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**Scott A. Morton, *The Sirens of Wartime Radio and How the American Print Media Presented Them*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020, 202 pp., \$95.00 (hardcover).** Reviewed by Elisabeth Fondren, St. John's University ([fondrene@stjohns.edu](mailto:fondrene@stjohns.edu))

"Don't you wish you were back in 1941—maybe sitting on your girl's front porch?" the propaganda anchor Tokyo Rose asked, tenderly, in her radio show that targeted U.S. troops fighting in the South Pacific. (43) During World War II, belligerent nations embraced psychological propaganda—via modern mass media—to charm, demoralize, and manipulate their enemies. Most Nazi and Axis powers broadcasts aimed at Allied soldiers in Europe and the Pacific followed a similar formula: They included a female presenter with a sultry voice, English-language "news," and sentimental stories about soldiers' sweethearts, their mothers, and their civilian lives back home (underscored by popular American music), as well as Axis-spun lies, rumors, and straight-up disinformation about fleet and infantry movements. U.S. servicemen, ironically, loved listening to these nightly shows, which to them were a form of entertainment and escapism from the brunt of war.

In *The Sirens of Wartime Radio and How the American Print Media Presented Them*, Morton provides an in-depth analysis of how and why radio programs starring female presenters were used as an innovative propaganda strategy in the mid-20th century. His book (relying on a systematic analysis of more than 1,200 newspaper and magazine articles) chronicles how U.S. print journalists hyped, mocked, and scrutinized these infamous radio shows. The American press, as Morton shows, created and amplified the frenzy around these female propagandists by portraying them as sexualized objects through the femmes fatales trope; trying to uncover their elusive pasts or identities; accusing these women of cooing to and charming U.S. military men; or framing them as political traitors.

The book's goal, as the author states in the introduction, is to explore the evolution of press

coverage about female enemy radio propagandists and their complicated legacies in popular culture from the period of World War II, through subsequent wars in Korea and Vietnam, and to the present. These five 'sirens,' nicknamed Tokyo Rose, Axis Sally Rome, Axis Sally Berlin, Seoul City Sue, and Hanoi Hannah, Morton argues compellingly, were powerful agents and are remembered more than their male counterparts, many of whom are largely forgotten. These 'sirens' held influential positions in broadcasting and, deliberately, evoked sensuality and eroticism on air, which conflicted with traditional gender roles in the 1940s and 1950s. Much of the propaganda anxieties around these women, Morton contends, stemmed from the male fear of losing control. Moreover, enemy female propagandists were a novelty, which aided to their mythologization on the American home front, and the press' narratives and storylines (ranging from media's fascination to aversion) shaped American cultural memory. In the post-war years, the trials of Iva Toguri D'Aquino (Tokyo Rose) and Mildred Gillars (Axis Sally), who were prosecuted for treason, became a media spectacle.

In eight chapters, the book discovers how the sensational discussion, interviews with soldiers, cartoons, and visuals in the national print media constructed the images and subsequent misrepresentations that continue to define these figures' characters. While there are cross-comparisons among the women, the analysis is organized in separate chapters featuring each propagandist's biographical background, her work as a radio announcer, how she was framed in U.S. print media, and her legacy in popular culture.

Some parts of the book stand out. For instance, Morton describes how in the late 1960s-1970s Hanoi Hannah's (Trinh Thi Ngo) broadcasts were more

political than the shows of her predecessors. This Vietnamese propagandist targeted U.S. troops and tried to weaken their morale by referencing the social and civil unrests in the U.S. Consequently, American military authorities—worried about growing anti-Vietnam War movement at home—closely monitored her intellectual arguments. In another chapter, Morton describes the 1949 trial of Mildred Gillars (Axis Sally), who was an American broadcaster working for Nazi-controlled German State Radio from 1940-1945. In this section the reader follows the evolution of Gillars' shows as scripted by Joseph Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry; her early programs were intended to keep the U.S. out of the war, and later she called on American troops to surrender to Germany. And finally, the conclusion provides an interesting outlook about digital mass persuasion strategies and how disinformation campaigns continue to shape the global info-sphere.

Since this is a book about how U.S. newspapers and magazines largely imagined these women propagandists, readers would have perhaps benefited from illustrations, such as cartoons, magazine clippings, or copies of surviving radio transcripts. Another aspect that could have been explored more

fully is the history of how U.S. government officials tried, unsuccessfully, to counter these wartime narratives and how they used radio programs to increase patriotic fervor among their own troops.

This book provides the first case study that analyzes and compares the various press portrayals of 20th century female radio propagandists. Since most Americans did not listen to these enemy short-wave radio broadcasts themselves but only knew about the infamous broadcasters from print stories, American journalists and editors—through their agenda building function—shaped public discourse and public opinion about these wartime 'sirens.' Morton's book methodically weaves together extensive primary sources and new insights with the history of World War II and subsequent wars, the role of radio broadcasting during wartime, and the gendered portrayal of women in the national press. Morton's book is an important addition to the historiography on media, war, and propaganda, and the chapters may be assigned as stand-alone essays. Overall, it is insightful for scholars and graduate level courses studying the interplay between radio as a propaganda weapon, press coverage and public opinion, and women's role in mass persuasion campaigns.