

therefore, but the power of their message remains undiluted in Kellner's assertive analysis. One factor he could not have anticipated is that two mainstream political thrillers (one of them, ironically enough, with Mel Gibson) subsequently emerged in the post-Bush era, both of them adapted from British television, and have possibly done more to underline the surreptitious and devious nature of Bush's America than some of the other prominent movies he mentions. Both *State of Play* and *Edge of Darkness* mixed political, economic, cultural and authoritarian ideologies into a noxious mix of deceit, unaccountable power and the politics of exploitation, and they are a significant coda to the venomous attacks here.

Kellner's book came too early for an account of these movies, but that does not detract from the powerful critiques on offer. His position is never less than emblazoned in bold letters, but it does not mean that his assessment of, for example, Moore's filmmaking, 9/11 movies, and new political biographies is not couched in anything other than analytical and observant tones that tease out illuminated meanings with each scene and sentence. Kellner's provocative style might not always appear to sit easily with the reader, and this book more than his others sometimes tries to bridge a dangerous ravine between Moore-like polemical accusations and, shall we say, a somewhat more crafted academic style. But that does not detract from the fact that *Cinema Wars* is provocative and infectious film history and it deserves a wide readership in an important political era.

University of Manchester

IAN SCOTT

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Steve Craig, *Out of the Dark: A History of Radio and Rural America* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009, \$42.00). Pp. xxvi + 228. ISBN 978 0 8173 1663 1.

Steve Craig's *Out of the Dark* is, as its subtitle says, a history of radio and rural America. While the narrative reaches to the present day, the book's focus is on the years before World War II. Since then, Craig argues, the changes in rural life and rural broadcasting have been so dramatic that their "distinctive nature has all but disappeared."

This is mostly a story of consumption, not production. A great proportion of the programming received by rural listeners in prewar years came from high-powered stations in distant cities and from regional affiliates of national networks, not from local programs on local stations. The reasons for that pattern lie in decisions made in Washington, DC, which Craig does a reasonably capable job of outlining, albeit with some curious omissions.

Thus Craig has a good discussion of the four radio conferences called by Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover in the 1920s, in which industry leaders pushed for rules that would favor a centralized commercial broadcasting system. But Craig's account of how the Radio Act of 1927 came to be is brief, and it takes the rationale for the new law at face value; he neglects Thomas Hazlett's scholarship suggesting that the legislation was both unnecessary and innately skewed toward the biggest and most politically powerful broadcasters. Craig does note that the new

Federal Radio Commission's spectrum allocation plan favored commercial operations with a large coverage area over "the smaller 'public' stations run by land grant colleges and other educational institutions, nearly all of which were relegated to part-time operation."

This on-again, off-again attention to the political economy of broadcasting continues throughout the book, which pays close attention to some aspects of the story – for example, the regulatory machinations of stations with clear channel assignments – while neglecting others. The oddest omission arrives when Craig attempts to explain why FM radio was slow to take off. He mentions "increasing competition, high construction costs, and the relatively small number of listeners who owned FM receivers," but he does not allude to the barriers that the Federal Communications Commission put in FM's way, which included a frequency re-assignment that rendered every expensive FM receiver obsolete overnight.

Where the book shines is in describing the content of the broadcasts and the ways they were received by rural listeners. In successive chapters, Craig offers detailed accounts of everything from soap operas to farm reports to religious broadcasts. There are occasional odd digressions that seem out of place, such as a two-page aside on the anti-Semitic priest Charles Coughlin. (As Craig acknowledges, Coughlin's "strongest support was among urban, working-class Catholics, and it is unclear exactly how popular he was among rural listeners, most of whom were Protestant." So why is he here?) Nonetheless, this is a useful portrait of radio broadcasting in the American countryside. By the book's end, readers have a strong sense of how those broadcasts helped to draw distant listeners into a national community – and how that community, in turn, was shaped by rural tastes.

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JESSE WALKER

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Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault (eds.), *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500–1830* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2009, \$59.95). Pp. 622. ISBN 978 0 674 0 3276 7.

Atlantic history has established itself, somewhat surprisingly for those of us who practised it before it became popular, as an especially dynamic subfield within early modern history. One reason for its seeming inexorable rise as the default frame of reference for early modern American historians is its cosmopolitan promise. I see Atlantic history as a conversation whereby scholars in related historical fields can share ideas and, most importantly, can resist falling into parochialism. It is only by avoiding parochialism, I believe, that the history of early America can continue to be made relevant. Here I follow the lead of Jack Greene, one of the most important promoters of an Atlantic perspective. Even more so, I follow the example of Bernard Bailyn, who has used his institutional clout as a long-time professor at Harvard and, more importantly, his remarkable historical vision and intellectual perspicacity to put forward a cosmopolitan, expansive view of the history of the early modern world.