vietnam as the U.S. involvement in the war escalated from the mid-1960s. Indeed, the chapter analyzes how AFVN's music, radio shows, news, television, and sports events became consumer commodities that paralleled U.S. domestic sounds and entertainment to help American soldiers cope with their tour and ideally prevent dissent as opposition to the war grew by the late 1960s. However, the U.S. military effort to replicate the substance of mainstream U.S. broadcasting with AFVN, but stripped of explicit controversial content that might undermine support for the war, fell short. Oversimplified understandings of the reach and appeal of mainstream broadcasting in the United States clashed with the actual demographics of those comprising the U.S. military in Vietnam and those who listened to AFVN. As a result, AFVN's misreading of the context in Vietnam did not match what made mainstream American broadcasting profitable and popular in the United States.

The shortcomings of AFVN's programming, combined with the disillusionment of American soldiers serving in Vietnam, fueled an unexpected example of radio dissent. Chapter 4 explores this example by telling the story of Radio First Termer (RFT). Born as the unintended consequence of the U.S. military attempt to mediate insurrection and subordination in Vietnam through AFVN, RFT was an unauthorized American radio show in Saigon that mocked the U.S. military in Vietnam and AFVN programs for twenty-one days (January 1-21, 1971). Its architect, former United States Air Force Sergeant Clyde David DeLay, Jr., under his on-air handle "Dave Rabbit," operated RFT with two anonymous associates referred to as "Pete Sadler," who was his studio engineer, and "Nguyen," RFT's signature female voice. By defying the American on-air

format and style, RFT combined profanity with satirical gags, drug-oriented songs, and sex jokes to lampoon the U.S. military. It dramatized the disillusionment, boredom, and dissent within the ranks that many American soldiers manifested as they came to terms with their war experience in Vietnam. In fact, this chapter, which also draws on histories, illustrates how radio technology in the hands of disillusioned soldiers became an instrument of participatory citizenship that tried to challenge the U.S. military authorities in Vietnam. At the same time, RFT captures the Zeitgeist that many Americans came to share on the home front by the mid-1960s and 1970s. A closer look at this example of dissent invites a discussion of what RFT tried to accomplish in Vietnam and the larger debates about obscenity, subversion, and radio satire that gained momentum in the U.S. during the 1960s and 1970s.

In conclusion, this dissertation strives to elaborate on works that have explored the interplay between technology and U.S. foreign relations through the lens of societal forces and other calculations that have guided radio's developments and uses in the history of U.S.-East Asia relations.³⁸ Furthermore, in taking up on Susan J. Douglas and Susan Smulyan's call to analyze societal forces and cultural influences in shaping radio technology across time and

³⁸ For a few studies exploring the interplay between technology and U.S. foreign relations, see Krysko, *American Radio in China*; Krysko, *Contested Airwaves: American Radio at Home and Abroad, 1914-1946* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2025); Hugh G. J. Aitken, *The Continuous Wave: Technology and American Radio, 1900-1932* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014); James Schwoch, *Global TV: New Media and the Cold War, 1946-69* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Jessica Teisch, *Engineering Nature: Water, Development, and the Global Spread of American Environmental Expertise* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

cultures, the four case studies demonstrate that Cold War radio initiatives failed in their original intent or had unintended consequences because the primary actors involved in those radio projects, blinded by their self-serving interests and unrealistic hopes, repeatedly oversimplified and misread the several contexts into which their initiatives were situated and operated.

Chapter 2 - “This is Radio Free Asia”: “A Feeble Echo of VOA”

It was 10:30 p.m. in China and 6:30 a.m. in San Francisco when Radio Free Asia (RFA) transmitted its first broadcast on September 4, 1951.¹ RFA started its activities from a rented studio at KNBC in San Francisco under the leadership of its director John W. Elwood, the manager of the commercial radio station and former National Broadcasting Company executive.² At the start of its airtime, RFA aired the following message, “This is Radio Free Asia . . . the voice of free men speaking to the people of Asia.” In the words of the announcer, RFA was a project of the Committee for a Free Asia (CFA), a “new voice” that targeted mainland China to disseminate anti-communist propaganda and infuse the Chinese audience with “peace and

¹ Richard H. Cummings, “The CIA and the Committee for Free Asia under Project DTPILLAR,” Sources and Methods, A Blog of the History and Public Policy Program, Wilson Center, October 19, 2020, accessed July 26, 2023, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/cia-and-committee-free-asia-under-project-dtpillar> and “Radio ‘Free Asia’ Commences Beaming Programs to Chinese,” *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, September 6, 1951. An earlier version of this chapter was published as an article on Taylor & Francis Online. For the Version of Records, see “‘This is Radio Free Asia’: The Story of a Failed CIA Radio Operation to Disseminate Anti-Communist Propaganda into Communist China During the Korean War,” Roberta Meloni, *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, © copyright # [2024], reprinted by permission of Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Taylor & Francis Group, <http://www.tandfonline.com>.

² KNBC belonged to the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) network. NBC is America’s first commercial network founded in 1926 when the development of broadcast industry was on the rise in the United States. For more detail, see Michael Henry et al., *NBC America’s Network* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

international friendship against the brutal forces of . . . Imperialism.”³ In truth, RFA was a covert operation sponsored by the newly established CIA in 1947 and designed with the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) — the CIA division dedicated to political and psychological warfare — to support the U.S. war effort during the Korean War.⁴ Nonetheless, RFA failed to fulfill its mission after three years of operation.

But why was RFA such a short-lived CIA project? First, the creation of RFA reflected a particular historical moment of the early Cold War years when a new phase in U.S.-China relations began in 1949. Communist revolutionaries led by Mao Zedong took control of the mainland over the U.S.-backed Nationalist regime led by Chiang Kai-shek, who retreated with his forces to Taiwan.⁵ The communist takeover in China represented a severe blow to the U.S. It

³ The original script was most likely broadcast in Chinese. Indeed, for their programs, CFA relied on Chinese students and other Asian emigres either in the United States or working at CFA’s overseas branches. For more, consult “Attached Radio Free Asia Script” in Memorandum to Mr. Devine from W. Bradley Connors, October 15, 1952, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, “OPC Form, Project Outline Clearance Sheet,” 6 September 1950, *Project DTPILLAR*, DTPILLAR Vol.2, Special Collection, Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act, document number: 5197c267993294098d50e8f6, accessed July 27, 2023, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DTPILLAR%20%20%20VOL.%202_0052.pdf.

⁵ The victory marked the end of the Civil War in China that opposed the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) led by Mao Zedong and the Nationalist Party, Kuomintang (KMT), led by Chiang Kai-shek. The Chinese Civil War began soon after World War II, although both sides had fought back and

offered a call to arms for many Republicans who blamed President Truman for his alleged soft line against communism and, consequently, the “loss” of China.⁶ Then, in 1950, came the Korean War, when Soviet-supported North Korea crossed the 38th parallel. The U.S. intervened on South Korea’s side almost immediately after North Korea invaded the South, and the U.N. vote followed thereafter. China also entered the war on behalf of North Korea only after U.S. forces crossed the 38th parallel and were advancing northward toward the Yalu River and the Chinese border. In this dismay, promoting American economic and cultural influence was imperative vis-à-vis the growing spread of communism in East Asia.

It is within the U.S.-China animosity surrounding the Korean War that the fledgling CIA designed RFA as a radio operation to fight communism in China akin to the State Department-run Voice of America (VOA). In obscuring RFA’s official government connection, the CIA argued that the covertness of their efforts offered a greater chance of success than the explicitly U.S. government-affiliated VOA. Indeed, VOA was a well-known U.S. international radio

forth since the 1920s. For more information, see Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-50* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

⁶ Like South Korea, China was an American protectorate. During the Chinese Civil War, the U.S. sided with Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Party as its former World War II ally and the only feasible option to prevent communist control of China. Thus, when China fell communist in 1949, Truman’s China policy was attacked for being too soft and tolerating communism. Statewide, his popularity declined drastically and cost him reelection in the 1952 presidential elections. For more, see Robert P. Newman, *Owen Lattimore and the “Loss” of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

service that began its transmission to China in the early 1940s.⁷ Hence, in harnessing RFA as a foreign policy tool to expand U.S. influence into communist China, the CIA claimed it could do a better job with radio than the State Department.

Though the initiative was short-lived, the CIA's argument was not entirely devoid of substance. In reflecting how understandings of international communications evolved by the 1950s, the CIA contended that radio could wield considerable influence when used effectively, particularly by taking the audience's perspective and assumptions into account. Indeed, by the time the CIA established RFA in 1951, scholars had already begun to question the pre-World War II theory regarding the direct effects of mass media, commonly known as the *magic bullet* or *hypodermic needle*. This theory, which suggested that mass media like radio wielded all-encompassing power, had already faced criticism for its misleading portrayal of the media's direct effects on supposedly pliable and passive audiences.⁸

⁷ Whereas President Truman founded the CIA in 1947 with the National Security Act, the State Department had a much longer history and reputation, presiding over U.S. foreign policy since 1789. President Franklin D. Roosevelt founded VOA in 1941 after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. VOA was originally supervised by the Office of War Information until the State Department took over in 1945. For a work discussing VOA and radio propaganda, see Holly Cowan Shulman, *The Voice of America: Propaganda and Democracy, 1941-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990). For the foundation of VOA, see Mark G. Pomar, *Cold War Radio: The Russian Broadcasts of the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Liberty* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Potomac Books, 2022), especially pp. 9-66.

⁸ For the most important works, see Stephen H. Chaffee and John L. Hochheimer, "The Beginnings of Political Communication Research in the United States: Origins of the 'Limited Effects' Model" in *The Media Revolution in America and in Western Europe*, edited by Everett M. Rogers and

With the benefit of historical hindsight, RFA illustrates that simplistic public utterances about media being all-powerful tools for influencing the intended audience may conceal more complex strategies. As historian Michael Hunt noted, public rhetoric should not be cynically interpreted as “a screen, tool, or ornament” but “a form of communication, rich in symbols and mythology” that “must draw on values and concerns widely shared and easily understood by its audience.”⁹ The CIA’s self-serving argument to establish RFA reflected a substantive position on how international communications worked and why it had the potential to be more successful than VOA. It reflected a simple way to articulate deeply rooted popular convictions about the power of mass media that, in turn, helped the CIA to gain legitimacy vis-à-vis the more venerable State Department and its VOA. Indeed, it was a potentially smart approach that anticipated the ideas later articulated in the propaganda model as the CIA relied on anti-communist radio propaganda in an effort to manipulate target audiences and achieve its self-serving interests.

Francis Balle (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1985), pp. 267-296; Deborah Lubken, “Remembering the Straw Man: The Travels and Adventures of Hypodermic” in *The History of Media and Communication Research – Contested Memories*, edited by David W. Park and Jefferson Pooley (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 19-42; Jefferson Pooley, “Fifteen Pages that Shook the Field: ‘Personal influence,’ Edward Shils, and the Remembered History of Mass Communication Research,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 608, No. 1 (2006): 130-156. P. R. Parsons, “The Lost Doctrine: Suggestion Theory in Early Media Effects Research,” *Journalism and Communication Monographs* 23, No. 2 (June 1, 2021): 80-138.

⁹ Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*. 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 15.

According to State, there was no need for RFA because VOA had dedicated broadcasts beaming China since World War II.¹⁰ The CIA, however, disagreed. VOA was not carrying out a satisfactory job in encouraging communist defection, as the recent U.S. blows in China and Korea demonstrated. In fact, the CIA's claim that VOA's well-known ties with the U.S. government could hamper its credibility in the eyes of targeted audiences speaks to political scientist Andrew Nathan's argument when he surveyed VOA listeners in China during the 1970s. Nathan argued that Chinese listeners remained skeptical of the United States and VOA, despite listening regularly, because existing worldviews and beliefs shaped how those Chinese listeners made sense of the content rather than changing their values and behaviors. In short, knowing VOA's official affiliation with the U.S., Chinese listeners were not inclined to take what they heard at face value.¹¹ CIA's proponents of RFA anticipated Nathan's findings.

Indeed, the CIA insisted that RFA could act as the Asian counterpart of another CIA-sponsored radio operation: Radio Free Europe (RFE). It is no coincidence that the main link between the CIA and RFA's sponsoring committee, the Committee for a Free Asia (CFA), was the Crusade for Freedom (CFF). As *The New York Times* reported in 1951, CFA received

¹⁰ Since its foundation in 1942, VOA extended the reach of U.S. culture and hegemony worldwide. For some seminal works, see Holly Cowan Shulman, *The Voice of America: Propaganda and Democracy, 1941-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); David E. Krugler, *The Voice of America and the Domestic Propaganda Battles, 1945-1953* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000); Alan L. Heil, Jr. *Voice of America: A History* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2003).

¹¹ In his work, Nathan devotes a brief discussion to VOA in a study primarily focused on Chinese notions of democracy. For more, see Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1985), pp. 171-180.

\$500,000 from Crusade for Freedom to initiate the RFA venture.¹² Headed by General Lucius D. Clay, a multi-decorated World War II veteran and senior officer of the U.S. Army, CFF was a purportedly private organization that concealed the CIA funding to generate domestic support for American Cold War policies from 1950 to 1960.¹³ Under CFF, a group of prominent diplomats, lawyers, philanthropists, and businessmen, including CIA Director Allen Dulles, and Foreign Service Officer George F. Kennan, founded the Committee for Free Europe in April 1949. Later renamed the National Committee for Free Europe (NCFE), this committee was a CIA-operated front that relied on RFE to broadcast anti-communist news and commentary to all Soviet satellite states since 1949.¹⁴ Consequently, the CIA established CFA to act as a counterpart of NCFE in

¹² “Radio Free Asia Set Up on Coast,” *The New York Times*, September 2, 1951, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹³ General Clay was appointed the first national chairman of the Crusade for Freedom under President Eisenhower in 1950. For more information, see Stephen E. Ambrose, “The Man Who Gave US West Germany: LUCIUS D. CLAY An American Life,” *New York Times*, 29 July 1990, p. BR13, and Troy Sacquety, “Gen. Lucius D. Clay, a ‘Brilliant Administrator,’ *Special Warfare* 31, No. 4 (2018): 5, accessed May 21, 2024, https://www.swcs.mil/Portals/111/31-4_OCT_DEC_2018_web.pdf.

¹⁴ RFE employed émigrés from Eastern Europe to persuade listeners in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania to defect from Soviet communism. For more, consult Central Intelligence Agency, “Memorandum Allen W. Dulles for the Secretary of Defense,” October 1, 1953, Crusade for freedom, General CIA Records, CREST, document CIA-

Asia, and RFA to mimic the American anti-communist radio propaganda that RFE broadcast into Eastern Europe.¹⁵

Hence, confident that their new radio operation could achieve better results than VOA in China, the CIA launched RFA in September 1951. However, according to VOA director Foy D. Kohler, the CIA did so without receiving authorization from the State Department's International Broadcasting Division (IBD) "in any way, shape, or form."¹⁶ As a result, departmental conflicts between the CIA and the State Department over RFA, rooted in the CIA's attempt to exploit popular misconceptions about the power of radio and encroach on the State Department's territory by duplicating VOA, contributed to RFA's demise after only three years of activities.

“Let Freedom Ring”: Origins of RFA

The origins of RFA began in 1951 when, after the outbreak of the Korean War, the CIA established this covert radio venture to encourage communist defection. However, the CIA was not new to this type of radio initiative. In 1950, just a year before establishing RFA, the CIA had

RDP80R01731R001300220014-3, FOIA, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP80R01731R001300220014-3.pdf>.

¹⁵ See Donald Feinstein, “Free Voices in the Battle for Men’s Minds,” *Journalism Quarterly* 31, No. 2 (1954): 193-200.

¹⁶ Kohler served as VOA director under President Truman from 1949 to 1952, see “Memorandum Radio Free Asia to Thurman L. Barnard from Foy D. Kohler,” September 3, 1951, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

founded Radio Free Europe (RFE), a covert radio project that targeted the Soviet Union and its satellite countries during the Cold War. In some respects, RFE worked in tandem with, but differently than, the State Department-run and venerable Voice of America (VOA). VOA was the voice of the U.S. government and relied on broadcasts intended to extend American culture and influence. It did so through radio broadcasts, such as editorials, American music, political comments, news coverage, and cultural and English-language programs centered on the life and history of the United States. Hence, the primary intent was to extend the purportedly universal U.S. values of freedom and impart a positive image of the United States vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.¹⁷

Like VOA, RFE also promoted freedom and countered the expansion of communism in the Soviet Union and its satellites in Europe. However, it did so by being a surrogate station and working as a “home service abroad.” Specifically, it broadcast domestic news from each targeted country to counter the communist propaganda and media services of the communist government.¹⁸ Thus, the CIA envisioned RFA as an extension of RFE, primarily focused on combating communism and communist propaganda in mainland China. Similar to RFE, RFA was intended to broadcast news and political commentaries that refuted communist propaganda

¹⁷ For more, see Mark G. Pomar, *Cold War Radio: The Russian Broadcasts of the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Potomac Books, 2002), and Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

¹⁸ For more, see Donald Feinstein, “Free Voices in the Battle for Men’s Minds,” *Journalism Quarterly* 31, No. 2 (1954): 193-200, and Pomar, p. xiii.

to promote defection from communism. However, in contrast to RFE, the CIA's strategy for designing RFA was executed so poorly that it could not match RFE's effectiveness and, more importantly, failed to be sufficiently distinct from VOA China. This shortfall is one of the main reasons why the CIA-sponsored RFE lasted longer and without the surrounding controversy than its RFA counterpart.

To set the early stages of the RFA operation, the CIA and OPC appointed Brayton Wilbur as the chairman of the Committee for a Free Asia (CFA) executive board.¹⁹ Wilbur was known to the San Francisco entrepreneurial scene for being president and co-founder of the Wilbur-Ellis Company, a San Francisco import-export firm of industrial and agricultural products founded in 1921. He was also a fervid anti-communist who believed in the U.S. mission to rid Asia of the evil of communism. Indeed, his staunch anti-communism influenced the CFA's ideological orientation from the outset.²⁰ As he stated in the foreword to the CFA prospectus of May 1951,

¹⁹ The CFA board of directors included relevant industrials, attorneys, banking executives, and civic leaders. For more information, see Central Intelligence Agency, "OPC Form, Project Outline Clearance Sheet," 6 September 1950, Project DTPILLAR, DTPILLAR Vol.2, Special Collection, Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act, document 5197c267993294098d50e8f6, accessed July 27, 2023, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DTPILLAR%20%20%20VOL.%202_0052.pdf; "Information from the Committee for a Free Asia, Inc., Background Memorandum," September 28, 1951, Alfred Kohlberg Collection, Box 37, Folder Committee for a Free Asia, Hoover Institution Library and Archives; "Information from the Committee for Free Asia, Inc., C. F. A. membership," March 1953, Box 66, Folder IPO-P MacKnight Committee for Free Asia (1953), General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

the committee's purpose was to create a line of communication between Asia and the West to expose Asians to Western culture and ideals.²¹ This exchange would have, in turn, benefitted Asians and Americans alike. In Wilbur's view, the primary CFA objective was "to keep these Asian nations free and to push back Communism where it has gained entry."²²

Under Wilbur's leadership, the CFA executive board selected George H. Greene, Jr. as the temporary CFA president for his background in Asian Affairs. A graduate of the University of Michigan, Greene gathered solid experience in Asian Affairs, working for twenty years for the

²⁰ Among his professional experiences, Wilbur was President of the World Affairs Council of Northern California, a member of the northern California sponsoring committee of the American Foundation, Vice President of the Japan Society of San Francisco, trustee of Lingnan University of Canton in China, and founder of The Asia Foundation, when CFA changed its name to The Asia Foundation in 1954. To know more about Wilbur's career, see "Office Memorandum to Mr. Barrett, from William C. Johnstone, Jr.," October 5, 1951, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; and "Brayton Wilbur, Sr.," accessed May 18, 2024, <https://asiafoundation.org/people/brayton-wilbur-sr/>.

²¹ "Prospectus Committee for a Free Asia, Inc.," May 1951, Inez G. Richardson Papers, Box 4, Folder 4:2 Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

²² Brayton Wilbur, "The Committee for Free Asia," excerpts from *The Far East Advertiser*, October 1951, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

National City Bank in China and as Chief of the Economic Cooperation Association (ECA) China Mission.²³ According to Greene, the ideal CFA president had to possess a sound background in Far Eastern Affairs and a high sensitivity to Asian and international issues. A candidate lacking these skills, in Greene's words, would have resulted "in a weakening of the organization."²⁴ Greene's suggestions aligned with Alan Valentine, a respected American educator and civic leader, who replaced Greene in December 1951. Like Greene, Valentine had also served as Chief of ECA in 1949 before being appointed Director of the Economic Stabilization Agency from 1950 to 1951.²⁵ As CFA chairman Wilbur heralded to *The New York*

²³ ECA China mission was a U.S. agency that sought to improve Sino-American relations in the early stages of the Cold War. Greene held other leadership positions in several educational institutions of Shanghai as chairman, president, and director of, respectively, the Shanghai American School, the American Junior Chamber of Commerce, and the U.S. Educational Foundation in China. For more information, consult "Information from the Committee for a Free Asia, Inc., Background Memorandum," September 28, 1951, Alfred Kohlberg Collection, Box 37, Folder Committee for a Free Asia, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

²⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, "Memorandum to Brayton Wilbur from George H. Greene, Jr.," 20 September 1951, Project DTPILLAR, DTPILLAR Vol.1, Special Collection, Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act, document 5197c267993294098d50e8fd, accessed 27 July 2023, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DTPILLAR%20%20%20VOL.%201_0044.pdf.

²⁵ "Dr. Alan Valentine Selected. Free Asia Group Picks President," *Palo Alto Times*, December 13, 1951, Inez G. Richardson Papers, Box 4, Folder 4:2 Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives. A few documents report that Valentine was also assisted by Major General Ray Tyson Maddocks, who served as Chief of Staff of the U.S. forces in China from 1943 to 1946. For more information, consult "Copy for release A.M. Tuesday,

Times in September 1951, the CFA was finally ready to launch RFA to pierce “the Iron Curtain of communism in Asia with factual, accurate and truthful news.”²⁶ Thus, under the CFA’s slogan “Let Freedom Ring,” RFA was finally born.²⁷

The collaboration among the CFA, Hoover Library at Stanford University, and former KNBC staff was essential to set in motion the RFA initiative. Between June and July 1951, CFA personnel consultant Emmett F. McCarthy wrote two letters to Hoover Library’s executive assistant Inez G. Richardson. These letters inquired about the professional skills and references of two applicants, James Day and Richard Bertrandias, as potential candidates for a “position of responsibility” at Radio Free Asia.²⁸ Besides being the executive assistant of the Hoover Library, Inez G. Richardson was a prominent radio expert at Stanford University. After a stint at KNBC

Sept. 16, 1952,” September 15, 1952, Committee for a Free Asia News, Alfred Kohlberg Collection, Box 146, Folder Committee for a Free Asia, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

²⁶ “Radio Free Asia Set Up on Coast,” *The New York Times*, September 2, 1951, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²⁷ Flyer “Asia in the World Today,” Box 65, Folder Committee for a Free Asia (1952), General Records of the Department of State, 1763-2002, Subject Files, 1956-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²⁸ The letters do not disclose for which positions Day and Bertrandias applied, see “Letters to Inez Richardson from Emmett F. McCarthy,” June 25, 1951 and July 16, 1951, Inez G. Richardson Collection, Box 4; Folder 4:2 Inez Richardson Papers, Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia, 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

radio in San Francisco in the 1930s, she held a variety of job positions for the Hoover Library and Stanford University, including serving as a faculty member of the Radio-Television Institute.

However, it is worth noting that it was unusual for a woman to serve in the capacity that Richardson did. Her position particularly highlighted how female broadcast journalists progressed in the broadcasting industry, which was primarily male-dominated. The explosion of radio in the 1920s and the subsequent development of national radio, which became a profitable business by the 1930s, created new job opportunities in the American broadcasting industry and for women in American society. In fact, it was under the pressures of the Great Depression and later World War II that many American women, like Richardson, entered the workforce and took over jobs traditionally held by men, who were sent to the fronts to fight.²⁹ Edythe Meserand, a pioneer woman in radio and television journalism, is another example comparable to Richardson's case.³⁰ Both women attained a high level of respect in broadcasting journalism, thus proving a great example for other women who later entered the profession.

In fact, it was thanks to her reputation that Richardson became acquainted with Bertrandias and Day during her years at KNBC and Stanford. For instance, in reply to McCarthy's letters, Richardson claimed that she first met Bertrandias when he was a radio

²⁹ James C. Foust and Katherine A. Bradshaw, "Something for the Boys: Framing Images of Women in Broadcasting Magazine in the 1950s," *Journalism History* 33, No. 2 (2007): 93-100.

³⁰ Meserand began her radio career at NBC in 1926. She later worked at WOR-Radio in New York and became the founder of the American Women in Radio and Television, an association dedicated to women's advancement in broadcasting journalism. For more information, see Merrilee A. Cox, "Edythe Meserand: Radio Pioneer and First President of American Women in Radio and Television" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2014).

writer-producer at KNBC and served as a radio writing instructor for the Stanford-NBC summer school. Similarly, she met Day when he was public service director for KNBC and kept working with him when he became co-director of the Stanford-NBC Summer Radio Institute in 1943.³¹

Richardson held both candidates in high regard. Beyond their shared work experiences at KNBC and Stanford-NBC summer program, Richardson praised Bertrandias and Day for their great work and organizational skills, not to mention their keen interest in international and Asian affairs. To make their credentials even more appealing to McCarthy, Richardson recommended Bertrandias and Day because of their previous work experience in Japan. Both men had indeed worked for the Broadcasting Division of the Supreme Commander for Allied Powers (SCAP), an executive institution of the U.S. government that reorganized the Japanese broadcasting system during the post-war U.S. occupation of the country.³² As it turned out, in 1951, Bertrandias

³¹ Richardson's connections with West Coast flagship KNBC became crucial when Stanford University decided to launch a summer program in 1943 to train radio personnel in collaboration with the NBC Summer Radio Institute, see "Richardson to McCarthy," June 29, 1951, and undated, Correspondence, Inez G. Richardson Collection, Box 4, Folder 4:2 Inez Richardson Papers, Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia, 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives. Richardson's reply to McCarthy's July 16, 1951 inquiry is undated. However, he likely received Richardson's letter before the end of July since the *Palo Alto Times* reported Bertrandias' nomination as the RFA program director on July 28, 1951.

³² SCAP's main objective was to reorganize the broadcasting system of Japan as part of the broader U.S. effort to rebuild Japan according to a pro-Western type of government. The U.S. viewed mass media, and radio in particular, as an essential tool for curbing Japanese militarism and instilling potentially beneficial U.S. values that embodied the ideals of democracy. To satisfy the interests of the Japanese people, broadcasting operations remained under the control of Japanese

became RFA's acting program director while Day was appointed executive assistant to RFA director Elwood.³³

Furthermore, the friendship between Richardson, Day, and Bertrandias — and by extension — the collaboration between CFA and Stanford proved quintessential to hiring RFA personnel. Although there is not enough evidence to know how many Stanford alumni asked Richardson for a recommendation to find employment at RFA or whether they were eventually hired, some sources nonetheless suggest the extent of this connection. For example, on 15 December 1952, Yoko Nakai, a young woman from Yokohama, a city 24 miles south of Tokyo, corresponded with Richardson, manifesting her interest in working for RFA: "I filed an application a few days ago and waiting for their final decision. I was requested to mention names of people who will be able to make references for me, and I wrote your name."³⁴ A week later,

broadcasters, while U.S. authorities acted as their advisers in developing a broadcasting structure that would seek to spread the ideals of democracy among the Japanese people. For more information, see Catherine A. Luther and Douglas A. Boyd, "American Occupation Control over Broadcasting in Japan, 1945-1952," *Journal of Communication* 47, No. 2 (Spring 1997): 39-59.

³³ Evidence shows that Paul Speegle, another Stanford University graduate, became RFA assistant program director on May 14, 1952. For more, consult "Letter to Alfred Kohlberg from Stuart R. Ward," May 14, 1952, Alfred Kohlberg Collection, Box 146, Folder Radio Free Asia, Hoover Institution Library and Archives; "Radio Free Asia picks pair of top executives," *Palo Alto Times*, July 28, 1951, Newspaper; Inez G. Richardson Collection, Box 4, Folder 4:2 Inez Richardson Papers, Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia, 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

³⁴ The letter does not specify for which position Miss Nakai applied, see "Letter to Inez G. Richardson from Yoko Nakai," December 15, 1952, Inez G. Richardson Collection, Box 4, Folder

Richardson wrote to Day recommending Miss Yoko Nakai. As the letter reads, Richardson supported Nakai's candidacy because she had studied at Stanford and had participated in the Summer Radio Institute. As Richardson put it, "She is an intelligent young woman whom you might find very helpful. Perhaps Dick [Bertrandias] can interview her and see whether she can fit your needs."³⁵

Besides drawing from its alumni, the collaboration with Stanford was crucial to producing the CFA propaganda material and setting the stage for RFA. On September 5, 1951, associate researcher of the Hoover Library, and former U.S. Consul General in Taiwan, George H. Kerr underscored this link in a memorandum he sent to Richardson. In this document, Kerr proposed to continue collaborating with CFA to provide background information and sources for the committee's activities and RFA broadcasts.³⁶ Indeed, CFA enjoyed special access to the extensive Chinese collection of the Hoover Library. This connection is further emphasized in another memorandum dated December 11, 1951, in which renowned historian of China Mary C. Wright, who was then curator of the Chinese collection at Hoover Library in Stanford, suggested

4:2 Inez Richardson Papers, Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia, 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

³⁵ "Letter to James Day from Inez G. Richardson," December 22, 1952, Inez G. Richardson Collection, Box 4, Folder 4:2 Inez Richardson Papers, Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia, 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

³⁶ "Memorandum to Inez G. Richardson from George H. Kerr," September 5, 1951, Inez G. Richardson Collection, Box 4, Folder 4:2 Inez Richardson Papers, Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia, 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

to CFA staff director Dr. Garrison to agree on a lump sum of about \$75 to be paid monthly for expenses.³⁷

Most of the CFA propaganda material produced in collaboration with Stanford was then used to promote CFA's activities, including RFA, by voicing the need to fight communism in Asia. Examples of flyers bore eye-catching captions with various fronts, generally capitalized with keywords highlighted in italics, such as "A Free Asia in a Free World," "A NEW APPROACH TO THE VITAL NEED FOR *Freedom in Asia*," "INDIVIDUAL AND NATIONAL FREEDOM *in Asia*," "Let Freedom Ring, A MESSAGE TO ALL *Asian Student* IN THE UNITED STATES."³⁸ To evoke a link between freedom and patriotism, these flyers had blue and white or red and white backgrounds, mirroring the colors of the American flag. All were branded with the CFA logo, and some even featured a message from CFA chairman Wilbur in the forward to these flyers. Considering his well-known reputation in northern California, Wilbur's words were indispensable to legitimize the CFA posture to the readers' eyes and solicit its alleged attempt to establish a bridge of communication between "the people of Asia and the people of the free world everywhere."³⁹

³⁷ The first name of Dr. Garrison does not appear in the document. For more, consult "Memorandum to Dr. Garrison from Mary Wright," December 11, 1951, Inez G. Richardson Collection, Box 4, Folder 4:2 Inez Richardson Papers, Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia, 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

³⁸ Brochure "Let Freedom Ring, Committee for a free Asia, inc., a message to all Asian Students in the United States," undated, Alfred Kohlberg Collection, Box 37, Folder Committee for a Free Asia, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

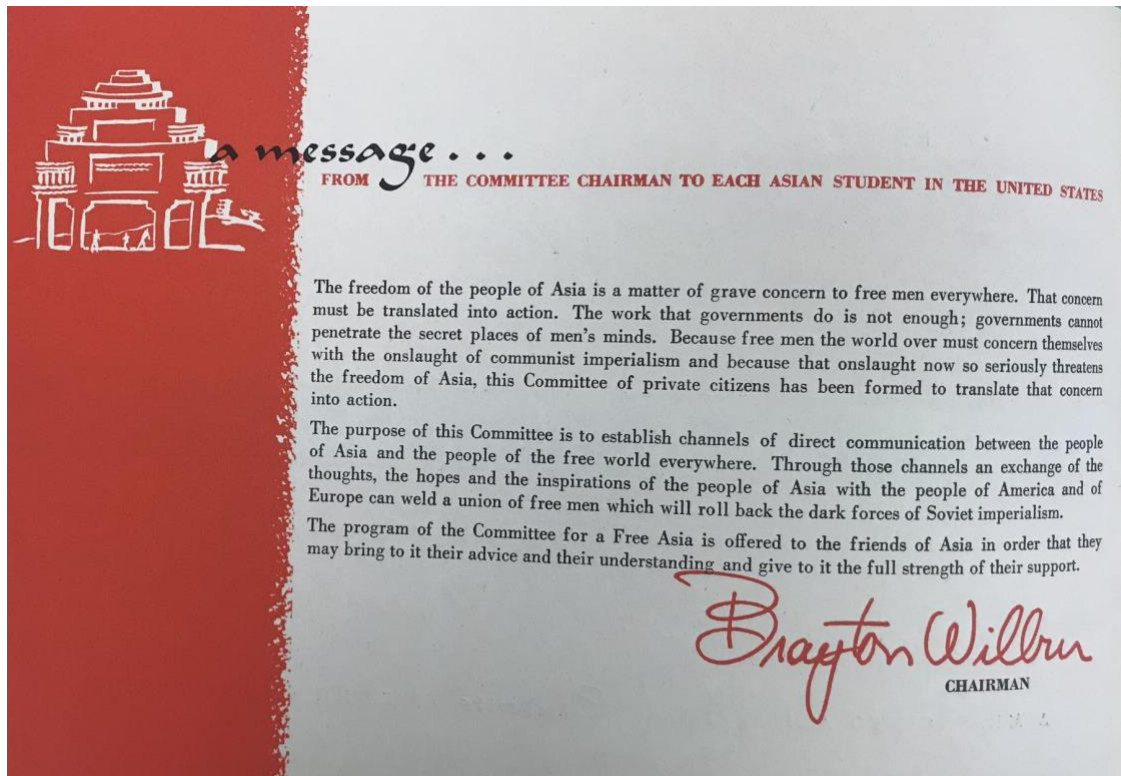


Figure 1 CFA Promotional Material. Alfred Kohlberg Collection. Hoover Library Institution and Archives.

This strategy to create propaganda materials emphasizing an association with the United States was clever. It was a way to underscore an American connection, just not an official one. Furthermore, the effort to conceal official ties with the U.S. government says something about how the CIA and CFA actors believed Americans were viewed positively in the larger world. The assumption that being American was good complements what cultural historian Laura Belmonte called “selling the American way of life.” As she argued, U.S. propaganda and propagandists during the Cold War spread a worldwide image of the United States “as a nation that valued freedom, tolerance, and individuality,” celebrating consumerism and capitalism as

³⁹ Ibidem.

opposed to communism.⁴⁰ CFA and its propaganda materials exemplify Belmonte's observation in the effort to engage its intended audience while projecting a positive American image in Asia and to Asian students in the United States.

CFA's overseas branches further strengthened this propaganda strategy undertaken by CFA and Stanford through the development of a network with diasporic Asians and crucial U.S. allies in Asia. The main idea was to rally U.S. support for the dissemination of anti-communist propaganda that targeted Asian emigres, especially students, living in the U.S. or other areas of East Asia. As stated in one of the earliest CFA status reports dated October 1951, overseas branches were in three top Asian venues: Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Manila.⁴¹ However, the opening of the CFA headquarters in these geographical areas was attuned to U.S. Cold War objectives in Asia.⁴² At the end of World War II, the United States occupied Japan to rebuild the

⁴⁰ Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*, p. 179.

⁴¹ The CFA had three main branches: the historical research, editorial, and student contacts branches. The historical research branch provided news and the necessary historical background for the committee's publications, including RFA broadcasts. This branch collaborated with the other two subdivisions in attracting young students to the CFA anti-communist activities. For more information, consult "Information from the Committee for a Free Asia, Inc. and Status Report – Committee for a Free Asia," October 9, 1951, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park.

⁴² CFA had correspondence with several other Asian and Southeast Asian countries to open offices and place American representatives in India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Pakistan, Taiwan,

country according to a pro-American and purportedly democratic model of government to counter the expansion of communism in Asia. Similarly, when China became communist in 1949, Hong Kong became strategically vital for the United States as another pillar in Asia that could be used to contain communist China. The U.S. also secured the extension of its influence into the Pacific through a series of Cold War agreements granting U.S. military bases in the Philippines.⁴³ Thus, all three locations were intended to be used as strongholds of CFA anti-communist operations and to extend American influence in that part of the globe by beaming RFA programs.

Vietnam, Thailand, and Singapore. For more information on the opening of CFA offices overseas, consult “Status Report – Committee for a Free Asia,” October 9, 1951, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; and Roger Thompson, “The Seeds of Understanding,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 9, 1952, Newspaper, Inez G. Richardson Collection, Box 4, Folder 4:2 Inez Richardson Papers, Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia, 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

⁴³ For more on the U.S. occupation of Japan, see Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 1987). For the place Hong Kong occupied in U.S. Cold War thinking, see Mark Chi-kwan, *Hong Kong and the Cold War Anglo-American Relations 1949-1957* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004). The U.S.-Philippines military agreements were the Military Bases Agreement, signed in Manila on March 12, 1947, and the Mutual Defense Treaty, signed on August 30, 1951. To know more, see Dennis Merrill, “Shaping Third World Development: U.S. Foreign Aid and Supervision in the Philippines, 1948-1953,” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 2, No. 2 (Summer 1993): 137-159.

RFA Programming

To achieve its intended mission, RFA broadcast weekly news and commentary, but also programs that, in the words of RFA director Elwood, used humor and satire to tap into the “every-day life of the Chinese.”⁴⁴ For example, each Tuesday and Thursday night RFA aired two programs, *Communist Bad Checks* and *Big Mouth and the Professor*, that mocked the communist doctrine and its leaders. Another program, *The Students’ Hour*, broadcast every Wednesday to Chinese students on the mainland, featuring interviews of prominent Chinese who had escaped China after the communist victory, such as the story of Dr. Han Lih-wu.⁴⁵

Dr. Han was an American-educated Chinese politician who served as the Minister of Education in China from 1944 to 1949. Upon the communist victory, he flew to Taiwan and served as the presidential adviser to Chiang Kai-shek until 1956.⁴⁶ Thus, by employing historical

⁴⁴ “Radio Free Asia plans an expanded program,” *Daily Palo Alto Times*, December 5, 1951, Newspaper Article, Inez G. Richardson Collection, Box 4, Folder 4:2 Inez Richardson Papers, Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia, 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives. For more on the RFA programming schedule, consult “Radio Free Asia, Announcement of Schedule Change Effective 11 December 1951,” Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁴⁵ Ibidem and Radio Free Asia script “Student Hour #19,” May 4, 1952, Box 45, Folder Far East – Public Relations – Radio – VOA, Office of Far Eastern Operations, Far East Subject Files 1950-54, Records of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Agencies, 1948-61, Record Group 469, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

examples and actors that were not strangers to the Chinese people and their history, RFA intended to persuade Chinese students in the mainland that a re-orientation of their political affiliation and, so to speak, “flipping sides,” was indeed possible, as the story of an eminent man such as Han Lih-wu demonstrated.

Surprisingly, after only twenty-one days on the air, RFA director Elwood told the *Daily Palo Alto Times* that Radio Budapest jammed RFA. Broadcasting from Hungary, Radio Budapest was a tool of the Soviet-communist bloc created to “win wars” through radio waves.⁴⁷ As Elwood enthusiastically stated, “the new voice of freedom was viciously attacked by Radio Budapest, a puppet voice of Moscow.”⁴⁸ Communist jamming was widely used during the Cold War to interfere with VOA and RFE broadcasts.⁴⁹ Indeed, a Soviet satellite like Hungary would

⁴⁶ To know more about the life of Han Lih-wu, see Paul van de Meerssche, *A Life to Treasure: The Authorized Biography of Han Lih-wu* (Olympia, WA: Sherwood Press, 1987), p. 31.

⁴⁷ George D. Woodard, “Cold War Radio Jamming” in *Cold War broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, edited by A. Ross Johnson & R. Eugene Parta (Central European University Press: 2010), pp. 51-65. The direct quote is from p. 53.

⁴⁸ “Radio Free Asia plans an expanded program,” *Daily Palo Alto Times*, December 5, 1951, Newspaper Article, Inez G. Richardson Collection, Box 4, Folder 4:2 Inez Richardson Papers, Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia, 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

⁴⁹ Johanna Granville, “Radio Free Europe and International Decision-Making during the Hungarian Crisis of 1956,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24, No. 4 (2004): 589-611, and Mark D. Winek, “Radio as a Tool of the State: Radio Moscow and the Early Cold War,” *Comparative Humanities Review* 3, No. 9 (2009): 99-113, <https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/chr/vol3/iss1/9/>.

likely assist China in deterring enemy transmissions via Radio Budapest, particularly since China and the Soviet Union were still allies in the early 1950s, with China engaged in the Korean War.⁵⁰ At the same time, however, it made sense for Elwood to publicize the jamming to assert that RFA could become a target of communist radio interference. Elwood may have leveraged Soviet influence and interference with American broadcasts to project the image that RFA was as successful as VOA and RFE in penetrating the communist bloc.⁵¹

Indeed, RFA continued encouraging its audience to defect from communism through political and news commentaries. As early as May 1952, RFA produced commentaries concerning the status of prisoners of war (POW), a clever strategy to capture the interest of the intended audience. An example is the script entitled “THEY WON’T GO HOME.” This English copy, whose original draft was most likely written and broadcast in Chinese, reported news from the Korean War front about the unwillingness of some Chinese war prisoners to return to China. According to the RFA script, there were 15,599 prisoners out of a total of 20,699 who did not want to return home because “they now know that this slogan ‘Resist America and Aid Korea’ is a phony.”⁵² In so doing, RFA stood out in support of those “disillusioned” soldiers who had

⁵⁰ Ideological divergences between China and the Soviet Union eventually led to the so-called Sino-Soviet Split in 1961. For more, see Lorenz M. Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁵¹ “Radio Free Asia plans an expanded program,” *Daily Palo Alto Times*, December 5, 1951, Newspaper Article, Inez G. Richardson Collection, Box 4, Folder 4:2 Inez Richardson Papers, Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia, 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

fought in the Korean War but eventually realized they would rather “face death” than “be ruled by the Communist tyrants.”⁵³ This RFA statement was perfectly aligned with the formulation of U.S. objectives regarding the POW issue in Korea. Indeed, President Truman supported *voluntary repatriation* when he publicly stated on May 7, 1952, that the United States was unwilling to agree to peace in Korea “by turning over human beings for slaughter or slavery.”⁵⁴

In response to RFA’s press release, the Chinese press published a series of pamphlets and newspaper articles to rally domestic support for the Korean War. In fact, by mid-May 1952, the U.S.-China animosity surrounding the Korean War intersected with the Chinese press’s attempt to stir up popular anxieties concerning the alleged U.S. attempt to engage in biological warfare

⁵² “Radio Free Asia Overseas Chinese Commentary #84,” May 4, 1952, Box 45, Folder Far East – Public Relations – Radio – VOA, Records of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Agencies, 1948-61, Office of Far Eastern Operations, Far East Subject Files. 1950-54, Record Group 469, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵³ “Radio Free Asia Daily News Commentary,” May 6, 1952, Box 45, Folder Far East – Public Relations – Radio – VOA, Records of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Agencies, 1948-61, Office of Far Eastern Operations, Far East Subject Files, 1950-54, Record Group 469, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵⁴ “Voluntary repatriation” is a term used to indicate that Chinese and North Korean prisoners could decide whether to be repatriated to their homeland according to their will and desire. For President Truman’s statement, see Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, “Harry S. Truman, Statement by the President on General Ridgway’s Korean Armistice Proposal,” The American Project, accessed June 10, 2023, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/230651>. For more details on POW issues during the Korean War, see Harry P. Ball, “Prisoner and War Negotiations: The Korean Experience and Lesson,” *International Law Studies* 62 (1980): 292-324, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1793&context=ils>.

against its enemies.⁵⁵ These allegations intertwined with a concurrent anti-Americanism that, as media historian Sei-Jeong Chin posited, was the direct outcome of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propaganda effort and how the Chinese people interpreted it.⁵⁶ For example, on May 16, 1952, a supplement to the Chinese magazine *People's China* reported the imprisonment of two U.S. Air Force officers, John Quinn and Kenneth Lloyd Enoch, captured on January 13, 1952, near Sunan, a district of Pyongyang in North Korea. The supplement featured their confessions and purported participation in the bacteriological warfare the United States was allegedly conducting in Korea.⁵⁷ Even if the accusations were false, they are worth addressing. Indeed,

⁵⁵ North Korea made the first allegation on May 8, 1951. Later, China and even the Soviet Union engaged in a campaign against the U.S., which had worldwide resonance. For more detail, see Milton Leitenberg, “False Allegations of U.S. Biological Weapons Use during the Korean War,” in *Terrorism, War, or Disease? Unraveling the Use of Biological Weapons*, edited by Anne L. Clunan, Peter R. Lavoy, and Susan B. Martin (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 1-43, https://cissm.umd.edu/sites/default/files/2019-07/leitenberg_biological_weapons_korea.pdf.

⁵⁶ Sei-Jeong Chin, “The Korea War, Anti-US Propaganda, and the Marginalization of Dissent in China, 1950-1953,” *Twentieth-Century China* 48, No. 1 (January 2023): 23-47.

⁵⁷ These confessions were complemented with hand-sketched illustrative drawings that described the size of the alleged germ bombs and the insects used to carry diseases. Both statements played on the Chinese fears with catching slogans such as “The Truth About How American Imperialism Launched Germ Warfare” and “How I Was Forced to Take Part in the Inhuman Bacteriological Warfare Launched by U.S. Wall Street.” For more, consult “Statements by two American Air Force Officers, Kenneth Lloyd Enoch and John Quinn, Admitting their Participation in Germ Warfare in Korea and Other Documents,” Supplement to *People's China*, May 16, 1952,

according to environmental historian Jacob Darwin Hamblin, such actions were not necessarily beyond the realm of possibility. For instance, during the Korean War, scientists at the University of Pennsylvania began working on a range of “chemical and biological warfare projects” in collaboration with the Department of Defense.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, despite the United States denying such accusations, China continued the anti-American propaganda in its newspapers throughout 1952. For instance, the Chinese magazine *China's Pictorial* published in the special issue of May 1952 photos of germ bombs with the following caption: “A germ bomb dropped by the American aggressors in Korea, which broke into two parts on reaching the ground and released germ-laden insects.”⁵⁹ Later, on October 24, 1952, *Ta Kung Pao*, another prominent Chinese newspaper, headed an article with a catching title that again labeled the United States with the epithet “aggressor.”⁶⁰

Committee For A Free Asia Collection, Box 7, Folder Korean War, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

⁵⁸ Jacob Darwin Hamblin, *Arming Mother Nature: The Birth of Catastrophic Environmentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2013), p. 187.

⁵⁹ Unknown author, “Renmin Huabao zhuanke, yi jiu wu er nian, wu yue 人民画报专刊 一九五二年 五月 [special issue of China's Pictorial, May 1952]” *China's Pictorial*, May 1952, Periodical, Committee For A Free Asia Collection, Box 7, Folder Korean War, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

⁶⁰ In denouncing as “intolerable” the U.S. attempt to undermine the principles enshrined in Article 118, Section II, of the 1949 Geneva Convention, the Chinese newspaper attacked the American position regarding the prisoners of war (POW) issue. The article spoke directly to China's

In supporting the U.S. effort, RFA retaliated and strongly denied these allegations. One of the first preserved accounts comes from a news press release issued on July 14, 1952. Radio Free Asia relayed the information from a *New York Herald Tribune* article published a few days earlier, on July 9, 1952. The article explained why the Chinese claims were a lie. It inferred that China was fabricating the pseudo-U.S. germ warfare as a narrative to educate the Chinese people about science and diseases. In fact, according to American scientist and scholar Milton Leitenberg, typhus and smallpox were two reported diseases in Asia at the time.⁶¹ For its part,

discontent on the POW repatriation issue that, from April to October 1952, posed a serious stalemate to the peace negotiations ending the Korean War. The Geneva Convention signed in 1949 clearly stated the immediate release and repatriation of POWs after the cessation of hostilities. However, the Korean War created more daunting problems for those prisoners, primarily Chinese and North Koreans, who fought in the war but were captured by the United States and the United Nations Command (UNC). Many Chinese and North Korean prisoners did not want to return to their homelands for fear of being tortured, or even killed, under suspicion of collaborating with the enemy. For more, consult unknown author, “Mei qinluezhe pohuai guo xianzhang yuanze 美侵略者破坏国宪章原则 [U.S. Aggressor Undermines Principles of National Charter],” *Ta Kung Pao*, October 24, 1952. Newspaper Article, Committee For A Free Asia Collection, Box 5, Folder Korean War, Hoover Institution Library and Archives. For the Geneva Conventions of 1949, see Article 118, Section II “Release and Repatriation of Prisoners of War at the Close of Hostilities,” p. 125, accessed June 6, 2023, <https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/external/doc/en/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-0173.pdf>.

⁶¹ In late 1950 and early 1951, typhus and smallpox were endemic diseases reported in Asia, especially Korea. In addition, during the Korean War, it was common for Chinese and Korean soldiers to suffer from diseases such as cholera. For more, see “Information and Reference Section Radio Free Asia, ‘Red Dean’ Unwittingly Gives Clew to Reason for Germ Warfare Lies,” July 14,

RFA tried to dismiss these allegations of the Chinese press as stratagems that the CCP used to trigger anti-American feelings and antipathy toward the United States among the Chinese population.⁶² In so doing, RFA was wholly engaged in its mission to debunk the purported lies of communist enemies. However, RFA's operations faced an obstacle as State Department representatives began questioning the validity and usefulness of RFA, claiming it was a weak imitation of VOA.

Duplicating VOA Programming

On July 27, 1951, State Department officer Jim Wales wrote a compelling memorandum to his colleague John Begg concerning the launch of RFA programming. In this document, Wales refers to a call that RFA program director Bertrandias made to his office to receive “a sample VOA program schedule.”⁶³ Wales, who voluntarily provided Bertrandias with an old

1952; Press Release, Committee For A Free Asia Collection, Box 7, Folder Korean War, Hoover Institution Library and Archives. See also Leitenberg, p. 13.

⁶² For more information see Information and Reference Section Radio Free Asia, “Reds use ‘Patriotic Days’ to Boost Production, Intensify Hate of America,” August 27, 1952, Press Release, Committee For A Free Asia Collection, Box 7, Folder Korean War, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

⁶³ “Memorandum Radio Free Asia to John M. Begg from Jim Wales,” July 27, 1951, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

schedule of VOA programming, expressed confusion about the activities of RFA. According to Wales, RFA was “a private enterprise,” but he was concerned it could “cross wires” with State and its VOA. As Wales elucidated to his colleague, “I sense a lot of groping by this outfit, John.”⁶⁴

Wales’ bafflement was not unfounded. Archival evidence shows that RFA expanded its programming schedule a few months after the beginning of its operations. These changes became effective on December 11, 1951, when in addition to RFA’s Tuesday through Thursday original programs, *Communist Bad Checks*, *The Students’ Hour*, and *Big Mouth and the Professor*, RFA added more news, commentaries, and music programs that beamed China in Cantonese, English, and Chinese.⁶⁵ As a result of this schedule expansion, Foy D. Kohler, VOA director from 1949 to 1952, eventually confirmed Wales’ early concerns about RFA programming, underscoring that RFA’s new additions overlapped with VOA broadcasts aimed at China.

Kohler manifested his concerns in a memorandum to Foreign Service and State Department officer John E. Devine. On December 19, 1951, after revising RFA’s press release and schedule change, Kohler signaled to Devine that RFA could be “at best . . . a feeble echo of

⁶⁴ Ibidem, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁵ “Radio Free Asia, Announcement of Schedule Change,” December 11, 1951, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

VOA.”⁶⁶ In supporting his claim, Kohler shared RFA’s new schedule with Devine and red marked the time frames from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m., China Standard Time, during which RFA’s new features coincided with VOA’s Chinese- and English-language programs. A closer look at Kohler’s notes captured that RFA’s additions, *News*, *News Commentary*, and *Music for a Free World*, broadcasting in Cantonese, English, and Chinese, overlapped with VOA’s services.⁶⁷

This evidence shows that RFA effectively attempted to mimic, if not duplicate, VOA. More precisely, it mirrored VOA programs that combined eight-to-thirty-minute segments concerning international news, political commentaries, American culture, and lifestyle in communist countries. For example, the VOA program schedule of December 19, 1951 revealed that VOA had daily programs in Chinese, Cantonese, and even Swatow dialect, which targeted listeners in Guangdong Province of South China. It offered a vast array of news, commentaries, and headlines about the Korean War, UN meetings, international news from Poland and India,

⁶⁶ “Office Memorandum F. D. Kohler to John E. Devine,” December 19, 1951, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁶⁷ “Radio Free Asia, Announcement of Schedule Change,” December 11, 1951, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Catholic officials in Hong Kong, agriculture in the United States, and protests against Mao Zedong from Chinese residents in Canada.⁶⁸

This evidence confirms what professor of modern Asian history Jeremy E. Taylor underscored about the VOA Chinese desk. As he posited, VOA had a dedicated Chinese branch that prepared radio programs to target Chinese listeners on the mainland since the 1940s. By August 1949, VOA added to its schedule previously discontinued programs in Cantonese and other Chinese dialects to appeal to a broader audience in and outside the People's Republic of China. Indeed, according to Taylor, VOA's experimentation had a "diasporic angle" that reflected the need to reach and influence those Chinese listeners who fled China and moved to Hong Kong or other parts of Southeast Asia after the communist takeover of China.⁶⁹ The outbreak of the Korean War added more urgency to VOA's Cold War strategy. Hence, by 1951, VOA's Chinese branch expanded its programming to impart a positive U.S. image to Chinese audiences in and outside the mainland through political comments and cultural programs.⁷⁰ For

⁶⁸ "Department of State, Daily Broadcast Content Report," December 19, 1951, Boxes 34, Folder 12/17/51 to 12/27/51, Records of the U.S. Information Agency, Record Group 306, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁶⁹ "Early History of Far East Service, China Branch," December 28, 1961, Henry L. and Anne Lorentz Miller Collection, Box 2, Folder 11, Series III – VOA – USIA – English Section 1947, Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park, MD. For more on VOA in China during the Cold War, see Jeremy E. Taylor, "Voice of America Chinese-Dialect Broadcasting and the Chinese Cultural Cold War, 1949-1953," in *Chineseness and the Cold War: Contested Cultures and Diaspora in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong*, edited by Jeremy E. Taylor and Lanjun Xu (London and New York: Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Asia, 2022), pp. 110-132.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

this reason, VOA director Kohler asserted that RFA could be a timid imitation of VOA. Nonetheless, RFA advocates persisted in their radio efforts, believing in the impact that RFA could have in China. Their overconfidence was further reinforced by the letters RFA received from its listeners.

Support for and Criticism of RFA

Despite the rumors and concerns surrounding RFA's broadcasts since 1951, the overlap with VOA's programming in China — whether intentional or not — did not discourage RFA executives. On the contrary, they continued to pursue and justify their mission based on the broad support that RFA received from the U.S. press. Furthermore, RFA proponents continued their activities because of letters from enthusiastic listeners who praised RFA's efforts to counter communism while spreading ideals of democracy, freedom, and international cooperation throughout East Asia.

The U.S. press widely celebrated and supported RFA since its origins. For example, just a few days before RFA went on air, *The New York Times* released a special praising the establishment of this new venture. This piece, which was headlined "RADIO FREE ASIA SET UP ON COAST" and subtitled "Broadcasts of World News Will Be Beamed to Orient, Beginning Tuesday," offered its readers a glimpse at the founding of RFA. In particular, the article presented RFA as the broadcasting division of the Committee for a Free Asia and the counterpart of Radio Free Europe in Asia.⁷¹ Similarly, newspapers in northern California

⁷¹ "Radio Free Asia Set Up on Coast," *The New York Times*, September 2, 1951, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public

celebrated the establishment of this initiative as a struggle “for men’s minds.”⁷² Indeed, the U.S. press supported RFA and publicized its mission to spread “the story of American democracy” in communist Asia.⁷³

More support for RFA and positive feedback came from Asian listeners. For instance, the draft of an RFA press commentary for release on August 28, 1952, contained extracts of letters from RFA listeners from Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Japan. In one of these complimentary letters, a Hong Kong listener wrote to RFA that his uncle, who lived in Tianjin, China, claimed that “RFA reception is clear.” More compliments came from Malaysia. An enthusiastic listener confessed how much he liked RFA, writing, “Every night I listen to your Cantonese program here in Perak. I am a mechanic.” A Manila listener from the Philippines congratulated RFA for its commitment to democracy, claiming, “I considered it a lucky evening when I was able to locate your transmission, because since then I have learnt quite a lot about democracy and the real happenings in Asia.” Likewise, a Japanese listener from Morioka wrote that it was in the hopes of the Japanese that “all the Asian people will get the true free and the peace.” In response, CFA President Alan Valentine stated that the committee was extremely

Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷² “For a Free Asia,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 9, 1951, Newspaper Article, Inez G. Richardson Collection, Box 4, Folder 4:2 Inez Richardson Papers, Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia, 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

⁷³ “Broadcast Pioneer Named Radio Free Asia Director,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 20, 1951, Newspaper Article, Inez G. Richardson Collection, Box 4, Folder 4:2 Inez Richardson Papers, Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia, 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

satisfied with the RFA work. In his words, “we are greatly heartened by responses indicating our broadcasts are not only being heard but are proving of value in the fight for freedom.” Likewise, RFA director Elwood welcomed these idyllic compliments, which were attuned to the objectives and work he had envisioned for RFA since September 1951.⁷⁴

Not all listeners, however, praised RFA. The draft of the RFA press commentary also included the extract of a Chinese listener from Canton who bitterly rebuked RFA programs. In claiming that the Chinese people were all driven by “two guiding lights,” communism and socialism, the Chinese listener concluded that RFA’s “fancy talks” could “only fool the ignorant overseas Chinese.” Valentine nonetheless weakened the negative feedback. He argued that angry letters showed that RFA was effectively penetrating communist China.⁷⁵

However, it is worth noting that the favorable letters that RFA received all came from areas already in the pro-U.S. orbit, with only one negative letter from a listener within the actual target audience. This evidence indicates more about RFA’s success at preaching to the already converted listeners, like those from Japan, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, than it did about being able to propel change in the audience it sought to influence. Furthermore, it is not possible to determine whether these letters were authentic because no archival evidence of preserved

⁷⁴ “News from Radio Free Asia,” August 28, 1952, Press release, Alfred Kohlberg Collection, Box 37, Folder Committee for a Free Asia, Hoover Institution Library and Archives, p. 1-3.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, p. 4. The letters subsequently appeared in a San Francisco Chronicle article dated September 3, 1952. However, the letter from the Canton listener was not included. See “Radio Free Asia --- The Message Is Getting Over,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 3, 1952, Inez G. Richardson, Box 4, Folder Inez Richardson Papers 4:2, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

copies accompanies the excerpts reported in the RFA press release.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the only negative letter from the RFA's listener from Canton reflected the verity of up-to-date communications research about mass media influence that emerged in the 1950s. Rather than being a passive and malleable listener, that letter is representative of the intrinsic awareness of a receiver culturally immune to an anti-communist message from the West, thus underscoring the fallacy of previous hypodermic-like ideologies about mass media influence and effects.

Besides angry letters, more criticism of RFA also came from Alfred Kohlberg, an American businessman known to San Francisco's business circles for his bitter opposition to communism. Kohlberg corresponded on June 27 and July 25, 1951, with CFA pro tempore President Greene to address his concerns that CFA looked like "a State Department front." As he further noted in his letter to Greene dated July 25, 1951, such an "impression" of CFA and its activities could constitute an alarming issue.⁷⁷ The fact that an outsider to CIA and CFA circles

⁷⁶ RFA used the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) transmitters in Manila and Guam to relay its broadcasts from San Francisco to China. Therefore, it is likely that the station elicited listener responses in areas where the signal was received, even if intermittently, and generated authentic letters from Hong Kong, Japan, the Philippines, and Malaysia. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that not everyone in these countries was converted. For example, Japan had a strong Communist Party and an ever-stronger Socialist Party. There were also many Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sympathizers in Hong Kong, and there was an ongoing left-wing insurgency in the Philippines (the Huks).

⁷⁷ For more information, consult "Letter to George H. Greene, Jr. from Alfred Kohlberg," June 27 and July 25, 1951, Correspondence, Alfred Kohlberg Collection, Box 37, Folder Committee for a Free Asia, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

such as Kohlberg could raise the issue that the CFA and its initiatives appeared to be government-sponsored illustrates the limitation of CIA's efforts to conceal government ties. It also demonstrates the flaws in the CIA's argument that its covert operation could have been more successful than VOA and the State Department. Overall, this example underscores the extent to which the CIA failed in its attempt to portray an image of CFA and its initiatives, like RFA, as independent of any government affiliation.

A memorandum of meetings between the RFA director, the CIA, and the State Department further contextualizes the above criticisms, as departmental issues arose between the CIA and State over RFA. On October 16, 1951, RFA director Elwood met with representatives of the State Department Bradley Connors and Frank James Devine to convince the State Department that such a project needed their advocacy. As Elwood explained to Connors and Devine in his remarks, RFA was a worthwhile initiative that sought to engage the audience in mainland China and persuade its listeners that an alternative path to communism was indeed possible.⁷⁸ However, Connor and Devine strongly asserted that State was not persuaded of RFA's usefulness. They criticized RFA, arguing that it could not play a remarkable and distinct role from VOA "to warrant the permanent operation of RFA."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ "Meeting with Representatives of Radio Free Asia," October 16, 1951, Memorandum for the Files, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, p. 1.

The RFA Demise

The demise of RFA eventually occurred during two more gatherings between representatives from the State Department and the CIA. Both meetings reveal the contrasting visions concerning the existence of RFA. The first of these two meetings took place at the home of State Department officer Edward W. Barrett on November 20, 1951. Barrett argued that it was his understanding that the radio listeners in China were “a small and decreasing audience” due to the harsh measures the CCP implemented on foreign broadcasts, “we did not need another American voice in the area,” concluded Barrett.⁸⁰

The second meeting, which took place on December 7, 1951, when CIA Director Dulles met with CFA Chairman Wilbur and State Department officer Howland H. Sargeant, took symbolic overtones. Records of the meeting show that Wilbur was the only dissenting voice who expressed his and his colleagues’ total devotion to CFA’s activities and the merits of a radio project that, in his words, began as a “cracker-jack job.”⁸¹ However, Sargeant’s definition of

⁸⁰ Besides Barrett, State Department representatives included Foy Kohler, Robert P. Joyce, Walworth Barbour, and Frank James Devine. For the CIA, Frank G. Wisner, Selwyn Lloyd, and Thomas Braden accompanied Dulles at the meeting. For more information, consult “Meeting at Mr. Barrett’s home on Tuesday evening, November 20, 1951, to discuss USIE and OPC relations,” November 20, 1951, Memorandum for the Files, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950-1955, The Intelligence Community, 1950-1955, Document 94*. Washington: Government Printing Office, accessed May 18, 2024, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950-55Intel/d94>.

⁸¹ Other CIA participants to the meeting were Frank Wisner and Thomas Braden. Consult “Meeting on Policy to Govern CFA,” December 7, 1951, Memorandum for Conversation, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of

RFA as “imitative of and duplicative of the Voice of America” immediately dampened Wilbur’s enthusiasm. Moreover, in continuing his statement, Sargeant inferred that RFA was a copycat of VOA in its intent to pierce communist China with its “set-up.”⁸² Dulles, on his part, grudgingly adjourned the meeting and suggested further discussion with his colleagues to keep “the whole Committee concept from collapsing.”⁸³

More widespread doubts about RFA’s effectiveness within the ranks of the U.S. State Department continued to circulate in 1952. After receiving two CFA proposals to build more powerful RFA transmitters in the Philippines, the State Department decided to survey RFA to elicit irrefutable findings on the rumblings surrounding this radio project. The outcomes of this survey are included in one of the most significant State Department memoranda, dated October 1, 1952. This memorandum that Deputy Assistant Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson and Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Howland H. Sargeant prepared for Undersecretary

Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸² Ibidem, p. 2.

⁸³ Ibidem, p. 4. The memorandum reports that Dulles, in concluding the meeting, suggested to his CIA colleagues that one way to prevent the end of CFA and RFA was to name Alan Valentine the new CFA President.

of State David Bruce stated that RFA could not act as a counterpart of RFE in Asia, let alone VOA.⁸⁴

According to the State Department, there was no need for another radio venture in China because VOA had been broadcasting to China since World War II. Furthermore, the CIA launched the RFA venture ill-informed of the context in which it was operating. Indeed, as the memorandum reads, VOA faced several difficulties in its radio broadcasts to China during the early 1950s. Among the most important were the size of the Chinese audience that used to listen to foreign broadcasts, which was “exceedingly small,” the scarcity of radio sets available to the Chinese on the mainland, and the presence of a state-owned radio network that supported the communist regime’s propaganda. In fact, Chinese officials persistently jammed foreign radio programs, including VOA. They also imposed severe penalties for those caught listening to these foreign broadcasts, which, in turn, discouraged Chinese listeners from tuning in.⁸⁵

This finding nicely complements what Nathan argued in *Chinese Democracy* more than a decade later about listeners’ responses in mainland China. By 1949, commercial and private radio stations in China were grouped into a state-owned network that fell under the watchful control of the Communist Party. Hence, those Chinese who had the luxury of owning a radio set and listening to foreign programs usually did it “in secret, late at night, and with earphones, in some cases keeping this activity hidden even from their families” due to the restrictions over

⁸⁴ “Committee for a Free Asia – Manila Broadcasting Project, Memorandum to David Bruce from U. Alexis Johnson and Howland H. Sargeant,” October 1, 1952, Box 65, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1952, General Records of the Department of State, 1763-2002, Subject Files, 1956-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸⁵ Ibidem, p. 1.

foreign technologies and programs the Chinese government carried out.⁸⁶ In this light, it is no coincidence the memorandum concluded that RFA offered nothing new that exceeded the task that VOA was already carrying out to communist China. Hence, the State Department recommended CFA to terminate RFA, although the idea of influencing and shaping people's minds through "radio transmissions" had been "an almost irresistible fascination" in the diplomatic and cultural history of the U.S.⁸⁷

Hence, despite the vain attempts to make a case for RFA's existence, by 1953 it was clear to the CIA that the project had to be dropped.⁸⁸ A report the President's Committee on International Information Activities (IIA), also known as the Jackson Committee, sent to President Eisenhower on June 30, 1953, offers more insights into what led the CIA to drop RFA

⁸⁶ Nathan, *Chinese Democracy*, pp. 174-177. The direct quote is from page 177. For more on radio in China, see Zhenzhi Guo, "A Chronicle of Private Radio in Shanghai," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 30, No. 4 (Fall 1986): 379-392, and Michael A. Krysko, *American Radio in China: International Encounters with Technology and Communications, 1919-1941* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 17-41.

⁸⁷ "Committee for a Free Asia – Manila Broadcasting Project, Memorandum to David Bruce from U. Alexis Johnson and Howland H. Sargeant," October 1, 1952, Box 65, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1952, General Records of the Department of State, 1763-2002, Subject Files, 1956-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, p. 2.

⁸⁸ "Memorandum for Mr. Walter Schwinn, Department of State, from Robert L. Fallow," September 13, 1954, Box 66, Folder P – MacKnight Committee for Free Asia (1954), General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

after three years.⁸⁹ The report stated that RFA was closed because of a CIA survey on the effectiveness of radio listening in communist China, whose outcomes made it clear that RFA's weak signal kept it from being heard in China. This survey prompted the CIA to terminate RFA on April 30, 1953, because "the results do not justify broadcasting to this area."⁹⁰ Former director of security for Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, Richard H. Cummings, further confirms this evidence in one of the most complete and recently published accounts of Radio Free Asia. His online article corroborates the evidence of the 1953 IIA report to President Eisenhower, arguing that the CIA discontinued RFA broadcasts because RFA was not heard in China.⁹¹

⁸⁹ The letter of transmittal to this report clarifies that on January 24, 1953, President Eisenhower authorized the Jackson Committee to gather information on the international activities and policies conducted by the U.S. government to have a plain view of the initiatives, both covert and otherwise, pursued by the executive branch of the United States in the face of the Soviet and communist threat. Robert Blum, future president of The Asia Foundation, was IIA's Director of Staff. For more information, see *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, National Security Affairs, Volume II, Part 2, Eisenhower Library, White House Office records, "Project 'Clean Up,'" Washington: Government Printing Office, 1953, Document 370, accessed July 26, 2023, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v02p2/d370>.

⁹⁰ Ibidem, para. 2, sec. 3.

⁹¹ Richard H. Cummings, "The CIA and the Committee for Free Asia under Project DTPILLAR," Sources and Methods, A Blog of the History and Public Policy Program, Wilson Center, October 19, 2020, accessed July 26, 2023, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/cia-and-committee-free-asia-under-project-dtpillar>.

However, the claim that RFA shut down because its signal was weak and could not be heard in China was a genuine face-saving attempt on the CIA's part. Other evidence, in fact, shows the State Department compelled the CIA to shut down their project. After so much effort expended to justify the RFA venture, CIA Director Allan Dulles wrote a letter to Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs John Allison in September 1952. In the document, Dulles asked for State's support for moving RFA's activities from San Francisco to Asia. The relocation would have also entailed the construction of the two much-needed "100-KW transmitters" in the Philippines under the promise that RFA programs would "supplement and not compete with VOA." Furthermore, in concluding his *captatio benevolentiae*, Dulles hoped to collaborate with the State Department "to coordinate all phases of this project."⁹²

As it turned out, the State Department did not welcome Dulles' attempt to reconcile, reverse course, and salvage the RFA venture. Indeed, the State Department memorandum of October 1, 1952, is a clear response to Dulles' letter. It clearly stated that the construction of two transmitters in the Philippines would not only be a waste of American funds but also that RFA could "seriously jeopardize the realization" of American cultural and economic interests in East Asia. Beyond the fact that the State Department saw the RFA existence unjustified as opposed to VOA, another important argument raised was that State feared that such a radio project would be "recognized as American-investigated despite the efforts that would be made to prevent its acquiring an American label." In fact, RFA's sponsoring committee, the Committee for a Free

⁹² "Letter from Allan Dulles to John Allison," September 11, 1952, Box 65, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1952, General Records of the Department of State, 1763-2002, Subject Files, 1956-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Asia, carried out several non-profit activities in the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Japan.⁹³ As State argued in the memorandum, it was “known in the Philippines that C.F.A.” was “an American-sponsored organization.” Therefore, separate from the poor execution of RFA and the CIA’s attempt to overmatch VOA, the State Department concluded that RFA had to be shut down because the CIA overplayed its hand. In so doing, State was trying to protect its own interests and status, strategically arguing that any “efforts at concealment” would have backfired in the long run and made RFA appear as a sloppy ersatz “American stooge.”⁹⁴

⁹³ These three countries were the primary locations of CFA’s overseas branches. CFA developed a project called “Seeds for Democracy” to distribute vegetable seeds to Filipino farmers. It also distributed fifty California redwood trees to Japan and developed projects to support the education of overseas Chinese in Hong Kong with the Mencius Education Enterprises. For more information on the opening of CFA offices overseas and “Seeds for Democracy,” consult “Status Report – Committee for a Free Asia,” October 9, 1951, Box 66, Folder Committee for a Free Asia 1951, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; and Roger Thompson, “The Seeds of Understanding,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 9, 1952, Newspaper, Inez G. Richardson Collection, Box 4, Folder 4:2 Inez Richardson Papers, Career Files, Committee for a Free Asia, 1951-53, Hoover Institution Library and Archives. For the Mencius Education Enterprises, see “Memorandum for Jess MacKnight from Robert L. Fallow,” Box 66, Folder IPO-P MacKnight Committee for Free Asia (1953), General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹⁴ “Committee for a Free Asia – Manila Broadcasting Project, Memorandum to David Bruce from U. Alexis Johnson and Howland H. Sargeant,” October 1, 1952, Box 65, Folder Committee for a

Hence, poor strategy, expectations of what the CIA could achieve with RFA, and the CIA-State rivalry are all factors that contributed to the end of RFA. Indeed, RFA's poor broadcasting infrastructure intersected with insurmountable historical, cultural, and political contexts in which RFA was situated and operated. As a result of misunderstandings and departmental conflicts, due to the CIA's attempt to duplicate VOA and encroach on the State Department territory, RFA terminated operations in 1953. All these considerations thus corroborate that RFA fell victim to the CIA's overconfidence to maximize its broadcasting's potential to influence Chinese listeners to defect from communism and embrace purported American ideals of democracy. At the same time, such overconfidence is also evident in the CIA's effort to apply a more sophisticated but still misguided understanding of media influence to understand and engage its intended audiences.

But what happened to CFA after the RFA termination? A State Department administrative memorandum, issued on February 19, 1953, reveals that the CFA underwent a reorganization of its subdivisions in the Spring of 1953.⁹⁵ Under its new President Robert Blum,

Free Asia 1952, General Records of the Department of State, 1763-2002, Subject Files, 1956-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, p. 3.

⁹⁵ The Korean War ended on July 27, 1953. For CFA reorganization, consult "Committee for a Free Asia," February 9, 1953, Administrative Memorandum No. 1, Alfred Kohlberg Collection, Box 37, Folder Committee for a Free Asia, Hoover Institution Library and Archives; and "Memorandum for Jesse MacKnight," April 21, 1953, Box 66, Folder IPO-P MacKnight Committee for Free Asia (1953), General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; "Memorandum to Jesse

a decorated World War II veteran who served for the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, CFA changed its name to The Asia Foundation in 1954. This new venture eventually abandoned the idea of designing another radio project like RFA by pursuing a new approach to Asian-American relations based on cultural and educational programs that would finally meet “fully Asian needs and aspirations.”⁹⁶

MacKnight from Emmons B. Brown,” 9 June 1953, Box 66, Folder IPO-P MacKnight Committee for Free Asia (1953), General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹⁶ Even though Radio Free Asia terminated its broadcasts in 1953, some Americans continued to carry out their supposedly beneficial activities in Asia under the umbrella of The Asia Foundation, which was a copycat of the long-criticized — yet still enduring — Committee for a Free Asia. See “Letter to Jesse MacKnight from Robert Blum,” November 10, 1954, Box 66, Folder P – MacKnight Committee for a Free Asia (1954), General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs Lot File 61D53, Subject Files of the Policy Plans and Guidance Staff, 1946-1962, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; and “The Asia Foundation, A Statement of the Foundation’s Purposes and Activities,” Brochure, Inez G. Richardson Collection, Box 1, Folder 1:9 Inez Richardson Papers, Career Files, The Asia Foundation, Newsletters, 1954-1960, Hoover Institution Library and Archives. As per Robert Blum, he served for the Jackson Committee under President Eisenhower, formally known as the U.S. President’s Committee on International Information Activities, whose focus was on surveying the status of U.S. propaganda, covert operations, and psychological warfare. For more information, consult Archives at Yale, “Robert Blum Papers,” accessed June 15, 2023, <https://archives.yale.edu/repositories/12/resources/3023>. For more information, see Robert Blum “The Work of the Asia Foundation,” *Pacific Affairs* 29, No. 1 (Mar. 1956): 49-56.

Conclusion

Radio Free Asia represents an example of radio's role as a broadcasting tool of anti-communist propaganda in American radio history during the Cold War. Its short life intertwined with the U.S. struggle to expand purportedly American beneficial values of freedom and democracy in Asia during the Korean War. Under the fear and pressure of losing Korea to communist hands, RFA was born as a radio propaganda tool of the Committee for Free Asia, a clandestine CIA operation that sought to encourage communist defection. In truth, the CIA designed its covert initiative to realize the agency's self-serving bureaucratic interest of achieving legitimacy vis-à-vis the State Department and its venerable international radio network, the Voice of America (VOA).

However, oversimplifications, misrepresentations, and misunderstandings of those target contexts and audiences ensured that the outcomes did not match the CIA's initial expectations. In fact, the RFA failure was the combination of several factors that altogether contributed to its end after only three years on the air. First, the CIA pursued a poor strategy. RFA's sponsoring committee (CFA) was designed to be a truly American organization that sought to project a good image of the U.S. in Asia. It did so through its promotional material and non-profit activities that, besides RFA, included cultural and educational programs carried out in Asia, like in the Philippines, Japan, and Hong Kong. Indeed, as the State Department argued, it was known in Asia that CFA was an American organization. Furthermore, the fact that CFA received money from the CIA-sponsored Crusade for Freedom, which made it through the pages of *The New York Times* in 1951, signaled from the very beginning the not-so-covered governmental ties.

Second, poor execution is another important factor. The effort to use RFA to pierce China did not meet the reality on the ground. The argument that RFA would have obtained better

results than VOA because of its hidden government ties blinded the CIA to understand the complexity of the context in which it was operating. Many of the complications that U.S. international broadcasting encountered in China, including VOA, stemmed from the lack of radio sets available to the Chinese people as well as the persistent jamming the CCP operated against foreign broadcasts. RFA's poor execution was also linked to its weak signal, which proved to be not powerful enough to reach its target audience in China as originally intended and desired.

Finally, the CIA-State rivalry was one of turf in which RFA was a symbol. Departmental tensions primarily stemmed from the CIA's attempt to capitalize on popular beliefs regarding the power of radio to infringe upon State's territory by duplicating VOA. Confiding in the ability that their covert operation would achieve better results in China than the U.S.-label and State Department-run VOA, the CIA designed RFA to advance the agency's status quo in matters of foreign relations and international broadcasting against the State Department. To be sure, the CIA's overconfidence in the success of their radio initiative reflected a lucid understanding of how radio could influence the intended audience if used intelligently, that is, by considering the audiences' assumptions and views. Nonetheless, the CIA inevitably fell victim to its own miscalculations. It was that same overconfidence in the RFA endeavor that blinded the agency from fully understanding and mastering the context in which their radio operation functioned.

Chapter 3 - “This is Radio of Free Asia”: A South Korean Radio Initiative to Manipulate Americans

August 15, 1967, marked a remarkable day for the first anniversary of Radio of Free Asia (ROFA). ROFA was a South Korean shortwave radio station operating from the Korean Broadcasting Service (KBS) facilities in Seoul. On that day, according to the only surviving ROFA script, Svetlana Alliluyeva — the daughter of the late Soviet Union ruler Josef Stalin — sat before the microphones to explain why she had escaped from the USSR. In 1966, thirteen years after her father’s death, she fled her country and moved to the United States. She admitted that her studies in history, social science, and Marxism had made her more critical of her country. She also explained to the ROFA listeners that the discovery of her faith was another factor that profoundly affected her life. Since then, she concluded, “the main dogmas of Communism lost their significance.”¹

¹ “Flight to Freedom, Radio of Free Asia Script No. 51,” in Committee on Foreign Relations. Senate, *Public Financing of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, 92nd Congress, 1st session, 1971, HRG-1971-FOR-0020, pp. 90–93. U.S. newspaper articles, U.S. government reports, memoirs of leading South Korean actors, and personal documents of American politicians enticed to support ROFA are the main American sources available on ROFA. A few archival documents can be found in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library’s Post-Presidential Papers, the recently declassified Melvin R. Laird Papers, and the Theodore C. Marrs Files of the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library. Newspaper articles regarding ROFA are available at the newspaper.com database. The main government reports mentioning ROFA are the U.S. House of Representatives hearings concerning U.S.-South Korean relations and hearings before the Select Committee on Ethics of the United States Senate of the late 1970s.

ROFA began broadcasting on August 15, 1966. Specifically, it operated under the sponsorship of the Korean Cultural and Freedom Foundation (KCFF), a philanthropic organization that Bo Hi Pak, a Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church member, established in 1964.² Under KCFF, ROFA was modeled after two CIA Cold War radio operations, Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Free Asia (RFA), to allegedly broadcast anti-communist messages to East Asia, particularly China and Vietnam.³ Anti-communist radio

² Pak founded KCFF to promote U.S.-Korean relations in the United States. Its headquarters at 1028 Connecticut Ave. N.W. in Washington, D.C. was the same as ROFA's. For more, see Bob Considine, "Broadcasts for Freedom," *The News American*, November 6, 1970, in *Public Financing of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, p. 86; "The Little Angels from Korea," advertising booklet of the Korean Cultural and Freedom Foundation, no date, Box 2, Folder AP-1 Little Angels (Korean Cultural Freedom Fdn.), 9-20-65, Dwight D. Eisenhower Post-Presidential Papers, 1961-69, 1965 Principal File, Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, Kansas, USA. According to historian Bruce Cumings, Bo Hi Pak was also a Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) agent, see Bruce Cumings, "Bringing Korea Back In: Structured Absence, Glaring Presence, and Invisibility," in *Pacific Passage: The Study of American-East Asian Relations on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Warren I. Cohen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 356.

³ Depending on the sources, ROFA was also designed to broadcast to North Korea. RFE was established in 1949 to broadcast to Soviet satellite countries in Eastern Europe and was a surrogated radio of Voice of America (VOA), the first U.S.-owned international broadcasting network since 1942. For the most important works on RFE, see Richard H. Cummings. *Radio Free Europe's "Crusade for Freedom": Rallying Americans Behind Cold War Broadcasting, 1950-1960* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 2010); Johnson A. Ross. *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: The CIA Years and Beyond* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010). RFA operated from 1951 to 1953 as another U.S. anti-

propaganda endorsed by famous figures such as Stalin's daughter was one of the means that ROFA adopted to convince many prominent U.S. senators and congressmen to endorse its activities under the deceitful promise of fighting communism in East Asia.

Indeed, the interplay between politics and technological enthusiasm became crucial to the U.S. endorsement of ROFA. The initial support that ROFA received in the United States came from those Americans who wrongfully assumed it was another anti-communist radio operation akin to the Voice of America (VOA) and RFE.⁴ Many prominent Americans such as former President Eisenhower, former vice president and future president Richard Nixon, Congressman Fred B. Rooney (D-PA), and American singer and actor Bing Crosby endorsed ROFA. They did so because it spoke to Americans' popular conceptions about radio as an unrivaled foreign policy tool of Cold War propaganda that could effectively support the U.S. anti-communist battle in East Asia. To these unsuspecting Americans, ROFA appeared attuned to VOA's and RFE's

communist endeavor during the Korean War. Documents declassified in 2007 from the CIA's administrative file codenamed DTPILLAR have revealed that RFA was an instrument of the Office of Policy Coordination, a CIA wing dedicated to covert operations, consult Central Intelligence Agency, "Project DTPILLAR," DTPILLAR Vol.2, Special Collection, Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act, 6 September 1950, document number 5197c267993294098d50e8f6, p. 1, available https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DTPILLAR%20%20%20VOL.%202_0052.pdf.

⁴ Since its foundation in 1942, VOA extended the reach of U.S. culture and hegemony worldwide. For some seminal works, see Holly Cowan Shulman, *The Voice of America: Propaganda and Democracy, 1941-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); David E. Krugler, *The Voice of America and the Domestic Propaganda Battles, 1945-1953* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000); Alan L. Heil, Jr. *Voice of America: A History* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2003).

foreign policy objectives to expand supposedly universal U.S. ideas of democracy and freedom into communist countries through anti-communist radio propaganda.

In truth, ROFA is the story of how South Korea used radio and the Cold War to manipulate Americans from the 1960s to the 1970s. In this respect, Korean studies on the cultural history of radio illustrate that the 1960s was South Korea's "golden age for radio."⁵ During this period, several domestic and foreign influences shaped South Korean radio culture. For example, radio scholar Sungmin Lee argued that the emergence of Protestant radio broadcasting during the Syngman Rhee regime (1948-1960) reflected the historical diffusion of U.S. Protestantism in South Korea and its "close ties to the propaganda goals of the United States vis-à-vis the communist bloc." South Korean Protestant broadcasting played a key role in the diffusion across the country of anti-communist ideology during the Cold War. Most importantly, radio propaganda helped consolidate the power of the Rhee regime domestically and its international reputation as a U.S. anti-communist ally. Such anti-communist prominence in South Korean radio broadcasting further developed after Park Chung Hee's coup in May 1961. It was under the Park regime (1962-79) that radio broadcasting became a state-owned propaganda tool to foster South Korean nationalism and secure the anti-communist stance of Park's military dictatorship into the 1970s.⁶

⁵ Hisuk Kim, 김희숙, 라디오의 정치: 1960년대 박정희 정부의 '농어촌 라디오 보내기 운동', 한국과학사학회지 38권3호 (2016): 425-51 ["The Politics of Radio: The Campaign to Send Radios to Rural Villages in the 1960s"], *The Korean Journal for the History of Science* 38, No. 3, (2016): 428.

South Korea's use of radio as a tool for legitimacy power and regime-building particularly spoke to some South Korean actors and their self-interested drive to manipulate the United States during the Cold War. Both Moon's Unification Church and the South Korean government catered to Americans' popular beliefs in the power of radio to propel change. Such appeals were central to the strategies those actors pursued in order to mobilize U.S. support and bend American policy toward the achievement of their respective objectives between 1964 and 1975.⁷ During this period, Reverend Moon, Bo Hi Pak, and South Korean President Park manipulated Americans' convictions about radio and its potential to influence as an appealing trope to penetrate U.S. politics and mobilize U.S. financial support for South Korea. Specifically, Bo Hi Pak used KCFF to help Moon shape ROFA into a lobbying instrument of anti-communist propaganda by which Moon could achieve power legitimacy and his self-interested aspirations to expand his religious and financial empire in the United States. The attempt to use ROFA to

⁶ Sungmin Lee, "A History of Religious Broadcasting in Korea from a Religious Politics Standpoint: Focusing on the Period of a Protestant Broadcasting Monopoly," *Journal of Korean Religious* 8, No. 2 (October 2017): 16.

⁷ Whereas the South Korean government represented a state actor, non-state actors like Moon's Unification Church are non-sovereignty entities that exert political power or influence. For more on how the interplay between smaller and greater powers in the international arena affected U.S. Cold War foreign policy in East Asia and perspectives toward South Korea, see Victor D. Cha, "Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia," *International Security* 34, No. 3 (Winter, 2009/2010): 158–196; James Summers and Alex Gough, *Non-State Actors and International Obligations: Creation, Evolution and Enforcement* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Peter Wijninga, et al., "State and Non-State Actors: Beyond the Dichotomy," in *Strategic Monitor 2014: Four Strategic Challenges* (The Hague, Netherlands: Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2014), pp. 141–161.

deceive Americans by intentionally obscuring its ties to the Unification Church underlines Moon's and Pak's implicit dishonesty and selfish drives. Similarly, the Park regime further affected the development of ROFA as an anti-communist propaganda vehicle that could secure his regime's survival through the mobilization of U.S. financial and political support for South Korea during the ongoing Vietnam War.⁸

At the same time, South Korean actors also relied on the power of celebrities to receive more political and financial support for ROFA. This strategy reflected an effective South Korean exploitation of the U.S. mass consumption society.⁹ Through public fundraising activities, newspaper articles, petitions, and flyers that included statements and endorsements from many unwitting former U.S. presidents, politicians, and popular personalities of the entertainment

⁸ For the centrality of anti-communist propaganda in U.S.-South Korea relations during the Cold War and how South Korea exploited anti-communist sentiments and U.S. values to shift U.S. policies toward South Korea since the 1910s, see David P. Fields, *Foreign Friends: Syngman Rhee, American Exceptionalism, and the Division of Korea* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2019); Kyle Burke, *Revolutionaries for the Right: Anticommunist Internationalism and Paramilitary Warfare in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

⁹ For seminar works centered on how the power of celebrity affected U.S. mass culture since the 1920s, and then the symbiotic relationship between politics and advertising, see Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), especially pp. 96–97, and David Haven Blake, *Liking Ike: Eisenhower, Advertising, and the Rise of Celebrity Politics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), especially pp. 3–7.

industry, South Korea shaped ROFA into a lobbying tool that effectively exploited American beliefs about radio and fears of communism during the Cold War.

Indeed, Korean actors played on U.S. antipathy toward communism and Cold War fears during an uneasy period in American history. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, a declining U.S. economy intersected with a generalized mistrust Americans showed toward U.S. institutions after the Watergate scandal and the ultimate failure in Vietnam.¹⁰ It was in this historical context that South Korea manipulated Americans and their fears of communism to achieve their self-interests. Such a strategy reflected a more sophisticated attempt to influence target audiences, in this case Americans, than the theories of the direct effects of mass media communication of a generation earlier. In fact, ROFA exemplifies another instance in which the main actors involved in this initiative attempted to apply early assumptions about how propaganda could be employed

¹⁰ Many scholars offer a far-reaching analysis of America as a nation in transition between the 1960s and the 1970s due to the weakness of the dollar, a losing war in Vietnam, the economic recession, and the Watergate scandal that exposed the corruption of the Nixon administration from 1972 to 1974, see Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press 2010); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011); Joshua B. Freeman, *American Empire: The Rise of a Global Power, the Democratic Revolution at Home 1945-2000* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012); Onno de Beaufort Wijnholds, *Gold, the Dollar, and Watergate: How a Political and Economic Meltdown was Narrowly Avoided* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Michael H. Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945-1968*. 1st edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), and Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

to influence audiences as South Koreans used radio broadcasting in an effort to manipulate Americans and achieve South Korean objectives in the United States. Nonetheless, South Korean actors' overconfidence in their ability to understand and engage with the context in which their American audience was embedded proved short-sighted and eventually backfired. In fact, the South Korean effort unraveled in 1976 when the so-called Koreagate scandal exposed South Korean machinations surrounding ROFA and the Korean political lobby in the United States.¹¹

ROFA and the Unification Church in America

The story of ROFA began in 1966 when the ROK government helped KCFF to establish a contract with the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) in Seoul. Under this agreement, KCFF used KBS's 500,000-kilowatt transmitter by the hour, at no cost, to broadcast six hours a week, Monday through Thursday.¹² KCFF chose August 15 as ROFA's launching date because it was

¹¹ Koreagate was a political scandal involving U.S. Congress members and South Korean politicians accused of bribing for South Korean objectives in the United States. For more information, see Shelley Sang-Hee Lee, "The Party's Over: Sex, Gender, and Orientalism in the Koreagate Scandal of the 1970s," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 39, No. 3 (2018): 1-28; Bruce Cumings, "Bringing Korea Back In: Structured Absence, Glaring Presence, and Invisibility," in *Pacific Passage: The Study of American-East Asian Relations on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Warren I. Cohen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 337-374; Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), pp. 445-447.

¹² Committee on International Relations. House; Subcommittee on International Operations. Committee on International Relations, *Activities of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency in the United States*, Part 1, 94th Congress, 2nd session, 1976, HRG-1976-HIR-0036, p. 107; and U.S.

Korea's day of independence from Japan at the end of the Second World War. In using such a symbolic day, KCFF wanted to send a specific message: Korea was a nation backed by the United States and committed to supporting anti-communist propaganda in East Asia.¹³ "This is Radio of Free Asia," proclaimed the radio announcer before introducing Stalin's daughter to the audience, "the voice of truth and freedom . . . to end the Communist monopoly of information in Red Asia."¹⁴

Thanks to these objectives that capitalized on America's existing beliefs about the power of radio and anti-communist sentiments, ROFA attracted the support of U.S. politicians from its inception. One of the first prominent Americans who advocated the use of ROFA to send anti-communist propaganda into China and Vietnam was Congressman Fred B. Rooney (D-PA). Rooney, perhaps unaware that Radio Free Asia (RFA) had previously tried that angle, claimed in a 1966 speech on the House floor that ROFA could serve "as a counterpart of Radio Free Europe."¹⁵ He also maintained in a letter to Crawford H. Greenwalt, chairman of the RFE board,

Congress, Senate, *Korean Influence Inquiry, Executive Hearings before the Select Committee on Ethics of the United States Senate*, 95th Congress, 2nd session, volume II, 1978, 13199 S. Rep 1314, pp. 1659–66.

¹³ "U.S.-Backed Radio Opened in Korea," *The New York Times*, August 28, 1966, in General CIA Records, CREST, document number CIA-RDP73-00475R000401500001-7, available <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP73-00475R000401500001-7.pdf>.

¹⁴ "Flight to Freedom, Radio of Free Asia Script No. 51" in *Public Financing of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, p. 94.

¹⁵ "Radio Free Asia Asked by Rooney," *Associated Press* story reprinted by *Standard-Speaker*, February 22, 1966, p. 12.

that ROFA should receive U.S. support through voluntary donations.¹⁶ For many Americans like Rooney, ROFA was an appealing project like RFE or VOA meant to win support for the U.S. cause in East Asia. Charles H. Flanders, national chairman of ROFA, was another enthusiast who argued that ROFA could “reach the millions of persons behind the ‘Bamboo Curtain’ who have no way of learning about democracy and the American way of life.”¹⁷ Rooney and Flanders were not necessarily exaggerating in their claims. In resembling the argument that the CIA raised in the 1950s with their RFA venture, Rooney and Flanders claimed that a non-profit and non-government affiliated radio operation like ROFA should be established “in addition to the official effort” provided by VOA and RFE.¹⁸

However, ROFA’s actual objectives differed greatly from those of the government-run VOA and RFE. ROFA was a creature of the Unification Church, a worldwide religious movement founded by Reverend Moon in Korea in 1954, and a vehicle to expand the reach of the Unification Church in the United States.¹⁹ The cultural, political, and social transformation that the United States experienced between the mid-1960s and the 1970s became central to Moon’s expansion of his Unification Church into the U.S. and the establishment of ROFA. Recent scholarship agrees that the 1970s was a transitional decade where a return to religion was

¹⁶ “‘Radio Free Asia’ Is Proposed by Lawmaker,” *The Sentinel*, Tue, Feb. 22, 1966, p. 4.

¹⁷ “Support Is Urged for Radio Free Asia,” *Cumberland Evening Times*, February 8, 1967, p. 7.

¹⁸ “Radio Free Asia Asked by Rooney,” *Associated Press* story reprinted by *Standard-Speaker*, February 22, 1966, p. 12.

¹⁹ Testimony of Donald L. Ranard, former Director of Korean Affairs of the Department of State in *Activities of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency in the United States*, pp. 68–73.

the consequence of the U.S. political and social transformations in the 1960s and 1970s. In the wake of the counterculture movement, the Vietnam War, the civil and women's rights movements, young people in the United States — the so-called “boomer” generation — embraced new forms of religious practices and spiritualities, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, to cope with social and political problems. It was in this historical context that Moon and the Unification Church began to attract many Americans, called “Moonies,” from among those disillusioned by the socio-political and ideological fracture of the late 1960s and the 1970s.²⁰ Moon envisioned ROFA as a tool that tapped into Americans' disquiet during this turbulent period in U.S. history.

The symbiotic relationship between Moon and Bo Hi Pak was crucial for the initial success of ROFA. While Moon served as the “spiritual leader” of the Unification Church, Bo Hi Pak was the key man who supervised “day-to-day operations” of Moon's religious movement in the United States. A former South Korean Army lieutenant colonel and former assistant military attaché at the Korean Embassy in Washington, D.C., Pak became a Unification Church member when he first met Moon in 1958 at the headquarters in Seoul. Since then, he had become closer to Moon to the point that he founded a Unification Church branch in the United States in 1965 and became Moon's special assistant and English translator in 1971. Between 1964 and 1966, Pak presided over several South Korean philanthropic organizations such as KCFF and The Little Angels, a children's dance troupe that had toured the United States since 1962. Both organizations sought to build mutual understanding and impart a positive image of South Korea

²⁰ Schulman, pp. xv, 43–49; Freeman, pp. 287–321; Rodgers, pp. 41–76; Cowie, pp. 70–73; and David G. Bromley, *Moonies in America: Cult, Church, and Crusade* (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1979).

as a strong U.S. anti-communist ally.²¹ Hence, Pak's previous professional experience and networking in the United States made him the ideal sponsor of ROFA activities to create financial and political support on Moon's behalf.

But why was the United States the primary target of Moon, and what can be drawn from his life that may explain how well-positioned ROFA was to achieve influential supporters in the United States? First and foremost, Moon was an ardent anti-communist advocate. In 1947, he had been imprisoned in North Korea by communist authorities and freed three years later by the United Nations and United States troops. As a result of this dramatic experience, he saw the United States as the world's salvation, and he came to dream of freeing East Asia from communism, reuniting Korea, and bringing world peace through a theocracy governed by himself and his Unification Church.²²

²¹ Robert Pear, "U.S. Stops Aide to Moon Sect," Special to *The New York Times*, July 9, 1981. Pak served as a military attaché from 1961 to 1964. He was also publisher and president of some daily newspapers, including *The Washington Times*, which he founded in 1982 on behalf of Moon together with the media association called the Washington Times Corporation. For more, see "Washington Times Corp. Founding Chairman Bo Hi Pak Dies," Special to *The Washington Times*, January 18, 2019, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/jan/18/washington-times-corp-founding-chairman-bo-hi-pak-/>; Bo Hi Pak, "Messiah – My Testimony to Rev. Sun Myung Moon, Appendix B – Brief Chronology of the Life of Dr. Bo Hi Pak," accessed April 14, 2024, <https://www.tparents.org/library/unification/books/messiah/Messiah-91.htm>.

²² Moon believed to bear a divine mission in the United States, which speaks to a specific moment in his life. On Easter morning of 1936, when Korea was under Japanese colonial rule and many Christians were persecuted for refusing to worship the Japanese emperor, Moon said that Jesus

To Moon, the United States had a strong religious and financial tradition, thus ideal to fulfill his self-interest objectives. America was a democratic and free country with a well-grounded Puritan tradition. “This is the country that leads the whole world,” he wrote in his memoirs.²³ However, Moon was not solely motivated by his religious zeal. He also targeted the United States because it was a wealthy nation — thus ideal for economic expansion. He was particularly attracted by philanthropic and money-making programs like People-to-People. Moon saw this program, which former President Dwight Eisenhower established in 1956 to counter Soviet propaganda and promote the U.S. culture, as an opportunity for his advancement in the United States.²⁴ Like People-to-People, the development of profitable activities that leveraged the U.S.-South Korean alliance in combating communism, such as Pak’s KCFF and The Little Angels, presented a valuable opportunity to garner political and financial support from many Americans. Moon expected that Americans would be willing to endorse ROFA for being another South Korean cultural activity playing the anti-communist card.

appeared to him and told him to be the New Messiah. For more, see Sun Myung Moon, *As a Peace-Loving Global Citizen* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Times Foundation, 2012), p. 109; Bo Hi Pak, *Messiah: My Testimony to Rev. Sun Myung Moon*, volume I, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), p. 223; and “Master Speaks, June 7, 1975,” in Committee on International Relations. House; Subcommittee on International Organizations. Committee on International Relations. House, *Investigation of Korean-American Relations*, October 31, 1978, HRG-1978-HIR-0066, p. 314.

²³ Moon, p.161.

²⁴ Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003).

To do so, Moon had Pak schedule a meeting with former President Eisenhower. The meeting marked the beginning of Moon's rise in the United States and the future development of ROFA. Pak arranged the meeting during Moon's first visit to the United States in 1965. However, he did not act alone. To create legitimacy on Moon's behalf in the eyes of Eisenhower and Eisenhower's key officials, Pak received the help of the former South Korean Ambassador You Chan Yang. Indeed, Yang carried the title of Ambassador-at-Large after his retirement in 1960 and was known to U.S. leaders for his anti-communism. Furthermore, Yang, who was one of the founders of KCFF in 1964 and its executive vice president, used his networking in Washington, D.C., to help Pak lobby for ROFA in the United States.²⁵ This strategy began when Yang offered retired Admiral Arleigh Burke, who was Chief of Naval Operations during the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations, the presidency of KCFF in 1964. Burke, who was unaware that KCFF and ROFA were projects set up by Moon and Bo Hi Pak, eventually accepted the position and became the first KCFF president.²⁶ In fact, it was through Burke that

²⁵ Yang resigned as KCFF member in January 1970. For more, see *Investigation of Korean-American Relations*, Report of the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, October 31, 1978 (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington: 1978, 34-674 0), pp. 363-4, <https://freedomofmind.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/fraserport.pdf>.

²⁶ Yang served as ROK ambassador under South Korean President Syngman Rhee when he retired in 1960 and decided to remain in residence in Washington, see Boettcher, p. 44. For information on the KCFF letterheads: "The Little Angels from Korea," advertising booklet of the Korean Cultural and Freedom Foundation, no date, Box 2, Folder AP-1 Little Angels (Korean Cultural Freedom Fdn.), 9-20-65, Dwight D. Eisenhower Post-Presidential Papers, 1961-69, 1965 Principal File, Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

Eisenhower became interested in KCFF activities in the United States and the one who convinced Eisenhower's executive assistant, retired General Robert L. Schulz, to schedule an informal meeting with Moon.²⁷

A letter that Bo Hi Pak wrote to Schulz on June 25, 1965, offers further insights into the nature of the meeting. Pak thanked Schulz for his "kindness in making the arrangements for Mr. Sun Myung Moon to meet President Eisenhower." The accompanying appointment reminder card provides further details. A short description reading "Korean Religious & Youth Leader" with an asterisk specifying "working against Communist trend in Korea" follows Moon's name on the appointment card.²⁸ Hence, Schulz arranged a courtesy, informal meeting with Eisenhower under the belief that Moon was a prominent South Korean religious leader and devoted anti-communist touring the United States for the first time.

Thus, at 10:30 a.m. on Friday, June 25, 1965, Moon stepped into Eisenhower's office at his farm in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. "I have personal admiration for you as a General and am grateful for all that you did for us in Korea," claimed Moon. A puzzled Eisenhower answered he

²⁷ "Robert L. Schulz, Memorandum for Record, November 29, 1966," Box 8, Folder MB-1 Memberships Accepted (August-December 1966), Dwight D. Eisenhower Post-Presidential Papers, 1961-69, 1966 Principal File, Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

²⁸ "Letter Bo Hi Pak to Robert L. Schulz," June 18, 1965, and Appointment Suspense Card, Box 2, Folder AP-1 Moon, S. M. (Korean Religious and Youth Leader), Dwight D. Eisenhower Post-Presidential, 1965 Principal File, Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

did not know who Moon was when he asked: “What is the name of your movement?”²⁹ During the meeting, The Little Angels performed in honor of the former U.S. president, and the customary picture-taking between Moon and Eisenhower took place. “You are well-armed with cameras, I see,” commented Eisenhower.³⁰ The pictures from Gettysburg were not only used to recruit church members but also to create an appearance of legitimacy and network for financial support for ROFA. Moon realized that Eisenhower’s support could appeal to many Americans.³¹ In fact, the meeting was much more than an informal visit celebrating the long-lasting friendship between South Korea and the United States. It represented a unique opportunity for Moon to “open doors for him to top officials all over the United States.”³² Indeed, information spreading and support from former President Eisenhower were essential to create an impression that ROFA was a legitimate anti-communist radio operation that supported the U.S. effort against communism in East Asia.³³ To this end, ROFA proponents adopted several strategies to cultivate and secure financial support from Americans.

²⁹ Gordon Ross, “Eisenhower Meets Our Leader,” *New Age Frontier*, 1, No. 13, July 15, 1965, pp. 2–3, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://www.tparents.org/Library/Unification/Publications/naf/NAF-1965-07-15.pdf>.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 3.

³¹ Robert B. Boettcher, *Gifts of Deceit: Sun Myung Moon, Tongsun Park, and the Korean Scandal* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), pp. 45–47.

³² John Hall, “A puzzled Ike gave Rev. Moon a big boost,” *The San Francisco Examiner*, May 12, 1977, p. 2.

Strategies to Cultivate and Secure American Support for ROFA

On July 25, 1966, former South Korean Ambassador Yang sent a letter to former President Eisenhower soliciting his support of ROFA. The letter asked Eisenhower for his endorsement with a proposed statement that read: “I urge my Fellow Americans to study the aims of RADIO of FREE ASIA and to give their full-fledged support for this vital stand for freedom in Asia.”³⁴ Then, a second letter, dated August 4, 1966, reiterated the request. Ambassador Yang once again asked former President Eisenhower to endorse ROFA activities. To obtain Eisenhower’s attention and support, Yang dwelled on the positive effect that such a radio project would have in East Asia as “the bridge of truth between the Free World and the captive millions behind the Bamboo Curtain.”³⁵

³³ Moon targeted Eisenhower because Ike relied on the strict relationship among celebrities, advertising, and media to promote his 1952 presidential campaign. For the interplay between celebrities and mass consumption, see Marchand, pp. 96–97. For the role that celebrities and advertising agencies played in promoting Eisenhower’s presidential campaign, see Blake, pp. 3–7.

³⁴ “Letter You Chan Yang to Dwight D. Eisenhower,” June 25, 1966, Box 8, Folder MB-1 Memberships Accepted (August-December 1966), Dwight D. Eisenhower Post-Presidential Papers, 1961-69, 1966 Principal File, Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

³⁵ “You Chan Yang to Dwight D. Eisenhower, Proposed Statement for Radio of Free Asia,” August 4, 1966, Box 44, Folder R (1) Korean Cultural and Freedom Foundation; Radio of Free Asia, Dwight D. Eisenhower Post-Presidential Papers, 1961-1969, 1966 Principal File, Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

Concurrently, ROFA leaders worked to create an impression that ROFA was an American radio project. Moon and Bo Hi Pak intentionally modeled ROFA after the CIA's Radio Free Asia (RFA). Indeed, by the time ROFA operated, Americans were familiar with RFA and the anti-communist activities that the Committee for a Free Asia carried out in East Asia.³⁶ Hence, Moon and Bo Hi Pak deliberately capitalized on the previous CIA's radio venture and used the name Radio *of* Free Asia to establish the appearance of an official connection with the U.S. government and an air of familiarity in the minds of U.S. donors.³⁷

ROFA proponents' strategy in creating a link with the previous American radio project succeeded because the U.S. press highly publicized ROFA stateside and called it Radio Free Asia. For example, as early as February 1966, two of Pennsylvania's local newspapers, *Standard-Speaker* and *The Gettysburg Times*, relayed the Associated Press (AP) news regarding Rooney's backing of ROFA with two similar headlines reading "Radio Free Asia Asked by Rooney" and "Rep. Rooney Asks 'Radio Free Asia'" respectively.³⁸ Between March 1966 and August 1969, other local newspapers circulated the same AP news chanting similar tunes. "Rooney Radio Free Asia proposal backed by RFE," reported *The Pocono Record*; "Support Is

³⁶ "Letter Kenneth R. MacDonald to Mr. Vincent P. Wilber," January 23, 1952, Box 65, Folder, Committee for a Free Asia (1952), General Records of the Department of State, 1763-2002, Subject Files, 1956-1962, RG 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

³⁷ *Investigation of Korean-American Relations*, p. 119.

³⁸ "Radio Free Asia Asked by Rooney," AP news relayed by *Standard-Speaker*, February 22, 1966, p. 12, and "Rep. Rooney Asks 'Radio Free Asia,'" AP news relayed by *The Gettysburg Times*, February 22, 1966, p. 6.

Urged For Radio Free Asia,” publicized the *Cumberland Evening Times*; “Radio of Free Asia . . . for a ‘bridge of truth’ to mainland Chinese,” outlined *The Bennington Banner*.³⁹

At the same time, Pak guided the production of KCFF promotional material to attract more Americans. One example is a booklet publicizing ROFA with slogans meant to play on U.S. fears of communism: “BAMBOO IS STRONGER THAN IRON . . . YOUR HELP IS NEEDED.”⁴⁰ By playing on anti-communist sentiments, ROFA directly spoke to ideological tropes familiar to many Americans. For instance, “RADIO OF FREE ASIA CAN PENETRATE THIS BARRIER” was one of the main claims used to inflate U.S. convictions that ROFA could indeed reach the audience behind the “Bamboo Curtain,” undermine the communist threat, and foster empathy for the United States.

The booklet’s cover page included a picture of Eisenhower, along with the statement that Ambassador Yang had enclosed in his July 25, 1966 letter. Eisenhower’s vice president and future president Richard Nixon and Admiral Arleigh Burke also appeared in this KCFF promotional material. Their pictures and names figured under the heading “Join These

³⁹ “Rooney Radio Free Asia proposal backed by RFE,” *The Pocono Record*, March 9, 1966, p. 3; “Support Is Urged for Radio Free Asia,” *Cumberland Evening Times*, February 8, 1967, p. 7; and “Radio of Free Asia To Tell Apollo Story,” *The Bennington Banner*, August 9, 1969, p. 6.

⁴⁰ “Radio of Free Asia Booklet,” June 25, 1966, Box 8, Folder MB-1, Memberships Accepted (August-December 1966), Dwight D. Eisenhower Post-Presidential Papers, 1961-69, 1966 Principal File, Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

Distinguished Americans In Supporting Radio of Free Asia,” as ulterior evidence that they were also lured into using their names by ROFA’s purported objectives.⁴¹

Alongside booklets, KCFF created flyers publicizing ROFA. One of these flyers, signed by Ambassador Yang, depicted the photo of a 10-year-old Chinese boy named Len Chen and appealed to U.S. religious and merciful sentiments with the following slogan: “DOES IT BOTHER YOU THAT 10-YEAR-OLD LEN CHEN IS BEING TAUGHT GOD IS SPELLED: M A O?” Furthermore, this flyer invited Americans to contribute donations, starting from \$15 up to as much as \$1,000, that would help ROFA purchase more powerful transmitters to influence “enslaved people” like Len Chen living in communist Asia.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibidem. The KCFF went even further to publicize its Korean activities in the United States with another booklet that used the picture of an unknown Lyndon Johnson, who was the U.S. president in charge at the time ROFA leaders were mobilizing support. For more, consult “The Little Angels from Korea,” advertising booklet of the Korean Cultural and Freedom Foundation, no date, Box 2, Folder AP-1 Little Angels (Korean Cultural Freedom Fdn.), 9-20-65, Dwight D. Eisenhower Post-Presidential Papers, 1961-69, 1965 Principal File, Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

⁴² “Radio of Free Asia Flyer,” no date, Box 29, Folder, Norman Allderdice Collection, Folder The Korean Cultural and Freedom Foundation (Washington, D.C.) 1966, Allderdice Name and Organization File, Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Palo Alto, CA, USA.

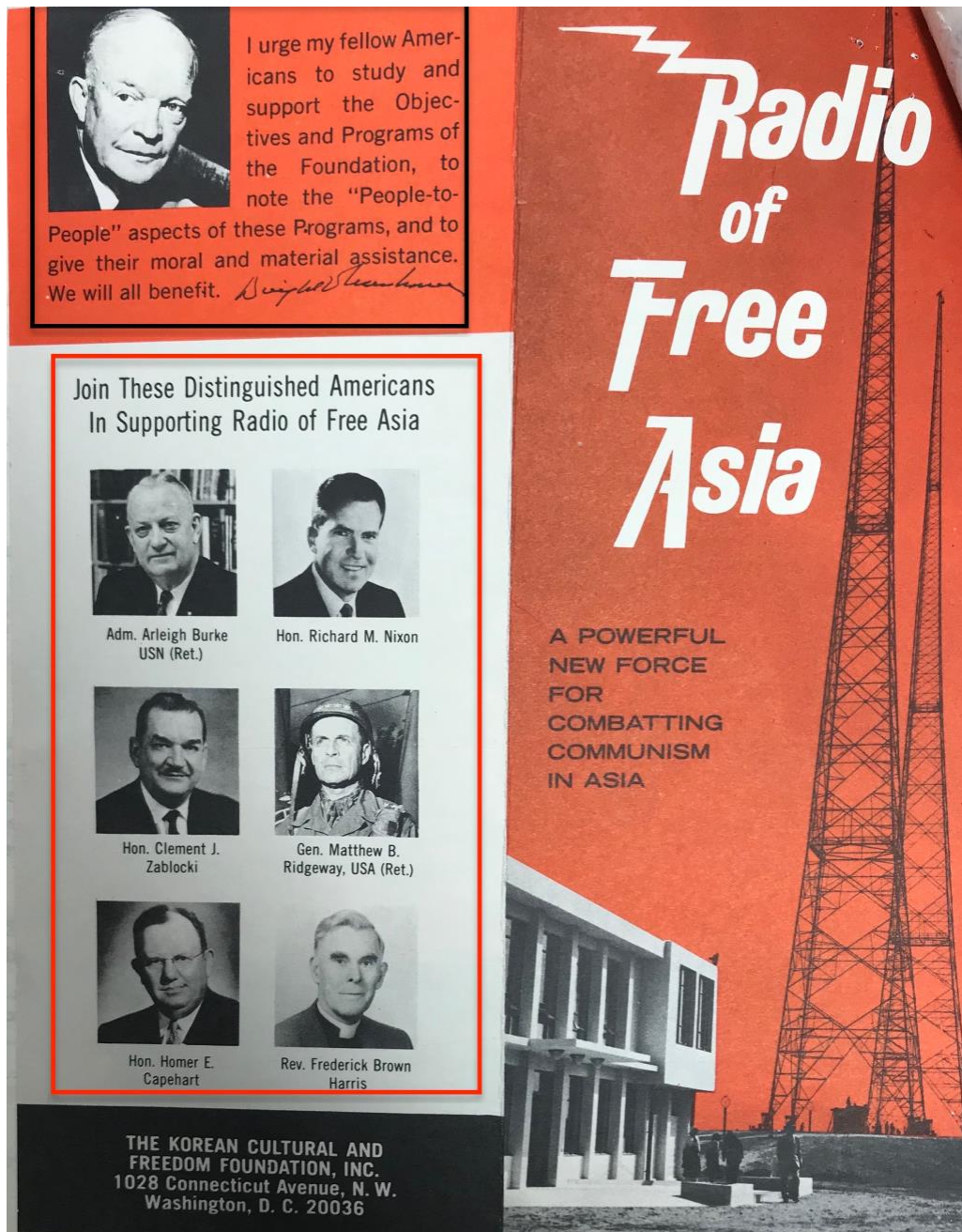


Figure 2 Radio Free Asia Booklet. Dwight D. Eisenhower Post-Presidential Papers, 1961-69. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

Letters soliciting money for ROFA's activities were also used to reach more endorsement from U.S. politicians. Besides Eisenhower's, the KCFF letters and letterheads included the names of former President Truman and former Vice President Richard Nixon to create an air of

respectability.⁴³ Yang was again the key man on whom Moon and Bo Hi Pak relied to send letters across America asking for contributions that publicized ROFA. As Bo Hi Pak recalled in his memoir, he sent letters nationwide to assist with ROFA fundraising.⁴⁴ Senator J. William Fulbright is an example of a prominent politician that KCFF targeted to lure him into the ROFA scheme. Fulbright received a letter from former Ambassador Yang in December 1969, in which he asked the Senator to join other Americans in their contribution to ROFA. “Dear Friend . . . with the help of anti-Communist Americans such you,” read the letter, “ROFA is fast becoming one of the most important weapons against Communism in all of Asia . . . Our finances are very tight. I am writing to you today in the prayerful hope that you will come to our aid.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Like Eisenhower, Truman was listed as KCFF honorary president, Nixon as a member of the board of directors, alongside many other prominent Americans such as General Matthew B. Ridgway, who won public support in charge of US/UN forces in the Korean War, and Congressmen Clement Zablocki, who was famous for his anti-communist stance in support of the Vietnam War.

⁴⁴ Pak, *Messiah*, p. 284.

⁴⁵ “Letter You Chan Yang to Senator J. W. Fulbright, December 8,” 1969, in *Public Financing of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, p. 76.

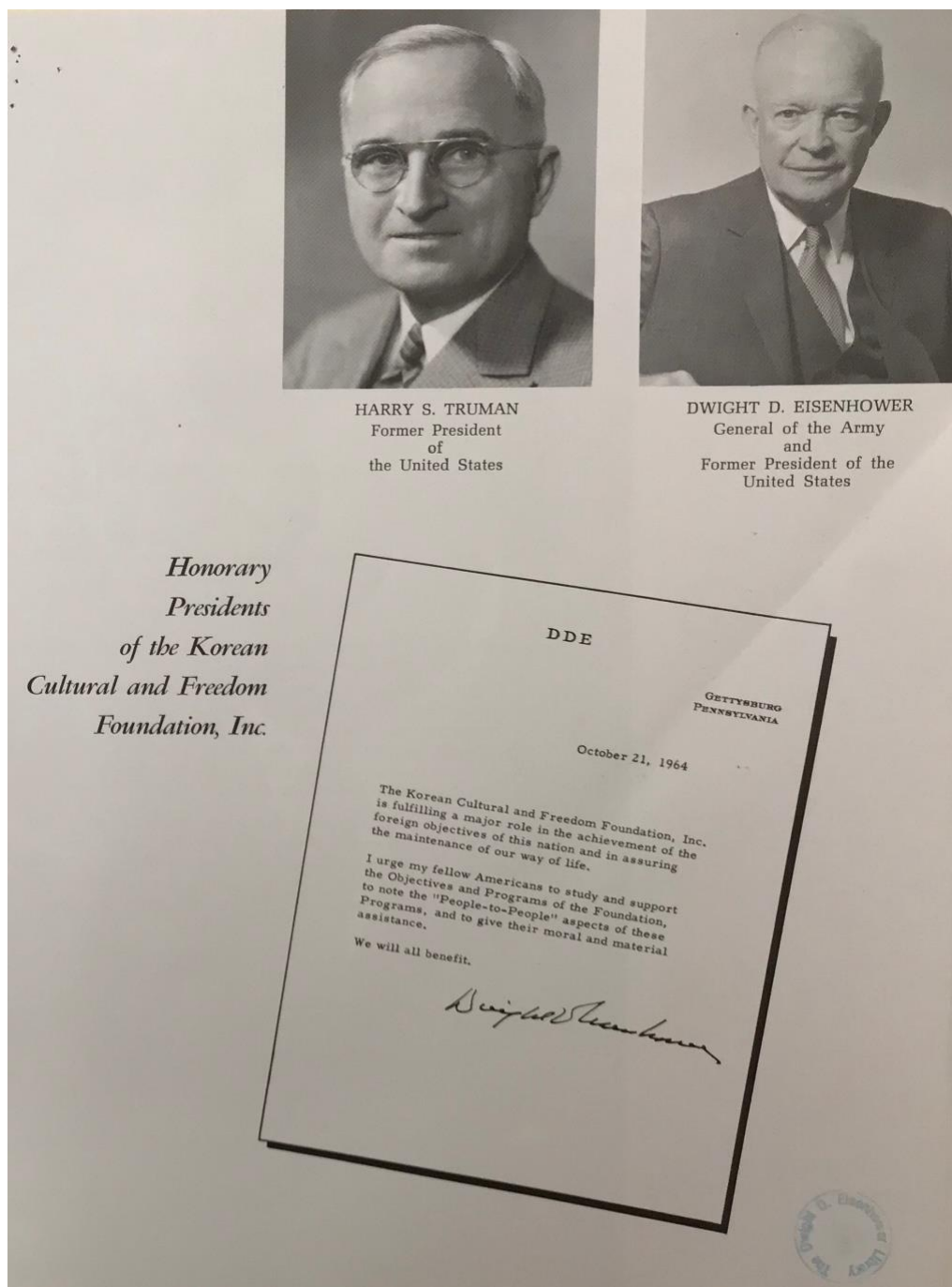


Figure 3 Former Presidents Truman and Eisenhower as KCFF Honorary Presidents, Advertising Booklet of the Korean Cultural and Freedom Foundation. Dwight D. Eisenhower Post-Presidential Papers, 1961-69. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

In the same vein, ROFA proponents used the power of celebrities to secure more political and financial support for ROFA's activities in the United States. This strategy reflected an

effective South Korean manipulation of the U.S. mass consumption society in which the power of celebrities to sell various items characterized much of the twentieth-century.⁴⁶ Indeed, this strategy was clever because it compelled prominent figures in U.S. popular culture to endorse ROFA, including singer and actor Bing Crosby, popular travel writer, journalist, and radio broadcaster Lowell Thomas, and actor John Wayne. Specifically, Crosby, Thomas, and Wayne provided ROFA with testimonials that echoed Eisenhower's endorsement. Such statements were part of the fundraising mailing that KCFF orchestrated and sent out in the United States. For instance, Crosby's statement in one of the KCFF letters read: "I urge all Americans to support Radio of Free Asia. I know the effect broadcasting can have over man's mind and actions." Similarly, Lowell Thomas supported ROFA, claiming that he "endorse[d] the campaign it [ROFA] has been conducting." "ROFA is one of the most effective weapons now working against world Communism," read John Wayne's endorsement.⁴⁷

Some of these letters used these popular names to ask the American public to sign petitions and make donations ranging from \$10 to \$100. For instance, a letter supposedly signed by George Murphy, former Republican U.S. Senator from California, read: "A check from you today for \$10, \$25, \$50 or \$100 will help ROFA."⁴⁸ Although sources do not come with a

⁴⁶ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, pp. 96–97.

⁴⁷ It is likely that these celebrities were compelled to endorse ROFA because none of them felt comfortable saying no to what was so obviously a "good" cause. Consult "These Distinguished Americans Urge You to Support Radio of Free Asia" in *Public Financing of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, p. 88; Boettcher, pp. 43–44, and Pak, p. 284.

⁴⁸ "Letter from George Murphy to Miss Morella R. Hansen," March 5, 1971, in *ibidem*, p. 84.

precise number, some show that ROFA's campaign was effective, at least initially, because some Americans contributed to it. One example is the charitable contribution of \$50 that Mr. Jack Eckerd, a famous businessman and owner of the Eckerd chain of drugstores, and his wife donated to ROFA.⁴⁹ The prominent American family, DeWitt and Lila Acheson Wallace, owners of the popular U.S. magazine *Reader's Digest*, were also among those Americans who gave \$500,000 in charity donations to KCFF activities between 1965 and 1976, including ROFA and The Little Angels.⁵⁰

Furthermore, between 1969 and 1970, Moon and Bo Hi Pak used ROFA to campaign for the U.S. prisoners of war (POWs) and missing in action (MIA) in Vietnam. Indeed, it was concurrent with the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War and after the infamous Tet Offensive of 1968 that ROFA proponents concocted other strategies to obtain more financial contributions from Americans.⁵¹ ROFA leaders particularly viewed the emergence of women's organizations

⁴⁹ "Others disagree," *Fort Lauderdale News*, September 27, 1970, p. 50.

⁵⁰ The Wallace donated before knowing ROFA was a scam through the National Charities Information Bureau, the oldest watchdog group in the United States. For more information, consult Brian Kates in "Gave 500G to Korean Fund," *Daily News (New York)*, March 16, 1977, p. 619, and David Cay Johnston, "A Watchdog Leaves the Scene," *The New York Times*, November 20, 2000, accessed April 29, 2024, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/national/112000givedcay.html?printpage=yes>.

⁵¹ The Tet Offensive marked the escalation of the war, during which North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces attacked several outposts and cities in South Vietnam during the Lunar New Year.

that campaigned for their missing husbands and sons in Vietnam as another instance by which they could play on American convictions and sentiments to their advantage.⁵² An example of this attempt appeared in a 1970 article by *Playground Daily News*, a Florida-state daily newspaper, reporting that the citizens of Fort Walton Beach had raised \$16,000 to send eight local wives searching for information about their missing husbands. To attract interest in this mission, ROFA made two tapes, each 15 minutes long with no commercials, and translated them into Vietnamese. Mrs. Marge Brinekmann and Mrs. Nancy Banmon recorded the first tape on behalf of the other wives. Mr. Dave Anderson, coordinator of the Fort Walton Beach POW-MIA effort, and Reverend Talmadge Smith, the unofficial chaplain of the mission, made the second tape. ROFA purportedly broadcast these tapes for a week, from 8:30 to 8:45 a.m., to convince the North Vietnamese authorities “about the universal concern of millions of people in the United States and around the world for the proper treatment of POWs.”⁵³

For more, see Marc J. Gilbert and William P. Head, *The Tet Offensive* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996).

⁵² Early efforts began in the Spring of 1966 until the League of Wives, later renamed The National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, was the first of these organizations that Sybil Stockdale founded in 1967. For more information and estimates on the Vietnam War, see Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War*. 1st ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 2, 14–62.

⁵³ Marilyn Passell, “Radio Free Asia Recording Wives’ Story for Broadcast,” *Playground Daily News*, November 3, 1970, p.1.

Concurrently, the U.S. press positively portrayed ROFA's commitment to the POWs' cause in tandem with women's organizations. From 1969 to 1973, several newspapers reported that ROFA's POWs campaign resonated with various women's clubs and chapters, showing their support and financial contribution. For example, the Grove City Senior Women's Club (PA), a branch of the Greater Federation of Women's Club, donated \$15 to ROFA in 1969.⁵⁴ According to the *Evening Independent*, other donations came from the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 9795 in Canal Fulton (OH).⁵⁵ The American Gold Star Mothers, Rock Island County Chapter (IL), donated \$5 to Radio of Free Asia in 1971 followed by a \$10 donation made by the Chapter in Moline (IL) in 1973.⁵⁶ Support for U.S. prisoners in Vietnam also came from The Sheffield Woman's Club (PA), the Golden Age Club at the Grande Hall (ME), and The Ladies Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Auxiliary Sathers Odgaard Post (IA).⁵⁷

⁵⁴ "Report Given at Club Meet," *The News-Herald*, February 11, 1969, p. 11.

⁵⁵ "Canal Fulton VFW auxiliary will have dinner," *The Evening Independent*, January 20, 1971, p. 14.

⁵⁶ "Donation Made by Rock Island County Gold Star Mothers," *The Rock Island Argus*, February 11, 1971, p. 24; "Gold Star Mothers compiling history of local chapter," *The Argus*, January 25, 1973, p. 13.

⁵⁷ "Woman's Club Conducts Thanksgiving Program," *Warren Times-Mirror and Observer*, November 26, 1971, p. 32; "Dexter Golden Agers Have Meeting," *The Bangor Daily News*, April 19, 1972, p. 10; "17 attend VFW Auxiliary meeting Jan. 17," *The Humboldt Independent*, January 20, 1973, p. 3.

Although these donations for ROFA's POWs campaign were not outrageous, they nonetheless demonstrate how ROFA managed to attract a fair amount of popular support in the U.S. It was another instance of Americans being unaware of what they were endorsing. In fact, these donations went to enrich Moon's organization and perhaps even Moon himself. By leveraging Americans' fears of communism and sentiments concerning the POWs campaigns in Vietnam, ROFA was aimed at cultivating the American people as a source of money for its activities and made the United States susceptible to South Korean influence. It was a nefarious and money-making project meant to play on Americans' fears, sentiments, and convictions.

ROFA and the ROK Government

It is no coincidence that South Korean President Park Chung Hee endorsed ROFA's POWs campaign and collaborated with the Moon organization in the early 1970s. In particular, Park was concerned about the prospect of cutbacks in U.S. forces in Asia. He considered ROFA a useful instrument to exaggerate rhetoric about POWs in hopes of persuading the U.S. to stay in Vietnam and Korea after the Nixon Administration sought to limit U.S. involvement in Asian wars. Indeed, according to the Nixon Doctrine, Nixon sought to transfer the burden of defense to Asian nations.⁵⁸ As historian Bruce Cumings put it, the clear message was "getting Asians to

⁵⁸ The new approach to U.S. foreign policy that President Nixon outlined during a press conference in Guam on July 25, 1969, became first known as the Guam Doctrine, and later formalized as the Nixon Doctrine after his November 1969 speech on Vietnamization, see Melvin R. Laird, *The Nixon Doctrine* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy, 1972), p. 3, accessed May 14, 2024, <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/The-Nixon-Doctrine.pdf?x91208>.

fight Asian wars.”⁵⁹ Had that happened, it could have reduced the flow of financial and military support that South Korea was receiving from the United States in return for the South Korean troops’ deployment in Vietnam. Furthermore, Park was concerned that the United States could abandon South Korea in favor of a multipolar geopolitical strategy. Though his calculations and strategy failed, Park’s concerns about U.S. policy changes were correct, given that Nixon visited China thereafter to restore diplomatic relations with Beijing and create leverage against the Soviet Union to end the war in Vietnam.⁶⁰

Park’s concerns over Nixon’s cutbacks of U.S. forces in Asia became a reality in February 1970.⁶¹ The State Department instructed U.S. Ambassador William J. Porter to arrange a meeting with Park to inform him that the United States had decided to withdraw the 7th Division deployed in Korea, approximately 20,000 men, as part of the Nixon Doctrine. Ambassador Porter communicated the unfortunate news to President Park on March 26, 1970. He also informed Park that Washington had something to offer South Korea: the timing of troop reduction could be negotiated, and military aid of \$1.5 million was offered to enable South

⁵⁹ Bruce Cumings, “Bringing Korea Back In: Structured Absence, Glaring Presence, and Invisibility,” in *Pacific Passage: The Study of American-East Asian Relations on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Warren I. Cohen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 356.

⁶⁰ For a work on Nixon’s 1972 trip to China, see Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao: The Week that Changed the World*. 1st ed (New York: Random House, 2007).

⁶¹ Boettcher, *Gifts of Deceit*, pp. 84–85.

Korea to modernize its military forces.⁶² With Richard Nixon as President, it became evident that the United States was no longer inclined to subsidize the Korean military as it began to withdraw its military forces from both Vietnam and South Korea.⁶³

However, the U.S. withdrawal risked undermining President Park and his South Korea. In fact, Park was concerned that the U.S. withdrawal from Korea would expose his country to a possible military attack from North Korea. Park's concerns over South Korea's security and defense were further justified by the fact that South Korea had been receiving military assistance from the United States during and after the Korean War. For example, U.S. military forces in Korea averaged 63,000 from 1954 to 1971, which not only contributed to protecting South Korea from potential attacks from the North but also strengthened the U.S.-South Korea military alliance.⁶⁴ The military ties between the United States and South Korea became even more important during the Vietnam War because, outside of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam

⁶² See *ibidem*, pp. 89–90; Uk Heo and Terence Roehrig, *The Evolution of the South Korea-United States Alliance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 166–167; and Tae Yang Kwak, “The Nixon Doctrine and the Yusin Reforms: American Foreign Policy, the Vietnam War, and the Rise of Authoritarianism in Korea, 1968-1973,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 12, No. 1/2 (Spring-Summer 2003): 54.

⁶³ President Nixon's decision to withdraw troops reflected the economic and financial strains the U.S. experienced by the late 1960s and early 1970s due to the high costs of the Vietnam War that contributed to weakening the U.S. economy and dollar. For more, see Freeman, pp. 278–296, and Wijnholds, p. 43, 147.

⁶⁴ Heo and Roehrig, p. 71.

(ARVN), South Korea provided the biggest non-U.S. contingent to fight in Vietnam, with approximately 312,000 troops serving from 1964 to 1973.⁶⁵

These security needs intersected with economic benefits. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the South Korean economy was built mainly by the war profits from the Vietnam War. South Korea earned \$60 million in 1966, surpassing \$380 million by the end of 1968. The agreement between South Korea and the United States to dispatch South Korean soldiers to Vietnam included U.S. assistance for the modernization of South Korean troops and work for South Korean contractors in South Vietnam, which had cost the United States more than \$1 billion between 1965 and 1970.⁶⁶

Therefore, when the U.S. ultimately withdrew the 7th Division from Korea in 1971, President Park sought new ways of safeguarding ROK security and Korea's economic interests. He was eager to manipulate U.S. Congress in every possible way, one of which was through ROFA. ROFA's commitment to learning more about missing U.S. soldiers in Vietnam spoke to South Korean President Park, who aspired to offset the effects of President Nixon's decision. In fact, when Ambassador Porter informed President Park of the U.S. withdrawal from South

⁶⁵ The U.S. provided \$5.5 billion in military aid from 1953 to 1972, and it has been estimated that the military sales to South Korea increased from \$295,000 in 1967 to \$100 million in 1974, reaching \$653 million in 1977, see R. R. Krishnan, "South Korean Export Oriented Regime: Context and Characteristics." *Social Scientist* 13, No. 7/8 (Jul. – Aug. 1985): 94–95.

⁶⁶ Economic benefits consisted of advantageous loans and conditions for Korean export goods on the U.S. market, along with a substantial wage for each South Korean soldier serving in Vietnam, see Heo and Roehrig, pp. 166–167; Richard Halloran, "Korea's Vietnam Troops Cost U.S. \$1-Billion," *The New York Times*, Sept. 13, 1970, p. 3; Jin Kim, "South Korea's Involvement in Vietnam and Its Economic and Political Impact," *Asian Survey* 10, No. 6 (Jun. 1970): 519–532.

Korea, Park strongly claimed that he “would not allow the American troops to leave Korea.”⁶⁷

To achieve this goal, Park collaborated with the Moon organization to affect U.S. politics by using the Vietnam War as a means of firming the two countries as allies.

Yet President Park and Moon were never in direct contact.⁶⁸ Their indirect collaboration began at the Blue House — the official residence of the President of South Korea — after Park met Bo Hi Pak and Tongsun Park, a South Korean businessman, lobbyist, and agent of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency. Through him, the South Korean President attempted to bribe U.S. congressmen and gain allies against Nixon’s new policy in Asia.⁶⁹ Tongsun Park fueled bribes and favors thanks to his primary contact at Capitol Hill — Congressman Richard T. Hanna (D-CA). It was through Hanna that South Korea obtained an entrée into Congress to bribe other U.S. congressmen and senators. Tongsun Park and Hanna agreed to share the commissions from U.S. rice sales to South Korea, which was regulated by Public Law 480, enabling South Korea to purchase U.S. grain surplus with local currency since 1954. After 1969, the attempt to use U.S. food aid programs as a weapon in foreign policy served specific military and security interests. Indeed, the rice sales to South Korea were then used to obtain favorable decisions for Seoul in the U.S. Congress. Hanna was responsible for lobbying other congressmen, but

⁶⁷ Boettcher, *Gifts of Deceit*, p. 90.

⁶⁸ Moon, *As a Peace-Loving Global Citizen*, pp. 158–160.

⁶⁹ Boettcher, pp. 96–97.

President Park was also involved in the rice sale commissions because he was providing financial incentives to Hanna, varying from \$100,000 to \$200,000.⁷⁰

Tongsun Park's help was certainly crucial to the ROK government in manipulating members of the U.S. Congress. However, the collaboration with the Moon organization was even more important because President Park hoped to influence a much wider audience in the United States through ROFA. Specifically, he supported ROFA's fundraising mail because, through its anti-communist activities, he hoped to exploit and exaggerate ROFA rhetoric about the POWs and get at the heart of U.S. public opinion to persuade the United States to stay in Vietnam.

Hence, Bo Hi Pak devised a plan to send 60,000 letters signed by President Park, asking for contributions to ROFA anti-communist broadcasting in Asia. ROFA's cultivation of U.S. anti-communist sentiment turned out to be a key element in Park's influential campaign. The intent was to position President Park as an especially prominent U.S. ally. It was also a way to admonish U.S. congressmen and loyal supporters of ROFA that Asia was still a battlefield against communism at a time when the Nixon administration was more inclined to negotiate rather than confront the communists.⁷¹ However, President Park's machinations and, by extension, those of the Moon organization eventually backfired under the pressure of suspicions

⁷⁰ President Dwight Eisenhower signed the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act, also known as Public Law 480, on July 10, 1954, see Robert L. Paarlberg, *Food Trade and Foreign Policy: India, the Soviet Union, and the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Boettcher, pp. 100–143.

⁷¹ Boettcher, pp. 156–158.

and investigations regarding South Korean illicit activities in the United States and the ROFA initiative.

Suspicious and Investigations

Key American officials raised suspicions about the ROFA initiative almost from its inception. Former President Eisenhower's executive assistant, retired General Robert L. Schulz, was the first American who became alarmed about ROFA, but also the one who arranged the meeting between Eisenhower and Moon in June 1965. Having set up that meeting in the first place, Schulz expressed concerns about using Eisenhower's name in connection to ROFA in a memorandum dated November 29, 1966. Since Admiral Burke was the man through whom Eisenhower became interested in ROFA and KCFF, Schulz asked him for some advice on the matter.⁷²

Schulz's concerns were indeed legitimate. Burke had resigned from the KCFF presidency in 1965. Specifically, he resigned after Robert Roland, an acquaintance of Bo Hi Pak and one of the original members of the KCFF's board of directors, gave Burke material on the Unification Church describing "Bo Hi Pak's ties with Moon."⁷³ As Roland claimed, Pak had told him he was "engaged in intelligence liaison work and was also proselytizing for Moon and the U.C.

⁷² "Robert L. Schultz, Memorandum for Record, November 29, 1966," Box 8, Folder MB-1 Memberships Accepted (August-December 1966), Dwight D. Eisenhower Post-Presidential Papers, 1961-69, 1966 Principal File, Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

⁷³ Boettcher, p. 45.

[Unification Church].”⁷⁴ Hence, Roland warned Burke about the underlying connections with the Unification Church with the understanding that Burke had accepted the KCFF presidency only because he did not know about the connections. For this reason, Burke resigned after almost a year as president of KCFF.⁷⁵ Therefore, in replying to Schulz, Burke recommended dissociating Eisenhower’s name from those organizations.⁷⁶ Besides this recommendation, Schulz’s immediate warnings in 1966 were not taken as seriously as they should have been and were never acted upon. However, a second round of suspicions unfolded in the early 1970s when key officials of the Nixon administration, concurrently with Park’s strategy to offset Nixon’s decision to reduce U.S. troops in Asia, continued to question South Korean activities in the United States and ROFA.

⁷⁴ Roland’s accusations are included in a 447-page report published by the Fraser Committee in 1977. This U.S. House of Representatives committee, which takes its name from its chairman Representative Donald M. Fraser of Minnesota, investigated U.S.-South Korean relations in 1976. Furthermore, Roland’s claims strengthen the account of Robert Boettcher, the Fraser Committee’s Staff Chief. For more information, consult *Investigation of Korean-American Relations*, pp. 312–325.

⁷⁵ Boettcher, p. 45. On the same page, Boettcher claimed that Burke did not inform other prominent Americans whose names were being used by KCFF because he was “never sufficiently alarmed.” Boettcher also inferred that despite Burke’s resignation, Bo Hi Pak continued using Burke’s name on the KCFF letterhead.

⁷⁶ “Robert L. Schulz, Memorandum for Record, November 29, 1966,” Box 8, Folder MB-1 Memberships Accepted (August-December 1966), Dwight D. Eisenhower Post-Presidential Papers, 1961-69, 1966 Principal File, Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

In fact, American officials within the Nixon administration raised more suspicions, including Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird.⁷⁷ In 1970, the Pentagon intercepted cables between the Korean embassy in Washington, D.C., and Seoul regarding suspicious money activity in U.S. Congress. Officials of the National Security Agency brought this piece of intelligence, codenamed “UMBRA,” to Laird’s attention. However, Laird concluded the cables were insufficient to evince that South Korea illegally bribed congressmen. Hence, this second round of suspicions also ended up nowhere. To Laird, there was not enough evidence to prove that U.S. politicians accepted foreign agents’ political contributions. Indeed, until the enactment of the Federal Campaign Act of 1974, which regulated how political contributions were raised and money spent after the fundraising abuses in Nixon’s 1972 presidential campaign, congressmen could accept contributions from foreign nationals “unless the recipient knew that the donor was a foreign agent.”⁷⁸ Despite his mild alertness, Laird warned the State Department

⁷⁷ When he was Secretary of Defense during the Nixon Administration from 1969 to 1973, Laird was the mastermind behind the administration’s “Vietnamization” policy.

⁷⁸ Kenneth H. Bacon and Jerry Landauer, “Pentagon Knew in ’70 of Korean Lobbying, Didn’t Tell Anyone,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 12, 1977, Box D30, Folder Korean Investigation – Newspaper Clips, 1977-78, Melvin R. Laird Papers, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. The Federal Campaign Act of 1974 was signed into law by President Ford, see “The White House Fact Sheet, Federal Election Campaign Act Amendments of 1974,” October 15, 1974, Box 14, Folder Federal Election Campaign Act Amendment – 1974, Philip Buchen Files, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. The same document is also available online at the following link: <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0019/4520542.pdf>. For more on the 1972 campaign and the Watergate scandal: Ben A. Franklin, “5-Million Given for Nixon in 2 Days

to monitor potential Korean lobbying efforts in Congress. His primary concern was that South Koreans could hinder Nixon's decision to reduce U.S. commitment in Asia by sidestepping the administration and directly addressing Congress. In Laird's view, this modus operandi could have political ramifications and impair the 1.5-billion-dollar program in financial aid and military equipment that the U.S. promised to South Korea in exchange for their approval on troop withdrawal.⁷⁹

Other key officials within the Nixon administration followed Laird's concerns. In the spring of 1971, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs U. Alexis Johnson warned Attorney General John Mitchell that ROFA was soliciting American money for its activities. He said that ROFA was mailing letters in which the names of prominent Americans had been connected to ROFA activities without their knowledge. Johnson informed Mitchell that these letters asked for U.S. money that was, in turn, allocated to pay for anti-communist broadcasts in East Asia. Nonetheless, the problem with this claim was that ROFA had been using ROK government broadcast facilities at no cost since its launch in 1966.⁸⁰

Predating Law," Special to *The New York Times*, September 30, 1973, accessed July 22, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/09/30/archives/5million-given-for-nixon-in-2-days-predating-law-confidence-in.html>.

⁷⁹ Laird became increasingly convinced that South Koreans intended to thwart President Nixon's decision to withdraw 20,000 of the 60,000 U.S. troops deployed in South Korea. For more, consult Richard Halloran, "Laird Says He Warned State Dept. About South Korea Lobby in 1970," *The New York Times*, November 10, 1976, Box D29, Folder Korean Investigation, 1977-78 (1), Melvin R. Laird Papers, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

These red flags continued to appear in the summer of 1971. On June 8, 1971, Donald L. Ranard, who served between 1970 and 1974 at the State's Office of Korean Affairs, warned that ROFA was a major object of the State Department's concern over violations of the Foreign Agents Registration Act. Ranard became increasingly convinced that an investigation was necessary.⁸¹ Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and former ambassador to Korea Winthrop Brown concurred with Ranard. Senator J. William Fulbright further agreed. Fulbright accused the State Department of not monitoring organizations proselytizing for a foreign government in the United States. Hence, he also called for an investigation into the suspect mailing that ROFA used to solicit hundreds of thousands of dollars in the United States by featuring the names of prominent Americans, including himself. He speculated that the ROK government could use ROFA money for purposes other than anti-communist activities.⁸²

As a result, Johnson, Ranard, Brown, and Fulbright pressed for a full investigation that targeted ROFA and improper Korean lobbying in the United States in 1971. Attorney General John Mitchell assigned the case to Assistant Attorney General Robert Mardian. The information memorandum that the State Department gave to the Department of Justice was prepared on June

⁸⁰ Johnson informed Mitchell during a break at a National Security Council meeting at the White House, see Boettcher, p. 197.

⁸¹ Before his retirement in 1974, Ranard became aware of intelligence reports that led him to believe that the South Korean government was involved in influence-peddling schemes involving U.S. congressmen. He testified about this before the House Subcommittee, see *Investigation of Korean-American Relations*, pp. 129–130; and Glenn Fowler, "Donald L. Ranard, 73, U.S. Aide Who Disclosed Seoul's Lobbying," *The New York Times*, August 1, 1990.

⁸² Boettcher, p. 217, and *Investigation of Korean-American Relations*, pp. 126–156.

2, 1971, which made clear that ROFA was a tool of the Korean government involved in illegal activities in the United States. Indeed, the memorandum was prepared under the direction of Ranard, who underscored that “ROFA [was] collecting money from unsuspecting Americans while using free broadcast facilities in Korea through the KCIA.”⁸³ Eventually, both Justice and the FBI interviewed Bo Hi Pak in 1971, but the investigation ended in a fiasco because of a lack of evidence.

Nonetheless, after many Americans warmly received and donated to ROFA after its inception, widespread skepticism of the enterprise began to take root by the early 1970s. In fact, rumors of South Korean illicit activities in the U.S. contributed to the mistrust that many American citizens began manifesting toward ROFA. This distrust, unlike the suspicions of key American officials, reflected the growing crisis of confidence that marked the changing dynamics of the 1970s. Popular anxieties over the corruption and dishonest machinations of U.S. politics intertwined with ROFA’s manipulations in the United States.⁸⁴ Indeed, many citizens directed messages full of concerns to popular newsletters and consumer information services, expressing their doubts about ROFA money soliciting. “I have a letter from ‘Radio Free Asia’ asking . . . for money. I’d like to be sure the organization is reliable before giving,” asked Mrs. F. R. Waynesville through “Action Line,” the consumer information service of the *Journal Herald* (OH). “We have no evidence which supports Radio Free Asia’s claim,” responded the

⁸³ Boettcher, p. 217. See also, *Activities of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency in the United States*, pp. 68–73, and *Investigation of Korean-American Relations*, pp. 127–140.

⁸⁴ The surrounding economic troubles of the 1970s and a losing war in Vietnam intersected with the U.S. public’s skepticism toward U.S. institutions and officials after President Nixon’s involvement in the Watergate scandal in 1972, see Schulman, pp. 43–49.

columnist.⁸⁵ More remarkably, American journalist Flora Lewis denounced ROFA and the illegitimacy of its fund-raising activities in her commentary published in *The Indianapolis Star* in 1971. She warned her readers that ROFA was backed by South Korean President Park, concluding that “a spot check produced several denials that the people named had ever heard of ROFA.”⁸⁶

This growing disillusionment among the American public regarding the dubious activities of ROFA and, by extension, American politics, would be further intensified by the eruption of the Watergate scandal in 1974. Thanks to the *Washington Post*, which revealed the wrongdoing and cover-up of the Nixon administration, Watergate represented the nadir in American politics. As historian Bruce J. Schulman posited in this respect, “Watergate would leave a tangled legacy,” after which Americans “sensed that the nation had entered a period of decline.”⁸⁷ Indeed, by the mid-1970s, a convergence of several factors exacerbated the pre-existing American public’s skepticism toward U.S. institutions and officials. The already shaky American economy entered a severe tailspin following the Arab oil embargo of 1973. Then, in 1974, President Nixon resigned in disgrace after the Watergate scandal, and South Vietnam ultimately fell into communist hands in 1975. Nonetheless, another “-gate” scandal emerged in 1976 when

⁸⁵ “Action Line,” *The Journal Herald*, March 30, 1971, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Flora Lewis, “POW’s Plight Used for Dubious Fund-Raising,” *The Indianapolis Star*, May 12, 1971, p. 25.

⁸⁷ Schulman, *The Seventies*, p. 43.

the *Washington Post* finally revealed the dubious connection between ROFA, Moon, and the ROK government just two years after the controversial Watergate.

On a Sunday morning in October 1976, Koreagate erupted on the *Washington Post* front page with a catchy headline that heralded “SEOUL GAVE MILLIONS TO U.S. OFFICIALS.”⁸⁸ The subhead went on: “A ring of South Korean agents directed personally by South Korean President Park Chung Hee has dispersed between \$500,000 and \$1 million yearly in cash gifts and campaign contributions.” The article celebrated the accomplishments of the Fraser Committee, which under Congressman Donald M. Fraser (D-MN), launched a second, full-fledged investigation into U.S.-South Korean relations in 1976. Furthermore, the article detailed the story of the rice agency that involved Tongsun Park and another “unnamed KCIA” agent and was accompanied by pictures of Congressmen Richard T. Hanna (D-CA), Cornelius Edward Gallagher (D-NJ), William S. Broomfield (R-MI), and Governor Edwin Edwards (D-LA). The leading U.S. newspapers had acquired “copies of six checks” that Tongsun had written to Hanna for 22,500 dollars.⁸⁹

After the *Washington Post*’s landmark scoop, several articles appeared across the country, underscoring ROFA’s unsavory connections. For example, *The Chicago Tribune*

⁸⁸ Maxine Cheshire and Scott Armstrong, “Seoul Gave Millions to U.S. Officials: S. Korea Gave Millions in Cash, Gifts to Congressmen,” *Washington Post*, October 24, 1976.

⁸⁹ Boettcher, p. 241. The exact number of U.S. congressmen and South Korean politicians accused of illegal activities in the U.S. to accomplish South Korean objectives varies between 90 and 115, depending on the sources. Nonetheless, the *Washington Post* reported that, besides Tongsun Park and Hanna, Congressmen Cornelius E. Gallagher (D-NJ), William S. Broomfield (R-MI), and Governor Edwin Edwards (D-LA) were also involved in the scandal.

denounced in October 1976 the link between ROFA, Moon, and the South Korean government with the following headline: “Radio Free Asia, run by an associate of Moon, is controlled by the South Korean government.”⁹⁰ Local newspapers followed, reporting another “-gate” scandal and issuing a scathing condemnation of the Nixon administration for its inability to keep Moon’s and Park’s lobby in check. For example, *The Kansas City Star* claimed that the inertia of the Nixon administration in preventing these types of illegal activities in the United States was because the administration “did not want to jeopardize the Korean commitment of 52,000 troops to the war in Vietnam.”⁹¹

Five years after the first 1971 investigation and suspicions about the Korean lobby, the Fraser Committee finally found the South Korean government responsible for illicit activities in the United States. But why did it take until 1976 to see those original concerns corroborated? By the time the Koreagate scandal unfolded, Americans’ convictions about the unparalleled global role of the United States, its unrivaled military and technological superiority, and confidence in U.S. officials had dramatically declined in the aftermath of Watergate and the failure in Vietnam.⁹² Not only did these changing dynamics limit South Korea’s success in securing its

⁹⁰ “Moon-KCIA tie,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 2, 1976, p. 176.

⁹¹ “Officials Ignored Korean Lobby,” *The Kansas City Star*, November 14, 1976, p. 2.

⁹² The domestic and international changes the U.S. experienced in the mid-seventies played a significant role in changing U.S. attitudes and perspectives. By then, Nixon had resigned from the presidency and U.S. disillusionment was cemented when North Vietnam took over the South following the U.S. withdrawal. For more, see James William Gibson, *The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2000).

desired outcomes in the United States, but they also demolished the endorsement that ROFA had gathered in the mid-1960s due to its effectiveness at speaking to and manipulating popular American convictions about radio and fears of communism.

Thus, by the late 1970s, the Fraser Committee had no doubts that South Korea had tried establishing an intelligence network in the White House. The Committee found that Tongsun Park, working on behalf of President Park, established this illicit network to push back against Nixon's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from South Korea and Vietnam. The Committee also found the Unification Movement involved in the Korean lobby to influence America through KCFF and ROFA. The total amount of money raised by KCFF is currently unknown, nor is the modality by which the money was allegedly "siphoned off for use by Korean agents" as *The Manhattan Mercury*, reporting a nationally syndicated Associated Press story, railed in its pages.⁹³ However, the Fraser Committee reported that the donations to ROFA activities came from Americans who had contributed under the belief that they were helping to fund purported broadcasts in East Asia. Robert Boettcher, Chief of Staff of the Fraser Committee, also speculated on ROFA's suspicious finances, which had led Donald Ranard, Alexis Johnson, Winthrop Brown, and William Fulbright to request an investigation in 1971.⁹⁴

Yet, after two years of investigation and allegations, Koreagate ended in a fiasco. Writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, Robert Jackson heralded in 1978 that the scandal, seen as "the

⁹³ "Foundation mum on allegations," *Associated Press* story reprinted by *The Manhattan Mercury*, November 2, 1976, p. 15.

⁹⁴ Boettcher, *Gifts of Deceit*, p. 217.

successor to Watergate,” ended up being “a flop.”⁹⁵ Indeed, fewer than ten were convicted out of 115 people who faced criminal charges, among them Congressman Richard T. Hanna. The Fraser Committee acknowledged South Korea’s misgivings and efforts to bribe members of the U.S. Congress. However, Koreagate did not produce the desired results because the committee could not find enough evidence to uphold the criminal charges. All in all, the scandal was only “a speed bump” that marked U.S.-South Korean relations in the 1970s.⁹⁶

Nonetheless, the Fraser Committee investigation made clear that ROFA was a well-orchestrated scam under the aegis of the Moon organization. It was, indeed, the ROK government that allowed KCFF to establish a contract with KBS to use its transmitter at no cost in the first place. Therefore, it is very unlikely that the money that KCFF was soliciting from Americans served to pay for ROFA broadcasts since KCFF paid no rent to the KBS facilities. Furthermore, no evidence suggests that these broadcasts effectively reached and influenced their targeted audience.

Where did the money that Americans gave to support ROFA broadcasts and activities go? Although it is impossible to track the specific ways the money was expended, it is safe to say that the money went to benefit the Unification Church, if not Moon himself. According to the Fraser Committee report, Moon and Bo Hi Pak discontinued ROFA in 1975 because the KCFF projects were the target of U.S. audits concerning violations of the standards governing South

⁹⁵ Robert L. Jackson, “Results Meager as Korea Scandal Sputters to an End,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1978, B1 in Shelley Sang-Hee Lee, “The Party’s Over: Sex, Gender, and Orientalism in the Koreagate Scandal of the 1970s,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 39, No. 3 (2018): 6.

⁹⁶ Lee, p. 7.

Korean fundraising activities in the United States.⁹⁷ In fact, Moon played loose with his finances because ultimately, only a few years after the termination of ROFA, he was convicted of income tax evasion for his financial malfeasance and served prison time in the United States.⁹⁸ Hence, the link between ROFA and the Koreagate scandal demonstrates that South Korea was able, at least sometimes, to succeed in manipulating the United States.

In his memoirs, Bo Hi Pak labeled the Fraser Committee investigation as unjust and orchestrated to depict KCFF and the Unification Church as agents of the Korean government.⁹⁹ The reality is that the troubles surrounding the U.S. domestic and international contexts of the seventies, the concern that the State Department had raised in 1971, and the 1976 investigation of the Fraser Committee all concurred to damage ROFA's reputation in the United States. These contingencies, as well as the increasing skepticism that Americans began to agitate in the pages of local and national newspapers, forced Moon and Bo Hi Pak to discontinue activities because they had overplayed their hands. Aside from the impact on ROFA itself and the many American and South Korean actors involved in the scandal, Koreagate made clear that the ROFA initiative had fed on American deeply held, but ultimately ill-informed, popular convictions about what radio could achieve in East Asia and fears of communism.

⁹⁷ *Investigation of Korean-American Relations*, p. 362.

⁹⁸ The Associated Press, "U.S. Releases Moon, Ending Prison Term on Tax Fraud Count," *The New York Times*, August 21, 1985.

⁹⁹ Pak, *Messiah*, p. 286.

Conclusion

The story of ROFA is an example of how South Korea capitalized on the U.S.'s effort to harness radio as a cost-effective tool of anti-communist propaganda between the 1960s and the 1970s. South Korean actors manipulated U.S. aversion toward communism alongside American convictions in the power of radio to influence by mobilizing, at least in part, financial and political support to pursue South Korean interests in the United States. ROFA is thus a case study that illustrates the limitations and unintended consequences of the South Korean radio initiative. ROFA proved that radio propaganda, when attached to ideological and cultural clichés familiar to Americans, made the United States susceptible to foreign influence.

Indeed, the efforts of Moon, Park, and their respective allies achieved some success. In particular, they relied on flyers, newspaper articles, public fundraising activities, and petitions that included statements and endorsements from many unwitting former U.S. presidents, politicians, and popular entertainment industry personalities. Former President Eisenhower, Congressman Fred B. Rooney (D-PA), and American singer and actor Bing Crosby are just a few names of prominent Americans who endorsed ROFA. They did so because it spoke to popular conceptions about radio as an unrivaled foreign policy tool of Cold War propaganda that could effectively support the U.S. anti-communist battle in East Asia. To these unsuspecting Americans, the ROFA initiative was attuned to VOA's and Radio Free Europe's (RFE) foreign policy objectives. In fact, like VOA and RFE, ROFA appeared as a radio initiative that sought to expand supposedly universal U.S. ideas about democracy and freedom into communist countries through anti-communist radio propaganda.

But what happened to ROFA and its leaders after 1976? ROFA was terminated and never operated again after the outbreak of the Koreagate scandal. Moon's popularity gradually declined

to the point that newspapers described the Unification Church as a mere “sect” that attempted to lobby for the Park’s government in the United States. Indeed, Moon’s proselytization and ministry in the United States ended on September 18, 1976, with a farewell speech imbued with anti-communist patriotism during a mass rally held at Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. Bo Hi Pak continued to dedicate himself to his philanthropic organizations and his renewed media career as the publisher of *The Washington Times*.¹⁰⁰ On his end, President Park’s attempt to influence U.S. politics to achieve South Korean political objectives ignited American suspicions about Park as a suitable international ally for the United States.¹⁰¹ Koreagate was the end result of Park’s insecurities and his unsuccessful effort to manipulate the United States to fulfill his self-interested goals. As Sheila Miyoshi Jager posited in this respect, Koreagate was the

¹⁰⁰ The Unification Church was also commonly referred to as a cult. For more information, see No author, “Moon’s Sect Seeks to Build Support in the U.S. for South Korean Regime,” *The New York Times*, May 25, 1976, 16 c, Box 54, Folder Unification Church, Theodore C. Marrs Files, 1974-1976], Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. For more on Bo Hi Pak’s life after Koreagate, see “Washington Times Corp. Founding Chairman Bo Hi Pak Dies,” Special to *The Washington Times*, January 18, 2019, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/jan/18/washington-times-corp-founding-chairman-bo-hi-pak/>. Bo Hi Pak, “Messiah – My Testimony to Rev. Sun Myung Moon, Appendix B – Brief Chronology of the Life of Dr. Bo Hi Pak,” accessed April 29, 2024, <https://www.tparents.org/library/unification/books/messiah/Messiah-91.htm>. For Moon’s farewell speech, see “Sun Myung Moon Ends Ministry in the U.S. With Anti-Communist Speech in Capital,” *The New York Times*, September 20, 1976, accessed April 29, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/09/20/archives/sun-myung-moon-ends-ministry-in-the-us-with-anticommunist-speech-in.html>.

¹⁰¹ Lee, p. 7.

“desperate attempt at influence peddling by a regime that was certain it was being abandoned.”¹⁰²

¹⁰² Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Brother at War: The Unending Conflict in Korea* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2013), p. 406 in *Ibidem*, p. 3.

Chapter 4 - “Bringing a Flavor of Home”: The American Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN)

On Christmas Day 1971, U.S. Air Force Staff Sergeant Stephen Pennington was entering the last month of his Vietnam tour and waiting to be reunited with his loved ones in the United States.¹ He missed celebrating Christmas with his family and wondered what it would be like to spend the holidays at home. It was dark in his barrack, with no Christmas tree, glowing decorations, or joyful songs. But wait a minute! Suddenly, while he was listening to the Armed Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN), a familiar dialogue came out from the radio loudspeakers. It

¹ The interviewees come from a nationwide pool across several U.S. states. This clarification also applies to both chapters 4 and 5 on AFVN and RFT, respectively. The researcher was in Manhattan, Kansas, interviewing respondents from across the nation via Zoom. For simplicity, the researcher will use her location as the main reference in the footnotes regarding interviews with Vietnam veterans. Stephen Pennington (U.S. Air Force), interviewed by Roberta Meloni, August 11, 2023. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter. Pennington served at Phu Cat Air Base in Bình Định Province, the Central Highlands, and the airfield at Danang Air Base in Quang Nam Province from 1971 to 1972. Pennington took part in an online questionnaire concerning his tours and radio listening experiences during the war, which was circulated from early May to early June 2023. The questionnaire gathered answers from fifty-two veterans who served in various branches of the U.S. military between 1964 and 1972. Based on the quality of their answers and previous professional background, the researcher selected an elite number of respondents for the interview process. Pennington is one of them.

was *Miracle on 34th Street*.² Pennington could not believe it. His mind was immediately transported to another place and time when he was a kid, and he would spend every Christmas watching that movie in the warmth of his home. “I could pick everything,” he said, “and I could know what the scene was in the movie.”³ Pennington’s recollection illustrates the role that AFVN could play for American soldiers in Vietnam by offering a psychological connection to the United States. Indeed, the strategy to use U.S. broadcasts to provide soldiers with a connection to home that would keep them motivated to fight was a trend not specific to Vietnam. It reflected a historical pattern inaugurated in World War II when the War Department established the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS) in 1942 to support the U.S. war effort and bring “a touch of home” to Americans fighting on the front.⁴

² It was a holiday classic, comedy-drama movie released in 1947 in the United States and starring Maureen O’Hara and John Payne. Several remakes of the movie have been made over the years, including the latest version released in 1994.

³ Pennington, interview.

⁴ For more information, consult “Historical Summary of AFRT/AFVN in the Republic of Viet Nam, 1962-1971,” undated, folder 228-08/Organizational History Files Folder I 1967-1970, box 1, Records of the United States Forces in Southeast Asia, RG 472, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. For a study that discusses the role of American radio during World War II, see Gerd Horten, *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda during World War II* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002). For the direct quote and the development of broadcastings that informed and entertained soldiers during World War II, see Matthew Seelinger, “A Touch of Home: The Armed Forces Radio Service, 1942-1945,” *On Point* 19, No. 2 (Fall 2013): 36-43. The direct quote is from page 42.

From the outset, the U.S. government explicitly established AFVN to support the successful execution of the Vietnam War. The first AFVN radio transmission occurred on August 15, 1962, when President Kennedy, following his predecessors' choices, continued to provide aid and military assistance to the South Vietnamese government to prevent it from falling into communist hands.⁵ After his assassination in 1963, the Johnson administration continued the escalation. By the time troops' morale waned and opposition to the war peaked after the infamous Tet Offensive of 1968, AFVN had already doubled its broadcasting hours and expanded its facilities across South Vietnam.⁶ In so doing, the AFVN mission reflected the U.S. military strategy to uplift troops' morale while preventing any potential disruption that would hinder the broader U.S. effort of winning the war in Vietnam, which again spoke to unrealistic convictions about the presumed power of radio to influence audiences and early ideas and approaches of what would later be termed propaganda model.

In fact, AFVN aired a vast array of radio shows. Specifically, these shows mirrored mainstream U.S. broadcasting stripped of any controversial content that could undermine the successful execution of the war. Among the most important examples, AFVN mainstream

⁵ When President Eisenhower left office in 1961, Kennedy pursued his predecessor's approach and launched a policy of counterinsurgency to support South Vietnam against the Viet Cong guerrilla attacks. For a work that explores the escalation of U.S. assistance under the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, see David E. Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁶ Tet marked the escalation of the war, during which North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces attacked several outposts and cities in South Vietnam. For more, see Marc J. Gilbert and William P. Head, *The Tet Offensive* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996).

programming included country western, rock and roll, and “Top 40” music formats, alongside sports recaps, interviews, and news.⁷ AFVN deejays and radio personalities provided American soldiers with a sense of intimacy through their voices, music, and radio shows. This aspect of radio was a constant theme since broadcasting’s early days when American radio listeners in the U.S. often engaged with radio programming and announcers to feel connected and make sense of those transitional moments in American history.⁸

At the same time, AFVN entertained American soldiers while fitting into a broader homeward-facing American media and communications options available to soldiers in Vietnam. In fact, AFVN music and radio shows were just one option among many that American soldiers had at their disposal to cultivate their desire to stay connected to their faraway home. Among the most important, letters, tapes with voice recordings, sporadic phone calls through the Military Auxiliary Radio System (MARS), newspapers, movies, and even popular American television series were other options besides radio that soldiers in Vietnam used to stay connected to the United States.

⁷ “Top 40” was a music format that emerged in the 1950s and played the most popular, broadcast, and best-selling songs. For more, see Susan J. Douglas, *Listening in Radio and the American Imagination*. 1st University of Minnesota Press ed. (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 246.

⁸ See Bruce Lenthall, *Radio’s America the Great Depression and the Rise of Modern Mass Culture*. 1st ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Elena Razlogova, *The Listener’s Voice Early Radio and the American Public*. 1st ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Jason Loviglio, *Radio’s Intimate Public: Network Broadcasting and Mass-Mediated Democracy*. NED-New ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

However, it is important to note that AFVN, like American radio at home, has never historically been a “cultural unifier” (to use Alexander Russo’s words) in engaging the various segments and demographics comprising its intended audience.⁹ For example, extensive scholarship has acknowledged the inability of supposedly national radio to work as a nation-building technology capable of overcoming cultural, racial, and ethnic differences comprising the American public during the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁰ Such studies have highlighted how American listeners, analyzed across race, class, gender, and ethnicity, often resisted mainstream programming and demanded content that appealed to their tastes and preferences.¹¹ Similar dynamics about race and demographics speak to the challenges that AFVN faced in engaging American soldiers in Vietnam.

Indeed, the AFVN mission fell short of its objectives not due to blind and unrealistic faith in radio’s ability to influence but because AFVN’s effort to account for the context in which it

⁹ Alexander Russo, *Points on the Dial: Golden Age Radio Beyond the Networks* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 4.

¹⁰ For other important radio studies that have influenced this chapter, see Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In Radio and the American Imagination*. 1st University of Minnesota Press ed. (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994); Barbara Dianne Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

¹¹ Razlogova, p. 53.

operated fell short. AFVN sought to replicate the substance of mainstream U.S. broadcasting, which had long targeted a primarily white and middle-class audience. However, AFVN failed to engage its target audience to the degree it hoped, partly because of the demographics comprising the U.S. military in Vietnam. For instance, the percentage of Black soldiers fighting in Vietnam was considerably higher than the percentage of African Americans that constituted the U.S. population at large. In fact, the U.S. military draft system disproportionately affected Black soldiers, but also other ethnicities such as Latinos, compared to their white counterparts. These disparities became especially true after the passage of the Selective Service Act of June 1948, which exempted well-educated and wealthy whites from the draft.¹² It was in this multiracial context that AFVN failed to engage the larger array of non-whites in the U.S. military in Vietnam. By mirroring mainstream U.S. broadcasting, AFVN did not cater to the diverse preferences of the various ethnic and racial groups within the military.

In so arguing, this chapter does not claim to be a true or statistically representative sample of the AFVN audience. It seeks to offer a perspective on the extent to which white listeners welcomed AFVN mainstream programming and how these dynamics primarily relate to

¹² For more, see Westheider, pp. 14, 21; Lea Ybarra and Edward James Olmos, *Vietnam Veterans: Chicanos Recall the War*. 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); and José Olagues (U.S. Army), interviewed by Roberta Meloni, August 23, 2024. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter. Staff Sergeant Olagues never went to Vietnam, but he was a draftee who primarily served at the U.S. Army base in Fort Ord, California, from 1967 to 1966. Olagues' claim on the unfairness of the draft system that affected other ethnic minorities beyond African Americans is further analyzed in David Cortright, *Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), especially chapter 8, pp. 155-179.

non-white soldiers. Indeed, interviews with Vietnam veterans on which this chapter is based, the majority of whom are white enlisted men with the rank of Sergeant in the U.S. Army, revealed that Black soldiers often resented the lack of Black music and shows in what was the generally AFVN mainstream programming. In fact, this chapter contends that AFVN's programming was not well-suited for a significant part of its audience in Vietnam, which diminished its ability to level potential tensions within the military ranks and function as the intended psychological link. Overall, AFVN's misreading of the context in Vietnam reflected the oversimplified understandings of the reach and appeal of mainstream broadcasting in the U.S., compounded by demographics in Vietnam that did not match what made mainstream American broadcasting popular and profitable in the U.S.

AFVN Radio Programming in Vietnam

At AFVN Saigon, broadcaster U.S. Army Sergeant Dick Cedner hosted morning and evening programs to entertain the troops with good music and talks. To him, these radio programs became a mission to help his fellow American soldiers go through their tour and bring a bit of the United States to Vietnam. Cedner felt "good" because he was helping his fellow Americans get through the war. Like many of his AFVN colleagues, he knew he was playing a "little" part in it by delighting and comforting those "guys listening to AFVN." As he proudly claimed, "it was just bringing a flavor of home to them!"¹³ In replicating the substance of U.S.

¹³ Dick Cedner (U.S. Army), interviewed by Roberta Meloni, July 11, 2023. The respondent did not agree to disclose his identity. Therefore, the name used in this dissertation chapter is an alias intended to protect the respondent's privacy. Cedner served at AFVN Saigon from 1968 to 1969, and he reached the rank of Spec/5, equivalent to a sergeant in the U.S. Army.

broadcasting that was popular in the United States, AFVN hoped to appeal to the presumed soldiers' common cultural background by tapping into their shared sense of being American citizens living miles away from home. Most of the soldiers that AFVN attempted to engage were young recruits aged nineteen and twenty-two who often regarded U.S. popular entertainment, such as music and radio shows, as markers of their culture and generation.¹⁴ In fact, AFVN aimed to replicate U.S. domestic sounds and broadcasts to keep soldiers motivated to fight while preventing any disruption that could hinder the broader U.S. effort to win the war in Vietnam.

It is no coincidence that the first AFVN radio transmission occurred on August 15, 1962, when President Kennedy continued his predecessors' policy to assist South Vietnam. After Kennedy, President Johnson cemented the U.S. intervention in Vietnam with the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which allowed the United States to engage in the conflict without a formal declaration of war.¹⁵ As the war dragged on between 1965 and 1967, the U.S. government increased AFVN programming on AM and FM from eighteen to twenty-four hours a day. It also expanded the reach of AFVN's radio signals through the construction of nine broadcast detachments located in various parts of South Vietnam that could cover several miles of range

¹⁴ Westheider, p. 76.

¹⁵ Congress passed the resolution on August 7, 1964, after the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, an allegedly enemy attack on two U.S. warships off the coast of North Vietnam, was exaggerated: see Michael H. Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945-1968*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1996, pp.72-105.

out of Saigon.¹⁶ Thus, by the time of the infamous Tet Offensive of 1968, AFVN reached the widest American audience serving in Vietnam and entertained it with “whatever was hot or popular back in the States.”¹⁷

Most AFVN material aired to American soldiers in Vietnam was pre-prepared in Los Angeles, California. There, American radio broadcasters, disc jockeys, and famous personalities of the entertainment industry recorded their shows at Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS). Robert Weston Smith, an American deejay better known as Wolfman Jack; radio deejay and announcer Tony Pigg; and American radio personality, actor, and disc jockey Kemal Amin “Casey” Kasem are just a few important names that worked at AFRTS.¹⁸ Once recorded, these shows reached Saigon by plane after several days. Then, when AFVN

¹⁶ Billy Williams (U.S. Army), interviewed by Roberta Meloni, July 21, 2023. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter. Williams was drafted in 1970, and his tour lasted from September 1971 to September 1972. He arrived in Vietnam as a Spec/4 and came out as Spec/5. He served as a Signal Corps aircraft electronics technician and then AFVN television operator before working at AFVN as a deejay and host of *Orient Express*.

¹⁷ Cedner, interview.

¹⁸ Williams, interview. For a complete list of Hollywood personalities who made shows for the troops, consult “American Forces Vietnam Network Recordings,” accessed February 8, 2024, <https://www.otrcat.com/p/afvn-recordings-armed-forces-vietnam>.

broadcasters and working staff in Saigon received the pre-recorded material, they put the tapes together to create the specific content portions of AFVN programming.¹⁹

Furthermore, on March 24, 1966, an undersea cable connected Saigon with AFRTS Los Angeles. This development improved the broadcasting quality through two-way transmissions, meaning that the U.S. transmitted to Saigon and vice versa.²⁰ Indeed, between the late 1960s and the 1970s, this undersea cable granted soldiers the enjoyment of live sports events and recaps like the World Series, NFL and NBA games.²¹ This technological improvement was psychologically important because it provided Americans with another vital link to home. As historian Meredith H. Lair argued, prior to the undersea cable, news and sports events “were put on 16mm film” and reached Vietnam many days later.²² Thanks to the underwater cable, soldiers could listen to live broadcasts, happening as they heard them, as opposed to taped broadcasts.

Such technical and technological developments proved quintessential as opposition to the Vietnam War continued to grow, and troops’ morale deteriorated by the 1970s. President

¹⁹ Robert Morecook (U.S. Army), interview with Roberta Meloni, August 14, 2023. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter. Morecook arrived in Vietnam with the rank of Spec/4, equivalent to corporal, before being promoted to Spec/5.

²⁰ Jim White and Jerry Nelson, “AFVN Timeline (Narrative & Graph),” accessed February 14, 2024, <https://www.afvnvets.net/hist---timeline.html>.

²¹ Williams, follow-up interview with Roberta Meloni, July 17, 2024.

²² Meredith H. Lair, *Armed with Abundance: Consumerism and Soldiering in the Vietnam War*. 1st ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 134.

Richard Nixon promised honorable peace in Vietnam while also bombing key targets in Southeast Asia, including Cambodia and Laos. In April 1970, he also committed the U.S. to invade Cambodia, thus perpetuating that string of presidential choices that cemented the U.S. debacle in Vietnam.²³ Concurrently, soldiers' disappointment with the war surged by the 1970s. As historian David Cortright argued in this respect, the widespread insubordination and dissent within the military ranks that marked much of the 1970s reflected soldiers' "disgust" for an unpopular war.²⁴

Given the complexity of the context in which it operated, AFVN did not play anything controversial that could ignite tensions.²⁵ Indeed, the effort to strip AFVN programming of

²³ See Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2002*. 9th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004), pp. 267-281.

²⁴ David Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance during the Vietnam War* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2005), p. 11. For more on GI and Vietnam soldiers' resistance to the war, see Richard R. Moser, *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent during the Vietnam Era* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

²⁵ Army Specialist (Spec/4) Robert Lawrence claimed in 1970 that AFVN radio and television were censored, and this accusation was later supported by News Officer Captain Randall Moody. Much credit goes to Robert Morecook, who kindly introduced me to Lawrence and Moody via email. Lawrence was extremely kind to acknowledge my request to take part in my dissertation questionnaire and potential one-on-one interview, but he had to decline because he was working on an important publication. Moody took part in the dissertation questionnaire, but unfortunately, he did not follow up on my request for an interview. A few articles discussing the alleged AFVN censorship are Charles B. Moore, "Censorship of AFVN News in Vietnam," *Journal of Broadcasting* 15, No. 4 (1971): 387-96, and Rick Fredericksen, "All the News That's Fit to Air," Historynet, accessed August 26, 2024, <https://www.historynet.com/news-thats-fit-air/>.

explicitly controversial content aligned with the U.S. effort to use AFVN for the successful execution of the war. AFVN and its broadcasters were often limited to playing what was in the AFRTS library, which included songs to play on the radio.²⁶ AFVN broadcasters could not air songs forbidden by the officer in charge, such as antiwar songs, drug songs, or any other song that would incite further tensions and divisions within the ranks.²⁷ For example, U.S. Army Sergeant Billy Williams, who served in Vietnam from 1971 to 1972, claimed that the only “paperwork” he ever saw that forbade the airing of a song related to Freda Payne’s 1971 *Brings the Boys Home*. The song, whose message revolved around the need to withdraw American soldiers from the unpopular Vietnam War, was officially banned on AFVN because it was “a bridge too far.”²⁸ Nonetheless, in replicating the substance of U.S. broadcasting stripped of explicit controversial content, AFVN mainstream programs covered a variety of radio programs and music styles that paralleled popular domestic sounds such as country western, rock and roll, and “Top 40.”

Town and Country, *Sergeant Pepper*, *Orient Express*, and *Dawn Buster* are some examples of AFVN’s mainstream and most popular radio shows in Vietnam.²⁹ Broadcasting

²⁶ Williams, interview. Copyright problems were another major issue that often limited AFVN broadcasters from playing specific songs or content.

²⁷ Williams and Morecook, interviews.

²⁸ Williams, interview.

²⁹ Other less-known AFVN programs included *Million Dollar Music*, *Nightbeat*, *Panorama*, *Purple Grotto Jazz*, *Go*, and *Top 30 Countdown*. For more, consult Jim White, “AFVN Audio Archives- Page 2,” accessed February 17, 2024, <https://www.afnvets.net/audio-archives-2.html>.

from the AFVN headquarters in Saigon, Cedner hosted his *Town and Country* show on AM from 7 to 9 p.m., during which he brought homebound country music vibes to soldiers in Vietnam. Indeed, *Town & Country* entertained listeners with popular country and western music like, for example, “Cryin’ Time” by Buck Owens & Susan Raye, Billy Edd Wheeler’s “Ode to the Little Brown Shack Out Back,” and Dickey Lee’s “Sparklin’ Brown Eyes.”³⁰

Indeed, country and western music are just one example through which AFVN attempted to build up morale and a stronger connection with the United States. By interacting with a specific song, music enabled American troops to escape reality, thus offering a powerful cognitive experience through which soldiers could drum the war out of their minds. According to U.S. Army Sergeant Douglas J. Bradley, music became the connective fabric that linked American soldiers in Vietnam. It was available everywhere: in the barracks, rooms, and bars. It was almost a mystic ritual that every American enjoyed daily, alone or in groups, to psychologically survive the war. As Bradley proudly claimed, “It kept me alive!”³¹

³⁰ After Cedner left Vietnam in 1969, Technical Sergeant (TSgt) USAF Donald “Don” Cotterell became another host of *Town and Country* from 1972 to 1973. For an example of this radio show, consult, “AFVN: Don Cotterell’s Town & Country Show, 562AU1831,” no date, Paul Kasper Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 21 September, 2024, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=562AU1831>.

³¹ Douglas J. Bradley (U.S. Army), interview with Roberta Meloni, July 12, 2023. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter. After being inducted in March 1970, he served in Vietnam until 1971, during which he earned the rank of Spec/5. Bradley is co-author with Craig Werner of the seminar music book *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War*, which explores the effects of popular music on American soldiers in the Vietnam War Bradley, interview.

Rock and roll was another popular music genre, perhaps the most important, that American soldiers wanted to hear in Vietnam.³² AFVN had a dedicated Sunday night rock and roll program called *Sergeant Pepper*, during which soldiers could listen to rock bands in vogue back home, like, for example, the Beatles, Creedence, The Animals, Steppenwolf, and Carlos Santana. Listeners could dance to the distorting and pulsating rock music of *Magic Carpet Ride* by Steppenwolf or the Beatles' *Helter Skelter*, to mention a few.³³ For instance, Army Specialist John Ketwig, who served as a mechanic in an ordinance unit supporting the 4th Infantry Division from 1967 to 1968, claimed that AFVN was available to anyone with a radio and aired "the latest thing," or whatever was popular in the United States. He confessed he liked to listen to rock music because it helped him escape reality and feel more connected to his distant fellow Americans back home.³⁴

³² Cedner, interview. For more on rock music and Vietnam, see Michael J. Kramer, *The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture* (Oxford, London: Oxford University Press, 2013), and Douglas J. Bradley and Craig Hansen Werner, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War*, edited by Christian G. Appy and Edwin A. Martini (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015).

³³ For more on *Sergeant Pepper*, consult Brother John & Sgt Pepper, "AFVN Hour of Love with Brother John & SGT Pepper," 1970, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://archive.org/details/afvn-hour-of-love-with-brother-john-1970/PART+18.mp3>.

³⁴ John Ketwig (U.S. Army), interviewed by Roberta Meloni, July 10, 2023. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter. Ketwig served from 1967 to 1968 in Pleiku and Dak To, Vietnam, and then in Korat, Thailand, in 1969. He was Specialist 4 (Spec/4), equivalent to corporal in the U.S. Army, thus below the rank of sergeant (Spec/5).

Orient Express and *Dawn Busters* delighted American soldiers with music formats such as “Top 40” that enabled the troops to listen to a crossover of popular hits. For instance, Williams hosted *Orient Express* from midnight to 6 a.m. on weekdays and midnight to 8 a.m. on Sundays. As he posited, his show offered a vast “spectrum of music” because the “Top 40” format possessed a wide range of genres, from rock and roll and country western to rhythm and blues.³⁵ Similarly, *Dawn Busters* offered a wide selection of music, including good oldies like Jonny Nash’s “Hold Me Tight” and Gary Lewis & The Playboys’ “I Wonder What She’s Doing Tonight.” The show became popular when U.S. Air Force and AFVN deejay Adrian Cronauer, who served in Vietnam from 1965 to 1966, began to greet his listeners with a stretched “Goooooooooooood morning, Vietnam,” which became *Dawn Buster*’s opening jingle.³⁶

Besides music, AFVN radio shows aired sports scores, real-time interviews, and news as an integral part of its programming to further engage and boost soldiers’ morale. An excerpt of *Dawn Buster* that AFVN deejay and radio personality Les Howard Jacobi hosted on Thanksgiving Day 1970 is a perfect illustration of how AFVN engaged its audience with sports recaps. Jacobi entertained his listeners with an “exciting” college football game between the

³⁵ Williams, interview.

³⁶ He and his radio show became popular among the general public thanks to the 1987 war comedy movie *Good Morning, Vietnam*, in which American actor Robin Williams depicted Cronauer as an insubordinate and unabashed deejay. For an audio clip of the show, consult the digitalized recording of *Dawn Buster* at the following link: “Dawn Busters AFVN,” 562AU0120, 86 min. 47 sec., no date, Paul Kasper Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed March 9, 2021, https://vva.vietnam.ttu.edu/%20repositories/2/digital_objects/314060.

University of Texas and Texas A&M, during which Texas demolished Texas A&M 52 to 14.³⁷ Similarly, Army Specialist Bob May took up the NBA news, informing AFVN listeners of a thrilling NBA basketball game that occurred on November 25, 1970. The Milwaukee Bucks, riding high from sixteen consecutive wins, crushed the Detroit Pistons 113 to 87. The New York Knicks managed to clinch the game against the Atlanta Hawks by beating them, May reported, 114 to 111.³⁸ Furthermore, to engage boxing fans, AFVN broadcast the 1972 heavyweight boxing match held for the first time in Tokyo, Japan, between American boxer and activist Muhammad Ali and American boxer Mac Foster.³⁹

AFVN also featured interesting live interviews from the United States because of the undersea cable. Hollywood radio personality Johnny Grant offers a compelling example of how AFVN attempted to diminish the distance separating U.S. troops from home. After greeting his listeners with a “Hello Tigers,” Grant tickled their curiosity by introducing his guest of the day,

³⁷ “AFVN-Saigon Orient Express; Dawn Busters” (1-11 Ex.), 562AU1847. 26 November 1970, Paul Kasper Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archives, Texas Tech University, accessed February 3, 2024, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=562AU1847>.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ Harold Lamar (U.S. Army), interviewed by Roberta Meloni, August 8, 2024. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter. Lamar is an African American Vietnam veteran who enlisted and served in Vietnam from 1971 to 1972. Before landing at AFVN Saigon as the host of *Soul Train*, he worked at the public information office in Danang and as a combat photographer. He arrived in Vietnam as a private and became Specialist 5 (Spec/5), equivalent to the rank of sergeant.

model Pam Haboian, of whom Grant gives an accurate description. He introduced his “very interesting” guest as a “brunette” with green eyes and “very kissable lips” wearing “bikini-like and crazy heels.” After the description, Grant continued his radio interview by asking “Pammy” how many contests she had participated in. On her end, Haboian passionately answered she was in three and had been placed in two. The preserved excerpt of the show ends amusingly with Grant heralding the following joke: “Well, you got some bad judges if you didn’t place in all of them!”⁴⁰

Listeners thousands of miles away from home could hear Grant’s interviews at the moment they were occurring. This point nicely intersects with what historian Stephen Kern argued about instantaneous communications and notions of simultaneity. They redefined the sense of time and space among people “in widely separated places,” which became “linked in an instant by the new communications technology.”⁴¹ Kern’s notion of simultaneity is evident in the way instant communications, like the undersea cable that connected Saigon to Los Angeles, affected Americans serving in Vietnam. It provided American soldiers with an immediate link to home. Not only did the cable reduce the psychological distance that separated soldiers from the

⁴⁰ “AFVN-Saigon Orient Express; Dawn Busters” (1-11 Ex.), 562AU1847, 26 November 1970, Paul Kasper Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=562AU1847>.

⁴¹ For an analysis centered on the notion of simultaneity in the context of the emergence of instantaneous communications like the telegraph and the outbreak of World War I, see Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983). The direct quote is from page 315.

United States, but live interviews, like Grant's, captured the soldiers' wildest imaginations as part of the cognitive processes at play when they listened to the radio announcer's voice. Indeed, radio was — and continues to be — an aural medium. Therefore, through a simple yet effective description of a “very interesting” model like Pammy, soldiers could instantaneously envision her beauty and silhouette in their mind's eye through what radio historian Susan J. Douglas called “the brain's visual imagining apparatus.” In short, the way American soldiers could picture Pammy in their minds was a product of their imagination and the brilliant way by which radio programming could instantaneously engage their listeners.⁴²

In addition, AFVN offered news segments devoted to more serious topics. For instance, AFVN's live news kept Americans serving in Vietnam informed of several themes, including the U.S. economy, domestic politics, the war front, and international news. One example is the audio clip of November 1970, in which Paul Harvey, a popular American radio broadcaster from ABC News, broadcast news concerning the economic situation in the United States. After a warm and nice “Hello Americans,” Harvey went straight to sharing with his listeners the stock markets trend for November, signaling a slight decline with prices “continuing to rise and the dollar continuing to shrink.”⁴³ Alongside the U.S. economy, other news offered a more international

⁴² Douglas, *Listening In*, p. 27.

⁴³ The high expenditures on the Vietnam War weakened the American economy and the U.S. dollar. The American economy spiraled in 1973 when Arab countries imposed an oil embargo on the U.S. and Western nations after the Yom Kippur War. For more information, see Onno de Beaufort Wijnholds, pp. 105-147, and Joshua B. Freeman, *American Empire: The Rise of a Global Power, the Democratic Revolution at Home 1945-2000* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), pp. 278-296.

depth, such as Pope Paul VI's visit to Sydney, Australia, on his ten-day trip to Oceania and Asia.⁴⁴

However, one drawback of live news was that popular commentators like Harvey would often throw in little comments against Nixon and his "stupid war." In sharing what he thought about the Vietnam War and the Nixon administration with his listeners, Harvey's off-script comments represented a "conundrum" for AFVN. Indeed, they could possibly undermine the AFVN mission to build morale among troops. As Williams posited, AFVN broadcasters could not eliminate Harvey's passionate anti-war comments by simply cutting out "any offending portions" from the radio broadcast because, as he concluded, it would have been "too obvious."⁴⁵

However, listeners' agency often intersected with the larger effort of authorities to regulate and minimize potentially subversive content that could undermine the U.S. war effort in Vietnam. For example, *We've Gotta Get Out of This Place* by The Animals was the most played and requested song that American soldiers heard and wanted to hear on AFVN.⁴⁶ The song was not originally intended to be a protest song, and, by extension, it does not mention the Vietnam

⁴⁴ For Paul Harvey's audio clip, consult "AFVN-Saigon Orient Express; Dawn Busters" (1-11 Ex.), 562AU1847, 26 November 1970, Paul Kasper Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed February 10, 2024, https://vva.vietnam.ttu.edu/repositories/2/digital_objects/314060.

⁴⁵ Williams, follow-up interview with Roberta Meloni, July 17, 2024.

⁴⁶ Ketwig, interview.

War in the slightest.⁴⁷ Indeed, the lyric, penned by American songwriter Cynthia Weil, speaks to the desperation of living in poor conditions and the struggle to escape an environment that does not offer social advancement and progress.⁴⁸ However, as Bradley put it, it became the anthem of the war in Vietnam because many soldiers identified with its lyrics as it evoked powerful images of despair and anguish.⁴⁹ By listening to and engaging with that song, soldiers derived new meanings that fitted their war experience and sense of being Americans stuck in a foreign nation at war. Seen in this light, listeners' agency was a powerful aspect of radio listening that could go beyond any best efforts at protecting American soldiers from subversive content.

Another striking aspect of listeners' agency was the intimate connection that soldiers developed with their broadcasters as AFVN continued to engage its audience and vice versa. To be sure, the sense of connection between listener and broadcaster was not just specific to Vietnam. This trend has a long history that dates to the ways with which American radio listeners in the U.S. often engaged with radio programming and announcers to find a sense of community and connectedness, especially during uncertain contexts in American history. Several radio historians have underscored the strict relationship between listeners and broadcasters

⁴⁷ A few examples of popular protest songs that criticize the Vietnam War are Bob Dylan's *Master of War* (1963), Pete Seeger *Bring 'em Home* (1966), *Fortunate Son* (1969) by Creedence Clearwater Revival, John Lennon's *Give Peace a Chance* (1969), Steppenwolf's *Draft Resister* (1969). For more, see Bradley and Werner, pp. 1-19.

⁴⁸ Marshall Bowden, "Cynthia Weil and 'We Gotta Get Out of This Place,'" *New Direction in Music*, accessed February 24, 2025, <https://www.newdirectionsinmusic.com/cynthia-weil-and-we-gotta-get-out-of-this-place/>.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 6.

during a transitional moment in U.S. history prior to the Vietnam War. For instance, Bruce Lenthall and Jason Loviglio acknowledged how during the 1930s and the 1940s American listeners often wrote letters to their favorite announcers to build intimate connections that gave meaning to a world that was changing under the impetus of the Great Depression, the rise of mass culture, and the specter of World War II. Similarly, Elena Razlogova underscored how radio producers often used listeners' letters to understand their audience and create programs that could satisfy their needs and desire for a sense of connection.⁵⁰

The sense of intimacy and reciprocity between broadcasters and listeners continued in Vietnam. This historical pattern particularly speaks to the intrinsic meaning that radio came to represent for many American soldiers as a communications technology to build a profound network of reciprocity and connectedness with the United States.⁵¹ The act of writing letters to AFVN broadcasters was not a practice in which every soldier engaged by the 1960s and 1970s, as was the case with radio in the United States. Nonetheless, radio fostered a sense of intimacy and connection between broadcaster and listener to better navigate atypical contexts such as that of being in a warzone miles away from home. This observation particularly spoke to AFVN broadcasters like Cedner. One day, he decided to dedicate the last fifteen minutes of his *Town and Country* show to the listeners' requests he received by mail. Since then, Cedner received letters from listeners claiming, "Gee, it's so nice to hear you," and underscoring the intimacy and

⁵⁰ For more, see Lenthall, especially pp. 4, 62-67; Razlogova, pp. 76, 85; Loviglio, p. 6.

⁵¹ Lenthall, p. 66.

private connection that listeners established with him as they listened to his country show.⁵² At the same time, Cedner used these letters to satisfy his listeners' needs by playing songs that American soldiers requested for their girlfriends, wives, or families in the United States. "I got letters from guys and foxholes up north and at the DMZ," Cedner said enthusiastically. This experimentation became "such a big deal" that he eventually decided to devote a full last half hour of his show to welcoming requests from American soldiers in Vietnam.⁵³

Although he never wrote her a letter when he was in Vietnam, Ketwig perfectly remembered American actress Chris Noel's voice on the radio. Noel was famous for her Hollywood career, but she became a respected radio personality who worked for the Armed Forces Network from 1966 to 1971. During these years, she produced radio shows and constantly visited her fellow American soldiers in Vietnam on several tours to cheer them up.⁵⁴ Noel hosted several radio shows, including *A Date with Chris*, whose popularity among American soldiers grew exponentially because she greeted her listeners with a succinct yet warm punchline: "Hi, love!" Every time Ketwig heard Noel on the radio, it was like feeling a familiar voice, or as he perfectly put it: "A voice from home, a beautiful blonde movie star talking just to you."⁵⁵

⁵² Cedner, interview.

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ For more on the life and service of Chris Noel, consult Chris Noel, "Incorporated/Va Medical Center Veterans Memorial & Multicultural Histories, and Carlton G. Cartwright," Chris Noel Collection, 1966, Personal Narrative, <https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.79462/>.

Ketwig's words reflect how *A Date with Chris* was another great example of radio engaging the visualizing apparatus of the brain. By making the brain do the work to imagine this relationship with a beautiful blond celebrity, Chris Noel became an "aural" version of the "pin-ups" of World War II.⁵⁶ Indeed, Noel became famous in Vietnam because she was a friend from home, that kind of friend anyone would like to have by their side during tough times. For this reason, American soldiers like Ketwig respected her for the support and contribution she gave during the war. "You will never hear a Vietnam veteran with a negative word about her," Ketwig concluded, "she was our female friend."⁵⁷ Nonetheless, despite this great variety of radio programs that AFVN offered to American soldiers in Vietnam, it is important to underscore that AFVN programming represented one option among many through which soldiers could stay connected to their faraway homes.

⁵⁵ Ketwig, interview.

⁵⁶ Photos of pin-ups, usually beautiful women, Hollywood celebrities and models, were often featured in newspapers and magazines, such as *Life*, during World War II to boost troops' morale. Many young soldiers, usually unmarried or without girlfriends, used the photos of these attractive celebrity women as the alternative to having a photo of their significant other. For more information, see Michael West, "The Birth of the Pin-Up Girl: An American Social Phenomenon, 1940-1946" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2021), pp. 19-20.

⁵⁷ Ketwig, interview.

AFVN and the Broader American Media Options in Vietnam

AFVN fit into a broader homeward-facing American media and communications context. It represented one option among several that soldiers in Vietnam used to stay connected to the United States. Letters were the most widespread means by which Americans in Vietnam cultivated their connections with the United States.⁵⁸ For instance, Bradley belonged to that narrower and more privileged cross-section of those serving in Vietnam who received mail daily. He worked in the rear as a reporter journalist at the Command Information Office in Long Binh Post, the largest U.S. Army military base about 25 miles northeast of Saigon. In fact, as Bradley claimed, soldiers in the field often did not receive mail for weeks.⁵⁹ Furthermore, lucky American soldiers like Bradley could sometimes call home through a radio system called Military Auxiliary Radio System (MARS).⁶⁰ Bradley talked to her mother once, but, as he jokingly said, “all my mother kept asking me was: ‘What time is it there?’”⁶¹ Still, Bradley’s

⁵⁸ Many other respondents who participated in the online dissertation questionnaire declared that letters were the primary means through which they stayed in touch with home.

⁵⁹ Bradley, follow-up interview with Roberta Meloni, July 7, 2024.

⁶⁰ Morecook, online dissertation questionnaire, May 5, 2023. A digitalized interview of Morecook, in which he talks about his Vietnam tour from May 1972 to March 1973 is available at the Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive: “Interview with Robert Morecook,” OH1180. No Date, Robert Morecook Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed February 11, 2024, https://vva.vietnam.ttu.edu/repositories/2/digital_objects/609995.

⁶¹ Bradley, follow-up interview.

case represented an exception commensurate to his rank and job position. As Lair argued in this respect, “calls from Vietnam to the United States were so rare that most soldiers went a year without making one.”⁶²

Tapes with voice recordings were another way that kept some American soldiers connected with home. Like letters, cassette tapes arrived in Vietnam by mail, and American soldiers could listen to them through reel-to-reel tape recorders and tape players that they possessed or could buy at a military retail store, the so-called PX. However, this option was also not available to all soldiers in the same way for two main reasons. First, not every American soldier had access to electronic devices and other amenities as those who were deployed in the biggest U.S. military bases, such as Long Binh Post. According to Lair, the PX system in Vietnam differed “from base to base.” The smallest ones often housed retail stores in rooms or containers, offering a limited selection of comfort items like small radios, toiletries, and magazines.⁶³ Specifically, radios and magazines were important consumer items because their availability in the PXs relates to the overall argument about media helping American soldiers fulfill their leisure time and maintain a sense of connection to home.

Second, not every soldier had loved ones at home that would send tapes. Pennington was among those lucky Americans who, like Bradley, served in one of the largest U.S. military bases in Vietnam, at Danang Air Base in Quang Nam Province, about 400 miles north of Saigon. His son was born while he was in Vietnam, and it was thanks to cassette tapes that he received from

⁶² Lair, *Armed with Abundance*, p. 158.

⁶³ Ibidem, pp. 151-153.

his wife that he was able to hear his son “right after he was born.”⁶⁴ However, Pennington was an exception. In fact, the reason not everyone in Vietnam received tapes from home can be more directly linked to demographic differences within the U.S. military. According to historian Christian G. Appy, regular soldiers who enlisted or were drafted for duty in Vietnam tended to come from working-class or poorer backgrounds and, thus, disproportionately from families unlikely to have the resources to own the equipment needed to make tapes.⁶⁵ Therefore, it is possible that the same individuals for whom AFVN did not offer a fully satisfactory listening experience also lacked the means or resources to explore other options that could provide them with a “taste of home.”

Newspapers were another means of connection. *Stars and Stripes* was the most widely available military newspaper in Vietnam. However, it only offered published reports, day-to-day information about the war, bulletins, or theater schedules.⁶⁶ The accessibility in Vietnam of newspapers published in the United States represented another exception that was available to a small niche of American soldiers. Bradley was one of them. He was able to keep up with what was going on in Philadelphia because his parents sent his hometown newspaper, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.⁶⁷ Similarly, U.S. Army’s AFVN television news anchor Sergeant Robert

⁶⁴ Pennington, follow-up interview with Roberta Meloni, July 29, 2024.

⁶⁵ Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

⁶⁶ Ibidem. For more on *Stars and Stripes*, see Lai, p. 186, and Bud Hutton and Andy Rooney, *The Story of the Stars and Stripes* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, incorporated, 1946).

Morecook received news from home because his father gave him a subscription to *The Norfolk Virginian*.⁶⁸ Furthermore, thanks to their jobs, Bradley and Morecook had daily access to national news from, for example, the Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI), as they came out from the teletype machine in their offices.

Movies represented another media alternative available to American soldiers in Vietnam. Movies to the various compounds and units across Vietnam were supplied by the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) to organize movie nights.⁶⁹ For example, in Pleiku, Central Highlands, about 350 miles northeast of Saigon, Ketwig watched *The Green Berets* (1968) with John Wayne. “We had a projector,” he claimed, “and we would all go out, sit on boxes, or the ground, in the open air after dark.”⁷⁰ Similarly, in Long Binh Post, Bradley enjoyed movie nights because they represented another “nightly ritual” for the troops. “I saw *Easy Rider* (1969) in Vietnam,” he claimed, “I mean, how crazy is that?”⁷¹

American soldiers in Saigon could even watch movies in the comfort of air-conditioned theaters. Pennington recalled watching “a lot of the spaghetti western” and first-run movies like *Summer of ‘42* (1971) in theaters that opened “round the clock,” offering the troops some leisure

⁶⁷ Bradley, follow-up interview.

⁶⁸ Morecook, follow-up interview with Roberta Meloni, July 23, 2024.

⁶⁹ Ibidem.

⁷⁰ Ketwig, follow-up interview with Roberta Meloni, July 26, 2024.

⁷¹ Bradley, follow-up interview.

time day and night.⁷² Indeed, Saigon was a big city and offered more opportunities for entertainment with theaters sponsored by the military. Civilian theaters in Vietnam did not usually show American films, even though some soldiers were intrigued by Vietnamese movies.⁷³ AFVN deejay Sergeant Harold Lamar, who served in the U.S. Army in Saigon and Danang from 1971 to 1972, was one of them. One Sunday, he visited a Vietnamese theater near his bachelor enlisted quarters (BEQ) in downtown Saigon. Before the movie began, he watched a few commercials on the screen, including “pitches” for “Seiko,” a Japanese watch. Although he did not remember what movie he watched, which can be a psychological response to the traumatic experience of the conflict, Lamar recalled he enjoyed it because the theater near his BEQ offered English subtitles “so you could understand.”⁷⁴

Television was another important communication option that facilitated a sense of connection to home. As Lair posited in this regard, the development of AFVN television programming in 1965 was “a natural spin-off” of AFVN radio and another important avenue to

⁷² Pennington, follow-up interview.

⁷³ Williams, follow-up interview with Roberta Meloni, July 17, 2024.

⁷⁴ Lamar, interview. For a few works that have explored the interplay between the Vietnam War and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), see Alex Kleinsorge, “The Unwelcome Soldiers: How Post-War Experience Shaped PTSD in Vietnam Veterans” (HIST 586, Kansas State University, Department of History, 2011), pp. 2-22; Wilbur J. Scott, *Vietnam Veterans since the War: The Politics of PTSD, Agent Orange, and the National Memorial* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004); William Schroder and Ronald Dawe, *Soldier’s Heart: Close-up Today with PTSD in Vietnam Veterans* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2007).

mediate soldiers' experiences in Vietnam while keeping them entertained and informed.

However, even though she acknowledged television as an important step forward that "later in the war many soldiers owned" or "bought them" at the PXs "for shared use," television was not available to everyone in Vietnam. Unlike radio, AFVN television was more limited in its reach and available to a privileged cross-section of those serving in Vietnam. Indeed, despite the lack of viewership statistics, Lair posited that at least 25% of American soldiers who had access to television watched it from "two to three hours per day" by 1971.⁷⁵

Sergeants Bradley, Williams, Wilford, Morecook, Pennington, and Lamar belonged to that percentage who had access to television.⁷⁶ They represented a more privileged cross-section of those who, except for Wilford, never engaged in combat and either worked for AFVN or in the rear. They were housed in military facilities similar to hotels in AFVN detachments or lived comfortably in the largest U.S. military bases in South Vietnam. There, along with televised news, they watched American TV series. *I Love Lucy* (1951), *Bonanza* (1959), *Combat* (1962), *Room 222* (1969) are just a few examples of popular American sitcoms and drama series that AFVN brought to Vietnam. These TV shows allowed soldiers not only to reduce the psychological distance from home but also to recreate the domestic and familiar ritual of enjoying television in groups, thus making common areas such as bunkrooms or military clubs the truly American living rooms of Vietnam.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, Bradley, Williams, Wilford,

⁷⁵ In 1965, AFVN used U.S. Navy Super Constellation aircraft called Blue Eagles for television broadcasting, see Lair, pp. 132, 133, 188.

⁷⁶ Bradley, Williams, Wilford, Morecook, Pennington, follow-up interviews; Lamar, interview.

⁷⁷ Lair, pp. 10, 188.

Morecook, Pennington, and Lamar represented an exception. The situation was different for U.S. Army Specialists Tomas Heikkala and John Ketwig, who represent that subsection of those serving in Vietnam that, as they claimed, never had access to television.⁷⁸ Such distinction can be primarily traced to the fact that they possessed a lower rank and did not serve in the rear. They belonged to a platoon and an ordinance unit supporting infantries, respectively, and lived in firebases at larger U.S. military compounds, such as Long Bình, or smaller bases like Pleiku.⁷⁹

However, for those with a TV, AFVN also offered a televised news service prepared in Vietnam by relying on source materials from AP, CBS, and ABC. For example, when Morecook worked at AFVN television in Saigon, his job was to assemble the news portion of a 30-minute evening newscast. He put together “the dated print almost universally for the president” and used the clippings of American journalist and longtime anchorman for *CBS Evening News* Walter Cronkite.⁸⁰ Once the material was assembled, newscasts at AFVN knew precisely they had to be very careful in their art of communicating and broadcasting news to their audience. Unlike Paul

⁷⁸ Ketwig, follow-up interviews with Roberta Meloni, July 26, 2024; and Thomas Heikkala (U.S. Army), follow-up interview with Roberta Meloni, July 20, 2024. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter. Like Ketwig, Heikkala was Spec/4.

⁷⁹ Ibidem.

⁸⁰ Morecook, interview. AFVN gained access to Walter Cronkite’s clips of his CBS show on April 28, 1969. For more information, visit Jim White and Jerry Nelson, “AFVN Timeline (Narrative & Graph),” last update November 6, 2021, accessed February 16, 2024, <https://www.afvnvets.net/hist---timeline.html>.

Harvey's real-time news, many AFVN news anchors like Morecook knew they had to adopt the "right word" and make sure that those words would support the morale of the American troops.⁸¹

Their training as professional journalists came in handy.⁸² For example, at 6 p.m. on March 22, 1973, Morecook reported the leading war front news that the U.S. government had requested North Vietnam to "come up with a list" of American soldiers held prisoners in Laos. The purpose of this news must be contextualized in the imminent withdrawal of the U.S. from South Vietnam based on a ceasefire agreement signed just a couple of months earlier, one that ultimately led to the complete collapse of South Vietnam by 1975.⁸³ After keeping American soldiers informed on the latest news from the war front, Morecook's televised news portion included many other important information, such as the latest developments in U.S.-Soviet Union relations and trade agreements.

Morecook concluded his news segment with a one-minute final piece from home regarding a historical event that attracted stateside media coverage in 1973. "Thirteen Indians,"

⁸¹ Morecook, interview.

⁸² Morecook and many other Vietnam veterans included in this chapter, such as Cedner, received their professional training at DINFOS, which was the Army information school that trained its personnel in a variety of subjects, including journalism and broadcasting. The school was located in Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, until it moved to Fort George G. Meade, Maryland, in 1995.

⁸³ The United States, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the Provisional Revolutionary Government signed the Paris Peace Agreement in 1973. Two years after these accords, North Vietnam launched a military offensive in March 1975. For more information, see Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War*, p. 121.

Morecook heralded, were indicted because they violated the federal anti-riot laws “for carrying supplies to the Indians occupying the South Dakota hamlet of Wounded Knee.”⁸⁴ As Associated Press reporter Terry Devine wrote in this respect in 1973, tensions between the American Indian Movement and the federal government began when the Indian tribe Oglala Lakota occupied for seventy-one days the town of Wounded Knee in the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation of Oglala Lakota Country, South Dakota.⁸⁵ Such news stories provided a window into the racial tensions unfolding at home. In so doing, they provide another example in which media was establishing a connection to home, albeit not necessarily in a way that achieved the sense of comfort and connection that was central for AFVN.

In fact, not everyone who had access to TV welcomed AFVN programming at face value. For example, Pennington watched the first episode of *All in the Family* (1971) with Carroll O'Connor as Archie Bunker at the Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) club in Danang. As he put it, he first learned about the show in letters from home “telling how irreverent and ribald some of the subject matter was.” Hence, when he first watched the show on AFVN TV, he was shocked and “surprised” about “the dialog, nuance, entendre and language,” which, as he said, “was

⁸⁴ For a preserved video clip, consult Robert Morecook, “AFVN Radio News with SP5 Bob Morecook,” March 22, 1973, *YouTube*, accessed on February 11, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61otE2TMDnU&t=1s>.

⁸⁵ Terry Devine, “AP WAS THERE: The Occupation at Wounded Knee,” 1973 article republished on February 27, 2023 for the 50th anniversary of the occupation, *The Associated Press*, accessed February 11, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/politics-united-states-government-us-federal-bureau-of-investigation-sd-state-wire-south-dakota-38cffe02e12c12976bdf5d1599b922>.

unprecedented at the time.” After his initial surprise at the “taboo content” he saw on TV, Pennington maintained that he ended up by liking the comedy sketch. As he concluded, it used irony to portray sensitive issues unfolding back home, like race and racism, showing “how naïve we [Americans] were at the time.”⁸⁶

In fact, the show used satire to address taboo topics in the American society of the 1970s, including racism, homosexuality, and abortion, thus making this outrageous sitcom one that touched American life and ideals to the core. Specifically, producer Norman Lear’s main objective was to satirize bigotry and offer a glimpse at race relations in American society through the creation of Archie Bunker, an exaggerated caricature of a racist bigot, and his son-in-law Mike Stivic, “the show’s liberal voice of reason.” However, rather than underscoring the absurdity and simplicity of their views, the humor often backfired because both characters frequently did more to engage with and reinforce the types of people they were intended to mock and critique.⁸⁷ In fact, Pennington’s reaction to Lear’s show, while not an exact reflection of the backfiring, highlights how this show engaged audiences by shocking them and offering an irreverent program whose message could be misinterpreted if the irony and satire behind it were not completely understood. Overall, *All in the Family* is just another example of how AFVN media products in Vietnam could illuminate, even if unintentionally, existing tensions of race and racism.

⁸⁶ Pennington, interview and follow-up email to Roberta Meloni, March 3, 2025.

⁸⁷ For a work centered on the show, see Jim Cullen, *Those Were the Days: Why All in the Family Still Matters* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020), pp. 21, 39-40.

AFVN and Issues of Race

Recent scholarship has underscored how dynamics of race, discrimination, and demographics marked the military experience of African Americans in Vietnam as they continued to serve and fight for their rights.⁸⁸ This scholarship agrees that the “problem of race” (to quote historian Beth L. Bailey) perpetuated systemic discrimination and culturally held prejudices against Black soldiers. It did so even after President Truman desegregated the Armed Forces in 1948 with Executive Order 9981.⁸⁹ Such institutionalized racism reached its acme with the passage of the Selective Service Act of 1948, which exempted well-educated and wealthy whites from the draft through occupational or college deferments.⁹⁰ As historian Amy J. Rutenberg argued, the act was part of a political calculation that effectively established “who should be drafted and who should remain civilian” based on “race and class.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ For works that explore the problem of racism in the military and African Americans’ war experience in Vietnam, see Beth L. Bailey, *An Army Afire How the US Army Confronted Its Racial Crisis in the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2023); Kimberley L. Phillips Boehm, *War! What Is It Good For?: Black Freedom Struggles and the U.S. Military from World War II to Iraq*. 1st ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Gerald F. Goodwin, *Race in the Crucible of War: African American Servicemen and the War in Vietnam*. 1st ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2023); Lawrence Allen Eldridge, *Chronicles of a Two-Front War: Civil Rights and Vietnam in the African American Press*. 1st ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012).

⁸⁹ Bailey, p. 5; Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, p. 21.

⁹⁰ Westheider, p. 21.

As it turned out, the act disproportionately affected African Americans.⁹² In fact, between the 1960s and 1970s, African Americans were disproportionately drafted (16%) in relation to the overall U.S. population (12%). Most served in the U.S. Army, and about 26% percent of Black enlistees were assigned to the infantry or volunteered for dangerous combat assignments in return for higher pay.⁹³ This verity must also be contextualized in the historical perpetuation of institutionalized racism that came to affect the U.S. draft system, especially after the passage of the Selective Service Act.⁹⁴ It is also important to underscore that the majority of African Americans who enlisted to fight in Vietnam did so as an opportunity to advance their civil rights and economic status. This observation must indeed be understood in the larger domestic context of the time, which saw a lack of educational advancement and job opportunities for African Americans.

At the same time, it must be noted that this Black and white divide fits into a larger context of the U.S. military in Vietnam that included other ethnicities as well. Mexican

⁹¹ Amy J. Rutenberg, *Rough Draft: Cold War Military Manpower Policy and the Origins of Vietnam-Era Draft Resistance* 1st ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), p. 12.

⁹² Olagues, interview.

⁹³ The Army was the branch that welcomed most conscripts. For the statistics and how the draft system adversely affected African Americans, see Amy J. Rutenberg, *Rough Draft: Cold War Military Manpower Policy and the Origins of Vietnam-Era Draft Resistance* 1st ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), p. 166; and James E. Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts: African Americans and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 13-14.

⁹⁴ For more, see Westheider, p. 21.

Americans offer another important example of the multiple racial and ethnic groups comprising the U.S. military in Vietnam. Besides Black soldiers, the U.S. military draft system adversely affected poorly educated and low-income Mexican Americans. In addition to Blacks, over 80,000 Latinos served in Vietnam in the U.S. Army, representing 4.5% of the overall U.S. population.⁹⁵ Like their Black counterparts, Latinos were disproportionately affected by the draft due to limited opportunities for college deferments and their socio-economic background. As Lea Ybarra and Edward James Olmos argued, many Latinos at the enlisted and drafted level served in Vietnam under the desire of economic betterment. Most importantly, they felt an obligation to serve because “they had too often been considered foreigners in the land of their birth and felt they must prove their loyalty to the United States.”⁹⁶ However, like Black soldiers, they were also disproportionately affected by the draft system because of their socio-economic status and lack of college deferments.⁹⁷ In fact, this verity must be contextualized in the historical perpetuation of institutionalized racism that came to affect Blacks and other ethnic minorities in the U.S. military, especially after the passage of the Selective Service Act.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ “Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Minorities in the Vietnam War: A Resource Guide,” Library of Congress, accessed February 27, 2025, <https://guides.loc.gov/racial-ethnic-and-religious-minorities-in-the-vietnam-war>.

⁹⁶ Ybarra and Olmos, *Vietnam Veteranos*, p. 5.

⁹⁷ Olagues, interview. See also Cortright, *Peace*, pp. 155-179.

⁹⁸ For more, see Westheider, p. 21.

The story of U.S. Black Marine Private George Daniels, although not directly connected to AFVN, perfectly illustrates the disparities and institutionalized racism that permeated the U.S. military.⁹⁹ Daniels joined the Marine Corps in 1966. However, he never left the United States to serve in Vietnam because he refused to do so. Indeed, he came to understand the systemic racism that affected the U.S. military in the summer of 1967 at Camp Pendleton, California. At that time, riots and violence were pervading the streets of America, from Detroit to Newark, because of major urban riots against housing discrimination and segregation taking place coast to coast.¹⁰⁰ One day, at Camp Pendleton, Daniels and his fellow Black and Muslim Marine Lance Corporal William Harvey, Jr. called other African Americans from their company to discuss their assignments. “They expected us to go to Vietnam,” claimed Daniels, “and then we had to come back and fight in our own neighborhoods.” Thus, they decided to speak to their commanding officer about their grievances, but they were refused and dismissed.¹⁰¹ Daniels and Harvey were not mutinous and never disobeyed an order. Nonetheless, in 1969, they received

⁹⁹ After converting to Islam, Daniels changed his first name to Ahmad. Therefore, I will address him as Ahmad Daniels in the following pages.

¹⁰⁰ Ahmad Daniels (U.S. Marine Corps), interviewed by Roberta Meloni, July 16, 2024. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter. For Jim Crow in American society and culture, see Daniel S. Lucks, *Selma to Saigon: The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2017). For more on the problem of racism, urban violence, and housing discrimination in American society during the 1960s, see Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

¹⁰¹ Daniels, interview.

unfair sentences of ten and six years, respectively, in prison for encouraging disloyalty and insubordination.¹⁰²

On top of this systemic racism, culturally held racial stereotypes were another aspect of the underlying racial divisions in the U.S. military. The story of U.S. Army Specialist Tomas Heikkala is an important example that illustrates how historically and culturally held prejudices that white soldiers held against their Black counterparts could sometimes be understood differently in a warzone. A native of San Francisco, California, Heikkala was drafted in January 1967 and arrived at the U.S. Army base in Long Binh Post in March 1968, where he served until January 1969. There, he worked as a radio telephone operator for a reconnaissance platoon attached to the 199th Light Infantry Brigade that patrolled the Vietnamese countryside jungle.¹⁰³ Heikkala was unhappy with his task because being in the jungle looking for the enemy was risky. Luckily, he managed to trade his position with the radio operator for the Lieutenant who was in his reconnaissance platoon. He could now stay in the firebase, selling sodas and beers during the daytime and hanging out with friends at night.

It was in the firebase that he connected with African Americans. As he claimed, “the Bloods,” slang for “blood brother,” a term that Blacks used to identify another fellow Black, did

¹⁰² For the scholarship who has treated racial divisions in the U.S. military in Vietnam, including the case of Harvey and Daniels, see, p. 56; Kaylyn L. Sawyer, “A Divided Front: Military Dissent During the Vietnam War,” *The Gettysburg Historical Journal* 16, Article 9 (2017): 142; and Cameron D. McCoy, *Contested Valor: African American Marines in the Age of Power, Protest, and Tokenism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2023), pp.174-176.

¹⁰³ Heikkala, interviewed by Roberta Meloni, August 16, 2023. Follow-up interview on July 20, 2024.

not get along with white soldiers because of the deep racial prejudices they held against Blacks.¹⁰⁴ However, Heikkala found a connection with them because he smoked marijuana. As he put it, “I was friendly, and they were friendly with me, we smoked grass in their bunker.” At one point, he also brought his portable battery-powered radio so they could listen to Motown music and dance while “passing joints.”¹⁰⁵ As Heikkala concluded, “It was a friendly and nice situation to be involved in. They helped me to overcome whatever racism I had been bred into me. Racism is such a crock of shit.”¹⁰⁶

However, Heikkala’s unusual fraternization with African Americans represents an exception to the bigger picture. As historian James E. Westheider concurred, many white officers and soldiers held a deep racial prejudice against Blacks to the point that “personal racism,” on top of institutionalized racism, became “endemic” to the U.S. military in Vietnam.¹⁰⁷ From a cultural and social perspective, Westheider’s observation spoke to the ongoing Civil Rights struggle that marked the U.S. domestic context of the mid-1960s. The Civil Rights movement

¹⁰⁴ Heikkala interview. For an oral history of the “Bloods” during the Vietnam War, see Wallace Terry, *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (N.P.: Presidio Press, 1985).

¹⁰⁵ Heikkala, follow-up interview. Motown music is often used to refer to a particular music genre that originated in the 1950s in Detroit when several African Americans experimented with a new genre that meshed soul with pop and R&B sounds. For more information, see Joel Rudinow, *Soul Music: Tracking the Spiritual Roots of Pop from Plato to Motown* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

¹⁰⁶ Heikkala, interviews.

¹⁰⁷ Westheider, pp. 4-5.

was mainly integrationist, with African Americans fighting side by side for the recognition of their rights and desegregation of American society. However, from the late 1960s onwards, as U.S. involvement in Vietnam escalated, integration was challenged from within the African American community. Activists and key leaders of the Black Power movement such as Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Sammy Young, Stokely Carmichael, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) came out against the war, promoting a sense of cultural difference that was divergent from that of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.¹⁰⁸

In particular, these activists reflected that strand of non-integration within the Civil Rights movement that broke with the Vietnam War. They embraced Black Power and the idea of separatism. For instance, Carmichael argued that Vietnam was a “white man’s war,” a threat to the Black community. Indeed, as historian Daniel Lucks argued in this respect, the Vietnam War had a “corrosive impact on the Civil Rights movement” because it “not only polarized the nation; it also drew a fault line across the Civil Rights movement and Black America.” It divided the Civil Rights movement at home and “drove attention away from the struggle for racial justice and toward opposition to the war.”¹⁰⁹ Hence, the cultural and social tensions that characterized the U.S. domestic context inevitably affected the experience of African American soldiers. By

¹⁰⁸ Sawyer, “A Divided Front,” p. 147

¹⁰⁹ Unlike Martin Luther King, Jr. who advocated for the use of nonviolence and civil disobedience, activists of the Black Power movement were more separatist and violent in their demonstrations and militant approach. Despite initial hesitation to oppose the Vietnam War, mainly for fear that it would affect the development and achievements of the Civil Rights movement, King eventually publicly opposed the war in 1967. For more, see Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, pp. 8, 112, 253.

the late 1960s, the U.S. military strategy to use AFVN radio and music genres to prevent potential dissent and build a sense of nationalness that could promote integration in the U.S. military was very difficult, if not impossible, in Vietnam. It was the historical moment of the mid-to-late 1960s that made tastes and music genres the signifier of those domestic, acute racial problems that fueled tensions between African Americans and white soldiers in Vietnam.

In fact, the cultural and social divisions between whites and Blacks is particularly illustrated by AFVN disk jockey and television anchorman U.S. Marine Sergeant Robert Wilford, who enlisted in 1965 and went to Vietnam in 1969. As he claimed, the division between white and Black soldiers was one of the most pervading issues that affected race relations in the U.S. military in Vietnam. It was unusual and difficult for “a person of a different race to fraternize,” Wilford explained. For instance, every time a new Black soldier joined his unit, there was “an invisible partition line” between whites and Blacks, which nobody ever dared to cross, including for the locker assignments. “They had their own music, their own culture, their own drugs,” Wilford concluded.¹¹⁰

The Black press was one instance reflecting Wilford’s statement. As Lawrence Allen Eldridge posited, the Black press was an essential cultural institution that aided African Americans in Vietnam to stay connected with their community at home.¹¹¹ However, Atlanta native Sergeant Lamar claimed that receiving a copy of the Black newspapers was difficult

¹¹⁰ Robert Wilford (U.S. Marine Corps), interviewed by Roberta Meloni, July 14, 2023. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter. In Vietnam, Wilford worked in Saigon, Danang, and Hon Tre, an offshore island and fourth most important AFVN detachment located more than 200 miles from Saigon.

¹¹¹ Eldridge, p. 4.

because “some didn’t even know they existed.” For this reason, he once wrote to the *Atlanta Daily World*, the first Black-owned news daily newspaper in Atlanta, Georgia, asking to receive a copy to stay connected with his community back home. Not only did he receive his copy, but he also claimed that, over time, *The Chicago Defender*, *New York Amsterdam News*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, and *The Michigan Chronicle* sent copies to Black American soldiers like him who wanted to stay in touch with their respective communities.¹¹² Lamar’s recollection is just one example of the extent to which the media environment in Vietnam overall failed to serve Black soldiers.

Indeed, these issues of race and cultural differences that affected the U.S. military in Vietnam inevitably reflected the audience that AFVN tried to reach and engage. According to Westheider, interests and preferences in Vietnam varied greatly between white and Black soldiers. For instance, music genres often came to represent cultural markers that further exacerbated racial tensions and divisions within the military ranks.¹¹³ Wilford concurred with Westheider’s observation. As he put it, there were “distinct differences in taste and culture,” which varied among white and Black soldiers.¹¹⁴ These differences in tastes also became the basis of tensions between what soldiers wanted to hear and what was the generally mainstream

¹¹² Lamar, interview.

¹¹³ Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, p. 76.

¹¹⁴ Wilford, follow-up interview, July 25, 2024.

programming that AFVN provided. Indeed, according to Bradley, the AFVN schedule tended to favor primarily the interests and tastes of white American soldiers.¹¹⁵

Yet, these claims must be understood in the context of the challenges that AFVN faced in meeting its listeners' preferences. As Williams concurred, "nobody was 100% happy" in Vietnam. Many soldiers lamented the lack of their favored tunes because country music listeners often received "several hours a day." Then, with the "Top 40" format, AFVN tried to satisfy "a bunch of different types of listeners" with tunes that were popular in the United States.¹¹⁶ Yet, despite these adjustments that attempted to provide more variegated entertainment, AFVN was never able to completely satisfy the preferences of multiple racial and ethnic groups comprising the U.S. military in Vietnam.

In fact, the AFVN mission to keep soldiers motivated to fight by cultivating their desires to remain connected to the United States fell victim to its oversimplifications of the broader context in which it operated. The U.S. government's expectations about what AFVN could accomplish in Vietnam often mirrored assumptions of domestic broadcasting's potential to work

¹¹⁵ Bradley, follow-up interview.

¹¹⁶ Williams, follow-up interview. It is also important to note that before the 1950s, race and racism affected the way records and music were marketed in the United States. For example, African American music usually belonged to a section called "race records/race music," which underscores how certain music genres, such as Jazz, Soul, R&B, and Motown, remained racialized even throughout the Vietnam era, thereby emphasizing a deeper thread of racial awareness in social history and media history scholarship. For more information, see Jeff Wallenfildt (eds.), *The Birth of Rock & Roll: Music in the 1950s through the 1960s*. 1st ed. (New York: Britannica Educational Pub, 2013), especially chapter 6, p. 87.

as a nation-building technology that could forge an ethnically diverse population into a unified social group by leveling cultural, racial, and ethnic preferences with its mainstream programming.¹¹⁷ Yet radio historian Susan J. Douglas argued that American broadcasting served as a nation-building technology in some but not all cases. As she claimed, “While radio brought America together as a nation in the 1930s and 1940s, it also highlighted the country’s ethnic, racial, geographic, and gendered divisions.” Mainstream U.S. commercial broadcasting mirrored a broader culture of mass consumption and entertainment that had long targeted a primarily white and middle-class audience.¹¹⁸

However, ethnicities and minorities that did not fit into that targeted demographic often resisted mainstream programming and found other options to satisfy their interests.¹¹⁹ This observation is particularly significant when considering what other options outside U.S. mainstream programming were available to these ethnic groups in the United States. For instance, in the 1930s and 1940s, Black listeners could fulfill their listening habits outside the mainstream U.S. programs through local radio stations that catered to their preferences.¹²⁰ For example, Black listeners in the U.S. often satisfied their need for black music like jazz by

¹¹⁷ Russo, *Points on the Dial*, p. 4.

¹¹⁸ Douglas, *Listening In*, p. 5.

¹¹⁹ Razlogova, *The Listener’s Voice*, pp. 34-35.

¹²⁰ Douglas, *Listening In*, pp. 223, 234, Smulyan, *Selling Radio*, p. 159.

listening to small local radio stations disaffiliated from the national network, which found “an important new niche market” in African Americans.¹²¹

Similarly, the World War II generation of Latinos nurtured their listening habits outside the mainly English-language U.S. broadcasting. Specifically, Mexican Americans engaged with consumer culture in the U.S. and used radio to turn into Spanish-language radio programs, thus cherishing their cultural bond with Mexico. As Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez posited in this regard, “radio was an important part of their lives, as it was for other Americans.”¹²² These options that Blacks and Latinos had in the U.S. since the early days of broadcasting were unavailable to them in Vietnam because AFVN was the sole alternative at their disposal. Hence, the AFVN effort to replicate the substance of what made mainstream U.S. broadcasting profitable and popular at home not only clashed with the demographics of the U.S. military in Vietnam, but it also underscored that AFVN’s programming was not tailored to appeal to a significant non-white portion of its U.S. military audience.

For this reason, AFVN programming sometimes elicited more reactions than those it was supposed to quell. This point was especially true for African Americans in Vietnam, who often lamented the lack of Black content on AFVN. Indeed, according to Lamar, Black soldiers often

¹²¹ Douglas, p. 234.

¹²² Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez, “Embracing the Ether: The Use of Radio by the Latino World War II Generation,” in *Beyond the Latino: World War II Hero, the Social and Political Legacy of a Generation* edited by Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez and Emilio Zamora (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), pp. 21-37. The direct quote is from page 25. For a work discussing how Mexican Americans engaged U.S. consumer culture, see *Land of Necessity: Consumer Culture in the United States-Mexico Borderlands*, edited by Alexis McCrossen (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

complained to their commanders about the lack of Black music, such as Soul, R&B, Jazz, and Motown. They also resented the paucity of African American broadcasters who could provide shows that distinctly appealed to African American soldiers. In such circumstances, AFVN attempted to compensate for the rampant resentment and malaise among African Americans by adding an R&B show called *Soul Train* in 1969. The show was previously hosted by African American deejay Chauncey J. Murray, known to his listeners as “Nighthawk.” After him, Lamar took over the show and hosted it every night from 11:50 a.m. for thirteen months, from August 1971 to October 1972.¹²³

Like his white colleagues at AFVN, Lamar also received letters from fans during his *Soul Train* show. As he put it, “I got plenty of letters,” and more than fifty years after his service in Vietnam, he cherished one significant recollection. One day, he received a letter from his high school friend who was also serving in Vietnam at the Bien Hoa Air Base, approximately 16 miles from Saigon. As Lamar posited, “he immediately recognized me” because “we were both Atlanta natives, and we had gone to the same public school.” Since then, Lamar has received letters from his high school friend at least twice a week. Their connection went far beyond the war because they both cherished it to this day. “I see him at football games occasionally,”

¹²³ Lamar, interview. Another important African American disk jockey who hosted *Soul Train* in 1972 and 1973 was U.S. Army Specialist 5 James “Sweetback” Brigham. Morecook, follow-up interview. For more, visit “Individual Photo Album & Stories, James ‘Sweetback’ Brigham SP5, USA Disk Jockey 1972-73,” accessed February 16, 2025, <https://www.afvnvets.net/pho-sto---brigham.html>.

claimed Lamar who continues to meet his old friend in Atlanta, Georgia, “so we’ve maintained our friendship ever since.”¹²⁴

This anecdotal example illustrates that the AFVN effort to accommodate the preferences of African American soldiers in Vietnam was welcomed. However, it is no coincidence that AFVN added *Soul Train* in 1969 when the Vietnam War reached its climax after the Tet Offensive, often regarded as a pivotal moment for “the beginning of the end” for the United States in Vietnam.¹²⁵ This addition reflected the AFVN’s attempt to accommodate the preferences of a demographic segment of its multiple racial and ethnic groups comprising the U.S. military in Vietnam. Furthermore, in light of the U.S. escalation in Vietnam after Tet, this addition spoke to the larger U.S. military strategy to level potential tensions that would stir up the military and hinder the U.S. victory in Vietnam.

Nonetheless, the adjustment the U.S. government attempted to make in 1969 was too late and insufficient. Indeed, despite the addition of *Soul Train*, the AFVN schedule continued to appeal mostly to white soldiers with its mainstream programming. Furthermore, the AFVN staff remained predominantly white. For example, Wilford, who worked at several AFVN detachments for the entirety of his tour in 1969, claimed that the staff was “primarily white soldiers” like him, even though they had “a Black soldier who was our engineer and a Black

¹²⁴ Lamar, interview.

¹²⁵ For Tet and the direct quote, see Daren Fonda, “Tet: The Beginning of the End,” *Time Magazine* 161, No. 13 (New York: Time Incorporated, 2003), p. A50.

soldier who was our assistant writer.”¹²⁶ Similar trends continued throughout the 1970s.

According to Williams, the majority of AFVN personnel who worked at every detachment when he was at AFVN between 1971 and 1972 were white Caucasians like him. The minority comprised Blacks and, “in some cases,” other ethnicities such as Asian Americans. Thus, as he concluded, there was “definitely a presence” of other races and ethnicities, but “it was not overwhelming.”¹²⁷ Other AFVN deejays and Vietnam veterans concurred with these claims, including Morecook, who affirmed that the race composition when he worked at AFVN Saigon from May 1972 to March 1973 was “primarily white America.”¹²⁸

Overall, AFVN’s effort to provide a connection with the United States with its broadcasts was a mismatch with the actual demographics of those who served and listened to AFVN. The over-representation of African Americans serving in Vietnam, compared to their percentage of the population at home, as well as other poorer enlisted and drafted minorities like Latinos, made sure that AFVN mainstream programming did not appeal to a substantial demographic segment of those fighting in Vietnam. Despite these impediments, there is no doubt that AFVN brought a bit of home to some American citizens and military members serving in the war. It all dovetails into the role that this network came to play — not without challenges — in being one option among many that helped American soldiers in Vietnam cultivate their desire to remain connected with their faraway homes.

¹²⁶ Wilford, follow up interview.

¹²⁷ Williams, follow-up interview.

¹²⁸ Morecook, follow-up interview.

Conclusion

AFVN played a crucial role in Vietnam as it allowed some American soldiers to remain connected with the United States. Indeed, the U.S. government created AFVN in 1962 to support the successful execution of the war. Using American popular broadcasting that replicated homebound sounds was essential to achieving that goal. AFVN was intentionally designed to support American soldiers psychologically and help them get through their Vietnam tours by reducing the distance that separated them from home. *Town and Country*, *Sergeant Pepper*, *Orient Express*, and *Dawn Buster* are just a few examples of AFVN's mainstream radio programming that primarily featured country western, rock and roll, and "Top 40" music formats. These radio shows mirrored the content of mainstream U.S. broadcasting, though they were stripped of explicit controversial material that could undermine support for the war. In addition to broadcasting U.S. radio shows, AFVN mediated the soldiers' war experience through sports recaps, interviews, news, and television series.

At first blush, AFVN achieved some success. For example, AFVN music, sports recaps, and live interviews often allowed American soldiers to escape reality by offering powerful cognitive experiences through which soldiers could drum the war out of their minds. AFVN programs and broadcasters established intimacy and familiar relationships with American soldiers in Vietnam that helped them cope with their emotional voids. By listening to a voice, song, or program, such as *A Date with Chris*, many mostly white American soldiers build personal connections and deep feelings of friendship and intimacy with their broadcasters. Such connections helped them psychologically survive their tours. As Pennington perfectly

summarized it, AFVN was a vehicle through which soldiers could cope with “the boredom, the dread, and anxiety” of living in an unfamiliar and frightening war zone.¹²⁹

However, the AFVN mission fell short because AFVN’s misreading of the Vietnamese context reflected an over-understanding of the reach and attractiveness of mainstream broadcasting in the United States. Oversimplified understandings of the surrounding context and the audience that AFVN hoped to engage were further exacerbated by the demographics of those who served in Vietnam, which did not match those that made American mainstream broadcasting popular and profitable in the United States. Not only was AFVN the only radio and television service available to American soldiers, but the over-representation of African Americans serving in Vietnam, in comparison to their share of the population back home along with poorer Latinos at the enlisted and drafted level, suggests that AFVN’s programming was not tailored to a significant portion of its military audience.

In fact, AFVN never represented an audience equalizer capable of overcoming cultural differences and issues of race that stirred up the U.S. military ranks in Vietnam. This claim primarily regards that demographic segment represented by Black soldiers fighting in Vietnam. In turn, this shortfall undermined AFVN’s potential and ability to serve as the intended psychological link. AFVN mainstream programming primarily appealed to white soldiers, despite best efforts to satisfy Black soldiers’ resentment over the lack of Black music and shows in 1969.

¹²⁹ Pennington, interview.

Chapter 5 - “Everything that Pissed Everybody Else Off”: The Story of Radio First Termer

On January 1, 1971, an unauthorized radio message interrupted the American Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN) radio transmission at 8 p.m. sharp.¹ A female voice, preceded by sitar music, suddenly heralded, “The following program is in living color and has been rated X by the Vietnam Academy of Maggots. This is Radio First Termer.”² The woman, dubbed “Nguyen,” introduced Radio First Termer (RFT) as a revolutionary, underground radio show that would enhance the listening experience of American soldiers in Vietnam with “vital news, information,

¹ AFVN offered music, shows, news, and sports events to American soldiers overseas. For more information, see Ovid L. Bayless, “The American Forces Vietnam Network,” *Journal of Broadcasting* 13, No. 2 (1969): 145-151; and Douglas J. Bradley and Craig Hansen Werner, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War*, edited by Christian G. Appy and Edwin A. Martini (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), pp. 155-157.

² Dave Rabbit, “21 Days in the Saigon Underground: The Birth and Death of Radio First Termer,” 2006, accessed February 19, 2021, <http://www.earthstation1.com/BiographyOfRFT.html>. Besides, Dave Rabbit’s online account, more material on RFT is available on YouTube and the first RFT tribute page created in 1995. For Dave Rabbit’s YouTube interview, consult Dave Rabbit, interview by Displaced Film, YouTube, “Vietnam Pirate Radio DJ Dave Rabbit—Bonus Story from *Sir! No Sir!*” accessed February 19, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhFvE4yk1hw>. For the tribute page, visit J. William Snyder, Jr., “Radio First Termer’s official website with the original restored show,” accessed March 1, 2021, <http://www.ibiblio.org/jwsnyder/rft/rft.html>.

and hard acid rock music,” such as psychedelic songs by Steppenwolf, Cream, and Jimi Hendrix.³

RFT was, however, short-lived and broadcast for only twenty-one nights, from 8 to 11 p.m., from a Saigon brothel in January 1971. Its architect, former United States Air Force Sergeant Clyde David DeLay, Jr., under his on-air handle “Dave Rabbit,” operated RFT with two anonymous associates referred to as “Pete Sadler,” who was his studio engineer, and “Nguyen,” RFT’s signature female voice.⁴ By defying the AFVN on-air format and style, RFT combined satirical gags with drug-oriented songs and sex jokes for American troops in Vietnam, especially for those soldiers on their first tour of duty – so-called “first termers.” In Dave Rabbit’s words, RFT was intended to provide first-termers with the “truth” about what their Vietnam War experience would be, representing “nothing but everything that pissed everybody else off except for the troops.”⁵

³ Acid rock developed in the 1960s, meshing bluesy sounds with loud and distorted guitar riffs and lyrics. For more information, see Jim DeRogatis, *Kaleidoscope Eyes: Psychedelic Rock from the ‘60s to the ‘90s* (Secaucus, N.J.: Carol Publishing Group, 1996).

⁴ The full and real name of Nguyen, as well as the real name of Pete Sadler, are currently unknown. Dave Rabbit served three tours in Vietnam and prematurely died of respiratory disease in 2012, see dallasnews Administrator, “David DeLay, pirate-radio DJ who entertained Vietnam troops, dies,” *The Dallas Morning News*, January 24, 2021, accessed February 19, 2021, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/obituaries/2012/01/25/david-delay-pirate-radio-dj-who-entertained-vietnam-troops-dies/>.

⁵ The original name was “Radio First Timer,” but it was changed to Radio First Termer because, according to Dave Rabbit, it sounded better than the original nickname. For more, visit Dave

These words capture how RFT tried to tap into American soldiers' unmet expectations of their Vietnam War experience.⁶ Through its sex jokes and satirical gags that lampooned the U.S. military in Vietnam, RFT dramatized the disillusionment, boredom, and dissent within the ranks that many American soldiers manifested as they came to terms with their war experience in Vietnam. Their interpretation of military service as the greatest form of participatory citizenship fell short as soldiers realized that their combat experience in Vietnam would not live up to ideals rooted in the American citizen-soldier tradition and the enduring "good war" reputation of World War II.⁷ Dave Rabbit epitomizes in this respect what historian Richard R. Moser called the "new

Rabbit, "21 Days in the Saigon Underground: The Birth and Death of Radio First Termer," 2006, accessed October 28, 2021, <http://www.earthstation1.com/BiographyOfRFT.html>.

⁶ For American soldiers' disillusionment and expectations of their wartime and military experience, see Meredith H. Lair, *Armed with Abundance: Consumerism and Soldiering in the Vietnam War*, 1st ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Richard R. Moser, *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent during the Vietnam Era* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996); David Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance during the Vietnam War* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2005); James E. Etterman, "First Termer Disillusionment: Its Effect on Attrition in the United States Navy," (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1982) <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA127311.pdf>; and Richard Weissbourd, "Moral Shock: The Disillusionment of Vietnam Veterans (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1987).

⁷ Citizen soldiers were not professional but common American citizens who embraced arms during the Civil War as the highest form of patriotism. For more information, see Susannah J. Ural, "Citizen Soldiers," in *The Cambridge History of the American Civil War*, edited by Aaron Sheehan-Dean (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 151-172. After the Japanese

winter soldier,” a dissenter who chose defiance over the war to voice his disillusionment toward the military service and articulate his opposition to an unjust and unpopular war in Vietnam.⁸

Scholars have so far treated RFT from the lens of cultural history as an example of how popular music affected the G.I. antiwar resistance in Vietnam.⁹ In placing attention to rock music as a vernacular expression of dissent that directly spoke to American soldiers in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s, this scholarship largely agrees that RFT was an underground radio show that connected American soldiers to the domestic antiwar and counterculture movements that originated in San Francisco in the 1960s.¹⁰

attack on Pearl Harbor, the Roosevelt Administration promoted a narrative centered on the idea of World War II as an inevitable and “just” war, pitting democratic nations against the evil forces of the Axis powers. For more details, see John E. Bodnar, *The “Good War” in American Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

⁸ Moser, *The New Winter Soldiers*, p. 145.

⁹ For the scholarship that treated RFT, see Bradley and Werner, p. 2, 145-146, 163-165; Michael J. Kramer, *The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture* (Oxford, London: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jan Philip Müller, “Radiophonics of the Vietnam War: A Collection,” *Continent* 5, No.3 (August 2016): 1-21; Lydia Fish, “Informal Communication Systems in the Vietnam War: A Case Study in Technology, Folklore and Popular Culture,” *New Directions in Folklore*, Issue 7 (2003): 1-2. Fish speculated that RFT could also be a sophisticated hoax created by AFVN radio technicians or a pirate radio used as a cover for psychological broadcast operations.

¹⁰ Antiwar demonstrations within the United States had various declinations, including discussion groups, marches, and organized protests, which culminated after the assassination of Martin Luther

However, scholars neglected important aspects when examining RFT through the lens of cultural history. The scholarship on the history of technology, radio studies, and U.S. foreign relations offers the opportunity to grasp RFT as the unintended consequence of the U.S. strategy to shape and develop American military radio in Vietnam as a broadcasting medium that could engage troops in Southeast Asia.¹¹ In the Vietnam context, the U.S. military authority harnessed

King Jr. in 1968. For example, the GI-Veteran March for Peace was the first GI anti-Vietnam War march that originated in San Francisco in September 1968. Desertion and declaring conscientious objector status were other forms of protest. These spontaneous and organized forms of dissent intersected with the anti-establishment and anti-Vietnam War attitudes that came to define the social movement called “counterculture” in the United States between the 1960s and 1970s. Rock music became a popular expression of counterculture that many artists used to channel their dissent for the Vietnam War. American soldiers in Vietnam sometimes created improvised radio broadcasts that reflected the circulation of such domestic counterculture. For more see Fish, pp. 1-2; Bradley and Werner, p. 2; Kramer, pp. 24-25; Moser, pp. 62-63, 81-101.

¹¹ AN/PRC-25 was the most widely used portable radio set by U.S. troops in the Vietnam War that worked as both receiver and transmitter providing two ways of communication. For the diffusion of military radio as a communications technology in Vietnam, see Thomas Matthew Rienzi, *Communications-Electronics, 1962-1970* (Washington, D. C.: Dept. of the Army, 1972), and John D. Bergen, *Military Communications: A Test for Technology* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1986). For the most important studies that have influenced this chapter through their exploration of American radio as a broadcasting medium that targeted domestic and international audiences during World War II and the Cold War, see Gerd Horten, *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda During World War II* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002); Michael A. Krysko, *American Radio in China: International Encounters with Technology and Communications, 1919-1941* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

radio as a commodity of entertainment that could reduce the distance from home by exporting American popular culture and thus boosting the troops' morale. Most importantly, the need to positively preserve the troops' mindset during the war became crucial in the face of the rising dissent many American soldiers began to express, especially after the Tet Offensive, which made it clear that the United States was far from winning the war.¹² RFT must indeed be understood at the intersection of the failed attempt to harness American military radio to engage the troops and the rise of the new winter soldier figure at the height of the Vietnam War. It illustrates how radio technology in the hands of disillusioned soldiers became an instrument of civil disobedience that, albeit short-lived, tried to challenge the U.S. military authorities in Vietnam.

In so doing, RFT expressed a form of disobedience that relied on much more than just rock music. In fact, Dave Rabbit's decision to create RFT was a manifestation of AFVN's shortcomings and failure to satisfactorily engage the full expanse of its intended audience. In this way, Dave Rabbit personified one aspect of listener agency in reaction to the shortcomings of the officially sanctioned AFVN. Furthermore, a closer look at Dave Rabbit's broadcasts invites a discussion of what RFT tried to accomplish in Vietnam and the larger debates about obscenity

¹² The Tet Offensive was a coordinated military attack in January 1968. The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces launched it against several targets in South Vietnam during the Lunar New Year holiday. Even though the seized territories were soon recaptured by the U.S. and South Vietnamese, psychologically, the Tet Offensive shocked the American public. Indeed, after Tet, opposition to the war within the military ranks dramatically increased from 1971 until the final U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam in 1973. For more, see Marc J. Gilbert and William P. Head, *The Tet Offensive* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996). For a discussion of dissent within the U.S. military ranks, see Cortright, p. 10, and Moser, pp. 131-133.

and subversion that gained momentum in the U.S. during the 1960s and 1970s. Dave Rabbit's use of profanities in his broadcasts offers a further connection with the home front by intersecting with the era's standup comedians, such as Lenny Bruce and George Carlin, who often crossed the line by heralding offensive lines as a reaction to U.S. broadcasting standards and ideas about what constituted obscenity and should, therefore, be banned from the airwaves.¹³ At the same time, such dissent and activism against limitations on free speech intertwined with the emergence of pirate radios in the United States. They represented a form of civil subversion that further challenged the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) discriminatory policies limiting licenses to low-power, non-commercial radio stations after the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967.¹⁴

Furthermore, as media scholar and radio personality Ian Punnett put it, the late 1960s and early 1970s were also the "Golden Age of Radio Satire." During this period, the proliferation of

¹³ Obscene, indecent content, and profanity are not protected by the First Amendment on either radio or TV. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) began to restrict obscenity and indecency in American radio broadcasting in the 1930s to protect children from foul language and vulgar material. Consult Federal Communications Commission, "Consumer Guide: Obscene, Indecent and Profane Broadcasts," accessed August 25, 2024, <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/obscene-indecnt-and-profane-broadcasts>.

¹⁴ The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 ensured the expansion of non-commercial broadcasting for radio and television services and established the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and National Public Radio (NPR). However, in line with the commercial and corporatist nature of the American radio industry, these semi-governmental agencies lobbied for high-powered FM stations and restricted access to low-power non-commercial radio stations, such as college and community stations. See Lawrence C. Soley, *Free Radio: Electronic Civil Disobedience* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999), p. 42.

satire in American commercial radio reflected an irreverent form of political subversion that spoke directly to the counterculture movement.¹⁵ Radio satire became a form of participatory citizenship that gave meaning to the anti-establishment movement by criticizing American mores, politics, and foreign policy. RFT perfectly captures how this domestic trend expanded beyond U.S. borders and affected disillusioned American soldiers in Vietnam. For twenty-one days, RFT aired rock music, obscenities, and satire to entertain soldiers while conveying a disguised message that, albeit not explicitly antiwar, was an attempt to voice opposition to the war and ideally incite insubordination in Saigon.

It is not surprising in this respect that RFT's outlaw nature circulated in the U.S. after the war. Indeed, the legacy of RFT was cemented in a documentary dedicated to anti-Vietnam War movements, released on Veterans' Day in 1987.¹⁶ The documentary, which placed radio at the

¹⁵ The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the exponential rise of radio comedy groups and satirists to provide and perform satirical news, music, and entertainment. This development was the direct expression of an adaptation that radio programmers and producers went through to appeal to the counterculture. Radio hosts and producers developed free formats in which disc jockeys decided what to air not according to a rigid program schedule but their tastes and moods. This trend also reflected the FCC's enforcement of the 1949 Fairness Doctrine, according to which U.S. radio stations were forced to provide fairness in their broadcasting of news and programs. The same, however, did not require supervision of the content. For more information, see Ian Punnett, "The Mixed Dish: Harry Shearer and the Golden Age of Radio Satire," *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 22, No.2 (2015): 148- 163.

¹⁶ The first documentary, entitled *Vietnam: Radio First Termer*, was produced by American journalist Alexis Muellner in collaboration with National Public Radio (NPR) and Interlock Media Associates. Then, the story of RFT appeared on the Internet when Dave Rabbit's fans began

center of American soldiers' lives and experiences during the Vietnam War, celebrated Dave Rabbit's show as an example of how American soldiers used underground radio and rock music to express their dissent against the war. Thanks to this documentary, the story of RFT captured the attention of other radio personalities and Internet fans in the early 1990s and 2000s, leading Dave Rabbit to eventually reveal his identity, which had remained a mystery for thirty-four years.¹⁷

Drawing on interviews with Vietnam veterans, radio engineers, and AFVN deejays, this chapter attempts to readdress the historical significance of RFT in its Vietnam-era context and beyond. By mocking the military brass with its satirical gags, drug-oriented music, and sex jokes, RFT represented an irreverent show for the troops that attempted to challenge authority against the U.S. military in Saigon. The story of RFT thus illustrates how Dave Rabbit exploited the U.S. military's use of radio as a broadcasting medium to engage troops to voice the rampant malaise among the military ranks in Vietnam. Indeed, the story of RFT continued to live years after its termination in 1971 because it reflected an effective manipulation on the part of Dave Rabbit and

celebrating his heroic act of radio dissent in Vietnam. It also figured as an addendum to David Zeiger's documentary *Sir! No Sir!* in 2005. For more information on the anti-Vietnam War military movement and GI dissent, see James R. Heyes, "The War Within a War: Dissent in the Vietnam-Era Military," *Vietnam Generation* 2, No. 1, Article 3 (1990): 9-19.

¹⁷ Dave Rabbit publicly disclosed his identity as an addendum to David Zeiger's *Sir! No Sir!* documentary on February 14, 2006. For the interview, consult Dave Rabbit, interview by Displaced Film, YouTube, "Vietnam Pirate Radio DJ Dave Rabbit—Bonus Story from *Sir! No Sir!*" accessed February 19, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhFvE4yk1hw>.

his associates, who shaped radio as an instrument of participatory citizenship to oppose the war and survive their tours in Vietnam.

Counterculture, Rock Music, and the Vietnam War: The Origins of Radio

First Termer

Dave Rabbit was the mastermind behind the origins of RFT. A U.S. Air Force Sergeant from Dallas, Texas, he began his radio career during his third Vietnam tour at the U.S. Air Force Phan Rang Air Base in Southeast Vietnam. In Phan Rang, a city located more than 190 miles from Saigon, Dave Rabbit met his roommate, AFVN broadcaster Jim Brookshire, who worked for the broadcast division at Phan Rang radio station. Brookshire eventually trained Dave Rabbit as his studio engineer for the launch of their improvised radio show called Radio Phan Rang, 101.75 FM. This experience led them to share a special bond, and they soon became close friends. Unfortunately for Dave Rabbit, this special friendship prematurely ended in January 1969, when Brookshire fell victim to a Viet Cong's surprise bombing attack against Phan Rang Air Base.¹⁸

Before leaving Vietnam, however, Dave Rabbit did not want the death of his closest friend to be in vain. By September 1970, Rabbit's tour was coming to an end. His last assignment was in Saigon, at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. It was here that he met his two associates,

¹⁸ Dave Rabbit also disclosed information concerning his military life, friendship with Jim Brookshire, and how he came to establish Radio First Termer in his personal website: Dave Rabbit, "21 Days in the Saigon Underground: The Birth and Death of Radio First Termer," 2006, accessed February 19, 2021, <http://www.earthstation1.com/BiographyOfRFT.html>.

Pete Sadler, Dave Rabbit's studio engineer, and Nguyen, RFT's sensual female voice. Dave Rabbit used pseudonyms to protect the identity of his close associates. However, he chose a Vietnamese name for his female associate, who had a distinctly American accent and worked for AFVN, to perhaps give his show a touch of Vietnam and titillate the fantasies of RFT's male audiences. This choice was clever because Dave Rabbit's listeners could make assumptions about Nguyen, an unseen speaker who sounded American but carried a Vietnamese name.¹⁹ Indeed, this strategy perfectly connects to the process of visualization and the imaging that the brain does to create a picture of the radio speaker in the minds of Dave Rabbit's listeners.²⁰ In doing so, RFT's listeners could envision Nguyen as either American or Vietnamese based solely on the sultry sounds of her voice coming through the radio loudspeaker.

Thanks to the friendship that connected the three of them, Dave Rabbit shared with his two associates the idea of creating an irreverent radio show for the troops. Specifically, the primary intent was to honor Brookshire's memory and his service in Vietnam. In Saigon, Rabbit made several friends and became part of a secret underground network of G.I.s that eventually helped him create Radio First Termer, starting by providing him with the technical and electronic equipment. Indeed, Dave Rabbit knew he and his associates had thirty days to go unpunished before the military brass realized the equipment was missing.²¹

¹⁹ "Vietnam Pirate Radio DJ Dave Rabbit – Bonus story from *Sir! No Sir!*," accessed March 2, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhFvE4yk1hw>.

²⁰ Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In Radio and the American Imagination*. 1st University of Minnesota Press ed. (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 27.

For this reason, RFT was a short-lived project from its conception. For the studio, Dave Rabbit and Sadler chose to broadcast from a brothel somewhere in downtown Saigon, and it was Sadler who secured that unusual location by negotiating the room rental with the brothel's madam. They made the room soundproof with mattresses to prevent needy moans, bed squeaks, creaks, and groans from adjacent rooms from interfering with their transmission. Then, they added foam padding around the microphones and used three Japanese tape recorders, "one for pre-recorded music, one for pre-recorded commercials, and one for pre-recorded gimmick stuff."²² Everything was finally ready to start the show. On the FM dial, Dave Rabbit chose a fictional radio frequency, "his favorite number, 69." In fact, there is no frequency 69 on the FM dial. Furthermore, as David Rabbit claimed, RFT broadcast over AFVN's frequency once it signed off for the evening, and AFVN frequency in Saigon was 99.9. In short, Dave Rabbit's claim to use a non-existent frequency was just part of the larger sexually charged jokes that were

²¹ Dave Rabbit, "21 Days in the Saigon Underground: The Birth and Death of Radio First Termer," 2006, accessed February 19, 2021, <http://www.earthstation1.com/BiographyOfRFT.html>. The dynamics of how Dave Rabbit came in touch with this secret underground network of GIs in Saigon remains unknown. His online account provides a brief and vague statement concerning this connection.

²² As Dave Rabbit recalled in his online account, the technical equipment was acquired through "Midnight Supply," which is military slang used to refer to something stolen. For more, consult Dave Rabbit, "21 Days in the Saigon Underground: The Birth and Death of Radio First Termer," 2006, accessed February 19, 2021, <http://www.earthstation1.com/BiographyOfRFT.html>; and Dave Rabbit's interview in "Vietnam Pirate Radio DJ Dave Rabbit – Bonus story from *Sir! No Sir!*" accessed October 3, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhFvE4yk1hw>. Akai reel-to-reel is a tape recorder manufactured in Japan between the late 1950s and late 1980s.

part of RFT's modus operandi, another explicit sexual reference to make his narrative more colorful.²³ Then, at 8 p.m. on January 1, 1971, Dave Rabbit heralded his sign-on message by allegedly preempting the AFVN signal, "This is your host for the next three hours of hard acid rock music, Dave Rabbit . . . We are an underground radio station here, and we say what we feel like saying."²⁴

²³ According to Sergeant Douglas J. Bradley, who first heard RFT when he was in Vietnam, the actual frequency was between 98.5 and 99.5 FM. Douglas J. Bradley (Army Vietnam veteran), interviewed by Roberta Meloni, July 7, 2023. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter. Furthermore, according to telecommunications expert Frederick Vobbe, 69 megahertz (MHz) on the FM dial in Vietnam was occupied by TV channel 4, and the adoption of a TV transmitter in place of a radio transmitter would have required a 10-meter-tall tower or 20-meter-long wire antenna, something extremely unlikely given that the RFT studio location was a brothel. Likewise, the possibility that RFT would broadcast over various frequencies, including on AM, through a sophisticated system of radio relays, a system used to increase the signal capability using a receiver that retransmits a signal on another frequency, is also hard to believe. The enemy could have triangulated and located the relays. Frederick Vobbe (telecommunication experts), interview by Roberta Meloni and Dr. Ian Punnett, February 3, 2021. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter.

²⁴ For Dave Rabbit's sign-on message, consult J. William Snyder, Jr., "Radio First Termer's official website with the original restored show," accessed October 7, 2023, <https://www.ibiblio.org/jwsnyder/rft/rft.html>. For more clarity regarding the AFVN radio frequency, the Armed Forces transmitted radio shows and music on 99.9 megahertz (MHz), which is 100 on the FM dial. For information on the radio frequencies, consult "Why Do FM Frequencies End in an Odd Decimal?," Federal Communications Commission, accessed October 7, 2023, <https://www.fcc.gov/media/radio/fm-frequencies-end-odd-decimal>.

One of the first distinctive aspects of RFT was its playlist. RFT frequently aired *The Pusher* by Steppenwolf and *White Room* by Cream, whose lyrics evoked a psychedelic world with their explicit reference to drug use. This illicit music, although not aired on AFVN, could be acquired in Vietnam. For example, Douglas J. Bradley and Craig H. Werner argued that contraband material often arrived in war zones in Vietnam thanks to “trusted people,” American soldiers with high levels of security clearance, who could smuggle in tape recordings, cassettes, and albums they received from the United States by mail.²⁵ Alongside Steppenwolf and Cream, RFT also broadcast Jimi Hendrix and Carlos Santana to celebrate the power of musical creativity and “male musical virtuosity” (to quote radio historian Susan J. Douglas) with their guitar riffs. Another major hit was *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* by The Animals, whose lyrics captured the soldiers’ anguish of feeling stuck, depressed, and hopeless.²⁶

In so doing, RFT’s music mirrored a historical trend that affected American popular culture in the late 1960s. Many antiwar and protest songs, including, for example, Bob Dylan’s *Masters of War*, translated the rising wave of opposition to the Vietnam War in the United States.²⁷ By 1968 — and especially after the Tet Offensive demonstrated the war was not close to being won — the escalation of the war in Vietnam was met with massive domestic unrest.

²⁵ For more, see Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, p. 2.

²⁶ Other famous rock bands that RFT aired were Led Zeppelin, Vanilla Fudge, and Bloodrock. For the place that the song occupied in American soldiers’ experience in Vietnam, see Bradley and Werner, pp. 9-15.

²⁷ Dylan’s song, which became an anthem of the anti-Vietnam War movement for its open denunciation against the war profits, was released in 1963.

College students, civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., respected generals like Matthew Ridgway of the U.S. Army and Lauris Norstad of the Air Force, and U.S. senators such as Eugene McCarthy (D-MN) and George McGovern (D-SD) all protested the war.²⁸ From ordinary people to famous activists, they questioned American involvement in Vietnam in speeches, articles, books, nonviolent protests, and also songs.²⁹

RFT paralleled this domestic trend as radio and music in Vietnam progressively created the cultural fabric that linked American soldiers to the United States. Indeed, the U.S. military authority exported consumer culture to Vietnam as the U.S. involvement in the war escalated

²⁸ For influential political personalities and military leaders who protested the Vietnam War, see Daryl Webb, "Crusade: George McGovern's Opposition to the Vietnam War," *South Dakota History* 28, No. 3 (1998): 162-190; Bob Buzzanco, "The American Military's Rationale Against the Vietnam War," *Political Science Quarterly* 101, No. 4 (1986): 559-576; Michael Nelson, "The Historical Presidency: Lost Confidence: The Democratic Party, the Vietnam War, and the 1968 Election," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 48, No. 3 (2018): 570-85.

²⁹ Vietnam protesters were part of a longer anti-war political tradition in the United States that dates to colonial America with the pacifist, quaker tradition. The scholarship about Vietnam and anti-war movements is massive. For the most important works, see George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979); Bradford Luttie, *The Chicago Anti-Vietnam War Movement* (Chicago: Midwest Pacifist Center, 1988); Donald Mrozek, *Air Power and the Ground War in Vietnam* (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1988); George Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); Nora Alter, *Vietnam Protest Theatre: The Television War on Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Daniel S. Lucks, *Selma to Saigon: The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War* (University of Kentucky Press: Lexington. 2017); Richard Spilsbury, *Who Protested Against the Vietnam War?* (London: Raintree, 2014).

since the mid-1960s. As historian Meredith Lair argued, consumer goods and material abundance constantly mediated American soldiers' experience in Vietnam through which military authorities tried to tackle the "war on boredom" and troops' discontent.³⁰ The development of American radio in Vietnam was a natural consequence of this attempt. The U.S. military harnessed radio and rock music as consumer commodities that paralleled domestic sounds and music entertainment to help American soldiers go through their tour and ideally prevent insurrections as resistance and opposition to the war grew by the late 1960s.³¹ For example, AFVN served such a purpose as it helped American troops shift attention from the war to

³⁰ By analyzing American soldiers' experience in Vietnam from the lens of cultural history, historian Meredith Lair offers an alternative to the traditional public interpretation of American soldiers' experience in Vietnam as harsh and dangerous. From electronics and music to food, alcohol, and clubs, she argues that U.S. military authorities relied on the power of American capitalism and consumerism to boost soldiers' morale and curb their uneasiness. For more see, Lair, pp. 22, 135.

³¹ U.S. ground troops were sent to South Vietnam in great numbers during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. In this context, radio and rock music became vehicles to offer homebound connections and boost the troops' morale in Vietnam. For the development of American consumerism in Vietnam, see Lair, *Armed with Abundance*, pp. 73, 133, 135, and Kramer, *The Republic of Rock*, pp. 135, 140. For the escalation of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam during the 1960s, see David E. Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), and Michael H. Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945-1968* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).

homebound feelings that boosted their morale.³² Through interactions with American radio and sounds, the U.S. military authority tried to build team spirit and prevent tensions in the military.

However, this attempt fell short as opposition to the war proved stronger than bland efforts to engage soldiers and build unity among troops. Horrified and repulsed by the dragging and unpopular U.S. intervention in Vietnam, many American soldiers gave voice to their disillusion with and opposition to the war as a collective group of servicemen and servicewomen whose sense of honor and duty came to be betrayed in Vietnam. Their antiwar resistance often included avoiding combat, refusing orders, and threatening officers with a fragmentation grenade.³³ Their disquiet originated from their unmet ideals embedded in the American citizen-soldier tradition and their unmatched expectations of a heroic and patriotic combat experience rooted in World War II's enduring "good war" reputation.³⁴ As historian Richard Moser posited in this regard, it was the internal struggle between their pre-existing values and expectations, as

³² Beyond American music and the latest tunes available nationally and internationally, AFVN broadcast sports news such as baseball, football, and basketball, US-related and international news, and other shows that also employed the contribution of famous American radio personalities, athletes, and actors. For examples of AFVN broadcasts, consult the digitalized audio files of the Paul Kasper Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

³³ This practice is commonly known as "fragging," which sometimes went beyond threatening to actually killing. For other examples of combat resistance, see Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt*, p. 46, 53, 131-132; Moser, *The New Winter Soldiers*, p. 142.

³⁴ Ural, "Citizen Soldiers," pp. 152-172; Bodnar, *The "Good War" in American Memory*, pp. 6-7, 203.

opposed to the new combat experience in Vietnam, that triggered the betrayal of their war sacrifice and “motivated revolutionary revisions in the way combatants understood war, history, and the tradition of the soldier.”³⁵ This internal fight, in turn, produced the new Vietnam-era figure of the antiwar soldier, a “new winter soldier” (to quote Moser), who found in their acts of resistance and dissent the greatest achievement of their failed expectations as American soldiers in Vietnam.³⁶

In such an environment, radio technology became an effective instrument for the new winter soldiers to connect and share their discomfort. Almost unexpectedly and contrary to what the U.S. military had hoped to achieve with AFVN, soldiers’ interactions with radio often laid the foundations for what folklorist Lydia Fish called “informal communication systems.” Such systems were casual networks of communication and entertainment that American soldiers in Vietnam set up via radios and other military equipment to connect, enjoy personal forms of entertainment, and escape official control by military authorities. The “Bullshit Band” is probably the best-known Vietnam-era example of this trend, as it was an after-the-hour network that connected American soldiers who regularly used their field radios and an unassigned frequency to stay engaged, talk, mock the military, and often entertain themselves with prohibited tunes in their barracks.³⁷ It was an open line of communication and entertainment

³⁵ Moser, p. 144.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 145.

³⁷ For the “Bullshit Band,” see Kramer, *The Republic of Rock*, pp. 24-25; Fish, “Informal Communication Systems in the Vietnam War,” p. 2.

through which any American in Vietnam who had a radio and some spare time could connect with other enlisted men by simply going on air and asking, “Who knows a good joke?”, “Hey, hey, hey, this is Cool Albert from Detroit,” or “Any Motor City Soul Brothers out there?”³⁸

However, the existence of an informal communication system such as the “Bullshit Band” often coalesced with the soldiers’ need for an unfiltered listening experience. As Fish further explained in this regard, AFVN “sometimes censored” the news and often decided what “suitable music to play in a combat zone.”³⁹ John Ketwig, an Army veteran who served in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968, offered more insights into Fish’s claim. To Ketwig, AFVN music “was good, and it was some of the latest stuff.” However, he also maintained that AFVN broadcast “nothing controversial in any way,” thus abiding by its mission of keeping up morale and protecting American soldiers against the backlash of possible antiwar protests or divisions that would stir up the U.S. military in Vietnam.⁴⁰ For this reason, American soldiers, especially those at the end of their Vietnam tour, often elevated an informal and recreative network such as the “Bullshit Band” to illegal broadcasts. Although not overly political, these underground radio

³⁸ Direct quotes are from Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, p. 65.

³⁹ Fish, p. 2. For more information on the controversy of censorship in the U.S. military and at AFVN, see Charles B. Moore, “Censorship of AFVN News in Vietnam,” *Journal of Broadcasting* 15, No. 4 (1971): 387-396. For an online article, consult Rick Fredericksen, “All the News That’s Fit to Air,” Historynet, accessed August 26, 2024, <https://www.historynet.com/news-thats-fit-air/>.

⁴⁰ John Ketwig (Army Vietnam Veteran), interviewed by Roberta Meloni, July 10, 2023. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter.

programs became a way by which soldiers had fun listening to what they liked while challenging the authorities in Vietnam.

One example is offered by artillery officer and decorated Vietnam veteran Barry Romo and his friend, known on the air as “Good Guy One” and “Good Guy Two.” Many details of their radio activism in Vietnam are not known, including where and how long it lasted. However, in the brief discussion that Fish devoted to these “ambitious GIs” and “underground radio pirates,” she posited that Romo and his friend set up their improvised broadcast in 1967. By using a field radio and a frequency for signal testing, they enjoyed playing records to the troops that they brought to Vietnam during a “rest and rehabilitation” (R&R) flight from Hawaii.⁴¹

WPOT is another instance. Marine Sergeant and newscaster Robert Wilford operated his illegal radio broadcast in 1969. He set up WPOT using the frequency, equipment, and facility of AFVN Detachment 4 in Hon Tre, an offshore island located in South Vietnam, when he arrived in October 1969. Once the official AFVN programming signed off at midnight, “we waited 90 seconds, turn[ed] the radio network broadcasting back on, and play[ed] whatever we wanted

⁴¹ Fish, p. 2. Romo’s friend’s name is unknown, nor is the type of records they played to the troops. Romo enlisted in the U.S. Army and served in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968 before becoming a political and anti-Vietnam War activist. For more on his life and service, consult Erin A. McCarthy, Columbia College Chicago, Barry L. Romo, and Cesar Ruvulcaba, *Barry L. Romo Collection*, 1966, Personal Narrative, retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.00106/>. R&R were commercial flights offered to American soldiers who were entitled to a seven-day leave if they had served in Vietnam for a year. During these days, soldiers had the opportunity to leave Vietnam and visit other places such as Hawaii or Hong Kong. For example, Pan Am offered its first R&R flights from Vietnam to Hong Kong and Japan on March 1, 1966. For more information, consult The Pan Am Historical Foundation, “Pan Am and Vietnam,” accessed August 24, 2024, <https://www.panam.org/jet-age/pan-am-vietnam>.

to.”⁴² WPOT was a way to hear and play unauthorized songs for the troops, including “Frank Sinatra, something that was borderline.” As Wilford put it, “we no longer cared about what the management said, and pretty much everybody I’ve talked to [had] this pro attitude.” WPOT operated irregularly during the last three months of 1969, and U.S. officials never caught it because Wilford maintained a low profile.⁴³

These underground radio broadcasts are just a few examples of acts of resistance that G.I.s orchestrated against the military authorities in Vietnam. RFT must be placed in this larger context and strand of dissent by which disillusioned American soldiers harnessed radio as a powerful instrument of entertainment but also disobedience in Vietnam. However, by airing much more than unauthorized psychedelic rock music, RFT took this trend to the extreme, using satirical gags and sex jokes that openly mocked and challenged the military authority in Vietnam.

More than Rock Music: Obscenity, Profanity, and American Radio Satire

Besides drug-oriented songs, RFT often aired gags that openly ridiculed the U.S. military radio in Vietnam. RFT’s parody of AFVN public service announcements exemplified this

⁴² On the story of WPOT, Robert Wilford (U.S. Marine Corps), interviewed by Roberta Meloni, July 14, 2023. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter.

⁴³ Ibidem.

trend.⁴⁴ According to Vietnam veteran Robert Morecook, who worked as a newscast at AFVN Saigon from 1972 to 1973, these announcements were intended to keep American soldiers informed and communicate what “their commander” wanted “soldiers to know.”⁴⁵ Such announcements included, for instance, reminders concerning the importance of taking care of their guns, as well as preserving their health by taking malaria pills. RFT distorted AFVN announcements by featuring fake commercials that stretched into obscenity. For example, Dave Rabbit often invited his listeners to buy gadgets or, in Rabbit’s own words, “different items that RFT has to offer.” He passionately advertised a one-of-a-kind RFT piece of merchandise, “the official Dave Rabbit sweatshirt,” a white sweatshirt with an aroused rabbit holding a sign with a

⁴⁴ For RFT’s distortion and mimicking of AFVN public announcements, see Kyran S (Sticks), “RADIO FIRST TERMER Dave Rabbit Vietnam Radio Part 1/4,” accessed April 9, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtuueqJkgjA&t=2s>. According to AFVN deejay and engineer Billy Williams, AFVN had its underground program called *Sergeant Pepper*, which ran on Sunday nights and sounded like RFT but without the “foul language.” Billy Williams (Army Vietnam Veteran), interviewed by Roberta Meloni, July 21, 2023. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter. For more information on *Sergeant Pepper*, consult “American Armed Forces radio Vietnam No 13,” Internet Archive, accessed October 26, 2023, <https://archive.org/details/316519-a-afvn-hour-of-love-with-brother-john-1970/316502A%20Sergeant+Pepper+Part+2+1970+and+Sage+Brush+Theatre+Fort+Laramie.mp3>.

⁴⁵ Robert Morecook (US Army Vietnam veteran), interviewed by Roberta Meloni, August 14, 2023. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter.

subtle — albeit eloquent — message against the Vietnam War that read: “Fuck it before it fucks you.”⁴⁶

Dave Rabbit’s foul language invites a reflection on what RFT attempted to accomplish in Vietnam and the debates over obscenity that gained traction in the U.S. Indeed, RFT’s profanity perfectly intersects with contemporary reactions to U.S. broadcasting standards and ideas about what constituted obscenity and should, therefore, be banned from the airwaves.⁴⁷ In the spirit of the counterculture of the mid-1960s and the 1970s, many American comedians reacted to such scrutiny on obscenity rules and free speech by entertaining and shocking their audiences with impudent performances that made them truly anti-establishment icons. In 1964, American standup comedian Lenny Bruce, for example, was arrested on obscenity charges in San

⁴⁶ The fake announcement became so popular that people began sending money to a fake address in Saigon to purchase these sweatshirts. Consult “Radio First Termer Restoration Project, Dave Rabbit’s written accounts of RFT,” accessed February 19, 2021, http://radiofirsttermerrrestoration.com/?page_id=2. For Dave Rabbit’s direct quote, see Dave Rabbit, interview by Displaced Film, YouTube, “Vietnam Pirate Radio DJ Dave Rabbit—Bonus Story from *Sir! No Sir!*” accessed February 19, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhFvE4yk1hw>, and J. William Snyder, Jr., Radio First Termer’s official website with the original restored show, accessed October 7, 2023, <https://www.ibiblio.org/jwsnyder/rft/rft.html>.

⁴⁷ One of the first acts that the FCC passed to protect minors and children from indecency in broadcast media is the Communications Act of 1934. The act is still in effect today and at the basis of what constitutes obscene material and language according to U.S. broadcasting standards and values. For more, see Elizabeth H. Steele, “Examining the FCC’s Indecency Regulations in Light of Today’s Technology,” *Federal Communications Law Journal* 63, No. 1, article 12, (2010): 289-310.

Francisco and New York and banned from performing after heralding irreverent lines such as “take away the right to say fuck and you take away the right to say fuck the government.” Then, in 1973, New York Pacifica’s WBAI radio station shocked its listeners by broadcasting American comedian George Carlin’s seven “Filthy Words” monologue, of which “fuck” was yet another example. Angry listeners eventually filed complaints to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which led to the 1978 Supreme Court decision *FCC v. Pacifica Foundation*. The ruling ultimately favored the FCC, affirming its authority to define and regulate what constitutes obscenity and indecency in broadcasting.⁴⁸

The subversive nature of RFT also spoke to another important dynamic happening on the home front: the rise of pirate radios in the United States. The growth of U.S. pirate radios reflected a form of civil engagement with radio technology, what historian Christina Dunbar-Hester called “radio activism,” that tried to challenge the FCC’s scrutiny and discriminatory

⁴⁸ For the intersection between foul language and obscenity in American standup comedy and comedians of the mid-1960s and the 1970s, see Susan Seizer, “On the Uses of Obscenity in Live Stand-Up Comedy,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 84, No.1 (Winter 2011): 209-234. For a few online sources discussing the legacy of Lenny Bruce and George Carlin in American standup comedy, consult Patrick Bromley, “History of Stand-Up Comedy in the 1970s,” liveaboutdotcom, accessed August 25, 2024, <https://www.liveabout.com/history-of-stand-up-comedy-in-the-1970s-801532>, and Robert Cashill, “6 Stand-Up Comedians Who Pushed the Envelope,” Biography, accessed August 25, 2024, <https://www.biography.com/controversial-comedians>. For the transcript of Carlin’s monologue, see Katherine Phelps, “‘Filthy Words’ by George Carlin 1973: The Transcript Presented to the Supreme Court in 1978,” accessed August 25, 2024, <https://katherinephelps.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/filthy-words-transcript.pdf>. For more on the 1978 Supreme Court case, see Steele, pp. 296-300.

policies against low-power and non-commercial radio stations since the late 1960s.⁴⁹ Like Dave Rabbit's pushback against AFVN and its music in Vietnam, pirate radios in the U.S. attempted to subvert the rising corporatism, professionalism, and album-oriented nature, characterizing the FM band between the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁵⁰ The earliest example of this trend was Allan H. Weiner, who operated WRAD, WKOV, and the Falling Star Network to provide his community in Yonkers, a New York suburb, with a local radio outlet. Between 1964 and 1971, Weiner aired rock music and artists that rarely received airplay on commercial stations in New York, including American rock band MC5 and American protest songwriter Phil Ochs. Weiner's objective was to offer his community an alternative listening experience to New York commercial stations, which were the only ones that could be heard in Yonkers. Although the

⁴⁹ Christina Dunbar-Hester, *Low Power to the People: Pirates, Protest, and Politics in FM Radio Activism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2014), especially chapter 1 offers a discussion of the historical context of radio/media activism and dissent, pp. 1-20.

⁵⁰ Lawrence C. Soley, *Free Radio: Electronic Civil Disobedience* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999), p. 55. In truth, the "border blaster" stations of the 1930s represented a historical precedent that pre-dated U.S. pirate radios of the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, "border blasters" attempted to subvert the corporatism and professionalism of American broadcasting, then wholly located on the AM dial. Unlike unlicensed pirate broadcasters, they were licensed by Mexico as part of its efforts to force the U.S. to change its radio policy toward Mexico. This example underscores a longer tradition of rogue broadcasters attempting to operate outside of the American system in an effort to challenge that system. For more information, see Michael A. Krysko, *Contested Airwaves: American Radio at Home and Abroad, 1914-1946* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2025), especially chapter 2, pp. 39-61; Gene Fowler and Bill Crawford, *Border Radio* (Austin, Texas: Texas Monthly Press, 1987).

FCC eventually raided the stations and shut them down, Weiner inaugurated a form of radio dissent that survived throughout the 1980s, the 1990s, and well into the 2000s.⁵¹

Along with connections with domestic debates about obscenity and subversion, RFT further pushed the envelope by adapting the wide diffusion of radio satire in the United States to the Vietnam contest. Between the late 1960s and early 1970s, radio stations stateside hired comedy groups to entertain the American audience with over-the-air parodies just when radio satire established itself as a two-faced source of cultural entertainment and political humor that appealed to the counterculture movement. *The Firesign Theater*'s satirical gags and *The Credibility Gap*'s news parodies are two prominent examples of radio comedy groups that emerged in Los Angeles between 1966 and 1968.⁵² At the same time, radio satire mirrored the

⁵¹ Ibidem, pp. 56-57. Jolly Roger Radio, which broadcast rock, country, and folk music to college students at Indiana University, is another example of the second wave of U.S. pirate stations during the 1980s. The station lasted for almost a decade before the FCC shut it down in 1988. WTFC is another that broadcast intermittently from 1964 to 1988. This pirate radio lasted for twenty-four years because the FCC was never able to locate it. Radio activism against the FCC's restrictions on the issuing of licenses for Low Power FM radio stations (LPFM) and monopoly in mainstream media endured in the 1990s and early 2000s. The Philadelphia-based advocacy group Prometheus Radio Project is one example discussed in Dunbar-Hester, especially chapter 1, pp. 12-20.

⁵² Borrowing from the artistic genre of Surrealism, *The Firesign Theater* first appeared with their comedy in 1966. Their style meshed wordplay, surreal humor, bizarre plots, and improvisation that satirized American life and media. *The Credibility Gap*, founded in 1968 by members of KRLA commercial radio station in Los Angeles, offered a type of parody that satirized official news reported in national media. For more, see Punnett, p. 151, and Gail T. Miller, "Reality is Only an Option: Firesign Theatre and Surrealism," *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 11 (1991): 325-333.

popular appreciation of humor magazines and satirical TV shows, such as the long-running MAD Magazine and *M*A*S*H*, respectively, which also used satire as a genre that continued to affect American media and popular culture in the twentieth century.⁵³ It is indeed not a coincidence that the popular comedy variety show *Saturday Night Live* premiered in 1975, with its first episode hosted by none other than standup comedian George Carlin.⁵⁴

RFT's outrageous character must thus be understood within the larger development of national debates regarding obscenity, subversion, satire, and American broadcasting standards. For example, RFT had a satirical editorial section called "Radio First Termer News," which mirrored the radio satire of *The Credibility Gap* in its intent to ridicule official news on the

⁵³ The origins of political satire in the U.S. can be traced to eighteenth-century America when cartoonists used it to criticize British colonialism and rules over American colonies. For more on the origins and development of political satire, see Alison Dagnes, *A Conservative Walks into a Bar: The Politics of Political Humor* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012). MAD emerged in 1952 as a satirical magazine that lampooned comics, but it expanded its scope to include poetry, songs, television, and political parodies of American life, culture, and politics. *M*A*S*H* was a 1970 dark war comedy movie and later a popular television show based on Richard Hooker's 1968 war novel about three army doctors during the Korean War. Although the fictional setup was the Korean War, the movie and TV show included anti-Vietnam War messages. For MAD, see Maria Reidelbach, *Completely Mad: A History of the Comic Book and Magazine*. 1st ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991). For more on *M*A*S*H*, David Reiss, *M*A*S*H: The Exclusive Inside Story of TV's Most Popular Show* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980).

⁵⁴ Nick Marx et al., *Saturday Night Live & American TV*. 1st ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), especially chapter 1 "The Evolution of Saturday Night" by Michele Hilmes, pp. 25-39, offers a complete overview of the origins and innovations of the NBC show.

Vietnam War, U.S. politicians, political candidates, and elections.⁵⁵ Through these skits, Dave Rabbit mocked AFVN news, which was one of the official channels through which news broadcasters like Morecook kept American soldiers informed about the latest U.S. news or sports events.⁵⁶ Playfully, Dave Rabbit mimicked AFVN news anchors to broadcast gags that encouraged listeners to compensate for their loneliness and homesickness with prostitutes. For instance, some of these gags chronicled the opening of “massage houses” in Saigon dedicated to special services for “maggots and first termers.” Others informed American soldiers and first termers of the arrivals in Phan Rang of what Dave Rabbit dubbed “champaign flights,” that is, flights full of women ready to satisfy the soldiers’ sexual appetite.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Mary B. Murphy, “Credibility Gap Show: Canceled or Changed? *Los Angeles Times*, June 9, 1970, p. 76. For online examples of radio satire by *The Credibility Gap* that mocked the U.S. Army and its public service announcements respectively, see The Credibility Gap - Topic, “The Last ‘Big Picture,’” YouTube, accessed June 7, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLxNCINCY3U>, and “Public Service Announcement,” YouTube, accessed June 7, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gML6woWjBn0>.

⁵⁶ Morecook, interview. American soldiers also received news through a military newspaper called *Stars and Stripes*: see Bud Hutton and Andy Rooney, *The Story of the Stars and Stripes* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, incorporated, 1946).

⁵⁷ The mass killing of Vietnamese civilians occurred on March 16, 1968 in the small village of My Lai, located northeast of Quang Ngai city in central Vietnam. For more information, see Kendrick Oliver, *The My Lai Massacre in American History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006). For RFT’s gags, consult Kyran S. (Sticks), “RADIO FIRST TERMER Dave Rabbit Vietnam Radio Part 1/4,” YouTube, accessed October 11, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtuueqJkgjA>.

Not all RFT news was, however, about sex and prostitution. Other skits attacked the U.S. government for the escalation of the Vietnam War, echoing the MAD Magazine issue of January 1971 that derided the U.S. military and government, including President Richard Nixon.⁵⁸ In the same vein, Dave Rabbit mocked the Nixon administration, heralding in his broadcast that Nixon was “officially charged” for the My Lai massacre. In so doing, Rabbit commented that “higher ranking officials” were accusing him even though Nixon was not in Vietnam when the massacre happened. However, it is worth noting that Nixon was not even president yet when My Lai occurred in 1968. Therefore, it was a case of blaming Nixon before he had even become president. In making such a strong claim, Dave Rabbit amplified the opposition to the war circulating in American popular culture and military ranks and adapted it to fit his irreverent, illegal show in Saigon.⁵⁹ In another similar mockery, Rabbit’s associate Nguyen lampooned

⁵⁸ The mockery includes a Christmas card of President Nixon reading “It Came Upon A Midnight Perfectly Clear,” which echoed Edmund Sears’ 1849 poem “The Angel’s Song-It Came Upon the Midnight Clear.” Sears’ poem became a Christmas carol for its evocative images. Still, the meaning goes beyond a jolly celebration of Christmas as it represents Sears’ sadness during a particular historical moment of uncertainty in world affairs that saw the end of the U.S.-Mexican War and the unfolding of nationalistic revolutions in Europe. Similarly, the Mad issue was meant to evoke that sense of madness, carelessness, and misery with which the U.S. government and military had “jettisoned” American soldiers into Vietnam. For more, consult “PUT ★ ON,” Albert B. Feldstein ed., *MAD Magazine* 1, No. 140 (January 1971): 5, 38.

⁵⁹ After Tet, the My Lai massacre of March 1968 and the Nixon administration’s decision to invade Cambodia in May 1970 contributed to worsening the soldiers’ widespread opposition to the war to the point that, by 1971, the antiwar movement became a leading force in the United States and Vietnam. Dissent for the Vietnam War was highly representative in the U.S. Army, Air Force, and

President Lyndon Johnson, claiming that he was arrested in “his Texas home” for public lewdness after leading a group of anti-Vietnam War protestors “down Main Street.” Johnson, Nguyen concluded, was also accused of “public vulgarity” and for “shooting the finger at an Air Force officer.”⁶⁰

In the same vein, RFT entertained listeners with misogynist parodies that conveyed anti-establishment messages. “Captain Ivan Pansy” was the quintessential anti-hero of Radio First Termer that Dave Rabbit invented to ridicule his widely hated base commander, whose name remains unknown to this date. During his show, Dave Rabbit used to give him offensive names such as “raging queen” or “midnight cowboy,” to the point that this parody was a frequent

Navy ranks. According to Cortright and Moser, antiwar dissent within the U.S. military ranks grew steadily and reached the highest levels of AWOL and desertion rates from 1971 until when the U.S. withdrew its troops from South Vietnam in 1973. For example, from 1971 to 1972, AWOL rates in the Air Force ranks increased from 59 to 83 percent. Similar trends also affected the U.S. Army and Navy. Concurrently, violent protests took place in several U.S. Air bases in the United States, from Travis Air Force Base (AFB) in California to Forbes AFB in Kansas, MacDill AFB in Florida, and many others, as Air Force soldiers opposed the war when the Nixon administration relied on airpower to launch strategic bombings in Indochina. For more information, see Cortright, pp. 11, 37, 131-133; Moser, pp. 79.

⁶⁰ The Vietnam War particularly escalated under President Lyndon Johnson, the reason why he also became a target of RFT. For more on the escalation of the Vietnam War under the Johnson administration, see Michael H. Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945-1968* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996). For the RFT gags that voiced dissent within the ranks, consult J. William Snyder, Jr., “The latest news,” Radio First Termer’s official website with the original restored show, accessed April 6, 2025, <http://www.radiofirsttermer.com>.

interlude of RFT's short-lived transmissions.⁶¹ Although Dave Rabbit never expressed a clear anti-Vietnam War stance when he was on the air, he nonetheless used Captain Pansy as a tool to voice his disdain for the U.S. military. Indeed, the relationship between Dave Rabbit and his fictionalized base commander was so distressful that, to those listeners who supposedly asked Rabbit what his base commander thought of his "nasty ways" on the radio, Dave Rabbit aired a recording in which his commander defined him as a "son of a bitch" and a "goddam kid." As Rabbit inferred, "Captain Pansy" was so hostile to RFT that Dave Rabbit became his captain's number one priority rather than "trying to win the war in Vietnam."⁶² At the same time, Dave Rabbit's effort to portray Captain Pansy as queer reflects a more complex historical trend. It is the sense of humor of a straight white man highlighting the rising importance of the political activism of the Gay Liberation movement that challenged stereotypes, misconceptions, and discrimination of the LGBT community in American society of the 1970s, as well as the

⁶¹ See Dave Rabbit, interview by Displaced Film, YouTube, "Vietnam Pirate Radio DJ Dave Rabbit—Bonus Story from *Sir! No Sir!*" accessed February 19, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhFvE4yk1hw>, and Kyran S. (Sticks), "RADIO FIRST TERMER Dave Rabbit Vietnam Radio Part 1/4," YouTube, accessed October 11, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtuueqJkgjA>.

⁶² To know what Dave Rabbit's base commander presumably thought of him and his radio show, consult J. William Snyder, Jr., Radio First Termer's official website with the original restored show, accessed October 7, 2023, <https://www.ibiblio.org/jwsnyder/rft/rft.html>, and Dave Rabbit, "21 Days in the Saigon Underground: The Birth and Death of Radio First Termer," 2006, accessed February 19, 2021, <http://www.earthstation1.com/BiographyOfRFT.html>.

increasing queer visibility, even in the military, which made Dave Rabbit able to develop a queer character.⁶³

Rabbit's hatred for his base commander often stretched into a more generalized distaste toward the U.S. Air Force. In one skit entitled "Aircraft Emergency Landing Procedures at March Air Force Base in California," Dave Rabbit aired a recording of an official U.S. Air Force training session in which soldiers simulated the procedures to follow during an emergency landing. The training was specifically aimed at building a positive team spirit among pilots and ground personnel in the event of an emergency landing or an enemy attack. The overall message was that the U.S. Air Force was a job for loyal American soldiers who believed in the power of teamwork. To Dave Rabbit, this form of indoctrination that soldiers received before and during their service duty in Vietnam represented an example of how the Air Force was "fucked up." As he put it in one of his raunchy gags, fighting for somebody's freedom in the Republic of Vietnam was like "fucking for someone else's virginity."⁶⁴

⁶³ LGBT stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. The fight for equality of the Gay Liberation movement and the present-day LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and plus) community is often associated with the Stonewall Inn riot of June 1969, which followed a police raid at the gay bar Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, Lower Manhattan. This event brought to light the systematic persecution of sexual minorities in the United States. For more information, see Phil Tiemeyer, *Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and AIDS in the History of Male Flight Attendants* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). For a discussion of the intersection between gender and sexuality in the U.S. military and history, see Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

In this spirit, RFT featured many other vulgar gags between one song and the next. In one of these jokes, which Dave Rabbit called “the Rabbit philosophy,” RFT told his listeners that the only way to survive a tour in Vietnam was to start a day with sexual intercourse because, as Dave Rabbit reckoned, “pussy is the breakfast of the champions.” This quote offers the opportunity to make another important home front connection. Indeed, Dave Rabbit used the Wheaties cereal slogan “The Breakfast of Champions,” dating back to the 1930s.⁶⁵ By making a vulgar twist to it, and assuming his listeners were familiar with the original slogan, he knew his joke had the potential to make his listeners laugh. Another salacious joke, combining sex with satire, was Rabbit’s reply to requests presumably coming from his listeners who wanted a picture of him to hang on the wall of their barracks. As Rabbit went on, he claimed that the only picture he could share was the one with his ex-girlfriend, “going ‘69’ in her bathtub,” adding that those

⁶⁴ This Air Force-centered gag echoed a 1966 parody called “What the Captain Means,” a mockery in which an unknown civilian interviewed two Air Force officials who spoofed an American F-4 Phantom fighter pilot. Colonel Travis McNeil, Lt. Colonel Joe Kent, and an unknown major from the Pacific Air Force (PACAF) at Cam Ranh Bay were behind the spoof interview. Consult General Edward G. Lansdale Collection of Vietnam War Songs (AFC 1977/044), Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Fish, p. 1. This gag can be also found on YouTube at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQ1AYVcAS7k>. For the RFT gag that targeted the Air Force, consult J. William Snyder, Jr., Radio First Termer’s official website with the original restored show, accessed October 7, 2023, <https://www.ibiblio.org/jwsnyder/rft/rft.html> and Kyran S. (Sticks), “RADIO FIRST TERMER Dave Rabbit Vietnam Radio Part 1/4,” YouTube, accessed October 11, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtuueqJkgjA>.

⁶⁵ Datamonitor, *Wheaties Fuel Case Study: Re-Energizing a Stalling Cereal Brand* (London: MarketLine, a Progressive Digital Media Business, 2009).

interested in that material could send money to “Dave Rabbit’s pornographic picture poster, A.P.O. in country, 96969.”⁶⁶

RFT often combined profanity with an open reference to the availability of drugs in Vietnam.⁶⁷ A popular gag of this type was “Saying from the Latrine Walls,” in which Dave Rabbit recalled episodes of him at the public restrooms in downtown Saigon.⁶⁸ As he posited, it

⁶⁶ A.P.O. is an abbreviation for Army Post Office, a shipping address the U.S. Military Postal Service used to deliver packages and mail to American soldiers overseas. The address that Dave Rabbit gave to his listeners was a fake. For the sex gags and fake advertisements, visit J. William Snyder, Jr., Radio First Termer’s official website with the original restored show, accessed October 7, 2023, <https://www.ibiblio.org/jwsnyder/rft/rft.html>.

⁶⁷ According to a 1985 study conducted nationwide on a random sample of more than 2,500 male soldiers to predict and explain the use of cannabis after their military service, the diffusion and use of cannabis during the Vietnam War increased from the 1970s onward. Even though the assumption of cannabis was less widespread than tobacco or alcohol, the diffusion of marijuana in Vietnam during the same time frame has also been confirmed by some Vietnam veterans interviewed for this dissertation chapter. For more, consult Christian Ritter, Richard R. Clayton, and Harwin L. Voss, “Vietnam Military Service and Marijuana Use,” *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse* 11, Issue 1-2 (1985): 119-130.

⁶⁸ During the twentieth century, the United States built toilets in foreign countries, such as the Philippines and Latin America, to export sanitation and civilize foreign populations considered “backward.” Likewise, the construction of latrines in Vietnam was part of America’s international approach to nation-building efforts after 1945, which also intersected with complimentary racism that affected American perceptions of Vietnamese who had to be educated on the principles of public hygiene and introduced to the use of toilets to end open-defecation. For more information, see Simon Toner, “‘The Paradise of the Latrine’: American Toilet-Building and the Continuities

was in these public restrooms that random people often “picked up” Dave Rabbit to smoke marijuana or have a quick sexual intercourse “with one of the whores” down the hall.⁶⁹

Similarly, “Drug Raid and Comment” was an audio clip of a drug raid, probably operated by U.S. military authorities in some barracks, which Dave Rabbit commented on with the following line: “What a waste of good grass. Well, that’s the way the cookie crumbles.”⁷⁰ Similarly, Dave Rabbit frequently incited his listeners to take advantage of the “big savings” of alleged shipments that arrived at the Saigon post exchange, known as PX, because — as he put it — they included “LSD” and “marijuana.”⁷¹

The testimony of U.S. Army veteran Douglas J. Bradley provides more insight into how RFT’s content was received by its listeners. Bradley was with his friends in the “hooch,” slang for barracks, at the U.S. Army Headquarters in Long Bình, about 24 miles east of Saigon, when he heard RFT in January 1971. He had arrived in Southeast Asia in November 1970 and was

of Colonial and Postcolonial Development,” *Modern American History* 2, Issue 3 (2019): 299-320.

⁶⁹ For more, consult Kyran S. (Sticks), “RADIO FIRST TERMER Dave rabbit Vietnam Radio Part 1/4,” YouTube, accessed April 5, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtuueqJkgjA>.

⁷⁰ Dave Rabbit, “Drug Raid and Comment,” in J. William Snyder, Jr., Radio First Termer’s official website with the original restored show, accessed October 10, 2023, <https://www.ibiblio.org/jwsnyder/rft/rft.html>.

⁷¹ Kyran S (Sticks) “RADIO FIRST TERMER Dave Rabbit Vietnam Radio Part 3/4,” YouTube, accessed April 6, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0LWO3xV7X0>.

feeling sorry for himself because he still had five months of service left on his Vietnam tour. When Bradley and his friends heard RFT's pirate message abruptly interrupting the regular AFVN transmission, they looked at each other in awe. "Our jaws dropped," he confessed.⁷² They immediately knew that voice did not belong to one of their favorite U.S.-government-approved AFVN deejays.⁷³ Bradley thought that radio message could be a hoax, "just somebody pranking the rest of us."⁷⁴ Nonetheless, he enjoyed listening to RFT because it was "very trippy" and "mind-blowing." Its skits made him laugh, and the music was outstanding because RFT brought to Vietnam that spirit of rebelliousness common to the rock music scene of the 1970s.⁷⁵ To

⁷² Bradley, interview.

⁷³ Besides Adrian Cronauer, another prominent deejay who worked at AFVN Saigon from 1968 to 1969 was Pat Sajak, who became later known as the host of the American television game show *The Wheel of Fortune* (1981).

⁷⁴ Bradley, interview. Besides Bradley, U.S. Air Force veteran Stephen Pennington affirmed that he heard about Radio First Termer "from guys I was with," adding that "if it wasn't Radio First Termer, it was a pirate radio station." However, apart from Bradley and Pennington, the Vietnam veterans included in this dissertation declared they never heard of RFT when they were in Vietnam. Stephen Pennington (U.S. Air Force Vietnam veteran), interviewed by Roberta Meloni, August 11, 2023. The respondent agreed to disclose his identity and authorized the researcher to include his real name in the dissertation chapter.

⁷⁵ According to radio historian Susan J. Douglas, this "re-masculinization of rock music" coincided with the FM revolution in the 1970s, which not only improved the quality of listening but also created the conditions under which musical virtuosity and unconventional rock performances

Bradley, Dave Rabbit provided him with some “good laughs” because he evoked a world of transgression with drug-oriented songs and over-the-top parodies against the military, which made his program outrageous yet entertaining.⁷⁶ Indeed, Dave Rabbit’s foul language and broadcasting style were utterly against American broadcasting standards.

However, on January 21, 1971, Dave Rabbit received the news that RFT was in dire straits. As he recalled, his underground network of AFVN friends and other military associates in the Saigon area warned him that he had to shut down RFT before the U.S. military authorities could catch and arrest him.⁷⁷ At this point, Dave Rabbit realized it was time to take RFT off the air, or as he claimed, “We knew that we had to stop. We knew we had to call it quits.” Thus, at

became a predominantly male artistic trait, albeit with some exceptions, such as Janis Joplin. For more, see Douglas, pp. 257-275.

⁷⁶ Bradley, interview. In his co-authored book that also briefly discusses RFT, Bradley relied on the testimony of his friend George Moriarty, a Vietnam veteran and Army information specialist at United States Army Vietnam (USARV) headquarters in Long Bình. According to Moriarty, RFT was “spooky,” and all the troops listened to RFT because Dave Rabbit played the kind of music that American soldiers wanted to hear, “probably getting stoned himself, and infuriating the brass.” For Moriarty’s testimony, see Bradley and Werner, p. 163. For more on the development of rock in Vietnam, see Kramer, p. 137.

⁷⁷ Dave Rabbit knew RFT could not last long. In fact, he was aware that he needed to return the technical equipment before anyone noticed it was stolen. Nonetheless, the U.S. military authorities could still catch and arrest him, even without knowing specifically which equipment was missing. As Vobbe argued, AFVN and the U.S. military in Vietnam possessed radio equipment capable of detecting and triangulating the origin of a radio transmission. Thus, Rabbit understood that he could be caught regardless of whether anyone realized what specific equipment he was using or was missing. Vobbe, interview.

11 o'clock on January 21, Dave Rabbit officially turned off his unauthorized transmission. In echoing and mixing two famous riffs, American radio and journalist broadcaster Edward R. Murrow's "good night and good luck" and AFVN deejay Adrian Cronauer's "good morning, Vietnam," Dave Rabbit terminated RFT heralding, "Goodnight, Vietnam, and good luck!"⁷⁸

The Legacy of Radio First Termer

The story of RFT did not terminate with Rabbit's closing riff in January 1971. According to Fish, many Vietnam veterans during the war recorded radio songs, music performances at a bar, improvised chats, and the like through tape recorders. Soldiers then copied these recordings

⁷⁸ Edward R. Murrow used the catchphrase to terminate his radio broadcasts when he worked as a war journalist correspondent in London during World War II. Murrow's catchphrase also became the title of a 2005 movie directed by George Clooney that tells the quarrel between Murrow and U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) at the height of the anti-communist hysteria, the so-called Red Scare. Similarly, AFVN deejay Adrian Cronauer used his riff to open his *Dawn Buster* radio show, which became the title of the war comedy film *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987). For Dave Rabbit's closing punchline, consult Dave Rabbit, interview by Displaced Film, YouTube, "Vietnam Pirate Radio DJ Dave Rabbit—Bonus Story from *Sir! No Sir!*" (Part 2), accessed March 14, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAe2hUE84Yg>; and unknown author, "What is Radio First Termer?", Radio First Termer Restoration Project, accessed June 6, 2024, http://radiofirsttermerrrestoration.com/?page_id=2. For more on Murrow's life and career, see Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting* (New York: Routledge, 2012). For a brief history of Cronauer and his show, see Bradley and Werner, p. 158. For an audio clip of Dawn Buster, consult "Dawn Busters AFVN," 562AU0120, 86 min., 47 sec., no date, Paul Kasper Collection Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=562AU1847>.

and passed them on to their close friends or other veterans to keep their shared war experience alive. After the war, these tapes often became historical records that created a collective memory of American soldiers' war experience in Vietnam to pass on to the next generations.⁷⁹ RFT was not immune to this trend as its story began circulating in the U.S. when presumed soldiers and Dave Rabbit's fans recorded segments of RFT in Vietnam. Upon returning to the United States – the story goes – they made copies of the original recording, which was then sold through a classified advertisement in *Rolling Stone Magazine* in the early 1970s.⁸⁰ Unfortunately, knowing who made the original RFT tape and what truth lies behind it is impossible. However, what is certain is that the story of Radio First Termer was first introduced to the American public more than ten years after the end of the Vietnam War in a national documentary released on Veterans' Day 1987.

Indeed, RFT's documentary, *Vietnam: Radio First Termer*, placed radio at the heart of American soldiers' lives and experiences in the Vietnam War. Most importantly, its producers, American journalist Alexis Muellner in collaboration with National Public Radio (NPR) and

⁷⁹ Fish, "Informal Communication Systems in the Vietnam War," p. 2.

⁸⁰ After perusing all the classified advertising in *Rolling Stone Magazine* published from 1971 to 1990, no corroborating proof exists to support this claim. Indeed, no single advertisement about the selling of the RFT cassette tape or Dave Rabbit's show appears in none of the issues covering a total of 19 years of publications. Whatever the truth of the matter, it remains impossible to validate that the tape recording was sold through *Rolling Stone Magazine*. Nevertheless, clips of this alleged recording of RFT are widely available on the Internet, including YouTube. For the rumors on the tape recording, see J. William Snyder, Jr., "Radio First Termer's official website with the original restored show," accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.ibiblio.org/jwsnyder/rft/dave.html>.

Interlock Media Associates (IMA), chronicled and popularized the story of RFT as an example of how American soldiers in Vietnam harnessed underground radio and rock music to channel their dissent for the war as a reflection of the antiwar movements that affected the United States in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸¹

In truth, RFT's documentary reflected how American popular culture often tried to frame the Vietnam War as the first rock and roll conflict to reconcile debates about the intervention in Southeast Asia as a tragic miscalculation of U.S. foreign policy.⁸² This tendency was a reaction to the widespread refusal to remember a sore past that affected American public opinion after the

⁸¹ The 59-minute version of the documentary is no longer available on the NPR website. For a condensed version, in which is also possible to hear an extract of Dave Rabbit's show, see Continent, "Vietnam: Radio First Termer," in *All Things Considered* by Alexis Muellner and National Public Radio (NPR), November 11, 1987, SoundCloud, accessed October 14, 2023, <https://soundcloud.com/continent/vietnam-npr-avfn-show-flac-2013>. For an audio story of the original documentary see, Robin Washington, "Audio Story, Vietnam: Radio First Termer," Public Radio Exchange (PRX), accessed October 14, 2023, <https://exchange.prx.org/pieces/220029?m=false>. Furthermore, some American newspapers publicized across the country the documentary on Radio First Termer, see unknown author, "The Vietnam Experience; Light up a Child's Life," *USA TODAY*, December 9, 1987, p. 01d; unknown author, "Exploring Radio's Role in Vietnam," *Boston Globe*, March 5, 1988, p. 30.

⁸² For a few works that have treated the Vietnam War by emphasizing U.S. assumptions of Vietnam and foreign policy miscalculations, see Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of a Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Michael H. Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945-1968* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); Joe Allan, *Vietnam: The (Last) War the U.S. Lost* (Chicago, Ill: Haymarket Books, 2008); Frederick Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012).

U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam in March 1973 and the ultimate defeat in Vietnam. Since then, many Americans have manifested a need to heal from the horrific U.S. intervention and forget the pain, betrayal, and disillusionment of the Vietnam period.⁸³ Furthermore, the necessity to overcome this generalized sense of malaise spoke to a new phase in the U.S. history of the 1980s, in which newly elected President Ronald Reagan promised to restore America's economic prowess, national strength, and international standing after the failure in Vietnam.⁸⁴

This act of elevating RFT as an example of “rock and roll” dissent in Vietnam was further exacerbated in the 1990s when the rise of the Internet made information and resources accessible globally.⁸⁵ Thanks to this development, many Vietnam veterans created “personal websites” with the recorded tapes of their favorite radio shows, including AFVN broadcasts or preserved copies circulated from person to person after the war.⁸⁶ It is indeed not a surprise that

⁸³ John A. Wood, *Veteran Narratives and the Collective Memory of the Vietnam War* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2016), p. 128.

⁸⁴ For more on the conservative shift in American politics that led to the election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980, see Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), and Graham Thompson, *American Culture in the 1980s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Stuart A. Kallen, *The 1980s* (San Diego, Calif.: Lucent Books, 1999).

⁸⁵ The origins of the Internet as a technology for military applications go back to the 1970s when the U.S. Department of Defense's Advance Research Projects Agency (ARPA) established ARPANET, the predecessor of the Internet. To know more on the origins of the Internet, see Janet Abbate, *Inventing the Internet* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1999).

Radio First Termer's popularity grew online in the 1990s. *Ibiblio.org* was the first tribute page dedicated to Dave Rabbit's heroic undertaking in Saigon that a Vietnam War and RFT affectionate, J. William Snyder, Jr., created in 1995 to celebrate Dave Rabbit as the "Godfather of pirate radio."⁸⁷

In truth, Dave Rabbit's identity remained unknown for several years until he came across *Ibiblio.org* while he was allegedly helping his son with a school assignment about Vietnam. "I see the number of sites that has to do with the program," Dave Rabbit recalled, "especially the Home Page created by J. William Snyder, Jr., who, in my mind, started the Internet Radio First Termer World Wide Phenomenon."⁸⁸ Surprised by the positive reaction that RFT had on the

⁸⁶ For the preservation of tapes and how they became material for personal websites, see Fish, p. 2. For an online example of this trend, consult the official AFVN webpage with preserved AFVN broadcasts, photos, videos, and stories: Robert Morecook, "AFVN (American Forces Vietnam Network) Memories," accessed October 28, 2023, <https://www.afnvets.net>.

⁸⁷ Consult J. William Snyder, Jr., "Radio First Termer's official website with the original restored show," accessed March 21, 2021, <https://www.ibiblio.org/jwsnyder/rft/rft.html>. For other tribute pages that tell the story of RFT by recycling the same information over and over again, see unknown author, "Radio First Termer Restoration Project, accessed October 17, 2023, <http://radiofirsttermerrrestoration.com>; unknown author, "What is Radio First Termer?", unknown author, "Radio First Termer," accessed October 17, 2023, https://www.hfunderground.com/wiki/Radio_First_Termer; 15th Field Artillery Regiment (1917-2017), "Radio First Termer by Outlaw DJ Dave Rabbit," accessed October 17, 2023, <https://www.15thfar.org/daverabbit.html>; Steam Community - Arma 3, "Radio First Termer," accessed October 17, 2023, <https://steamcommunity.com/sharedfiles/filedetails/?id=2956924397>.

⁸⁸ Dave Rabbit, "21 Days in the Saigon Underground: The Birth and Death of Radio First Termer," 2006, accessed October 28, 2021, <http://www.earthstation1.com/BiographyOfRFT.html>.

Internet, Clyde David DeLay Jr. publicly disclosed his identity in an interview with American filmmaker David Zeiger for his 2005 anti-Vietnam War documentary *Sir! No Sir!*⁸⁹



Figure 4 Radio First Termer Logo in *Ibiblio.org*. Courtesy of J. William Snyder, Jr.

Then, a few years after the big reveal, Rabbit granted another interview for the American radio program *The Opie & Anthony Show* in mid-February 2008. During the interview for this boundary-pushing show, often vulgar in its heyday, Dave Rabbit confessed that his growing

⁸⁹ Dave Rabbit was interviewed on February 14, 2006. Consult: Dave Rabbit, interview by Displaced Film, YouTube, “Vietnam Pirate Radio DJ Dave Rabbit—Bonus Story from *Sir! No Sir!*” accessed Feb. 19, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhFvE4yk1hw>.

Internet popularity prompted him to broadcast a remake of RFT for the American troops in Iraq. However, for the reboot of RFT in Iraq in 2006, Dave Rabbit asked for full authorization from the U.S. government and employed two new associates referred to as “Charlie Cooper” and “Nadirah.”



Figure 5 The Picture is of Dave Rabbit in 2006 Broadcasting in Iraq during the Iraq War as Part of his Reboot of RFT. Courtesy of J. William Snyder, Jr.

The remake was also performed for the American troops in Afghanistan in 2011 before Dave Rabbit's untimely death in January 2012.⁹⁰ Indeed, the radio interview for *The Opie & Anthony Show* would be the last public appearance of Dave Rabbit before he passed away prematurely because of a respiratory disease.⁹¹ Nonetheless, his memory and the legacy of his radio show continue to live in the present and far beyond those twenty-one days in January 1971.

Conclusion

RFT is the story of a runaway joke that Dave Rabbit and his associates concocted to ridicule and upset the military authorities in Vietnam. By defying American on-air language and broadcasting standards, RFT terminated operations after twenty-one days because it was an over-the-top radio show that tried to incite insurrection. As Bradley openly confessed, "It is still a mystery to me how in the heck he [Dave Rabbit] ever got away with it."⁹² Besides its short life, the story of RFT continued to speak to many in the United States as it embodied a reaction to what historian Michael Kramer has referred to as "hip militarism," or the way by which military

⁹⁰ For more, consult Opie & Anthony Show, "Dave Rabbit's Underground Vietnam Radio," YouTube, accessed Feb. 23, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kf7-P06WPPU>, and J. William Snyder, Jr., "Radio First Termer's official website with the original restored show," accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.ibiblio.org/jwsnyder/rft/rft.html>, and Kramer, pp. 163-164.

⁹¹ Dallas Administrator, "David DeLay, pirate-radio DJ who entertained Vietnam troops, dies," *The Dallas Morning News*, accessed January 24, 2021, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/obituaries/2012/01/25/david-delay-pirate-radio-dj-who-entertained-vietnam-troops-dies/>.

⁹² Bradley, interview.

authorities in Vietnam harnessed rock music to “channel dissent” and help American soldiers go through their year of service in Vietnam.⁹³

However, RFT did much more than just embody the power of rock music in Vietnam. RFT is an example of an effective manipulation on the part of Dave Rabbit and his associates of the strategy by which the U.S. government harnessed radio and American popular culture to boost the troops’ morale at the height of the Vietnam War. It also offers a chance to understand how this myopic U.S. strategy backfired as soldiers in Vietnam created illegal radio broadcasts to enjoy an uncontrolled listening experience by airing unauthorized music as spontaneous acts of disobedience against the military. RFT embodies a form of radio activism that gave meaning to American soldiers’ disillusionment with and opposition to the Vietnam War.

Furthermore, RFT captures the Zeitgeist that many Americans came to share by the mid-1960s and 1970s. RFT’s outrageous nature mirrored contemporary national dissent against the FCC’s regulations on obscenity, subversion, and radio satire and adapted such ongoing reactions in the U.S. to the Vietnam context. Through its rock music, sex jokes, and satirical gags that lampooned the U.S. military in Vietnam, RFT dramatized the disillusionment, boredom, and dissent within the ranks that many American soldiers manifested as they came to terms with their war experience.

Indeed, the story of Radio First Termer endured well beyond its irreverent twenty-one days. RFT was first introduced to the American public more than ten years after the end of the Vietnam War in a national documentary released on Veterans’ Day in 1987. By placing radio at

⁹³ For more on the intersection between radio, rock, and the notion of “hip militarism,” see Kramer, *The Republic of Rock*, p. 13.

the center of American soldiers' lives and experiences during the Vietnam War, *Vietnam: Radio First Termer* illustrated how American popular culture aimed to portray the Vietnam War as the first rock and roll conflict, attempting to reconcile debates about U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia as a tragic miscalculation of foreign policy.⁹⁴

A similar development unrelated to RFT also occurred in the movie industry. During the 1970s and 1980s, Hollywood became influential in producing movies that sought to tame traumatic recollections of the Vietnam War with positive emotions associated with the 1960s and its music, such as youth rebellion and counterculture. In so doing, Hollywood “mythologized” the Vietnam War as a truly rock and roll conflict while leaving the audience with a sense that Vietnam was a senseless tragedy.⁹⁵ Hal Ashby's *Coming Home* (1978) set the standard for using period soundtracks of the 1960s, such as songs by Jimi Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane, and Bob

⁹⁴ For a few works that have treated the Vietnam War by emphasizing U.S. assumptions of Vietnam and foreign policy miscalculations, see Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of a Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Michael H. Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945-1968* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); Joe Allan, *Vietnam: The (Last) War the U.S. Lost* (Chicago, Ill: Haymarket Books, 2008); Frederick Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012).

⁹⁵ See Peter Hope, “The Mythologizing of the Vietnam War through the Use of Rock and Roll in Film,” in *Mythologizing the Vietnam War: Visual Culture and Mediated Memory*, edited by Jennifer Good, 1st ed. (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 63, 71, and *Veteran Narratives*, p.100.

Dylan.⁹⁶ Barry Levinson's radio-centered *Good Morning Vietnam* (1987) is another example that explores the interplay between rock and radio at AFVN Saigon. The movie gave American actor Robin Williams a free hand to showcase his improvisational and comedy skills. Indeed, Williams offered an exaggerated account of U.S. Air Force Sergeant and AFVN deejay Adrian Cronauer, who, like Dave Rabbit, is portrayed as an insubordinate DJ in Saigon, defying his military superiors with exuberant skits and commentaries.⁹⁷

Despite these developments, there is no doubt that RFT became a true online phenomenon, thanks to Dave Rabbit's fans and blogs such as *Ibilibio.org*. Indeed, RFT's Internet popularity offers a chance to explore another related instance: the Internet-mediated interplay between history and public memory. In her study of how Pearl Harbor has been constructed and de-constructed in American memory, historian Emily Rosenberg dedicated a brief, albeit compelling, focus to discuss how the worldwide access and immediacy of the Internet created new venues for the circulation, amplification, and contestation of the historical past. Through tribute pages, online communities, and discussion boards, Internet users established "hybrid forms of history" by simply typing a comment to debate history topics or share their

⁹⁶ Other examples are *Platoon* (1986) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) that, along with *Heaven & Earth* (1993), compose a trilogy directed by former Vietnam veteran Oliver Stone. For more on these movies, see Hope, pp. 63-78.

⁹⁷ In discussing the movie's accuracy during a 2008 conference at the American Veterans Center in Washington, D.C., Cronauer posited: "Anybody who has been in the military will tell you that if I did half of the things in that movie, I'd still be in Leavenworth right now." For more on Cronauer's criticism, consult "Good Morning, Vietnam: Adrian Cronauer on Accuracy (2008 AVC Conference)," accessed October 1, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8FkXRgA4Sg&t=160s>.

recollections of the past, thus generating what she calls “E-history.”⁹⁸ *Ibiblio.org*, including various Internet accounts of Dave Rabbit and webpages dedicated to RFT, are examples of E-history as Internet fans shared information and materials that contributed to keeping RFT alive well into the twenty-first century.⁹⁹

However, the Internet also offers a place where information and memories can be contested. One example relating to RFT is *usmilitariaforum.com*, a military history discussion board that questioned the credibility of Dave Rabbit’s story in the early 2000s.¹⁰⁰ Under various nicknames, the board discussants expressed puzzlement over Dave Rabbit’s almost bullet-proof memory when recalling his Vietnam tour as they came across Rabbit’s tribute page, accounts of

⁹⁸ These hybrid forms are not intended to restore an objective historical truth of the past but rather perpetuate, alter, and often contest historical narratives and collective recollections. For more, see Emily S. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 3, 160-163.

⁹⁹ Six of fifty-two Vietnam veterans who voluntarily participated in an online dissertation questionnaire concerning their radio listening experiences during the war, which I distributed between May and September 2023, claimed they heard about RFT between 1987 and 2000 when they came across it on the Internet and purchased CDs of Dave Rabbit’s show on eBay. Of these six respondents, one claimed he heard about RFT “25 or 30 years ago” during one of the AFVN reunions. AFVN has indeed held reunions since 2001, visit “AFVN Reunions: Why do we have reunions?,” accessed October 24, 2023, <https://www.afvnvets.net/afvn-reunions.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Unknown author, ““Radio First Termer’ Verification,” December 13, 2009, Military History Discussions, U.S. Militaria Forum: Collectors Preserving History & Honoring Veterans, accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.usmilitariaforum.com/forums/index.php?/topic/61532-radio-first-termer-verification/>.

RFT, and interviews. As Bob Hudson, co-founder of the board, argued, “Most of us would be amazed at his apparent detailed memory of events of almost 40 years ago.”¹⁰¹ Other discussants underscored a discrepancy over why Rabbit established RFT. In *Ibiblio.org*, he claimed that RFT commemorated his Vietnam roommate, Jim Brookshire. However, on another website called *radio.about.com*, Dave Rabbit stated that RFT commemorated a close friend from high school. As Hudson commented, “So was it his Phan Rang roommate or high school buddy?”¹⁰²

Despite these discrepancies, the story of RFT continued to live years after its termination in 1971 thanks to documentaries, radio interviews, and websites about RFT. Overall, the story of RFT is an example of how Dave Rabbit and his associates shaped radio as an instrument of participatory citizenship to oppose the war and survive their tours in Vietnam. Indeed, RFT’s secretive setup represented an irreverent act of participatory citizenship that fascinated producers, radio personalities, Vietnam veterans, Internet users, and scholars who came across its story.

¹⁰¹ Bob Hudson, comment posted on December 14, 2009, in “‘Radio First Termer’ Verification.”

¹⁰² Ibidem. *radio.about.com* is active, but the webpage pertinent to Dave Rabbit’s 3500-word account with Hudson’s claimed discrepancies of the RFT story (<http://radio.about.com/od/pirateradio/a/aa021506a.htm>) is no longer available.

Chapter 6 - Tying Past and Present: Were the Lessons of Cold War International Radio Learned?

International radio initiatives in Cold War East Asia proved limited and, at times, unattainable. From the 1950s to the mid-1970s, societal forces shaped the interplay between state and non-state actors in the design of Radio Free Asia (RFA), Radio of Free Asia (ROFA), the American Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN), and Radio First Termer (RFT). These initiatives also intertwined with the larger historical context that saw the escalation of the Cold War in East Asia and the increasing U.S. efforts to use radio as a cost-effective tool that would presumably extend American cultural and economic influence in China, Korea, and Vietnam. However, each radio initiative often failed or produced unexpected outcomes that ultimately fell short of the main actors' overconfidence in the power of broadcasting to engage the various audiences in which their initiatives would operate. All in all, misunderstanding, misreading, and oversimplification of the target context made sure that the four initiatives went awry and rarely matched the actors' initial expectations.

The four radio initiatives sought to apply up-to-date theories about media influence and pursue strategies that deliberately considered the contexts and desires of the target audiences to achieve the main actors' case-specific goals. For example, amid the U.S.-China rivalry during the Korean War, political and self-serving choices lay behind the CIA-sponsored Committee for a Free Asia (CFA) and its umbrella radio operation, Radio Free Asia (RFA). CIA officials and proponents of RFA, such as CIA Director Allen Dulles and CFA Chairman Brayton Wilbur, argued that the Voice of America (VOA), overseen by the State Department, was not

encouraging communist defection as the communist takeover of China in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 demonstrated.

The effort to apply what were then up-to-date theories of communication is evident in the CIA's argument that RFA could do better than VOA because of the covertness of their radio operation. In fact, both CIA and RFA proponents argued that VOA's well-known ties with the U.S. government hampered its effectiveness in engaging potential Chinese listeners. The support for RFA was, however, completely at odds with the criticism that such a project received from State Department officers, including Edward W. Barrett and Howland H. Sargeant. From their perspective, RFA was a copycat of VOA's Chinese and English programs to the mainland. They argued that the United States did not need another similar and overlapping radio service alongside VOA in China, which only fostered a bureaucratic rivalry with the State Department.

With the benefit of historical insight, this case study demonstrated how CIA officials used RFA to partly capitalize on communist fears and popular convictions about the power of radio. Specifically, they did so to achieve the agency's legitimacy on turf primarily dominated by the State Department. By asserting that RFA would have achieved better outcomes than VOA due to its concealed governmental connections, the CIA deliberately crafted RFA to enhance its credibility and invade the sphere of foreign policy that the State Department had long dominated since the nineteenth century.

Indeed, the CIA contended that radio could exert influence only if used effectively and thoughtfully, considering the audience's perspective and assumptions. Aside from the overall poor execution of RFA, the CIA's assertion that RFA could outperform the State Department in radio communications highlights the evolving understanding of international communications at that time. Consequently, the CIA's self-interested objectives covered in communications theory

that were at the basis of the RFA venture inevitably led to departmental tensions with State. Ultimately, RFA's weak signal and inability to surpass VOA in engaging Chinese listeners did the rest, leading to its termination in 1953.

American officials continued to be receptive to strategies that exploited popular beliefs about radio and communist hysteria. During the 1960s and the 1970s, ROFA demonstrated how South Korea, a U.S. Cold War ally, manipulated the U.S. aversion toward communism and American convictions in the alleged power of radio to fight communism from 1964 to 1975. By exploiting a declining U.S. economic situation, the ongoing Vietnam War, and the cultural upheaval of the counterculture revolution, Unification Church (UC) leader Reverend Sun Myung Moon and UC member Bo Hi Pak shaped ROFA into a lobbying instrument of anti-communist propaganda by which Moon could achieve his self-interested aspirations to expand his religious and financial empire in the United States.

At the same time, South Korean President Park collaborated with Moon and Pak to secure his regime's survival through the mobilization of U.S. financial and political support for South Korea during the ongoing Vietnam War. Although his objectives differed from Moon's, President Park viewed ROFA as a valuable tool to promote the campaign for American prisoners of war (POWs). He hoped to convince the U.S. to remain in Vietnam and reverse President Nixon's decision to withdraw American troops because the U.S. military presence in Vietnam benefitted Korea.

In fact, the efforts of Moon, Park, and their respective allies achieved some success. They did so through public fundraising activities, newspaper articles, petitions, and flyers that included statements and endorsements from many unwitting former U.S. presidents, politicians, and popular entertainment industry personalities. Former President Eisenhower, Congressman Fred

B. Rooney (D-PA), and American singer and actor Bing Crosby are just a few examples of prominent Americans who endorsed ROFA because it spoke to popular conceptions about radio as an unrivaled foreign policy tool of Cold War propaganda that could effectively support the U.S. anti-communist battle in East Asia. To these unsuspecting Americans, ROFA was attuned to VOA's and Radio Free Europe's (RFE) foreign policy objectives to expand supposedly universal U.S. ideas about democracy and freedom into communist countries through anti-communist radio propaganda.

However, Moon, Pak, and Park's manipulations were exposed in 1976 when the Koreagate scandal uncovered South Korean proponents and motives. Indeed, Koreagate offers insight into why ROFA's propaganda lost efficacy in 1976. The domestic and international changes the U.S. experienced in the mid-seventies significantly changed American attitudes toward propaganda and exaggerated anti-communist sentiments. By then, President Nixon had resigned, and Americans' convictions about the unparalleled global role of the United States and confidence in U.S. officials had dramatically declined in the aftermath of Watergate and the failure in Vietnam.

In this context, ROFA's message became ineffective, and the endorsement it had received in the mid-1960s was completely lost. Its demise occurred despite its efforts to address and sway popular American beliefs about radio and fears of communism, which echoed the manipulative style of the Creel Committee during World War I.¹ Indeed, the effort unraveled when the affiliation to the Unification Church and allies in the Korean government were exposed. This

¹ For the reference to the Creel Committee during World War I, see Gerd Horten, *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda during World War II* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), p. 86.

outcome is consistent with the argument the CIA made about the VOA's supposed limitation of its influence because of the explicit connections it had to a foreign actor. If it had not been exposed, Korean actors leveraging U.S. domestic politics and Cold War fears to further their agenda through covert lobbying and information dissemination might have been a smart strategy, reflecting a more sophisticated understanding of how to influence the target audiences.

More miscalculations and unexpected consequences informed the U.S. military attempt to use AFVN as a tool to mediate the soldiers' experience during the Vietnam War. The U.S. government explicitly used AFVN to support the successful execution of and win the war in Vietnam through broadcasts that would keep American soldiers psychologically motivated to fight. In truth, AFVN partly succeeded in providing American soldiers a vehicle to cultivate their desire to remain connected with their faraway homes. This trend particularly spoke to the sense of connectedness American radio has historically represented for many Americans during transitional moments in U.S. history.

This interplay continued in Vietnam. In fact, American soldiers often engaged AFVN broadcasters by sending letters of appreciation to specific radio programs, such as *Town and Country* and *A Date with Chris*, or song requests for their loved ones in the United States. At the same time, AFVN broadcasters reciprocated the soldiers' requests by playing their favorite tunes and offering familiar voices from home. Furthermore, American soldiers with access to television enjoyed popular parodies and sitcoms in Vietnam, such as *I Love Lucy*, *Bonanza*, and *All in the Family*, that could tame the anxiety of living in a war zone by satisfying their desire to remain connected with the United States.

However, AFVN fell short of its objectives not because of blind and unrealistic faith in the power of radio to influence regardless of the receiving context. Rather, the effort to account

for contexts and audiences fell short. The AFVN mission faced several impediments in engaging its target audience to the degree it hoped because of the complexity of the context in which it worked and the variety of the audiences it tried to reach. AFVN's primary difficulty in engaging a multiracial audience stemmed from radio's limitation — and media in general — to overcome cultural, demographic, racial, and ethnic differences that marked the demographics of the U.S. military in Vietnam. For instance, African American soldiers' resentment against the scarcity of music, content, and deejays that appealed to that specific racial and ethnic segment of the U.S. military in Vietnam is indicative of AFVN's difficulty. Hence, when the Vietnam War reached its climax after the Tet Offensive, AFVN added *Soul Train* in 1969, an R&B and soul music program hosted by African American deejays for African American listeners.

However, the adjustments the U.S. government attempted to make were too late and insufficient. Moreover, had such efforts been pursued before the Tet Offensive, often regarded as a pivotal moment for “the beginning of the end” for the United States in Vietnam, they would not have affected military strategies that were not conducive to winning the war.² Indeed, the over-representation of African Americans serving in Vietnam, compared to their percentage of the population at home, as well as poorer enlisted and drafted Latinos, suggests that AFVN's effort to provide that “touch of home” was a mismatch with the actual demographics of those who were fighting and listening to AFVN. AFVN's misreading of the Vietnamese context reflected an over-understanding of the reach and attractiveness of mainstream broadcasting in the United States, worsened by Vietnam's demographics that did not match those that made American mainstream broadcasting popular and profitable in the United States.

² Daren Fonda, “Tet: The Beginning of the End,” *Time Magazine* 161, No. 13 (New York: Time Incorporated, 2003), p. A50.

These AFVN shortcomings, in turn, fueled dissent in disillusioned American soldiers. The spontaneous emergence of unlicensed radio networks and programs through which American soldiers could enjoy prohibited tunes and mock the military brass in Vietnam demonstrated the limitations of AFVN's confidence in mastering U.S. broadcasting to achieve its mission. RFT was the unintended consequence of AFVN shortcomings. Through uncensored rock music, sex jokes, and satirical gags, RFT lampooned the U.S. military in Vietnam. It also dramatized the disillusionment, boredom, and dissent within the U.S. military ranks that many American soldiers manifested as they came to terms with their war experience. RFT was the unintended outcome of the strategy by which the U.S. government harnessed radio as one of the many options to boost the troops' morale during the Vietnam War. Such an approach, centered on the unrealistic idea that radio and American popular culture could mediate discontent in Vietnam, backfired. American soldiers created their networks to join prohibited tunes as spontaneous acts of dissent against the U.S. military in Vietnam and AFVN mainstream programs.

At the same time, RFT's irreverent broadcasts offered insight into the national discourse surrounding contemporary domestic issues related to obscenity, subversion, and radio satire. These debates, which affected the development of U.S. broadcasting standards and the enjoyment of free speech by the mid-1960s and 1970s, intersected with the larger domestic context that defined U.S. politics and foreign affairs at the height of the Vietnam War. The fact that RFT's dissent reflected larger domestic debates signaled long-standing patterns of using international communications in a way that tried to replicate familiar content from a distant home.

Furthermore, RFT's unique content and approach, unlike that of AFVN, offer insights into the beginning of diversification in the U.S. media landscape of the 1970s. At that time, network-dominated, mainstream broadcasts faced increasing competition, particularly in national "prime time" programming. Although airing on NBC, *Saturday Night Live*, for example, entered the mainstream due to its edgy content. Moreover, cable television and local radio stations expanded access to niche programming not represented in network commercial offerings. For instance, Home Box Office (HBO) was established in 1972 as one of the first American pay television networks.³ Context matters, and in its brief existence, RFT highlights this idea.

This dissertation's results thus substantiate what other scholars have previously acknowledged about the social construction of technology. The idea that technological inventions or machines follow an inevitable path that remains outside human control is misleading because technology does not bear an unrivaled and unchecked power that drives human progress. It is rather the combination of societal forces that shape technologies' uses and developments across time and cultures. Such processes, which include, for example, cultural expectations, political calculations, military strategies, and economic calculations, shape technological developments at the same time that technology affects society.⁴

³ Rebecca Weeks, *History by HBO: Televising the American Past* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2022), p. 5.

⁴ For technological determinism and its influence on understandings of technology, see David Nye, *Technology Matters Questions to Live With* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006); Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx (eds.), *Does Technology Drive History? The Dilemma of Technological Determinism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994). A seminal study offering a corrective to a deterministic understanding of technology is Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J.

Cold War radio was no exception to such processes. Radio studies by Susan J. Douglas and Susan Smulyan have concluded that American radio's development into a modern broadcasting system that targeted domestic and international audiences before, during, and after World War II resulted from social contexts, policies, regulations, economic and cultural forces that shaped radio technology and its uses throughout American history. Douglas' examination of the emergence of early American radio (1899-1922) and Smulyan's account of the commercialization of American broadcasting during the interwar period (1920-1934) acknowledged the crucial implications that radio amateurs, popular culture, corporate institutions, and the advertising industry had on the historical development of national radio in the United States.⁵ Mainstream U.S. commercial broadcasting indeed mirrored a broader culture of mass consumption and entertainment that had long targeted a primarily white and middle-class audience by excluding ethnics and other minorities. Nevertheless, such segments of the U.S. population that did not fit the targeted demographic, building on their resistance to mainstream broadcasting, discovered other options outside the mainstream to satisfy their interests, such as local radio stations.⁶

Pinch, *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989).

⁵ Susan J. Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) and Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

⁶ Elena Razlogova, *The Listener's Voice Early Radio and the American Public*. 1st ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), pp. 34-35.

This account recognizes the extent to which societal processes shaped the development of radio broadcasting in American history. However, it emphasizes the implications of such forces from a different perspective by examining the interplay between state and non-state actors in U.S.-East Asia relations during the Cold War. In fact, this account builds on the growing body of literature that explores the interplay between communications and U.S. foreign relations, which consider how the development of international radio initiatives in East Asia reflected an array of societal influences and political calculations specific to the U.S. domestic context.⁷ Like

⁷ For the most important works discussing pre-World War II secondary literature focused on American radio in East Asia, but also communications and U.S. foreign relations more generally spanning much of the 20th century, see Michael A. Krysko, *American Radio in China: International Encounters with Technology and Communications, 1919-1941* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Harry Kirwin, "The Federal Telegraph Company: A Testing of the Open Door," in *Pacific Historical Review* 22, No. 2 (1953): 271-286; Michael J. Hogan, *Informal Entente: The Private Structure of Cooperation in Anglo-American Economic Diplomacy, 1918-1928* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1977); John P. Rossi, "A Silent Partnership?: The U.S. Government, RCA, and Radio Communications with East Asia, 1919-1928," in *Radical History Review* 33, (1985): 32-52; Hugh Aitken, *The Continuous Wave: Technology and American Radio, 1900-1932* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Susan J. Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1920* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987); Daniel R. Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Daniel R. Headrick, *Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Daqing Yang, *Technology of Empire: Telecommunications and Japanese Expansion in Asia, 1883-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010); Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870-1871*. 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001); Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983); Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American*

American international broadcasting initiatives before and during World War II, the four Cold War radio projects examined in this account also fell victim to the actors' miscalculations and oversimplifications of the broader contexts in which their operations were situated and operated.⁸

Most importantly, the four initiatives discussed in this work failed in their original intent or had unintended outcomes because they reflected the main actors' unrealistic expectations about the power of radio. However, these unrealistic expectations were not necessarily grounded in misguided beliefs in the singular power of radio to effect change and influence, as was the case with their generational predecessors during the interwar and World War II periods. Instead,

Broadcasting, 1920-1934 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994); and Gerd Horten, *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda During World War II* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002). For a few works on communications and U.S. foreign relations during the Cold War that have influenced this dissertation, see Holly Cowan Shulman, *The Voice of America: Propaganda and Democracy, 1941-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); David E. Krugler, *The Voice of America and the Domestic Propaganda Battles, 1945-1953* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000); Alan L. Heil, Jr. *Voice of America: A History* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2003); Jeremy E. Taylor, "Voice of America Chinese-Dialect Broadcasting and the Chinese Cultural Cold War, 1949-1953," in *Chineseness and the Cold War: Contested Cultures and Diaspora in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong*, edited by Jeremy E. Taylor and Lanjun Xu (London and New York: Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Asia, 2022), pp. 110-132.

⁸ For other works exploring how American miscalculations and oversimplification of the broader context and audiences affected U.S. radio initiatives, see Michael A. Krysko, *Contested Airwaves: American Radio at Home and Abroad, 1914-1946* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2025); Gary D. Rawnsley, *Radio Diplomacy and Propaganda: The BBC and VOA in International Politics, 1956-1964* (London: Macmillan, 1996); Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1985), pp. 171-180.

they stemmed from overconfidence in these actors' ability to understand and engage with the broader societal contexts in which their target audiences were embedded, thereby maximizing broadcasting's potential to affect and influence audiences in the desired direction. Such strategies represented an effort to apply more contemporary understandings about mass communication that developed in the 1950s, which challenged the pre-World War II assumptions about the direct effects of mass media. Indeed, this dissertation claims that the main actors' overconfidence in using international broadcasting's potential to influence audiences in a desired direction proved shortsighted because of the limitations in terms of what mass media, and media propaganda in general, could achieve.

In fact, in 1988, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky articulated a model of mass media communication that sought to explain how propaganda worked to construct consensus for foreign and domestic policies. In particular, Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model held that elites, corporations, interest groups, and governments relied on media propaganda imbued in news and media in an effort to manipulate the target audiences and achieve their desired and often self-serving interests. To be effective, the construction of propaganda must tap into shared assumptions and values among the population or the intended audience.⁹ For instance, the ideology of "anticommunism," as Herman and Chomsky argued, was a "control mechanism" through which interest groups during the Cold War sought to mobilize the general public against a common enemy, such as the Soviet Union or communist China, as they began threatening

⁹ Noam Chomsky, "Noam Chomsky: The five filters of the mass media," *publicreading Rooms*, *The art of politics and vice versa*, accessed April 5, 2025, <https://prruk.org/noam-chomsky-the-five-filters-of-the-mass-media-machine/>.

“Western ideology and politics.”¹⁰ Their model, however, was not intended to explain the effect of media on people, for whom agency is always an important factor that can disrupt even the best-formulated propaganda.

In fact, as the case studies discussed in this work demonstrated, mass media influence and propaganda are limited in their reach and results. The main actors often obtained outcomes that rarely met their initial expectations because, blinded by their oversimplified understandings of their target audiences and contexts, they imperfectly anticipated the later Herman and Chomsky’s model about how propaganda could be used to influence their audiences in a desired direction. For this reason, RFT, which is the fourth and final case study explored in this account, was the unintended consequence of AFVN’s shortcomings and inability to achieve its desired objectives. It underscores an important aspect of listener agency exemplified by a disillusioned Dave Rabbit, who could not be persuaded by the AFVN mission and goals.

At the same time, an important communication theory that applies to the four case studies and how the main actors used media to satisfy their goals is the uses and gratification theory. In the early 1970s, communication theorist Elihu Katz developed the notion that people use media to their benefit, the so-called uses and gratification theory (U&G). According to this theory, people are active users who project their agency onto the media to satisfy their needs. In fact, the main pillars on which U&G relies emphasize the importance of the social contexts, how audiences interpret and negotiate a media message, and audiences’ choices to rely on one media over another to compensate for their needs. Although the theory perfectly works for all four radio

¹⁰ For more information on the propaganda model, see “A Propaganda Model, Edward Herman & Noam Chomsky, Excerpted from *Manufacturing Consent*, 1988,” accessed April 5, 2025, <https://chomsky.info/consent01/>.

initiatives, it particularly speaks to the story of Dave Rabbit. RFT can indeed be considered Dave Rabbit's "compensatory artifact" through which he concocted a powerful example of participatory citizenship. RFT helped Dave Rabbit to meet his unfulfilled needs of the wartime experience in Vietnam as well as to satisfy the troops' need to escape the boredom and frustration caused by the Vietnam War through his irreverent radio shows.¹¹

Hence, this account offered insights into the murky boundaries between how the historical approach to the social construction of technology intertwines with how social groups often attempt to manipulate societal influences to fulfill specific goals. RFA spoke to the CIA's political and self-interested objectives to establish the agency's legitimacy in U.S. foreign relations vis-à-vis the State Department and its venerable VOA. ROFA served as a vehicle for Moon to gain legitimacy and expand his religious movement in the U.S. and for South Korean President Park to mobilize political support for the security of his regime. AFVN reflected the U.S. military strategy to use radio and popular entertainment to prevent potential dissent and keep soldiers motivated to win the war in Vietnam. RFT originated from the disillusionment and frustration of American soldiers who harnessed radio to protest the war and mock the U.S. military in Vietnam. As a result, the self-interested objectives and misguided strategies at the origins of the four radio projects became the reasons that led to ultimate failure, like in the case of RFA; partial success, such as the story of AFVN suggested; or unintended consequences, like ROFA and RFT.

¹¹ See Jay G. Blumler and Elihu Katz, *The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1974). For the use of mass media as a compensatory artifact, see John Fiske and Henry Jenkins, *Introduction to Communication Studies* (New York, Routledge: 2010), p. 144.

Such conclusions about radio's development and use in foreign relations remained significant even at the end of the Cold War, thus reflecting patterns comparable to what this account uncovered. In this respect, political scientist Gary D. Rawnsley argued that radio and international broadcasting have historically been a tool for "the projection of foreign policy interests." This trend, however, continued after the end of the Cold War. Radio and international broadcasting still serve as valuable post-Cold War foreign policy tools, fostering self-serving agendas, unrealistic expectations, and unintended consequences in international relations.¹²

Rawnsley's observation perfectly captures the goals the United States sought to achieve in Asia with the founding of a new Radio Free Asia (RFA) venture in the 1990s.¹³ The need for this renewed international radio project, which was and continues to be primarily concerned with the promotion of democracy in Asian societies, emerged after the infamous Tiananmen Massacre of 1989 when the Chinese government suppressed a pro-democratic, student-led demonstration with military force.¹⁴ As the *Los Angeles Times* reported in 1997, it was Senator Joseph R. Biden (D-Del) who proposed the establishment of RFA as a radio broadcasting service of the U.S.

¹² Gary D. Rawnsley, "Introduction to 'International Broadcasting and Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century,'" *Media and Communication* 4, 2 (2016): 42-45.

¹³ For another discussion of the RFA ventures in U.S.-China relations, see Roberta Meloni, "Sino-American Relations in the Information Age," Chapter 5 in *Dynamics of World Politics and 21st Century Asia*, edited by Tilak Jha, Keshav Mishra, Shachee Agnihotri (New Delhi: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2025), pp. 53-69.

¹⁴ For more information on the Tiananmen Massacre, see Jean-Philippe Beja, *The Impact of China's 1989 Tiananmen Massacre*. 1st ed. (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011).

government targeting the Far East. The Clinton administration eventually supported the project, which was officially launched in March 1996.¹⁵ The new RFA venture gathered the support of U.S. politicians, including Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, who in July 1996 claimed that RFA continued the legacy that VOA and its surrogate radio stations, like Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL), did by spreading freedom and democracy to communist countries during the Cold War.¹⁶

Despite the primary target of the radio station remaining China, the new RFA's scope has expanded its broadcastings to include other Asian countries under authoritarian regimes, such as North Korea, Tibet, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Burma.¹⁷ The modern RFA, which is still operating, does not supplant but broadcasts along with other U.S. international stations and broadcasting services, including VOA, under the sole supervision of the U.S. Agency for Global

¹⁵ Jim Mann, "Republican Voltage Keeps Radio Free Asia Buzzing," *Los Angeles Times*, accessed November 12, 2024, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1997-oct-01-mn-38101-story.html>.

¹⁶ Gary D. Rawnsley, "Radio Free Asia and China's Harmonious Society," in *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion: From World War I to Wikileaks*, edited by David Welch, 1st ed. Vol. 90 (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2014), p. 129.

¹⁷ Susan B. Epstein, "Radio Free Asia, CRS Report for Congress, 97-52 F," October 24, 1997, accessed November 12, 2024, https://heinonline-org.er.lib.kstate.edu/HOL/Page?collection=congreg&handle=hein.crs/crsmthaagog0001&id=1&type=image&rot=-90&page_scrolling=0.

Media (USAGM).¹⁸ Furthermore, with the emergence of the Internet in the early 1990s, RFA embraced this new technological development to expand its reach. It developed into an online vehicle in the early 2000s with its www.rfa.org website and two online branches, BenarNews and WHYNOT/WAINAO, which provide access to RFA's news. In 2006, RFA's online presence further expanded with the launching of its YouTube channel, Twitter, and Facebook accounts.¹⁹

Despite these developments, the problem with the contemporary RFA remains the same as its predecessor. Its mission to promote American purported universal values of democracy and freedom to fight communism and authoritarianism continues to rely on the overconfidence of the RFA proponents' ability to understand and engage with the broader societal contexts in which their target audiences fit. Like its predecessor, many remain wary of RFA broadcasts and messages because the radio station is still perceived as a foreign tool of U.S. propaganda to promote U.S. interests vis-à-vis China. As Rawnsley himself argued, there is no doubt that "the

¹⁸ USAGM is a government-owned agency overseeing U.S. international broadcastings since 1994. See U.S. Agency for Global Media, "Structure," accessed December 24, 2024, <https://www.usagm.gov/who-we-are/organizational-chart/#:~:text=USAGM%20also%%2020oversees%20six%20entities,Open%20Technology%20Fund%2C%20and%20> and U.S. Agency for Global Media, "Mission," accessed December 24, 2024, <https://www.usagm.gov/who-we-are/mission/>. See also Rawnsley, "Radio Free Asia and China's Harmonious Society," p. 132.

¹⁹ U.S. Agency for Global Media, "Radio Free Asia, Fact Sheet Overview," accessed November 12, <https://www.usagm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/RFA-Factsheet-2017.pdf>, and Radio Free Asia, "RFA Celebrates Its 25th Anniversary," accessed December 24, 2024, <https://www.rfa.org/english/about/releases/rfa-celebrates-its-25th-anniversary/>.

previous incarnation of RFA in the 1950s” has “helped to sour perceptions of the modern version.”²⁰

The result is that RFA has obtained scarce results in its effort to democratize China and other Asian countries. This outcome is indeed consistent with the argument the CIA made in the 1950s about the supposed limitation of the influence that international radio services may have because of explicit connections to a foreign actor. Perhaps one of the most recent unintended consequences of RFA’s failure to achieve its mission pertains to the closure of its oldest overseas office in Hong Kong, a special administrative region of the People’s Republic of China, established since RFA’s launch in 1996.²¹ It is no surprise that the *Global Times*, a Chinese newspaper under the aegis of the Chinese Communist Party’s newspaper *People’s Daily*, celebrated the end of RFA in Hong Kong as the “final chapter of failed US ‘effort’” to use radio propaganda to interfere in Chinese affairs.²²

²⁰ Rawnsley, “Radio Free Asia and China’s Harmonious Society,” pp. 130, 138-139.

²¹ RFA operations in Hong Kong ceased over safety concerns for RFA staff and journalists after Article 23 of Hong Kong’s Basic Law was enacted in March 2024. As a former British colony, Hong Kong became a special region of China in 1984. For more information, consult “China (Includes Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibet): Hong Kong, U.S. Department of State, no date, accessed January 15, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/china/hongkong/#:~:text=Hong%20Kong%20is%20a%20Special,a%20high%20degree%20of%20autonomy>.

²² “Closure of RFA in Hong Kong shows final chapter of failed US ‘effort,’” *Global Times*, April 01, 2025, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202404/1309921.shtml>.

Al Hurra TV is another important contemporary example of the way the United States attempted to use communications technology to extend American influence in another area of the globe: the Middle East. Launched by President George W. Bush on February 14, 2004, Al Hurra, whose Arabic name means “the Free One,” began operation with a budget of \$62 million. Specifically, this Arabic-language satellite outlet became part of the “war on terror” that the Bush administration established to win “Arab hearts and minds” following the September 11, 2001 attacks. In particular, the U.S. government designed Al Hurra as an initiative that could impart a positive image of the United States in the Middle East. The main objective was to offer an alternative media outlet in the Arab world that countered the Qatar-based Al Jazeera television and other Arab media stations critical of U.S. foreign policy.²³

The verity of this observation must, however, be understood in the broader historical context that marked U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East in the early 2000s. Indeed, U.S. policymakers established this television initiative to engage audiences and “news-seekers” of all ages after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Hence, by offering an alternative message of hope, as opposed to “messages of victimization” by local Arabic outlets, Al Hurra sought to promote

²³ William Youmans, “The War on Ideas: Alhurra and US International Broadcasting Law in the ‘War on Terror,’” *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 6, No. 1 (2009): 45-68; Gregory D. Jonhsen, “Arabs glued to TV news- but not to US-sponsored Al Hurra,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 30, 2004; Jim Rutenberg, “Coming Soon to Arab TV’s: U.S. Answer to Al Jazeera, Production values and All,” *The New York Times*, December 17, 2003; Bill Gertz, “U.S. satellite channel tunes in to Mideast,” *The Washington Times*, February 29, 2004; Neil Macfarquhar, “Washington’s Arabic TV Effort Gets Mixed Reviews,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2004.

purported U.S. universal values of freedom and democracy to counter the widespread anti-American sentiments that circulated in the Middle East after the U.S. invasion of Iraq.²⁴

To achieve its mission, Al Hurra TV broadcast a vast array of content and programs. Unlike Arab media outlets, the pan-American television station Al Hurra offered news, documentaries, and talk shows that replicated the popularity of some U.S. domestic television programs. For example, it offered daily newscasts following a format similar to ABC's "Nightline" and a documentary-like version of PBS's "Frontline."²⁵ Furthermore, Al Hurra TV broadcast *Free Hour* and *Free Debate*, two talk shows mostly centered on discussing political and social issues regarding the Middle East. *I-Tech* is another important program that kept Arab audiences informed about the latest technological developments. Sports was another crucial component of the Al Hurra schedule. In fact, *Alhurra Sports Weekly* offered a specific glimpse at the major sports in the Middle East.²⁶

²⁴ Norman J. Pattiz, "Radio Sawa and Alhurra TV: Opening Channels of Mass Communication in the Middle east," in *Engaging the Arab & Islamic Worlds through Public Diplomacy: A Report and Action Recommendations*, edited by William A. Rugh (Washington, D.C.: The Public Diplomacy Council, 2004), pp. 75,79; Jim Rutenberg, "Coming Soon to Arab TV's: U.S. Answer to Al Jazeera, Production values and All," *The New York Times*, December 17, 2003. For more on the U.S. intervention in Iraq in 2003, see Beth Bailey and Richard H. Immerman (eds.), *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan* (New York, NY: New York University Oress, 2015).

²⁵ Bill Gertz, "U.S. satellite channel tunes in to Mideast," *The Washington Times*, February 29, 2004.

²⁶ Pattiz, "Radio Sawa and Alhurra TV," p. 82.

Despite this great variety of programs, the origins of Al Hurra must also be framed in the lack of effectiveness that U.S. international broadcasts achieved in the Middle East. Besides the need to foster a positive image of the United States in the Arab world, another important reason for the establishment of Al Hurra was a recognition that VOA Arabic was not piercing the Middle East. According to former American broadcasting entrepreneur Norman J. Pattiz, weekly listenership surveys conducted between 1998 and 2000 revealed that only a small percentage of people in the Middle East knew about VOA Arabic. For instance, only 0.8% of listeners in Saudi Arabia and 0.9% in Egypt were aware of it in 2000 — albeit VOA Arabic started operations in the 1950s. The primary reason for this listenership gap was that VOA Arabic was perceived as an instrument of American propaganda or, to use the words of an Egyptian listener, “an American station speaking in Arabic in the name of America.” In short, the U.S. effort to create an Arabic television station was specifically done knowing the deficiency that VOA had in the Middle East. Indeed, in the minds of its founders, Al Hurra sought to extend U.S. cultural and political influence in the Arab world while fighting anti-Americanism. However, the project ended up replicating the same mistakes of the past. Al Hurra is indeed mostly perceived as “local in flavor yet American in spirit.”²⁷

Hence, like Radio Free Asia, Al Hurra revealed how U.S. official efforts were not unmindful of their audience but still ended up with results less than hoped. Al Hurra represents another partially learned lesson for the United States in the post-Cold War period. The reasons for its fiasco are several. Among the most important are poor management and strategy, as well as listenership issues, which impacted the successful execution of this project. On top of these

²⁷ Ibidem. The direct quotes are from pages 73 and 79.

problems, the reality is that U.S. policymakers failed to understand the broader context and audiences in which Al Hurra was operating.

The Bush administration launched this project confident that the United States could harness television, as it did with radio during the Cold War, as a tool to fight anti-Americanism and extend U.S. influence in that area of the globe. However, misinterpretation and oversimplification of the larger context and audiences made sure that what Al Hurra could achieve in the Middle East never met the original expectations. Indeed, the Arab press largely portrayed Al Hurra as “a propaganda arm of the United States,” “a spiritual descendent of TV Marti,” another Cold War U.S. project that sought to fight communism in Cuba and ideally incite insubordination against Cuba’s former President Fidel Castro.²⁸ This outcome is once again consistent with the argument the CIA made in the 1950s concerning international broadcasting initiatives. Explicit connections to a foreign actor simply hamper the credibility of the initiative itself in the eyes of the targeted audience, hence making its presumed power to influence limited.

Overall, the Bush administration’s vision for Al Hurra was not only shortsighted but also inaccurate. Specifically, it reflected the idea that the Arab world, like the communist bloc during the Cold War, lacked a “credible source of news and free public debate.”²⁹ For this reason, Al

²⁸ Neil Macfarquhar, “Washington’s Arabic TV Effort Gets Mixed Reviews,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2004. For more on Radio Marti, see “The Long Road for Radio Marti,” *Broadcasting* 108, No. 7 (1985).

²⁹ Marc Lynch, “The Alhurra Project: Radio Marti of the Middle East,” *Arab Media & Society*, June 18, 2007, accessed March 8, 2025, <https://www.arabmediasociety.com/the-alhurra-project-radio-marti-of-the-middle-east/>.

Hurra sought to offer its Arab audience a new perspective on the United States and other international issues through cultural programs, talk shows, and news. Nonetheless, Al Hurra fell short of its objectives. The Bush administration failed to understand that when Al Hurra was launched in 2004, the Middle East already had a vast array of other satellite television services, such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, that used talk shows and news that discussed taboo themes, including repressions in Arab countries and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.³⁰ On top of this reason, the problem of U.S. funding continued to introduce Al Hurra to the eyes of the Arab audience as an extension of the U.S. government. In fact, as political scientist Marc Lynch concluded, Al Hurra “never had a chance to be more than a drop in the ocean.”³¹

In conclusion, the RFA and Al Hurra examples illustrate that the lessons from American international broadcasting initiatives during the Cold War have been partially learned. Like their Cold War predecessors, contemporary American international broadcasting projects continue to remain double-edged swords in the post-Cold War landscape. They often advance self-serving agendas, fuel unrealistic expectations, and result in unintended consequences in global relations. Most importantly, they contributed to exacerbating the American image abroad rather than effectively imparting a positive message as originally intended.³² It is therefore crucial to focus

³⁰ Neil Macfarquhar, “Washington’s Arabic TV Effort Gets Mixed Reviews,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2004.

³¹ Lynch, “The Alhurra Project.”

³² For a study discussing the American image abroad as perceived through communications technologies, especially television, see Martha Bayles, *Through a Screen Darkly: Popular Culture, Public Diplomacy, and American’s Image Abroad*. 1st ed. (New York: Yale University Press, 2014).

on how societal and cultural dynamics will affect traditional radio technology — now adapted to the rise of the Internet — and new satellite and digital communication tools such as television and social media. Such considerations and more studies on the matter will produce important results for the future implications of American international broadcasting.

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J. William Snyder, Jr.
1013 Woodland Pointe Drive
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April 7, 2025

VIA E-MAIL ONLY: rmeloni@ksu.edu

Roberta Meloni
2051 Kerr Drive, Apt R7
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Page 2

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "J. William Snyder, Jr.".

J. William Snyder, Jr.

JWS

cc: Chandler DeLay (via Facebook Messenger)

