2005 Issue No. 10 — Media Communities

A Curious Case of American Exceptionalism: Ideology, Policy and Practice in American, Australian and Canadian Community Radio

By *Charles Fairchild*

Introduction

It is often at times of greatest crisis, when the values and ideals of an organisation are most under threat, that they can also become most clear. Such a paradox was apparent in the streets of Berkeley , California in 1999, when a large crowd of people gathered for a protest outside the offices and studios of KPFA-FM. They were there to save what they thought of as 'their' radio station. They were protesting a long series of acts committed by people they saw as outside usurpers, acts which had transformed their open and idealistic radio station into a tightly controlled corporate office, or so the story went (Everest) [1]. The demonstration came at the height of a dispute lasting nearly a decade. It left the Pacifica Foundation with a tremendous amount of debt and had to be resolved through a series of legal challenges to the structure and definition of the Foundation itself (*Settlement Agreement*; Fleming). The entire affair was a spectacular failure of community politics and has been deeply damaging to many involved; the worst part was that it never really had to happen at all. While this may seem like the worst kind of remark, several simple factors in the analysis that follows below make this point very clearly. As will become clear, deep-seated structural and practical problems within the larger sphere of community radio in the United States played a significant role in the Pacifica debacle, problems that have either been solved or avoided in other countries. In what follows, I will show how careful application of some very basic elements of public policy, ideology and actual practice can help to stabilise and expand community radio in the United States , and help others learn from the exceptional, and sometimes exceptionally awful, American experience.

There are several crucial aspects of the extended struggle over the five stations in the Pacifica network that highlight the problems in American community radio. First, while the conflict was primarily fought over extensive changes to programming and the way these stations were run, this conflict was not fought out in any formal policy arena. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the American broadcast regulator, was only tangentially involved in the conflict as it was not, as remarkable as it may seem, a struggle over the conditions of license. The formal mechanism by which the Pacifica stations exist, their broadcast licenses, were not technically part of the problem. Therefore parties to this conflict could not appeal to an impartial mediator and no implicit authority respected by all parties could exert any consequential power to resolve this dispute. Second, since any possible resolution to this conflict would have to be reached through an essentially political settlement, the institutional memory of the oldest community radio stations in the United States was marginalised and could not be invoked in any formal way. That is to say, the conflict turned on expressions of political power not informed questions of principle, lived history, or actual practice. To a significant extent it did not matter what Pacifica 's participants had been doing at their stations nor did it matter how long they had been doing it. Any actual definition of community radio as it was practiced was sidelined. Finally,

since no specific and binding definition of Pacifica 's version of community radio existed, those who were imposing change on a largely resistant body of participants had free reign [2]. With no formal mechanism to invoke and codify either change or resistance, conflict was inevitable.

Unfortunately, the conflict at Pacifica was not an isolated event. While it was a more extreme contest, similar fights had occurred at many community radio stations across the U.S. throughout the 1990s (Adelson; Alarik; Morris; Jacobson). The goal of this analysis is not to rehash past conflicts, but to understand their origins and causes. These causes are at the root of troubles facing community radio in the U.S. which at one time made it a threatened and shrinking sector of broadcasting at the exact historical moment when community radio around the world was expanding at unprecedented rates, crucially, in countries such as Australian and Canada, countries more broadly similar to the U.S. than most [3]. There are three core causes of the continuing instability: the ideological environment of broadcasting in the U.S. , the lack of well-developed, effective and consequential policy governing community radio and the ways in which most community stations in the U.S. are run and funded. While each of these causes is intertwined with the others, I will try to take each in turn in order to tease out their consequences and implications. Further, I will compare how these same three issues have been dealt with in Canada and Australia with a view towards providing comparatively positive alternatives to the seemingly endemic conflicts found in the U.S.

A particular danger in comparing community radio between countries lies in obscuring important differences between larger surrounding social systems that may account for various successes and failures, or conflating particularly visible similarities into a more general definition of the form assumed to be more broadly applicable that it might actually be. I will attempt to avoid these difficulties by adopting only a general definition of community radio which I have explored at length elsewhere. While a variety of new works on alternative media have produced a series of valuable and important definitions and reconceptualisations of many forms of alternative media (Atton 28-30; Rodriguez 190; Downing 69-72), I remain unconvinced that community radio can or should be defined in the specific terms offered. Normative definitions of alternative, radical, citizens' or simply, community media run the risk of imagining institutions founded on exclusions based on political affiliation, ideology, geography, or specific models of what counts as citizenship and civic participation. As I have argued elsewhere, community radio stations often succeed particularly well when they act as what Liora Salter presciently called a fulcrum, balanced, perhaps precariously, between the multiple interests, issues, participants, listeners and publics they exist to animate (Salter 114). In this way, these organisations do not implicitly exclude anyone. The boundaries of community or participation are not cordoned in advance, but only as a consequence of the actual practices of particular institutions. By definition, these boundaries cannot be established by fiat, but more likely by consensus; this is of course the whole point [4] (Fairchild *Community Radio* 98-106).

Ideology and Policy

Community radio has never been a legally defined and distinct broadcasting sector in the U.S. It is still mostly governed only by familiar, vague ideas of what community radio should be; these ideas are not legally binding. From the standpoint of regulators, it is considered part of the public radio system. The peak administrative and funding body for most community radio stations is the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). The CPB makes operating grants to many community stations on an annual basis, which are often the difference between success or failure, as well as life and death. But this lifeline has come at a price (Bekken; Walker). The CPB has been under intense political pressure for over a decade with hostile state and federal legislators threatening its funding and demanding various forms of 'accountability'. For example, several community radio stations have had their funding threatened for sponsoring so-called hate speech and religious intolerance (Hardesty; Plotz). Equally important has been the increased reliance on broadcast ratings systems as the primary definition of success for all organisations receiving federal funding (Stavitsky; Conciatore). In short, as audience ratings systems have become the benchmark for

future funding, community radio stations have had to demonstrate both a minimum and perpetually increasing audience share, or no future grants would be made. Under the banner of increasing audience share, the CPB has undertaken several station improvement projects designed to make community radio stations more popular. While CPB consultants have made repeated shows of community consultation, their recommendations have been remarkably similar despite the diverse stations to which they have been applied. Popularity consists of homogeneous 'user-friendly' programming reducing unpredictability and increasing satellite programming from National Public Radio (NPR), American Public Radio (APR), and the BBC World Service. Further, CPB recommendations invariably push increased reliance on professional paid programmers and reduced use or complete abandonment of volunteer programmers (NFCB; Jacobson; Bailey; Walker). The fact that most community radio practitioners in the U.S. see diverse, heterogeneous programming produced by largely independent volunteers as the very definition of what they do, these pressures have caused an unsurprising amount of conflict [5]. Further, defining the audience through ratings systems is counterintuitive to most community radio participants. The ideal of community radio is to bring actual people into the station, not just their ears and their money.

Another important part of the crises facing many community radio stations in the U.S. has to do with the pressure applied by commercial broadcasting and the FCC. When public radio was created in 1967, it was confined to the 'educational' end of the FM band, between 88 and 92Mhz, previously established for 'educational broadcasters' under pressure from commercial broadcasters supposedly concerned with signal interference. This has drastically constrained the creation of new community radio stations and provoked the eventual prohibition of all radio stations broadcasting under 100 watts. While this latter prohibition has been partially lifted in recent years, specious arguments about interference and spectrum scarcity used by commercial broadcasters when convenient have largely held sway [6]. There has been virtually no policy development undertaken by the FCC to increase citizen involvement in broadcasting until very recently. In fact, they have been working to isolate broadcasting from public participation of any kind, other than as consumers (Fairchild *Deterritorializing Radio*). Further, many of the FM frequencies granted to noncommercial broadcasters in the 1940s and 50s, when FM was viewed as a questionable experiment, have since become very valuable commodities, often resulting in pressure to sell frequencies (Lasar). The Pacifica Foundation even began leasing its sub-carrier frequencies (those frequencies that do not carry the stations 'listenable' signal) and used the money to provide financial independence, and thus greater power, to the national board of directors, a key component to the conflict described above (Noton). Finally, deregulation has left the commercial radio industry dominated by two or three powerful conglomerates which have a great deal of clout in national politics. They have been extraordinarily successful at swatting away all developments perceived as hostile to their interests, a hostility that extends to all sectors of noncommercial broadcasting. The combination of tying audience ratings to funding, the lack of a specific legally enforceable definition of community radio and a hostile regulator and commercial industry has weakened community radio tremendously, making stations vulnerable to consolidation of internal power and the marginalisation of those aspects of the form that are considered to be at the core of its being by almost all practitioners around the world.

Community radio policy has been similarly constrained, but by forces radiating from within the community radio movement. The National Federation of Community Broadcasting (NFCB), the main lobbying body representing most community radio stations in the U.S., has been a key player in pushing CPB policy regarding audience ratings systems and their precise connection with funding initiatives (NFCB). While the NCFB has a series of general principles they claim to uphold, they have been largely ineffective in providing an alternative model of development outside of the CPB framework, mostly due to the necessity of fighting strenuously to protect what little funding and power they had throughout the worst period of crisis non-commercial broadcasting had faced since its inception. As a result of these conflicting interests, many of the NFCB's members have split off to form the Grassroots Radio Coalition (GRC) to independently

pursue the 'original' vision of community radio, 'giving voice to the voiceless' (GRC). The real policy developments at the federal level have followed larger trends, specifically decreasing public participation and increasing national programming. As Bekken and others have noted, many community radio stations were all too eager in adapting to the new policy environment, pursuing a variety of federal funding options only to discover that they had ceded much of their programming autonomy as a result. Further, funding was often intermittent and politically contingent, sometimes causing dependence on funds that would then disappear if CPB rules were not followed (Bekken 34-7; Walker; Riismandel). Yet, the core paradox of American community radio remains; there are plenty of policies, but none of them tell you what community radio actually is.

Practice

The policy vacuum at the centre of noncommercial broadcasting in the U.S. has left many community stations to fend for themselves when trying to figure out how to run their organisations. A common complaint has been that inadequate contributions and involvement from listeners and the larger community have been a main cause of pursuing federal funding and their requisite demands to centralise and rationalise. Yet it is hard to find cases of conflict-free adoption of homogeneous programming or the marginalisation of volunteer programmers. Indeed, community members may have been far too involved for the comfort of some. It seems clear that the problem with funding community radio in the U.S. has not simply been about involving elements of the community, but the ways in which community is defined in the first place. Community radio is largely perceived as a leftist (or 'progressive') enterprise in the U.S. Accurate or not, this perception has limited the development of most stations to a small core of dedicated volunteers. This progressivism, so called, is largely a defensive posture, a form of resistance to the bland corporate sound of commercial radio, the scare tactics of right-wing talk radio and the elite chatter of public radio [7]. Interestingly, most CPB money going into community radio stations in recent years has not gone into facilitating community outreach programs, but into infrastructure, satellite access and equipment, policies which have proved successful in facilitating the desires of the CPB, but not necessarily the needs of local communities. In fact, most community radio stations are explicit in not wanting to represent all parts of their communities, but only those thought to be marginalized by mainstream broadcasters. Yet as Walker and others have noted, community radio's traditional constituencies, leftists, African Americans, Latinos, gay and lesbians and specifically targeted slices of ethnic, rural and working class communities are not the only groups who feel ignored by mainstream media. There is plenty of evidence to suggest widespread dissatisfaction with commercial and public radio. Yet most community radio stations have not been successful in broadening their support base. This has left them vulnerable to the kinds of imposed change that has been at the heart of much of the conflict of the past decade.

A key indicator of the failure of community radio in the U.S. is the low power radio movement [8]. In the early 1990s, several now-famous pirate broadcasters began a campaign of 'electronic civil disobedience' by setting up low-watt pirate operations and using subsequent FCC enforcement of the ban on low-power radio to launch a series of court challenges to the regulations. The goal was not a legal victory, but a political one (Milner 13). The disobedience gradually became widespread, with more unlicensed broadcasters starting up operations than there were legal community radio stations (Richtel). Yet the people setting up the illegal operations were largely of the constituency claimed by community radio. Further, when the FCC began the application process to license low power broadcasters, well-organised grassroots non-profit organisations poured thousands of expressions of interest and about 3,400 applications into the FCC offices hoping to start up radio stations. They represented a remarkable array of people who were supposed to be represented by existing community radio stations such as church groups, social justice organisations, community groups, universities, colleges and schools (Baxter).

Using the same inaccurate arguments about spectrum scarcity and signal interference in vogue among commercial broadcasters since 1948 (Carmode), the NAB and NPR fought strenuously against any legalisation of low power broadcasting (Parrish; Janssen *FCC Okays*). Remarkably, when the FCC decided to commission a serious study of the issue of interference, an independent contractor found interference was not an issue (Wigfield). Nevertheless, the NAB's campaign included a scare campaign derided by FCC engineers as 'disinformation' (FCC) and a lobbying effort sparking the kind of heated rhetoric usually inspired by suspiciously large campaign donations. The campaign was successful at first as can be seen when comparing the original intent of the FCC plans with legislation designed to derail the final outcome of the application process. When the FCC issued its first 'Notice of Proposed Rulemaking' in 1999 to begin the process of legalisation, it stated that it was not worried about interference at all. Their argument turned on a fairly obscure technical matter. Interference has generally been avoided in the past by leaving channels adjacent to existing broadcasters open. The FCC restricted adjacent channel use by leaving one, two or three channels on either side of an existing signal free. The larger the signal, the more space allowed. Thus many large commercial operations 'used' up to seven channels. The 1999 FCC Notice raised a firestorm of protest as it stated 'we believe that current restrictions on third-channel adjacent operations are not needed for LPFM stations.' Further, stated the commission, 'we believe it may be possible to disregard second-adjacent channel interference for these stations as well' (FCC). When the FCC brought down its final plan for licensing low power radio in 2000, the third channel adjacent restrictions were waived while the second adjacent channel restrictions were kept, despite the commission's doubts about interference on these channels (FCC). With the goal of reducing the possible number of licensed low power broadcasters to a paltry few, the NAB lobbied for legislation gutting the FCC's plan. Under the legislation, most major metropolitan centres were declared devoid of any 'open' channels. It should be noted that between 1999 and 2000 Congress had passed several bills claiming to do everything from 'saving' radio to defunding the FCC. As the spokesperson for the NAB noted, 'if everybody owns a radio station, then nobody hears anything' (Parrish). Yet in the interim, a surprising amount of public unrest over continued deregulation of radio opened the political space necessary for the FCC to more or less adopt the original plan from 1999. By winning a battle they could not win, the low power radio movement has changed the face of community radio in the U.S. with only token support from the NFCB and outright hostility from NPR and the CPB [9]. Further, for the first time, some community radio stations will now have a legally enforceable definition, sadly, drafted by a body which has been mostly agnostic, if not hostile, to its continued existence—the FCC. Indeed, when one looks more closely at the FCC Rules for Low Power Radio, the specifically American shortcomings of the form become obvious. Most obvious is the implicit assumption that low power radio is yet another offshoot of 'public radio'. The rules regarding funding and operations are simply subsumed under existing public radio rules. Second, the entities eligible include many of the institutions, which caused so many problems for community radio in the first place, notably universities and other educational institutions, which have prevented public access to the large number of radio stations, public and student, that they already control. Further, since the funding requirements from public radio have simply been adopted wholesale, it does not take much imagination to see where low power radio might be headed [10]. While a new opportunity exists for struggling community radio stations to define the parameters of their practices and expand the bases of their support, it remains to be seen what they will make of it [11].

Learning From the American Exception

Community radio practitioners in countries around the world can learn from the American experience; so can Americans. The first step is to understand why community radio in other countries has been, comparatively speaking, so successful. Two countries stand out because of their relevance to the American situation, Australia and Canada . The bare facts are suggestive, but not sufficient. As noted above, Canadians and Australians have exponentially greater access to community radio than do Americans. But the issue is not simply one of access to the

broadcasting infrastructure. There are plenty of noncommercial broadcasters throughout the United States , mostly at colleges and universities, but few allow open access because most have never had to, nor has much pressure been brought to bear on these broadcasters by those claiming to represent the interests of community radio stations. As noted, a second major problem in the U.S. has been funding, but more money will not change the problems of community support and involvement, often the very factors most damaged when federal funds are granted to individual stations. I would argue that developing a good policy framework is at the core of the issue as effective community organising and greater funding stability are mutually sustaining goals both of which grow from a policy infrastructure that defines what community radio is in such a way as to establish basic values that can be flexibly applied to diverse circumstances. As demonstrated above, the ideological environment of broadcasting often has a determining effect on the development of community radio including the usefulness of the policies and practicalities that define the sector. In both Canada and Australia , this has also proved to be the case, but with happier consequences. In both cases, the 'democratisation' of broadcasting grew from multiple sources nurtured by both a strong public broadcasting sector, public policy and citizen support. I will take each country briefly in turn.

In Canada , the democratisation of radio broadcasting grew from experiments within the public sector and aboriginal communities. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), for example, created the Forum programs in the 1930s and 40s. The creators of Farm Forum, Citizen's Forum, and Labour Forum were explicit in their desire to create popularly-based participatory radio programs designed to increase citizen involvement in broadcasting (Klee; Fairchild *Community Radio* 135-6, 140). While perhaps an example of a certain modernist paternalism, these programs marked a decided shift away from the dominant commercial and public radio models then existing in North America . Similarly, variously motivated broadcasting experiments in aboriginal communities also contributed significantly to the establishment of a public policy regime tuned to the then-unusual demands of community-based broadcasting. Importantly, both public broadcasters and various federal and provincial governments reacted positively to these experiments, allowing them to become more influential than they otherwise might have been (Fairchild *Community Radio* 141-146; Roth and Valaskakis 221; Valaskakis 70). Further, the nationalist movement in Quebec contributed both infrastructure and impetus for the further regionalisation and localisation of broadcasting designed to serve specifically-defined communities (Fairchild *Community Radio* 149-151; 169). While the history of these and related efforts is too broad to be addressed here, their broad contours demonstrate how the general social and ideological environment can help rather than hinder community radio. The policy consequences, however, are important to examine.

Creating effective and consequential public policy to enhance the growth of community radio is more often than not a long, arduous and thankless task that is as difficult as it is necessary. In Canada , a remarkably successful and flexible regime of licensing community radio stations that has played a significant part in the sector becoming fairly widespread. It took shape over a period of about ten years between 1980 and 1990. Prior to 1980, the Canadian broadcast regulator, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), considered community radio to be mostly an experimental form. While there were many existing stations, no real blueprint existed to guide further development and the regulatory regime governing these operations was thin. After 1980, the CRTC began to take greater interest in the many different types of community radio that had developed in different parts of the country, including noninstitutional stations, stations in aboriginal communities and those on the campuses of universities and colleges. The Commission's first unambiguous statement of support for community radio came in 1980 when they admitted that existing stations 'have demonstrated the validity of the concept. The stations broadcast vital and innovative programming reflecting their communities' (CRTC 1980 4). Importantly, the regulator allowed what they termed 'limited commercial activity' from the beginning , which has allowed a kind of financial stability and necessary community outreach unusual in community radio. The commission's core interest was

in licensing stations that would survive infancy and provide a genuine community service. The first specific definition of community radio was produced in 1985. The CRTC decided that a community radio station, not surprisingly, was defined as one

> owned and controlled by a nonprofit organisation whose structure provides for membership, management, operation, and programming primarily by members of the community at large. Its programming should be based on community access and should reflect the interests and special needs of the listeners it is licensed to serve (CRTC 1985 9).

Also, the CRTC established different kinds of licenses for different communities, depending on the kinds of services they feel are best suited to their needs. In essence, the regulator simply codified existing practices. This flexibility has been crucial for the survival of most noninstitutional stations and the later expansion of the campus-community model in that diverse sources of funding and participation encouraged stability and longevity (CRTC 1992).

The key term in the definition noted above is 'licensed to serve' for it is in the licensing process that the practical definition of community radio takes place. Any radio station in Canada , commercial or community, has to draft what is called 'A Promise of Performance,' an extremely detailed description of exactly what programming they will offer for the terms of their license. The reason for this detailed accounting is that it allows stations to demonstrate that they are serving otherwise underserved populations and that the station is not replicating the efforts of other commercial or community stations. Thus the Commission can determine whether or not their goals of allowing and encouraging the development of the community sector are being met and whether or not a 'varied and comprehensive' radio band exists in a given market (CRTC 1990). This requires prospective applicants to establish community support networks before licensing, a crucial step to their success. Equally important is the fact that the POP gives each station a significant if not dominant voice in their own licensing, gives them an opportunity to justify their programming choices, and gives them an opportunity to make moderate periodic adjustments if conditions change. Given the difficulties the most community stations have had staying solvent and relevant, the POP can be an enormous advantage. It can help prevent obsolescence due to external changes or self-destruction due to internal conflict because a station's mandate, right down to the number of hits vs. non-hits they are allowed to play, is never in question and can be changed only by consensus. Finally, the broadcast license allows each station to have a formal relationship with the CRTC that can and often does go a long way towards resolving disputes without the destructive kinds of conflict found in the U.S.

It is crucial to note that Canadian community radio policy developed from what existing stations were already doing prior to any specific regulations being drafted. A similar argument could be made about Australian community radio. When what is now called community radio began in Australia , it was called public broadcasting and licenses were granted under the Wireless Telegraphy Act, an act not exactly up to the delicate task of crafting careful definitions for new types of broadcasting. Much in the same way as in Canada, a variety of experiments were put forward and licensing decisions were made without an overall vision or framework in which to set them. It was not until 1992 that the term 'community radio' even entered the regulatory lexicon and a formal Code of Practice was not adopted until 2002. Nevertheless, the current expansion of community radio stations in Australia is due in part to the groundwork laid in previous years.

There are many issues and controversies in the development of the current regulatory regime in Australia . While these have been thoroughly described elsewhere (Thornley *The Early Days*; Liddell *Policy by Pressure*), it is important to note the specific sources from which current policy grew. To some extent indigenous broadcasting has played a similar role as in Canada, providing important precedents for other broadcasters (Morris and Meadows 85). Early examples of community broadcasting in capital cities, such as 5UV in Adelaide, 4ZZZ in Brisbane and 3CR in Melbourne helped push the Federal government towards a licensing regime for community

broadcasting. (Liddell *Policy by Pressure*, *The Battle*, *Revolutionary Radio*; Thornley *The Early Days*). Further, more mainstream groups such as Sydney 's Public Broadcasting Association of Australia were instrumental in giving the idea of community broadcasting credibility in policy circles (Moran 148-149). The work of the latter in particular had specific policy consequences that led to the initial licenses being granted (Liddell *Policy by Pressure*). Again, we find varied, often unrelated or even contradictory efforts in specific places slowly expanding out through the political sector and resulting in a lurching forward towards a specific policy. More importantly, however, we find the successful process of turning the interest and efforts of various publicly minded organisations and individuals into workable public policy through the cooperation of a reasonably sympathetic public sector faced with determined and diverse efforts from constituents.

To follow on from this, of particular interest to community radio activists in the U.S. , again are the specific rules and policies governing community radio in Australia that evolved from these organisations. The Code of Practice is the current governing document for community stations and is operated and enforced through the cooperation of the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia and the ABA (CBAA). It sets out several 'Guiding Principles' and eight specific areas of stations operations and programming that are intended to define the form. The 'Guiding Principles' stake out the broad terrain for the form as a whole. Through these it is clear that community radio is designed to serve those underrepresented in other media in an operationally and editorially independent way. Further, community radio should promote harmony in diversity wherever it operates. Specifically, community radio should operate in a democratic, accessible and equitable way, widening the community's involvement in broadcasting. These principles are carefully delineated in more specific ways throughout the eight codes that follow. Interestingly, these Codes make very clear calls for not only non-discriminatory practices and programming, but also practices that are anti-racist and anti-prejudicial. Importantly, stations are required to have a detailed and clear dispute resolution framework established to deal with conflicts that arise from within the station. What is most remarkable about the Code of Practice is its specificity regarding the broad purpose and outlines of the form, and its flexibility in the precise ways individual stations meet the standards. Much as in Canada, the guidelines take into account the varied circumstances and contexts of community radio, prescribing broad goals, but giving communities the flexibility to meet them in ways that appropriate to their situations. Also, as in Canada , community radio is not designated only to serve those with a particular politics, but to allow people to use the form in the ways they choose. As noted by others, this has often led Australian community radio to reflect the broadly conservative middle of the Australian community as well as urban leftist or ethnic communities. (Forde). Reflecting the broad diversity of Australian society may prove to be the strength of community radio in that country.

Conclusion

It is important to recognise that community radio practitioners in the United States have always had a much more difficult struggle than their counterparts in Australia and Canada . First, the U.S. did not even have 'public broadcasting' until 1967, and very little in the way of community media. Second, the commercial media have always held the kind of dominance over broadcasting law, policy and practice that has simply not been tolerated in most other countries. Further, the simple fact of radio in the U.S. is that the raw number of commercial radio stations dwarfs the numbers found anywhere else. They literally take up almost all available broadcasting space. But I would argue that community radio is probably more needed in the U.S. for exactly these reasons. As the low power radio movement has shown, change can happen, but it is a long, slow process without any guarantee of success. Further, the Canadian and Australian community radio systems developed policy in periods of comparatively friendly federal governments willing to undertake innovative and forward-thinking initiatives. Americans have rarely had the luxury of a even reasonably cooperative public sector.

None of the foregoing analysis is intended to valorise the Australian and Canadian experiences. Serious problems face community radio in both countries in terms of funding, managing everyday operations and increasing community involvement and representation. But I would argue that neither country has faced the extinction of what I would call actually-existing community radio; the U.S. has. Nor is the purpose of this analysis to suggest that Americans can replicate the experiences found in other countries; they can't. What they can do is understand the processes through which success has been created and to see the pieces of that success that might be used within their own context. The form has survived in the U.S. , but survival is simply not good enough. The question is no longer about how long or how well the 200 odd community radio stations in the U.S. will continue to serve their communities, but how to create a sector that is dynamic, ubiquitous and stable. Basic policy and extensive community organising would be a good start. For those outside of America , it is useful to realise that reliance on limited sources of funding, support and participation, as well as ambiguous policy and slack community outreach can harm community radio in ways that are sometimes surprising in their consequences.

The protest outside the offices of KPFA described above was inspired by the abrupt firing of popular station manager Nicole Sawaya by the head of the Pacifica national board (and former NFCB director), Lynn Chadwick. The termination letter gave no reason for this act. By all accounts, Sawaya was exactly the kind of person needed to run a community radio station. She navigated through a famously factional radio station and managed to unite a group of unruly volunteers, programmers and paid staff into productive working relationships. She instituted many programming innovations and was unusually open about how she ran the station. She exceeded fundraising goals and according to one report, Sawaya 'came into a station still stewing over a contentious contract negotiation and riven by factionalism and mistrust and, by all accounts, turned it around by sheer force of personality' (Rauber). The decision to fire Sawaya, one in a long string of questionable decisions made by a national board that was both feared and mistrusted, galvanised almost everyone who had a stake in the station. As historian Mathew Lasar suggests, 'When Lynn fired Nicole, she reached blindly into the bush and picked up a hornet's nest' (Rauber). Most community radio stations can easily become hornets' nests, but they can also become remarkable institutions, especially when they are informed by explicit principles, implicit respect and a tremendous amount of effort. There are plenty of examples of stunning success and catastrophic failure and we can learn much from both.

Charles Fairchild is a Lecturer in the Department of Music, School of Society, Culture and Performance at the University of Sydney in Australia. He received his Ph.D in American Studies from the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1997.

Dr Charles Fairchild
Department of Music, University of Sydney
Sydney NSW 2006
charles.fairchild@arts.usyd.edu.au
+61 2 9036 5224

Endnotes

[1] The history of this conflict is bewildering and riven with factional infighting making disinterested accounts hard to find. Sources such as Noton, Lasarand Whiting provide accessible and useful introductions. [return]

[2] The documents governing the broadcasting activities of the Pacifica Foundation were drawn up in 1948 and had not changed to the extent needed to help adapt Pacifica to new contexts. They

became sacred documents, not living ones. See www.pacifica.org for more information. [return]

[3] It is estimated that there are between 150 and 200 community radio stations in the U.S. (Howley 409; NFCB), Canada has over 200 stations and Australia has over 200 as well, with about one hundred and fifty applications currently under review at the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) (Tacchi; Forde). Importantly, a recent ABA planning document has established transmission space for about 350 community stations (ABA 2001). On a per capita basis, Australia and Canada have nearly ten times the number of community radio stations as the U.S. does. [return]

[4] The case study in Chapter 5 of Fairchild (*Community Radio*) complicates normative ideals of citizenship and community as it deals with a community radio station in an aboriginal community in which claims to citizenship, when they are made at all, are split between the American, Canadian and several aboriginal nations. [return]

[5] For a very smart and thorough analysis of the experience of one station in Bloomington , Indiana , see Howley. [return]

[6] A particularly bitter irony of the spectrum scarcity argument has been that as commercial broadcasters pushed for deregulation of radio broadcasting in the 1980s, they did so specifically by arguing that new technologies made spectrum scarcity irrelevant (Fairchild *Deterritorializing Radio*). Yet, when the FCC recently allowed a new licensing regime for Low Power FM (LPFM) stations, suddenly, according to the commercial broadcasting lobby, the spectrum was scarce again and interference would become destructive if the new low power licenses were granted. An important FCC study has all but disproved the interference argument (Wigfield). [return]

[7] This characterization comes from a broad survey of community radio programming in 1995 and 2003. In 1995 and 1996, I distributed a questionnaire and requested program guides from community radio stations in the U.S. receiving about 50 responses from all parts of the country. A recent check of station websites reveals broadly similar characteristics and claims. [return]

[8] It should be noted that low power broadcasting in the U.S. is only low power because commercial broadcasters have such huge signal power. What is low power in the U.S. is normal power in most other countries. Interestingly, the NFCB has changed tack by creating a low power radio project in 2002, but only after ten years of near total silence on the issue and a moderate change in the direction of the leadership.[return]

[9] Interestingly, the NFCB has changed tack by creating a low power radio project in 2002, but only after ten years of near total silence on the issue and a moderate change in the direction of the leadership. [return]

[10] One early low power broadcaster is already moving into the same morass of trading autonomy for money as other community radio stations. (Janssen *Chicago's WRTE*) [return]

[11] For an excellent overview and analysis of various low power radio debates, see Riismandel. [return]

Works Cited

Adelson, Andrea. "A Wider Public for Commercial Radio." *New York Times* 10 Feb. 1997: D8.

Alarik, Scott. "Folk Radio Beacon to Mark a Birthday." *Boston Globe* 17 Sept. 1997: C4.

Atton, Chris. *Alternative Media* . London : SAGE Publications, 2002.

Australia . Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA). *Report on Radio Planning* . December 2001.

Bailey, George. "Radio Intelligence: What Would Work for Community Radio in the Morning?" *Current* 9 Mar. 1993.

Baxter, Kevin. "And the Media Gods Said, Go Forth and Multiply." *Los Angeles Times Magazine* 13 June 1999: 24.

Bekken, Jon. "Community Radio at the Crossroads: Federal Policy and the Professionalization of a Grassroots Medium." *Seizing the Airwaves: A Free Radio Handbook* . Eds. R. Sakolsky and S.

Dunifer. San Francisco: AK Press, 1998. 29-46.

Canada . Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). *Public Notice CRTC* . 20 Mar. 20 1980. 80-192-7.

Canada . Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). *The Review of Community Radio* . 23 April 23 1985. 1985-194.

Canada . Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC *). Public Notice CRTC 1990-111: An FM Policy for the Nineties* . 1990-111, 1990.

Canada . Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). *Policies For Community and Campus Radio* . May 29, 1992. 1992-38.

Carmode, Ralph. "A Brief History of 10-Watt Noncommercial Educational FM Radio Stations." Paper presented to College Media Advisors, [location of institution, address] November 1995.

Australia . Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA). *Code of Practice* 2002.

Conciatore, Jacqueline. "Radio stations sharpen their formats to keep CPB grants." *Current Online* 17 Mar. 1997.

Couldry, N., and J. Curran, eds. *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World* . Lanham , Md. : Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

Craik, Jennifer, J. Bailey, and A. Moran, eds . *Public Voices, Private Interests: Australia 's Media Policy* . St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1995.

Downing, John. *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements* . Thousand Oaks , Ca.: SAGE Publications, 2001.

Everest, Larry. "KPFA: The Struggle Continues." *Revolutionary Worker* 8 Aug. 8, 1999: 6-7.

Fairchild, Charles. *Community Radio and Public Culture, Being an Examination of Media Access and Equity in the Nations of North America* . Cresskill , N.J. : Hampton Press, 2001.

Fairchild, Charles. "Deterritorializing Radio: Deregulation and the Continuing Triumph of the Corporatist Perspective." *Media Culture and Society* 21.4 (1999): 549-562.

USA . Federal Communications Commission (FCC *). In the Matter of Creation of a Low Power Radio Service* . Federal Communications Commission, Mass Media Bureau, Docket No. 99-25, 3 Feb. 3, 1999.

USA . Federal Communications Commission (FCC). "Statement of Dale Hatfield, Chief, Office of Engineering and Technology, and Roy Stewart, Chief, Mass Media Bureau, Concerning Low Power FM Engineering Issues." Press Release, 24 Mar. 2000.

USA . Federal Communications Commission (FCC). "FCC Adopts Revised LPFM Order." Press

Release, April 2, 2001.

Fleming, Scott . *Status of Litigation Against the Governing Board of the Pacifica Foundation. National Lawyers Guild* , 11 Jan. 2001.

Forde, Susan. "Community Radio and 'Progressive' Politics: Australian Community Radio and its Shift to the Right." Paper presented to *Radiocracy: Predicting Pathways and Pulling Together*, Durban, South Africa, 20-24 Sept. 2001.

Grassroots Radio Coalition. "Grassroots Radio Coalition Formed." Press Release, 16 Aug. 16, 1996.

Hardesty, Michael. "Duel on the Dial." *Washington Post* 24 Oct 1993: C5.

Howley, Kevin. "Talking about Public Affairs Programming: WFHB and the Legacy of Listener-Sponsored Radio." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 21.4 2001: 399-415.

Klee, Marcus. "Hands-off Labour Forum: The Making and Unmaking of National Working-Class Radio Broadcasting in Canada , 1935-1944." *Labour/Le Travail: Journal of Canadian Labour Studies* 35 (Spring 1995): 107-132.

Jacobson, Don. "Experience Talks about the HSP." *Radio Resister's Bulletin* Dec. 1994: 7.

Janssen, Mike. "FCC Okays Noncommercial LPFM Over Broadcasters' Objections." *Current Online* 24 Jan. 2000.

Janssen, Mike. "Chicago 's WRTE. Preview of LPFM: Much Community Involvement, Little Revenue." *Current Online* , 22 May 2000.

Lasar, Matthew. "The Crisis That Wouldn't Go Away." Unpublished Paper. 19 Sept. 2003 <www.savepacifca.net/sofar.htm>.

Liddell, Craig. "Policy By Pressure." *CBOnline* . 6 Nov. 2003. 24 Nov. 2003 < http://www.cbonline.org.au/> .

Liddell, Craig. "The Battle with the Bureaucrats." *CBOnline* . 7 Nov. 2003. 9 Dec. 2003 <http://www.cbonline.org.au>.

Liddell, Craig. "Revolutionary Radio." *CBOnline* . 8 Nov. 2003. 9 Dec. 2003 <http://www.cbonline.org.au>.

Milner, Greg. "Rebel Radio: Stephen Dunifer versus the FCC." *Express: The East Bay's Free Weekly* , [location, date] p. 1. +.

Moran, Albert. "Multiplying Minorities: The Case of Community Radio." *Public Voices, Private Interests: Australia's Media Policy* . Eds. J. Craik et.al. St. Leonard's, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1995: 147-162.

Morris, C., and M. Meadows. "Framing the Future: Indigenous Communication in Australia." *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World* . Eds. N. Couldry, and J. Curran. Lanham , Md. : Rowman and Littlefield, 2003: 71-88.

Morris, Rob. "Range Wars." *Rolling Stone* , 24 Mar. 1994. 55-57.

USA . National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB). "The NFCB Talks." *Radio Resister's Bulletin* , Dec. 1994. 6.

USA . National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB). "Community Broadcasters Reflect

America's Diversity." *Press Release* .

Noton, Peggy. "Independent Radio's Problems and Prospects." *Z Magazine* , Mar. 1994.

Parrish, Geov. "Revisiting Low Power Radio." *Alternet.org* 22 July 2003. 1 Sept. 2003 <www.alternet.org/story.inc?StoryID=16467>.

Plotz, David. "Static Disrupters." *Washington City Paper* , 19-25 Nov. 1993: 24+.

Rauber, Paul. "War at Pacifica." *Express: The East Bay's Free Weekly* , 13 Aug. 1993: 1+.

Richtel, Matt. "F.C.C. Takes a Harder Look at 'Microradio' Stations." *New York Times* 20 Aug. 1998.

Riggins, Stephen, ed. *Ethnic Minority Media: An International Perspective* . Newbury Park : SAGE Publications, 1992.

Riismandel, Paul. "Radio By the For the People: The Death and Resurrection of Low-Power Radio." *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio* . Eds. M. Hilmes and J. Loviglio. New York : Routledge, 2003. 423-450.

Rodriguez, Clemencia. "The Bishop and His Star: Citizen's Communication in Southern Chile." *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World* . Eds. N. Couldry and J. Curran Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003. 177-194.

Roth, L. and G. Valaskakis. "Aboriginal Broadcasting in Canada : A Case Study in Democratization." *Communication For and Against Democracy* . Eds. P. Bruck, and M. Raboy. Montreal : Black Rose Books, 1989. 221-233.

Salter, Liora. "Two Directions on a One-Way Street: Old and New Approaches in Media Analysis in Two Decades." *Studies in Communication* 1 (1980): 85-117.

"Settlement Agreement." *The Pacifica Radio Foundation* 12 Dec. 2001.

Stavitsky, Alan. "Guys in Suits with Charts: Audience Research in U.S. Public Radio." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 39.2 (1995): 177-89.

Tacchi, Jo, and Price-Davies, Eryl. "A Comparative Study of Community Radio." Paper presented to *Australian Broadcasting Authority Conference.* Canberra, ACT. 3-4 May, 2001.

Thornley, Phoebe. "The Early Days of Community Broadcasting: Elites, Ordinary People and Community of Interest." Paper presented to *CBAA Conference.* Coolangatta, Qld. 24-26 Nov, 2000.

Thornley, Phoebe. "Early Voices: Divergent Philosophies/Aspirations of the Original Participants." Paper presented to *CBAA Conference.* Hobart, Tas. 16-18 Nov, 2001.

Valaskakis, Gail. "Communication, Culture and Technology: Satellites and Northern Native Broadcasting in Canada." *Ethnic Minority Media: An International Perspective* . Ed. S. Riggins. Newbury Park : SAGE Publications, 1992. 63-81.

Walker, Jesse. "With Friends Like These: Why Community Radio Does Not Need the Corporation for Public Broadcasting." *Cato Policy Analysis.* No. 277 Cato Institute, Washington D.C. 24 July, 1997.

Whiting, John. "Pacifica in Vincula." *Radical Poetics* 1 (Jan. 1996). 28 January 2005 <www.radio4all.org/fp/vincula.htm>

Wigfield, Mark. "Study Pans Low-Power Radio Rules." *Wall Street Journal* 23 July 2003. B5C