

## Slide 1

Hello, and welcome to the defense of my digital dissertation project, entitled *Underground and Over the Air: Radio Liberty, Russian Dissidence, and the Cultivation of a Listening Public*. To establish the context of my subject, let me offer a bit of background on Radio Liberty. In 1948, partly as an extension of the Truman Doctrine, George Kennan advocated for the creation of a permanent covert operations office within the federal government. Thus was established the Central Intelligence Agency, whose mandate included so-called gray-ops propaganda initiatives targeting the nations behind the Iron Curtain (and all communist regimes, really). Among the activities sponsored by this new agency was a slate of surrogate radio broadcasting, which would differ from the already existing Voice of America (whose pro-American propagandistic intent was perfectly clear) by acting more as a local station, broadcasting local and international news into areas where the state news media was heavily censored. The first of these stations was Radio Free Europe, founded in 1950, which employed native speaking emigres to target the subject nations of Eastern Europe in their home languages, such as Polish, Czech, and Hungarian. Based on the success of RFE, the CIA decided in 1953 to establish a new station, which would broadcast directly to the Soviet Union, primarily in Russian, but eventually in 17 other languages of the Soviet republics. Like RFE, the fledgling Radio Liberation, as it was called at the time, employed emigres as broadcasters and programmers, but its existence was a much more direct challenge to the sovereignty of the USSR. Coincidentally, it began broadcasting just days before the death of Stalin, and buoyed by this dramatic change in leadership, the station began to build a relationship with its listeners that would prove the key to its success.

## Slide 2

My examination of Radio Liberty as a historical subject was guided by 4 primary research questions:

- First – How did the station envision its listeners? Who did they imagine sitting at the radio receiver in the target area?
- What did they reasonably hope to gain from this endeavor? Were they actively pursuing regime change, or did they expect to invest in the long game, only subtly affecting hearts and minds?
- What was the role of Radio Liberty in domestic politics? They were arguably much better known in their target listening areas than they ever were in the US, yet their perception among American lawmakers was crucial to their survival.
- And how did the station respond to changing developments at home and abroad? Both local and world events informed the topic and tone of broadcasts.

And finally, as I began answering these questions and my project became more interdisciplinary, I began to question whether the presentation of this research would best be served by a traditional monograph, or by a digital publication platform. I asked What type of resource will best serve future scholars?

## Slide 3

The project I then developed can be defined as:

“A curated collection of primary source material related to the construction of a mediated relationship between the station and its listeners.”

With this definition in mind, the project grew along two intertwined paths.

- First, I created a digital resource, which would consist of a searchable database of primary sources in the form of images of letters sent to the station, and selected radio broadcasts. Within the digital resource, I then created interactive maps based on the origin points of those letters, a timeline of the letters and broadcasts included in the project, and the possibility to create visualizations based on thematic tags.
- The second path then employed that collection of resources to draft an analytical document, much like a traditional historical essay. This document is published within the digital resource, and consists of a Preface on the importance of jamming as both technology and sociology across the history of Radio Liberty, and 3 content chapters:
  - o The first, entitled Black and White and Red and Gray is a historical essay on the station's founding and its ideological underpinnings in Enlightenment philosophy
  - o The second, entitled Collective Farm Drivers also Like the Beatles, Is a close reading and listening of the relationship built directly with listeners and its basis in literature.
  - o The third, entitled Contemptuous of Eagles, explores the role of celebrity in Radio Liberty's perceived influence at home and abroad, and how the station's understanding of celebrity was informed by western attitudes.

#### Slide 4

The two prongs of my project necessitated two sets of methodologies:

- The analytical frameworks for the content chapters are interdisciplinary, comprising Media and Sound studies, particularly the work of Stuart Hall, Kate Lacey, and Jonathan Sterne; The concepts of Publics and Communities first described by Habermas and Anderson, but through the lens of Ann Komaromi and Stephen Lovell in Slavic, and Nancy Fraser in Political Science and critical theory; and through Audience and Participatory culture, again through Hall's description of interpreting mediated code, and Henry Jenkins's work
- My approach of close reading and listening focused on 344 letters and post cards written to Radio Liberty between the years 1961-1972 and currently housed in the RFE/RL archives at the Hoover Institution; and on the digitized radio broadcasts of Radio Liberty's Russian Service available through the Open Society Archives at Central European University
- The digital tools I employed began with my selection of Scalar as the publication platform. Scalar facilitates the integration of text with media, and while it was originally developed for visual media, I felt it could be adapted for use with audio media as well; I used the free version of ArcGIS online to build the maps in the project, and the Timeline JS tool developed at Northwestern primarily for journalistic applications, but this, too, can be adapted to scholarship. And finally, I used Google sheets to build the csv files that underlay the maps and timeline, and created both thematic and geo-tags for each letter

#### Slide 5

The over-arching question behind this project is, not surprisingly, Why Digital? A so-called analog piece of scholarship as a traditional monograph could certainly contribute to the historical field. Going back to my original research questions, however, I feel strongly that a digital tool will provide a more immersive experience for users, and will be able to grow and adapt for future scholars. A digital platform allows for the integration of text with media on the same page, a particular benefit when working with both images and audio files as primary sources. Such an environment also affords the user both linear and non-linear engagement experiences, and multiple engagement points, to focus on the parts of the project most relevant to them. And most importantly, a resource such as this one is expandable, responsive, and discursive. It does not have to continue to live in the format that will be archived today, but can grow and change in response to readers/users.

Now is a good time to jump to the live site for a quick look at its functionality and potential.

Jump to Live Site

We begin with the title or “splash” page, where you can find the Table of Contents in the upper left corner. This is a persistent element on every page, so a user may jump to another part of the project at any time. The next persistent element is the compass icon, which allows a user to generate visualizations. These can take some time to load, so I will show a couple of examples later in the presentation. And the last most useful persistent element is the search bar, allowing a user to search for specific items or terms.

Let’s enter through the Introduction, where you can see that at the bottom of the first page in a path are links to all pages within that path. You may follow them in order, or move back and forth.

How to Use this Resource explains basic navigation, and from there you may enter the analytical content, beginning with the Preface on Jamming. You will notice there are forward and back buttons in the left and right margins for further navigation. This page demonstrates the integration of both sound and image (in expandable PDFs) as evidence for the text.

Finally, we can visit the Map Collection and the Timeline, which can serve as entry points, or as incidental features in the project.

The Map Collection consists of 3 geographic visualizations, two of which are interactive. First, and most importantly, is the interactive map of listener mail. The user may zoom in or out for greater or less detail, and may even select a different background depending on their own visual needs. Selecting a pin will open a window with information about the letter or letters tagged to that coordinate. If there is more than one letter from that location, you may page through them. You may expand this window for easier reading of the linked information, and the original source may be opened by selecting “More Info.”

The second map is a heat map visualization of the relative frequency of mail from certain regions. It was useful in narrowing down some possible conclusions about the listening audience, since it indicates three main regions of higher frequency, around Moscow, in the tri-country border region of Poland, the former Czechoslovakia, and East Germany, and in Ukraine.

The final map opens in a new window, and provides a slider visualization that allows the user to compare relative frequency of total listener mail with that mail that evinced a hostile attitude toward the station. The map on the left displays all mail, and the map on the right displays hostile mail. Here, too, we can see a marked prevalence in a specific area of Eastern Ukraine, which resonates with the political situation in the region today.

Finally, we can return to the Timeline, which organizes both letters and broadcasts in a linear, chronological format, but allows the user to select any entry to view or listen to the associated media page.

#### Slide 6

Here I will give you a quick example of the self-generated visualizations possible from the visualizations tab on the menu bar. This depicts a networked relationship centering on the thematic tag of "jamming," with connections to letters that reference jamming or reception quality. Letters to the left are "hostile" and letters to the right are "friendly."

#### Slide 7

The Jamming tag may also be visualized as an index, with links to all other content to which it is connected. Hovering over the links displays the title, and the user may select any of them to view the associated page.

#### Slide 8

Employing the resource that I built, my research led to the following conclusions:

- Radio Liberty (and its American governmental founders) envisioned an audience that was both inherently inclined to support the message they wanted to convey, and yet susceptible to conversion
- Participation in community practice, particularly through literature, fosters a sense of relationship
- The most meaningful "dissidence" was the "kramola" of day-to-day frustrations, because the relationship that the station had built based on these frustrations set the stage for the later large-scale, organized samizdat and human rights movements
- Cultural "celebrity," whether literary or scientific, plays two roles, one to western policy makers, and another to dissidents, who turn a more critical eye toward the "use" of major public figures

Thank you!

The site is currently password protected – please contact me for access at the following email address: [jkaybrandt@gmail.com](mailto:jkaybrandt@gmail.com)