

Institution: University of Cambridge
Unit of Assessment: UoA30
Title of case study: America, Empire of Liberty
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>As a result of his research and publications on American history, Professor David Reynolds was invited by the Controller of BBC Radio 4 to research, write and present a series of 90 programmes, each 15 minutes in length, on the history of America. These were broadcast in three segments over a total of eighteen weeks in 2008-9. The series had a dedicated website and it remains available as a set of BBC CDs.</p> <p>The series won the Voice of the Listener & Viewer Award for Excellence in Broadcasting, 2008, for the Best New Programme or Programme Series. It also received a SONY Radio Academy Award Nomination, 2009, for the Speech Award, and it was short-listed for the Orwell Prize in 2010.</p> <p>The impact of Reynolds' work was demonstrated by the BBC's decision to re-broadcast ten programmes about the American Civil War in April 2011 to coincide with the 150th anniversary of its outbreak in 1861. These were also re-issued separately as BBC CDs and as a boxed set of three.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The research was carried out by Professor David Reynolds (Professor of International History, University of Cambridge, 2002 to present).</p> <p>Reynolds' major work (<i>America, Empire of Liberty: A New History</i>, 3a) was the outcome of his research and publication over the last twenty years in various areas of American history and foreign relations (3b, 3c). Reynolds took as his title Thomas Jefferson's assertion in 1780 that the United States would become a great 'empire of liberty' and organized his argument around three major themes – empire, liberty and faith.</p> <p>Empire: in 1776 the United States was the first country to free itself from the British Empire and during the 19th century it developed a vigorous anti-imperial ideology, pitting the idealistic New World against the corruptions of the Old World. Yet in the course of the 20th century the anti-empire of 1776 became the greatest superpower the world has ever seen.</p> <p>Liberty: In the 19th century this was a country that offered liberty and opportunity on a scale unmatched in Europe. Yet its prosperity rested on the dispossession of the Native Americans and the labour of black slaves. Coming to terms with this dark past, especially the legacies of slavery, has been a continuing burden for Americans right up to the present day.</p> <p>Faith: The tensions between empire and liberty have often been resolved for Americans by faith. By this Reynolds signified two themes. First, the evangelical Protestantism that has energized US politics – from the abolitionist campaign to end slavery to the current demands for an end to abortion – and, second, the larger faith in the nation's righteousness that has impelled the country's expansion across the American continent and then the wider world.</p> <p>Each of these themes is rooted in recent historiographies but they are drawn together in a fresh synthesis. This was intended to address the very patchy British knowledge of USA (exacerbated by the modular study of history in schools) and also to build on public interest in America aroused in an election year (2008) by the prospect of America's first non-white president.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>a. David Reynolds, <i>America, Empire of Liberty: A New History</i> (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. xxv +</p>

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672, including 47 pages of endnotes and a 12pp guide to further reading.

b. David Reynolds, *From Munich to Pearl Harbor: Roosevelt's America and the Origins of the Second World War* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 2001), pp. xi + 209.

c. David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. xxx + 555.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The series was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 (**5a**). It was split into three segments of 30 programmes, each of which aired over six weeks, Monday to Friday from 3.45pm to 4pm (15 Sept. to 24 Oct. 2008, 19 Jan. to 27 Feb. 2009 and 1 June to 10 July 2009). The five programmes from each week were condensed in an hour-long Omnibus edition, broadcast on Fridays at 8pm. The weekday programme attracted some 350,000 to 400,000 listeners; the figure for most of the Omnibus programme was close to 500,000.

BBC Radio 4 audience research centres on the 'Audience Index' (AI). This measures the degree to which people make a special effort to listen to a programme. The first series scored 82, the second 86 and the third 85 – giving an average for the whole run of 83. 'Very good' is defined as 75; the average for the Radio 4 is 79 (**5f**).

In the week of 16 Feb. 2009, for instance, the series *America, Empire of Liberty* was rated 3rd among BBC programmes across all BBC radio stations. Its AI of 86 placed it above 'Wake Up to Wogan' on BBC Radio 2. 'The Archers' was in 22nd place (**5g**).

The 'tab cloud' showed that the most frequently used words in listeners' responses were 'interesting', 'informative', 'excellent' and 'fascinating'. Specific comments on the final omnibus programme included: 'This has been an unexpected joy to listen to . . . If someone had told me I would have found the history of American politics so fascinating I would have laughed in their face' (Female, aged 47); 'A masterpiece: accessible to general listeners or those with a sound knowledge of American history (Male, 61); 'Excellent and informative program. It is so good that I bought the book' (Female, 68) (**5f**).

The series won the Voice of the Listener & Viewer Award for Excellence in Broadcasting, 2008, for the Best New Programme or Programme Series. These awards are based on voting by members of the VLV, which represents ordinary listeners and viewers rather than the media industry, and is therefore indicative of public outreach (**5b**).

The series also received a SONY Radio Academy Nomination, 2009, for the Speech Award. The SONY awards are judged by media professionals. The judges commented: 'This programme brought out some of the inherent contradictions and ironies in American society. The judges felt that it offered them a lot that was new about America and helped them to see the country with different eyes' (**5e**).

Because of his series Reynolds was also short-listed for the Orwell Prize in 2010, given to those who come closest to George Orwell's ambition 'to make political writing into an art'. Reynolds was short-listed for the Orwell Journalism Prize, one of 7 finalists from the original 85 entrants and the only academic on the short-list (**5c, 5d**).

The impact of Reynolds' work was demonstrated by the BBC's decision to re-broadcast ten programmes about the American Civil War in April 2011 to coincide with the 150th anniversary of its outbreak in 1861. These were also re-issued separately as a BBC CD.

The Controller of Radio 4 (from 2004-10), wrote that the series 'had a dramatic impact not merely on its audience – but for Radio 4 as a whole'. It was commissioned to show that radio could produce 'ambitious multi-part series...authored and presented by historians at the top of their

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profession' such as television had featured since the 1990s. Its 'combination of academic rigour and accessible production created a new grammar for Radio 4 – and one that has been emulated'. 'There is very little indeed which made me more proud at Radio 4 than this series.' (5h)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- a. BBC Radio 4 website for America, Empire of Liberty <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/america/>
- b. Voice of the Listener and Viewer Awards for Excellence in Broadcasting, 2008: Best New Programme or Programme Series <http://www.vlv.org.uk/pages/VLVAwards08.php>
- c. Shortlisted for the Orwell Prize, 2010 <http://theorwellprize.co.uk/shortlists/david-reynolds/>
- d. Programme for Orwell Prize, Awards Ceremony, 19 May 2010 (pdf).
- e. SONY Radio Academy Awards, 2009, Nomination, for Speech Award <http://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/sony-radio-academy-awards-2009-nominations/2016903.article>
- f. E-mail and attachments from person 1 (Commissioning Editor Radio 4, BBC) 13 July 2009 (pdf)
- g. Radio Pulse table, 16-21 Feb. 2009 (pdf)
- h. Letter from person 2 (Controller of Radio 4 from 2004-10, BBC), 30 Sep. 2013 (pdf)