

The following is a discussion paper for the workshop on "American Philanthropic Support for Communications and Culture" to take place at the Rockefeller Archive Center in August 2004. Please do not quote from this paper. This is a first draft.

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The Rockefeller Foundation and Pan-American Radio

This paper explores an undertaking funded by the Rockefeller Foundation's Humanities Division in 1937-8, the Pan American Broadcasting Project. Written and produced under the responsibility of the Pan American Union, the Pan American Broadcasting Project consisted of a series of sixteen experimental radio programs broadcast to Latin America over a Boston-based educational short-wave station, the World Wide Broadcasting Foundation. A Division record documenting the funding decision explained the objectives of the project. Although "originating in the United States", the programs were to be the product of a multilateral effort and "genuinely Pan-American in point of view." They were meant to stimulate "more general cultural interchange" and thus create "better mutual understanding among the countries of the three Americas." By providing inspiring programs of "cultural interest", moreover, the series was hoped to "set standards" and help raise the quality of both U.S. short-wave programming and of domestic broadcasting in Latin America.¹ Such objectives, of course, were long-term in nature and far too ambitious to be accomplished by a small series of broadcasts. Hence, the latter were understood as "experimental" programs put on the air to test the water and "to determine the type of radio best suited for promoting better understanding and closer relations between the twenty-one republics of the western hemisphere."²

The Foundation's interest and involvement in the Pan-American Broadcasting Project³ may be seen simply as an outgrowth of its general mandate to help improve international understanding and overcome national partisanship. At the same time, the project may also be interpreted as an (albeit small) element in a new program initiated toward the mid-1930s as part of a major reorientation of the Foundation's Humanities Division funding policies.⁴

As the Foundation's Annual Report for 1935 explained, its humanities program was now less concerned with the work of individual scholars engaged in the preservation and interpretation of the materials of culture, but rather with the processes by which culture

¹ Resolved RF 27088, Pan American Union, Latin American Broadcasts, June 18, 1937, pp. 1-3. Rockefeller Archive Center [RAC], Rockefeller Foundation [RF], Record Group [RG] 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3170. I am grateful to Professor William Buxton to bring this and the following sources related to the Rockefeller Foundation's funding of communication projects to my attention.

² Letter Marshall to Rowe, June 7, 1937. RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3170.

³ The available records indicate that the Foundation's Humanities Division had been involved in the development of the project at least six months before the PAU officially handed in its the application; see Folder 3170; RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266.

⁴ On the reorientation of the humanities program see William J. Buxton, "John Marshall and the Humanities in Europe: Shifting Patterns of Rockefeller Foundation Support", *Minerva* 41 (2003), pp. 133-153

and education were diffused in modern society.⁵ More precisely, the new humanities program set out to explore ways and means by which the channels of mass communication could be enhanced in their ability to serve the general public by strengthening their role in the diffusion of knowledge, culture, and international understanding among wide audiences. Whereas traditional academia was now found wanting for its typically cloistered existence, the modern mass media, particularly the large radio and film industries, were seen to be reaching out to ever increasing audiences, yet offering little beyond entertainment programs of a quality that fell far short of what John Marshall and his fellow officers at the Humanities Division deemed acceptable.⁶

The new humanities program led, among other things, to a profound interest in communication research and to the funding of a number of path-breaking research institutes under the direction of Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Hadley Cantril, Harold D. Lasswell, and other social scientists.⁷ Indeed, the Rockefeller Foundation came to be credited as having been a "midwife" to the establishment of communication studies as a discipline in the social sciences.⁸ As is well known, toward the end of the 1930s, these research institutes increasingly engaged in work related to national security objectives. "Galvanized by the recognition that the Roosevelt Administration, hamstrung politically, could not adequately prepare for war on the propaganda front," Brett Gary explained, the Rockefeller Foundation officers, together with the communication scholars, "took up the slack".⁹ In order to prepare the state for a spiritual war against totalitarian propaganda both within and outside the United States, the Rockefeller Foundation helped to lay the groundwork for a wide range of monitoring and research institutions - such as the Princeton Shortwave Listening Center or the Experimental Division for the Study of War-time Communications, to name but two of the more well-known examples that were eventually absorbed by the state.¹⁰

⁵ The Rockefeller Foundation, Annual Report 1935, p. ??.

⁶ Detailed analysis of the vast array of projects funded in the communication program is still lacking. The forgoing is a preliminary interpretation based on a viewing of selected projects related to Latin America and on a close reading of two pioneering articles by William Buxton, cf. his "John Marshall" and "Reaching Human Minds: Rockefeller Philanthropy and Communications, 1935-1939," The Development of the Social Sciences in the United States and Canada: The Role of Philanthropy, Stamford: Ablex, 1999, pp. 177-209.

⁷ For a biographical account of the foundation of communication studies see Everett M. Rogers, A History of Communication Study, New York: The Free Press, 1994.

⁸ Brett Gary, "Communication Research, the Rockefeller Foundation, and Mobilization for the War on Words, 1938-1944," Journal of Communication 46:3 (Summer 1996), pp. 124-147, p. 125. Other scholars rather emphasize the preparation for psychological warfare during World War II as a pivotal moment in the consolidation of the research field; see Christopher Simpson, The Science of Coercion. Communication Research and Psychological Warfare 1945-1960, Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1994

⁹ Gary, "Communication Research," p. 125; on the political difficulties to establish propaganda and propaganda-control agencies in the United States, see Richard W. Steele, "Preparing the Public for War: Efforts to Establish a National Propaganda Agency," The American Historical Review, Vol. 75, Issue 6 (October 1970), pp. 1640-1653.

¹⁰ For further details see Brett Gary, The Nervous Liberals. Propaganda Anxieties from World War I to the Cold War, New York: Columbia UP 1999, pp. 85-173.

Not surprising, by autumn 1937 when the Pan American Broadcasting series went onto the air, fears about Axis propagandistic inroads into the hemisphere were very much on the minds of those involved in the project. Their attention was drawn, most of all, to the (seemingly) sophisticated psychology and aggressive use of short-wave radio by Nazi Germany.¹¹ It is therefore tempting to read this project against the background of national security concerns. Wasn't this project, in essence, meant to compete with rivaling and hostile powers for the hearts and minds of Latin Americans? Were the Pan American Union and the Rockefeller Foundation taking the initiative to build up defense mechanisms long before the Roosevelt administration was politically free to take decisive action? Incidentally, when such decisive action came in August 1940, it was closely associated with a member of the Rockefeller family. Winning the allegiance of Latin Americans was made the task of a special agency directed by Nelson A. Rockefeller, the Office of Inter-American Affairs.¹²

In the following sections, I will discuss the radio project against the background of the Humanities Division's new communications program and against national security concerns. But first, the origins of the project itself, its characteristics and contents have to be dealt with.

The Origins of the Pan American Union's Radio Project

Even as radio became, in the 1930s, a major weapon in the political arsenal of the world's greater and lesser powers, many observers, particularly among the (what Akira Iriye has termed) "cultural internationalists",¹³ continued to pin hopes on this medium as a possible means to further mutual understanding between nations. War and aggression, it was assumed, were to a large extent the product of a lack of familiarity and knowledge about other countries, their culture and customs, and hence might be avoided by increasing cultural and educational interchange among the peoples. Radio technology, it seemed, was ideally suited to serve toward this end. Short-wave broadcasts spanning the globe as well as the exchange of programs between stations, by relay or transcriptions, were ready and comparatively inexpensive devices to spread knowledge and mutual understanding among wide audiences throughout the world. Thus, Albert Einstein remarked in 1930, at the opening of the German Broadcasting Ex-

¹¹ Contemporary American reports tended to exaggerate the effort, thoroughness, and care that was going into Nazi Germany's short-wave operations; for a more realistic view based primarily on German archives, see Willi Boehlke, *Die Macht des Radios. Weltpolitik und Auslandsrundfunk*, Frankfurt/M.: Ullstein, 1977. Less research has been directed to a possibly more important element of the Nazi propaganda offensive in Latin America, i.e., the efforts of German embassies and other representatives to exert influence over local stations and the arrangements to have German programs relayed or rebroadcast over local standard wave.

¹² The first official title *Office for Coordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations Between the American Republics* (OCCCRBAR) was changed a few months later to *Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs*. In 1945, the office was again renamed to *Office of Inter-American Affairs* (OIAA). The establishment of the OIAA and the role of Nelson Rockefeller are discussed in great detail by Claude Curtis Erb, "Nelson Rockefeller and United States-Latin American Relations, 1940-1945," Ph.D. Thesis, Clark University, 1982; Cary Reich, *The Life of Nelson A Rockefeller. Worlds to Conquer, 1908-1958*, New York: Doubleday, 1996, pp. 165-261.

¹³ Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.

hibition in Berlin, "radio can easily contribute to eliminate that mutual feeling of strangeness (*Fremdheit*) that so easily degenerates into suspicion and hostility."¹⁴

In the Americas, the idea of radio as a medium for mutual understanding and cultural interchange had surfaced at various conferences, most notably during the 7th International Conference of American States at Montevideo (1933) and the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace at Buenos Aires (1936). Prodded by officials of the Pan American Union (PAU), these conferences recommended to advance a multilateral effort of broadcasting. While delegating the general administration to the PAU, the recommendations proposed that every member nation should contribute individual programs to be jointly broadcast over the so-called "Pan-American frequencies", i.e., short-wave frequencies that the United States had registered with the Bureau of the International Telegraph Union in Berne in 1929 and subsequently reserved for this purpose. After 1933, PAU officials had sought to transform the rather vague Montevideo and Buenos Aires resolutions into a concrete plan for multilateral broadcasting. But for various reasons, and like many of the non-binding resolutions resolved at international conferences, the project did not materialize.¹⁵

Time, moreover, was running out for the PAU's multilateral radio project. During the second half of the 1930s, the international scramble for short-wave frequencies intensified. In view of the impending International Telecommunications Conference convening in February 1938 in Cairo and fearing that competing powers at the conference might lay claim to unused frequencies, U.S. government officials concerned with telecommunications recommended that the Pan-American frequencies not be left idle. While there had been some discussion about the federal government establishing its own short-wave station and have the PAU make use of the frequencies in question through this station, it was now decided to assign them, for the time being, to private broadcasters. By February 1938, therefore, the United States had reassigned the Pan-American frequencies to private stations to be put into immediate use.¹⁶ Two of them were made available to a commercial station located in Schenectady and operated by General Electric, which was about to greatly expand its transmitting facilities. The remaining two were assigned to Walter Lemmon's World Wide station in Boston. The latter had previously been directed rather toward European audiences, but now had taken steps to expand its programming to Latin America by adding new shows in Spanish and Portuguese and, most notably, by collaborating with the PAU in the Pan American Radio Project.¹⁷

¹⁴ As quoted in Boehlke, Die Macht des Radios, p. 72 (my translation).

¹⁵ This point would need further elaboration taking into account the records of the Pan American Union, which I plan to view in October 2004. For a preliminary discussion of the historical background for the failure of the recommendations see Fred Fejes, Imperialism, Media, and the Good Neighbor, Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1986, pp. 81-95

¹⁶ On the Pan American frequencies see Fejes, Imperialism, p. 81, Howard S. LeRoy, "Treaty Regulation of International Radio and Short Wave Broadcasting," The American Journal of International Law 32:4 (October 1938), pp. 719-737, especially pp. 728-734.

¹⁷ Having concentrated rather on Europe, in mid-1937, WWBF expanded its programming to Latin America, using a temporary directional antenna to increase the strength of its signal. (Letter Lemmon to Marshall, June 10, 1937, RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3170)

Indeed, the impending issue of the Pan-American frequencies was a major driving force behind the Radio Project. When preparations for the initiative matured in mid-1937, Pan American Union and Rockefeller Foundation officials had, what an internal memorandum of conversation called, a "frank discussion" about the matter. By demonstrating the "feasibility and value of intercultural broadcasting for Pan America", the former hoped to "demonstrate and maintain the Union's ultimate right" to the frequencies.¹⁸ They obviously hoped that, in the future, they would be able to play a larger role in hemispheric broadcasting as had been proposed at the previous inter-American conferences. The turn of events would prove them not altogether unsuccessful, in that in early 1938, the frequencies came to be assigned on a temporary basis and could easily be reclaimed for the PAU by federal authorities in case of a change of policy.¹⁹

While the Pan American Union tried to safeguard an "ultimate right", the memorandum recorded, "Lemmon undoubtedly [hoped] to obtain use of one or more of these frequencies." In the upcoming scramble for the reassignment of the frequencies, the Pan American Radio Project served to bolster Lemmon's bid against much larger competitors such as NBC, which also had applied for their use.²⁰ Furthermore, his position was strengthened by the fact that his ventures in educational broadcasting were underwritten by grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, which served to quell the doubts of federal regulators as to the financial solidity of the station.²¹

The Foundation's support thus helped to bolster the position of both the Pan American Union and Lemmon's World Wide Broadcasting Foundation in the field of inter-American radio. This support came at a time when, for reasons discussed below, the large commercial broadcasters were preparing for an expansion of their short-wave programming to Latin America. While the Foundation's funding policy was not directed against the large commercial stations,²² it certainly aimed to carve out a larger role for educational and cultural programming in the expanding field of inter-American broadcasting.

¹⁸ Interviews JM, June 2, 1937, p. 1. RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3170.

¹⁹ On the reassignment of the frequencies see Fejes, Imperialism, p. 95.

²⁰ In an interim report on the progress of Pan American radio series to the Rockefeller Foundation, the director of the program, Ph. Barbour, mentions that the development of the program served to "justify the assignment" of the two frequencies to WWFB, see: Interim Report on Progress in the Experimental Cultural Broadcasts to Latin America (Philip Barbour), p. 8; RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3171.

²¹ This is suggested by a report of Marshall on a conversation with FCC engineer Craven who inquired about the financial backing of Lemmon's educational radio station in view of the "situation regarding Pan American frequencies" (Interviews JM, June 2, 1937, p. 2. RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3170). It seems obvious that the FCC would not have assigned international frequencies to a station considered to be in severe financial difficulties.

²² Reports written for the Rockefeller Foundation indicate that this station actually cooperated with commercial stations, particularly with CBS, in the development of programs; see, for instance, Interim Report on Progress in the Experimental Cultural Broadcasts to Latin America (Philip Barbour), p. 4, 7; RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3171.

Characteristics and Contents of the Pan American Radio Series

The Pan American Radio Project consisted of a series of sixteen half-hour programs. Written and produced under the responsibility of the Pan American Union, they were handled over Walter Lemmon's short-wave station in Boston. Lemmon's World Wide Broadcasting Foundation relied on various sources, but mainly on the Rockefeller Foundation, for financial support. Relying, moreover, on the active cooperation of scholars and educators from Harvard University and other educational institutions in or close to Boston, Lemmon's "University of the Air" had developed into the most important educational station in the United States and had built up sizeable audiences in Europe, mainly in Britain.²³ An American "vest pocket version" of the BBC, as William Buxton has called it,²⁴ Lemmon's station was an important element in the Rockefeller Foundation's new communication program as far as a radio was concerned.

For the new Pan American project, Lemmon hired a special director, Philip Barbour, to manage the scripts and technicalities of the series by working closely with PAU officials and Latin American diplomats in Washington. A short-wave enthusiast, Barbour had previously been engaged in the research of short-wave broadcasting and had only recently returned from an extended (ten-months) tour through Central and South America. Funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, he had investigated local broadcasting systems and particularly the short-wave situation.²⁵

Hence, considerable fieldwork had been done before this project came up for funding in mid-1937. Comparatively little energy was employed, however, to reflect on the over-all objective of the series. Like many other projects destined to bring about "better mutual understanding" by increasing the cultural and educational interchange among nations, the over-all planning for this project did not spell out clearly how such a program might actually work. To put it bluntly and raise but one out of many possible issues: increasing information and knowledge about foreign peoples and their culture does not necessarily produce sympathetic views, as public opinion researcher Hadley Cantril pointed out a few years later in a confidential report prepared for Nelson Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs. Analyzing the attitudes of U.S. citizens towards Latin Americans, he found that the more information the respondents had about the nations south of the Rio Grande, the less sympathetic they were toward Latin Americans.²⁶

²³ For a brief portrayal of Lemmon's career and the WWBF see Forum and Century XCIX:6 (June 1938), pp. 321.

²⁴ Buxton, "John Marshall", p.149.

²⁵ Some of his findings were published in Philip L. Barbour, "Short-wave Broadcasting and Latin America," Bulletin of the Pan American Union (October 1937), pp. 739-750, where he gives an overview over the number, location, broadcasting capacity, and strength of short-wave stations in Latin America. In his report for the Rockefeller Foundation, he specifically outlines the situation of cultural and educational stations; see his Summary of Present Situation of Broadcasting in Latin America, June 17, 1937, RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3170.

²⁶ Analyzing the data of various opinion polls conducted in 1940, Cantril found: "It is very obvious that an increase in information about the countries of Latin America does not produce more flattering characterizations of the people in these countries. On the contrary, many adjectives which, in our culture, are definitely derogatory and unfavorable, are used much more frequently by well informed than by uninformed persons." Hadley Cantril, American Social Surveys, Inc., Confidential Report. What People of the United States Think and Know About Latin America and Latin Americans, January 18, 1941 (enclosure of),

Yet, while such issues were not explicitly raised, the design of the project shows that its producers and sponsors, most likely out of practical experience, were implicitly aware of at least some of its possible pitfalls. Thus, their selection of contents²⁷ was anything but random. They shunned topics pertaining to the realm of contemporary politics, a sphere that would have been difficult to navigate if the series aimed to cause sympathetic understanding.²⁸ The opening broadcast on October 15, 1937, featured Secretary of State Cordell Hull and Colón Eloy Alfaro, Ambassador of Ecuador and Vice-chairman of the Pan American Union, giving stately speeches about the value of the program for inter-American relations.²⁹ Thereafter, the series focused on the culture and the intellectual achievements of Latin America, some of the talks being country or author-specific, others dedicated to overarching treatments of the music and literature of the region. The series also included some subject matter of a more specifically Pan-American character, featuring, for instance, a presentation on the Inter-American Court of Justice, and concluding with a talk on the Pan American Union by its director, Leo S. Rowe.³⁰

Cultural topics, to be sure, could also, and easily, spin into unwanted directions. Hence, care had to be taken to select contributors who "would do a great deal to promote mutual understanding, if properly supervised", as a memorandum by Lemmon pointed out.³¹ Prominent among the contributors were Latin American diplomats based in Washington, who for one reason or another, had developed an interest or expertise in literature, art or music, and were eager to present their own achievements and national cultural heritage over the air. While these contributions could easily be gathered in Washington, a few others, mostly by Latin American academics and specialists in their field, were recorded in Havana and elsewhere for the program. A number of scholars in the United States also contributed to the program by giving talks on their subject of expertise, i.e., the music and literature of Latin America. Hence, although produced in the United States, the series was to feature (what Rowe called) "leaders of thought"³² from

NARA II, RG 59, Records of the Department of State Relating to Political Relations Between the United States and the other American Republics, 1940-1949, M1276, roll 20, 710.11/2686/enclosure.

²⁷ I was as yet unable to locate recordings or scripts of the series, yet hope to find more documentation on the project in the archives of the Pan American Union. For the meantime, this discussion is based on various contemporary press accounts and the pertaining correspondence and memoranda of the Rockefeller Foundation officials that, while incomplete, give evidence on the shape and contents of the series.

²⁸ Incidentally, when the Pan American radio idea was first discussed at the Montevideo Conference, the State Department initially contemplated to confine the programming to music. The recommendations voted by the Conference specified the contents to be broadcast as confined to music and addresses on the cultural and intellectual life of the American republics, see Fejes, Imperialism, p. 81-2.

²⁹ Further details about the inauguration in: Bulletin of the Pan American Union (December 1937), pp. 914-916.

³⁰ A short listing of the program titles is provided in an article ("La Universidad Nacional Fija Programa y Horario") published in "Panamá-América", located in: RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3171.

³¹ Memorandum Relative to a Projected Series of Educational and Cultural Radio-Broadcasts to Latin America, p. 5, RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3170

³² Letter Rowe to Marshall, February 28, 1938; RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Folder 3171.

all over the hemisphere and thus become, as a Foundation memorandum called it, "genuinely Pan-American in point of view."³³

As so often, music was considered a particularly propitious medium to further "mutual understanding", and the program's authors went into some effort to procure recordings of music from various parts of Latin America. Local recordings of typical tunes were hoped to make the programs more attractive and authentic.³⁴

The individual programs were produced mostly in Spanish,³⁵ hence reducing the possible audience to the Spanish speaking regions of the Americas. Future translations into English and other languages, however, were mentioned as a possibility to increase their regional appeal.

It was well understood that the series, broadcast over short wave, would reach a rather limited number of listeners. To overcome the limitations of short-wave broadcasting, the series was recorded by electrical transcriptions to be offered free of charge to selected stations in Latin America, usually non-commercial government or university-based stations with an interest in cultural programs. These transcription, moreover, were to be employed to reach audiences in the southern regions of South America. As most of the U.S. short-wave stations at the time, the signal strength of WWFB was too weak to be clearly audible much beyond the equator. The project, therefore, envisaged the use of transcriptions for the time being, contemplating the possibility of relay-agreements with a sufficiently powerful South American station for the future, i.e., once this type of programming would get off the ground.³⁶

At the same time, it was obvious that the subject matter and format of the Pan American series were not designed to reach mass audiences, but aimed at a small, educated elite.³⁷ Assuming that the cultural elite throughout Latin America had similar educational backgrounds, interests and tastes, the projects' advocates obviously hoped to be able to develop a type of transnational program that would appeal to small, yet highly influential audiences throughout the hemisphere.

³³ Resolved RF 27088, Pan American Union, Latin American Broadcasts, June 18, 1937, p. 2, RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3170.

³⁴ The advantage of local recordings over the use of U.S. orchestras to play Latin American tunes is explicitly discussed Lemmon's "Memorandum Relative to a Projected Series of Educational and Cultural Radio-Broadcasts to Latin America", RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3170, pp. 4-5.

³⁵ Except for No. 12, which featured a talk (in French) on Haiti by the Haitian Ambassador in Washington, E. Lescot as well as Haitian music, the programs were in Spanish. Originally, the production plan had also envisaged programs in Portuguese, but these failed to materialize. I have not been able as yet to identify the reasons for this.

³⁶ Letter Lemmon to Marshall, June 10, 1937; RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3170; The Americas on the Air, p. 12. RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3171.

³⁷ Interview JM with L. S. Rowe, Director of Pan American Union, July 22, 1938, RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200. Box 266, Folder 3171.

The Pan American Radio Project and the Rockefeller Foundation's Communications Program

Counting on the insights gained by Barbour's fieldwork, on the accumulated experience of the largest educational broadcaster in the United States, and on the institutional expertise and connections of the Pan American Union, the Rockefeller officials were rather optimistic about the prospects of Pan American broadcasting. In an memorandum on the possible merits of the project, they expressed that this project, once tested and dutifully revised after the initial experimental phase, would demonstrate how "broadcasting can become a medium of genuine cultural interchange for Latin America, and also between North and South America."³⁸ It was meant not only to serve an overarching goal of "international understanding" but also to induce an "upgrading" of radio broadcasting both at the local and the international level. At the local level, the use of transcriptions was expected to have, what an internal memorandum called "a demonstration effect". On the international level, the series was hoped to demonstrate the feasibility of inter-cultural radio and, particularly, impress the larger short-wave broadcasters. "Based as it is on a thorough knowledge of present conditions in South and Central America", the memorandum continued, this project should set "standards for such broadcasting in this country, at a time when the two principal chains [i.e., NBC and CBS] are initiating similar services."³⁹

At first sight, it seems somewhat bewildering that such high hopes were attached to a small, experimental series, funded by a grant of a mere \$12,800 (in today's terms, some \$166,500). In order to understand such optimistic assessments, it is necessary to view the project as part of a larger program, i.e., the Humanities Division communication program, and discuss some of the underlying assumptions and convictions that guided it.

There certainly was no blueprint available for philanthropic engagement in the mass communications sector, and the Humanities Division's funding praxis, by supporting a multitude of projects, both large and small, followed a rather experimental and somewhat scattered approach. While this multitude of projects still awaits a thorough analysis as to contents, objectives, and results, it seems fair to say that the Division's policy aimed to explore ways by which the channels of mass communication, both modern (radio, film) and more traditional (popular press, museums), could be enhanced in their ability to diffuse knowledge, culture, and international understanding among wide audiences. Assuming that there existed a considerable, albeit ineffective, demand for such contents that, by and large, was not being served by the media, the Humanities Division set out to explore a number of possible remedies. These included the funding of undertakings that immediately served to expand the cultural and educational supply available to the public (such as Lemmon's WWBF); the establishment of links between the media, universities and other centers of knowledge and culture (for instance, in order to have radio programs written and produced by scholars and broadcast over larger commercial

³⁸ Hot List – June 1, 1937. Humanities. Pan American Union. Pan American broadcasting, RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3170.

³⁹ Hot List – June 1, 1937. Humanities. Pan American Union. Pan American broadcasting, RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3170.

chains or smaller educational stations);⁴⁰ the interchange "throughout the world of constructive radio programs";⁴¹ experiments to test the usefulness of modern media for educational purposes (such as documentary films or radio programs for classroom use); or communication research as a tool to reveal the needs and demand structure of broad audiences. Once the preferences of an increasingly educated and culturally literate audience were revealed and the means to draw upon knowledge and culture as a source for mass consumption were in place, it was implicitly assumed, even the deftest of commercial media could be induced to invest less into, what John Marshall called, a "pathology of substitutes" and more into "genuine knowledge".⁴² Hence, the communications program, while not aiming at a wholesale restructuring of mass communications, aimed to induce processes toward an "upgrading" of the system that would eventually be self-sustaining and independent of the Foundation's aid.

An analysis of the Pan American Radio Project before this background may help to spell out some of the underlying assumptions and convictions that led the Foundation's officers to be optimistic about the project. Reviewing the current broadcasting situation in Latin America, a memorandum prepared by Lemmon and based on Barbour's field studies, pointed out to the "pathology of substitutes" to be found over there. A rapid expansion of radio broadcasting in Latin American was giving rise to some large and powerful stations. These however, were found to devote themselves exclusively to "endless tangos, sambas, and what-not, interrupted every two-and-a-half to three minutes by advertising". While not opposed to a transmission of cultural programs, these were unwilling or unable "to originate programs of such nature." The few stations found to produce "cultural programs of considerable interest" were largely owned by governments and universities operating with small, local transmitters and working in isolation from each other. Hence, Latin Americans had been left "woefully ignorant not only of what is being done culturally in the United States, but even of what is being done in the nearest Latin American republic."⁴³

The Pan American radio project went about to change this sorry state of affairs through essentially three steps: Firstly, by producing an appealing series; secondly, by demonstrating that there existed a real demand for cultural programming, as was to be measured, in this case, not so much by audience responses, which were difficult to come by, but by the reactions of local stations many of which, when previously interviewed by Barbour, seemed to have shown eagerness to cooperate; thirdly, by inducing a cooperative effort, by which programs produced in one country would be recorded and made available for broadcasting elsewhere, in both smaller and larger stations. Latin America was viewed as a sufficiently homogenous region in cultural and linguistic terms⁴⁴ to al-

⁴⁰ For example, the "Chicago Round Table" and other initiatives discussed in Buxton, "John Marshall"; Buxton, "Reaching Human Minds", and the Annual Foundation Reports.

⁴¹ RF Annual report 1935, p. 279, this quote refers to a grant for the WWBF.

⁴² As quoted in Gary, "Communication Research", p. 124, .

⁴³ This assumption was supposedly based on an interview with the Director of the Argentine-North American Institute of Culture in Buenos Aires, Argentina, see: Memorandum Relative to a Projected Series of Educational and Cultural Radio-Broadcasts to Latin America, p. 6; RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3170.

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 1.

low a buildup of transnational audiences for the type of programs involved. Hence, once the feasibility and the technicalities of the project could be demonstrated, local stations (including the larger U.S. networks) were expected to pick up the idea and start cooperating by interchanging programs. This cooperative effort, it was implicitly assumed, would lead to a self-sustaining process of cultural interchange that would serve the objectives of international understanding and of a general "upgrading" of radio broadcasting.

The Pan American Radio Project and National Security Concerns

When Philip Barbour toured Latin America in 1936 on a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship, "he found that the European programs came in with such power that they blanketed the ether."⁴⁵ Studies commissioned by U.S. federal agencies came to similar results. European programs, particularly those originating from Germany and Italy, seemed to "drown" the weak signals emanating from the United States.⁴⁶ Indeed, except for Liechtenstein, Monaco, and few other minor states, the Europeans had heavily invested into international broadcasting,⁴⁷ and short wave came to be viewed as a major weapon in the arsenal of foreign policy. Stirred by federal studies on European radio incursions into the hemisphere and by rather alarming press reports about (what seemed to be) highly sophisticated propaganda techniques employed by Nazi Germany, a number of federal regulators and politicians in Washington revived the idea of establishing a powerful short-wave station to be run by the federal government and directed at Latin America. Thus, in 1937-8, bills were introduced into both Houses of Congress to force the matter.

Neither of these bills would be signed into law. They met stiff resistance from the broadcasting industry, found insufficient support among the general public, and failed to get backing from the White House. Yet, they served to increase the pressure on private broadcasters to expand their services to Latin America. Fearing that the government, by entering the short-wave sector, might eventually interfere with both international and domestic broadcasting, the radio industry now signaled willingness to take programming to Latin America more seriously. Whereas previously their short-wave programs had consisted of little more than rebroadcasts of shows produced for the domestic market, they now set out to expand the number of programs designed specifically for audiences south of the Rio Grande although short-wave radio continued to be an unprofitable venture. New federal regulations, moreover, forced them to step up their transmission equipment to a signal-strength comparable with European competitors.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ The Americas on the Air, p. 9. RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3171.

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Report of International Short-Wave Broadcasting Reception in Latin America, Washington: GPO, October 1937

⁴⁷ For an overview over the expansion of short-wave transmission facilities in the 1930s see Boehlke, Die Macht des Radios, pp. 28-70

⁴⁸ For a comprehensive discussion see Michael B. Salwen, "Broadcasting to Latin America: Reconciling Industry-Government Functions in the Pre-Voice of America Era," Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television 17:1 (1997), pp. 67-89; Fejes, Radio Imperialism, pp. 63-114.

Not surprisingly, when the Pan American Radio series went onto the air in autumn 1937, it was widely viewed as part of the U.S. response to challenges posed by international competitors. "Highly tooted as expressions of good will toward Latin America," reported Newsweek in November 1937, these broadcasts "actually mark the entrance of the U.S. into competition with Japan, Britain, Italy, and Germany, all of which send short-wave propaganda well baited with entertainment."⁴⁹

Walter Lemmon himself was quick to present the series (and other programs) in this light. According to the Washington Post, in early 1938 he proclaimed that his station might serve very much the same objectives as the proposed government station, "without any cost to the taxpayer" and avoiding the political risks that a government-owned radio station would involve. Referring to the Pan American series on the air, he pronounced it to be successful in showing that "radio can become a great force in binding closer together the peoples of this hemisphere and even of the world." And he continued to profess a special concern for creating goodwill in the "smaller Central American states [...] since they will make good buffer states for this country in case of war."⁵⁰

Such utterances, of course, have to be interpreted in the context of a public confrontation between broadcasters and the advocates of a government station. They should therefore not carry too much weight in an inquiry into the origins of the Pan American Radio project. Yet, it seems that national security concerns were indeed present and not just tooted in public to ward off a government incursion into broadcasting. Internal memoranda and papers on the project equally show evidence of a growing uneasiness about the "increasing intensity in the bombardment of propaganda," in the United States and in Latin America, of "German, Italian, Russian, or other foreign origins."⁵¹

On a more fundamental level, we may assume that foreign policy objectives could hardly have been absent in a radio project proposed and guided by Leo Rowe and the Pan American Union. Without being a simple tool of control for Washington, the Pan American Union was one of the instruments in place to exercise what Joseph S. Nye and Robert O. Keohane have called "soft power", i.e., "the ability to achieve desired outcomes in international affairs through attraction rather than coercion."⁵² Acceptance abroad of U.S. leadership could obviously be sought by different means, and Rowe had consistently argued in favor of "cultural exchange" and "mutual understanding" as means to create "goodwill" and maintain U.S. influence.⁵³ During the 1930s, a less coer-

⁴⁹ Newsweek, November 29, 1937

⁵⁰ The Washington Post, January 9, 1938, pp. B1, 7.

⁵¹ These quotes were taken from a short interim report from the Rockefeller Foundation titled "The Americas on the Air", from early 1938, p. 9. RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3171.

⁵² Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, "Power and Interdependence in the Information Age", in *Foreign Affairs* 77:5 (September/October 1998), pp. 81-94, p. 85.

⁵³ For a discussion of the PAU's activities under Rowe see Robert David Johnson, "The Politization of Cultural Diplomacy: Inter-American Relations between the World Wars", in The Cultural Turn. Essays in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations, ed. Frank A. Ninkovich and Liping Bu, Chicago: Imprint, 2001, pp. 131-155, particularly pp. 139-148. During the war, the PAU would receive funding from Rockefeller's OIAA for a number of cultural projects, including Inter-American radio programming and essay contests.

cive exercise in power politics came to the forefront under the Good Neighbor policies,⁵⁴ and in a discussion with Rockefeller officials on the possible merits of the Pan American Radio project, Rowe implicitly placed the project into the context of U.S. foreign policy and the Good Neighbor. According to a memorandum of conversation, he expected this project to help "provide a broad popular base for the present excellent inter-governmental relations." Except for Mexico, Rowe explained, the relations between the United States and the governments of Central and South America had taken a very positive term, yet because of the "lack of knowledge on the part of the general population of the Latin American states [...] these good governmental relations have as yet little popular support."⁵⁵ Such popular support, we may add, must have been deemed advisable if the hemisphere was to be effectively insulated against propagandistic intrusions from the outside.

In a guarded manner, an intermediate report of the Rockefeller Foundation on the radio project raised a related point. Contrasting the radio series currently on the air as a kind of antithesis to crude propagandistic maneuvers of other powers, the report maintained that this was "no conscious effort to beat the big drum for any special interest. The whole purpose and technique of the broadcasts are directed to the end of making the peoples of the Americas more aware of their common interests, better acquainted with the history, the music, the drama, the literature, and the other arts, institutions, and cultural achievements of our Western nations."⁵⁶ This set of ideas, indeed, sounds very much like one of the standard themes of American propaganda during the war, when Nelson Rockefeller's OIAA was beating a truly "big drum" to ponder the common history, destiny, and interest of the nations of the Western hemisphere, in a very "conscious" effort to forge a united front against the Axis.⁵⁷

Yet, in comparison to the massive and, at times, blunt exercise of radio propaganda later on by the OIAA,⁵⁸ the actual design of the Pan American series seems to have been

⁵⁴ This is not the place to engage in a discussion of such a complex issue as the Good Neighbor policy; for a general treatment of the matter see David Green, The Containment of Latin America. A History of the Myths and Realities of the Good Neighbor Policy, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971; Frederick B. Pike, FDR's Good Neighbor Policy: Sixty Years of Generally Gentle Chaos, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995; Irwin F. Gellman, Good Neighbor Diplomacy. United States Policies in Latin America, 1933-1945, Baltimore and London: The Johns-Hopkins UP, 1979. Although his treatment of some of the issues involved appear outdated today, Green's insistence on treating the Good Neighbor policies as a form of power politics remains valid.

⁵⁵ Interview JM with L. S. Rowe, Director of Pan American Union, July 22, 1938, RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200. Box 266, Folder 3171.

⁵⁶ "The Americas on the Air", p. 9-10. RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3171.

⁵⁷ Some analysts, based on a partial reviewing of the documentation available at the Roosevelt presidential archives, have concluded that U.S. radio programming during the war remained a rather weak endeavor, see Michael Fortmann and David G. Haglund, "Public Policy and Dirty Tricks: Two Faces of United States 'Informal Penetration' of Latin America on the Eve of World War II," Diplomacy and Statecraft 6:2 (1995), pp. 536-577. Yet, even a superficial viewing of the pertaining record group (National Archives II, RG 229) would have shown otherwise. A comprehensive analysis of the truly massive propaganda offensive in Latin America during World War II is still lacking; for a discussion of radio propaganda in Mexico see José Luis Ortiz Garza, La guerra de las hondas, Mexico: Planeta, 1992.

⁵⁸ For a rather sarcastic description of the blunt propaganda which pervaded some of the radio programming during the war see Hernane Tavares de Sá, The Brazilians. People of Tomorrow, New York: John

grounded in a rather internationalist creed. The internationalist response to growing national security concerns was trying to create "goodwill" south of the Rio Grande by expanding educational and cultural cooperation and by following a rather multilateral approach to the interchange of ideas, as exemplified by the exchange of radio programs envisioned by the project.

Not surprisingly, this approach did therefore not satisfy all contemporary observers. Among the reactions to the program, we may discern a preview of the more visible conflicts arising during the war when internationalists and their critiques exposed highly divergent views on how to approach Latin America in order to gain general goodwill and effective cooperation.⁵⁹ Whereas some observers praised the Pan American radio project for not following the line of blatant propaganda supposedly employed by Europeans,⁶⁰ others were left unconvinced. For the latter, radio shows featuring, for instance, the Mexican ambassador and poet, Dr. Francisco Castillo Nájera, reading from his own works and, with a musical background consisting of "corridos", discussing Mexican poetry,⁶¹ did simply not seem the most propitious approach to garner goodwill for the United States. Thus, Newsweek, while crediting foreign broadcastings to Latin America as propaganda "well baited with entertainment", lambasted the Pan American Series as "containing mere expressions of international friendship" and thus "amateurish compared to the carefully planned German propaganda programs."⁶²

Epilogue: the Results

As mentioned earlier, the Pan American Radio project was an experiment designed to "determine the type of radio best suited for promoting better understanding and closer relations between the twenty-one republics of the western hemisphere." It was hoped to induce far-reaching effects with respect not only to Inter-American relations, but also to the quality of radio broadcasting in the Americas. The project was to work in essentially three steps. Firstly, by producing an appealing series; secondly, by demonstrating that there existed a real demand for cultural programming, as measured by the response of local stations; thirdly, by inducing a cooperative effort, by which programs produced in one country would be recorded and made available for broadcasting elsewhere.

To evaluate the experiment, however, turned out to be more difficult than expected. In effect, for none of the three steps mentioned, the project's accomplishments were clear. The program's appeal among audiences was difficult to gauge, since listener responses were difficult to come by, thus precluding any serious analysis of the reactions it pro-

Day, 1947, pp. 229-235. At the same time, it should be noted that some of the programs produced on behalf of the OIAA were rather creative and found considerable audiences.

⁵⁹ For a discussion of the internationalist agenda in the Cultural Division of the Department of State, in contrast to Rockefeller's OIAA see Frank A. Ninkovich, The Diplomacy of Ideas. U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938-1950, Cambridge: CUP, 1981.

⁶⁰ See, for instance, The Washington Post, January 9, 1938, P. B1.

⁶¹ This was one of the earliest broadcasts in the Pan American series; for further details see: The Americas on the Air, RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3171.

⁶² Newsweek, November 29, 1937.

duced. Yet, due to World Wide's somewhat sloppy handling of this phase of the project, even the station's responses proved to be difficult to evaluate. With some prodding of the Rockefeller Foundation, the World Wide in 1940 at last ascertained to which stations the electrical recordings had been sent, but it remained unclear how often and how these had actually been used.⁶³ What seemed obvious, nonetheless, was that local stations had not reacted with much fervor to "advice and suggestion from the United States".⁶⁴ The precise reasons for this lack of enthusiasm were impossible to determine.

Was it simply that Lemmon's World Wide lacked the necessary organizational capacity to run an experiment on this scale, as was suggested by Barbour who left the station rather disgruntled soon after the experiment was concluded?⁶⁵ Was it that the subject matter of the series, as Rowe seems to have suggested afterwards, "lacked in interest"?⁶⁶ Did this program and others broadcast by Lemmon's "University of the Air" fail to elicit enthusiastic responses south of the Rio Grande for being "almost painfully intellectual and patronizing", as a contemporary analyst suggests?⁶⁷ Whatever the reasons were, the failure of the experiment to deliver tangible results came as a clear disappointment to the Rockefeller officers. Not surprisingly, when Rowe applied for funding for a similar radio project in November 1938, he was turned down.⁶⁸

What did become clear during the course of the experiment, was – as Rowe summed up the situation – that none of the established international broadcasters "can do the job alone". In order to establish a service "comparable to what other countries now are offering", they would have to coordinate their programming among themselves, as John Marshall suggested.⁶⁹ Albeit, it would take a government agency, Nelson Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs to coordinate U.S. broadcasting to Latin America. By 1940, national security concerns were certainly outweighing any concerns for the use of radio as a medium to spread culture and knowledge. True, even under the pressure of war, the OIAA's programming did not completely lose sight of radio as a means to educate

⁶³ Letter Lemmon to Manger, April 9, 1940, RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3171.

⁶⁴ As had been suggested in Barbour's report on the findings of his trip to the Rockefeller Foundation, Summary of Present Situation of Broadcasting in Latin America, June 17, 1937 (Philip Barbour), RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3170.

⁶⁵ Interviews IAL; Mr. Philip Barbour, November 3, 1938; RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3171. Barbour's complaints should not be easily dismissed as that of a disgruntled employee. Thus, Robert Sherwood, the director of the Foreign Information Service complained that the station's were conducted in a "weird and sloppy manner" (as quoted in Salwen, "Broadcasting to Latin America", p. 77).

⁶⁶ Interview JM with L. S. Rowe, Director of Pan American Union, July 22, 1938, RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3171.

⁶⁷ Beth Arlene Roberts, "United States Propaganda Warfare in Latin America," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Southern California, 1943, p. 382.

⁶⁸ Letter Rowe to Leonard, November 21, 1938; Letter Marshall to Rowe, March 17, 1939; RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3171.

⁶⁹ Interview JM with L. S. Rowe, Director of Pan American Union, July 22, 1938, RAC, RF, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 266, Folder 3171.

and to enlighten,⁷⁰ but culture and education were now clearly subservient to national security objectives.

⁷⁰ Such as English lessons by radio, produced on behalf of the OIAA in various countries. But some of the general entertainment series contained, to some degree, educational subject matter, as did one of the rather successful programs produced for Argentina ("Amigos Inolvidables"). Booklets produced to sponsor such programs among wide audiences, in some countries gained access into schools and other institutions of learning.