The Battle for the U.S. Airwaves, 1928–1935

by Robert W. McChesney

An analysis of the early opposition to the network-dominated, advertising-subsidized broadcasting system suggests that the modern system emerged not through consensus but through broadcasters' concerted efforts to limit public and congressional impact on policy.

Much mass communications research assumes that the character of the U.S. media system—private, operated for profit, subsidized by advertising revenues—is innate. Some scholars believe the best possible system has been adopted; others, perhaps less positive, assume the system is entrenched and immune to challenge. Such presuppositions are troubling. By treating the institutional and social relations of mass communication as given, normal, and implicitly neutral if not socially beneficial, scholars are prevented from addressing vital political and intellectual issues facing late twentieth-century communications.

This article debunks the central myth that the modern corporate, commercial mass media system in the United States is the "natural" system and that it was adopted, if not enthusiastically, at least with minimal qualms. Because questions of how the media are owned, structured, and operated are distinctly political issues in virtually all other nations, this situation presumably represents a classic case of American exceptionalism. But history reveals that the United States was not exceptional. True, the social and political implications of the print media's for-profit, advertising-supported foundations have not been subject to legislative debate. In broadcasting, however, the right and need for the government, if not the public, to establish a coherent policy and even to establish the basis of the industry was by and large accepted from the outset.

This article will examine the opposition to the network-dominated, advertising-subsidized U.S. broadcasting system that emerged between 1928 and 1935. This opposition insisted that network, for-profit, commercial broadcasting was inimical to the communication requirements of a democratic society and attempted to generate popular support for a variety of measures that would sub-

1 For some recent work by scholars who have been willing to examine the political and economic foundations of mass communication, see (34, 80, 163).

Robert W. McChesney is Assistant Professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin–Madison. The author would like to thank Steve Vaughn and Jim Baughman for their assistance with this article.

Copyright © 1990 Journal of Communication 40(4), Autumn. 0021-9916/90/$0.00 + .05
stantively recast U.S. broadcasting. Curiously, this chapter of U.S. broadcasting history has been largely ignored in the otherwise extensive scholarship on the development of U.S. broadcasting, which has concentrated on the period preceding 1928. This article attempts to shed light on a too long overlooked period in communications history and, in doing so, to challenge some of the received wisdom of mass communications researchers in general and communications historians in particular.

**U.S. broadcasting in the mid-1920s was far different from the system that would be entrenched only a few years later.** Several hundred nonprofit broadcasters had commenced operations in the first half of the decade, the majority affiliated with colleges and universities, and well over 200 of these (approximately two-fifths of all stations) remained on the air in 1925 (64, pp. 180–249; 72, p. 4). Although still largely overlooked in mass communications literature, these nonprofit broadcasters are now recognized as the true pioneers of U.S. broadcasting, who were, as one of the leading radio engineers of the period observed, “at the start of things distinctly on the ground floor” (92, p. 214; 165). As for the ostensibly for-profit broadcasters, they were hardly professional broadcasters in the modern sense of the term. The majority were owned and operated by newspapers, department stores, power companies, and other private concerns, and their *raison d’être* was to generate favorable publicity for the owner’s primary enterprise (17; 92, p. 215). Indeed, as late as 1929, few if any private broadcasters were thought to be earning profits from the business of broadcasting, and there was little sense, in public discourse at least, that they ever would (35; 66; 179, p. 129).

The National Broadcasting Company (NBC), established in 1926, and the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), established in 1927, did not have much of an impact until after the passage of the Radio Act of 1927. Throughout the late 1920s, NBC presented itself not as a traditional for-profit corporation but as a public service corporation that would sell advertising only as necessary to subsidize high-quality noncommercial fare (10, 162). And commercial advertising, the other pillar of the emerging status quo, did not begin its stampede to the ether in earnest until 1928 (see 168). As has been amply documented in the major studies of the period, commercial advertising was very controversial and more than a little unpopular throughout the 1920s (see 70, 161). Few contemporary observers foresaw the role that NBC, CBS, and commercial advertising would assume in short order. Indeed, in all public discourse on the matter prior to 1927, there was general agreement that nonprofit broadcasting should play a significant and perhaps even a dominant role in the U.S. system and that commercial advertising’s potential contributions to the field should be

---

2 The best treatment probably has been Rosen (160, pp. 161–178). Since the Communications Act of 1934 largely restated the Radio Act of 1927 verbatim, the preponderance of the scholarship concludes, the “real debate” over broadcasting must have taken place prior to 1927. If one concentrates upon that period, one would be perfectly justified in arguing that the status quo emerged without significant opposition. For some excellent scholarship that addresses this earlier period see (113, p. 185; see also 53, 148, 167).

Hence there is little reason, on the surface, to regard the passage of the Radio Act of 1927 as some sort of mandate for network-dominated, advertising-supported broadcasting, as that system barely existed at the time and absolutely no one was discussing the issue in those terms. Moreover, the Act was hurriedly passed in February after a federal judge had ruled the Department of Commerce's licensing of stations unconstitutional in 1926. With any effort at regulation discontinued, the ether had become a mass of chaos; 200 new broadcasters immediately commenced operations, the total wattage increased by nearly 75 percent, and few stations respected the frequencies occupied by other broadcasters (21; 47, p. 169; 74; 141). The committee deliberations and floor debate concerning the Radio Act of 1927 were what one might expect of emergency legislation; there was almost no discussion of what the legislation would mean for the type of broadcast system to be created (16, p. 281; 71; 75, p. 78; 131, p. 182).

The Radio Act of 1927 established the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) for one year to allocate broadcast licenses and bring order to the airwaves by reducing the total number of stations. The law gave the FRC only one directive in its allocation determinations: to favor those station applicants that best served the "public interest, convenience or necessity." The primary reason that even these criteria were put in the statute was to ensure the bill's constitutionality; otherwise, the bill's sponsors argued that it was essential to give the FRC complete latitude to operate as it saw fit (see 27; 50, p. 196). The commercial broadcasters were vocal in their support of having the FRC, rather than Congress, determine licensing criteria (see 83).

Budgetary problems and the death of two members prevented the FRC from taking any significant actions to reduce the number of stations in its first year (see 6; see also 164, pp. 22–23). Congress renewed the FRC in 1928 for a year
and then in 1929 indefinitely. There was no sense during this period that the Radio Act of 1927 and the FRC were anything more than temporary measures. The topic of broadcast regulation was before Congress at every session until the passage of the Communications Act of 1934, when the matter would be disposed of, seemingly, for all time.

At the congressional committee hearings on whether to extend the FRC in early 1928 and again in early 1929, FRC members were questioned about the unchecked and stunningly rapid emergence of network broadcasting over the previous two years as well as the noticeable decrease in the number of non-profit broadcasters. "The great feeling about radio in this country," commented Senator C. C. Dill, Democrat of Washington and one of the authors of the Radio Act of 1927, "is that it will be monopolized by the few wealthy interests" (183, p. 24). FRC members were repeatedly admonished to protect the non-profit broadcasters and prevent all the choice frequencies from falling into the hands of NBC or CBS (179, pp. 68, 74, 108–109; 182, part two, p. 192). In addition, in 1928 Congress passed the Davis Amendment, which required the FRC to reallocate the entire spectrum in order to provide more stations to the underrepresented southern and western regions of the nation (see 6; 57, pp. 38–39).

Three of the five FRC members were appointed to an “allocating committee.” One member, Harold Lafount, had served as a director for several radio manufacturing firms in his native Utah and was a proponent of the capitalist development of the ether. “What has education contributed to radio?” Lafount asked in 1931. “Not one thing. What has commercialism contributed? Everything—the lifeblood of the industry” (99). The other two committee members were a McGraw-Hill utility trade publication editor who was on loan to the FRC for a year and a broadcaster who would leave the FRC to become an executive at CBS in 1929 (182, part one, pp. 151, 191; 183, p. 142).

The FRC crystallized the dominant trends within broadcasting over the previous two years and made no effort to counteract them. The allocating committee held a number of meetings with radio engineers and representatives of the networks and the commercial broadcasters' trade association, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), as they determined their plan. These conferences and sessions were barely publicized, and the nonprofit broadcasters and concerned nonbroadcasters did not have an opportunity to present their opinions. Given the background of the FRC members, the manner in which they operated, and the sources they employed, the result of their deliberations is not surprising (see 189).

In August 1928, the FRC announced its reallocation plan under General Order 40. Forty of the 90 available channels were set aside to be 50,000-watt clear channels that would have only one occupant nationally. The other 50 channels would house the remaining 600 or so broadcasters who could operate simultaneously on the same channel at much lower power levels; broadcasters in the same region would share a frequency by using it at different times of
day. Anyone could challenge existing broadcasters for their frequency assignments at the end of their three-month terms. In general, the FRC had competing applicants share the contested frequency, with the station deemed most worthy allocated the majority of the hours. In the long run, the station accorded the fewest hours on a shared channel often found it very difficult to stay on the air. This direct head-to-head competition for the scarce broadcast channels created great antipathy between the contending applicants, particularly, as was often the case, when commercial broadcasters successfully challenged nonprofit broadcasters (6, p. 459). In any case, without the FRC actually having to turn down many license renewal applications, there were 100 fewer stations on the air by the autumn of 1929 (143, p. 65).

With General Order 40, all stations, except for a handful of network-affiliated clear channel stations that had been established by the FRC the previous year, were assigned to new frequencies and new power levels (180, part one, p. 75). The networks were the big winners. In 1927 NBC had 28 affiliates and CBS 16, for a combined 6.4 percent of the broadcast stations; within four years they together accounted for 30 percent of the stations. And this alone vastly understates their new role, as all but three of the 40 clear channel stations were owned by or affiliated with one of the two networks. Indeed, when the number of hours broadcast and the level of power are considered, NBC and CBS accounted for nearly 70 percent of U.S. broadcasting by 1931 (117; 144; 155, pp. 26–27; 169, p. 12). By 1935, only four of the 62 stations that broadcast at 5,000 or more watts did not have a network affiliation (cited in 150, p. 447). Moreover, commercial advertising, which barely existed on a national level prior to 1928, grew by leaps and bounds to an annual total of $72 million by 1934 (33, 85). One commentator noted in 1930 regarding the emerging status quo that "nothing in American history has paralleled this mushroom growth" (187). This point has also become a staple insight among broadcast historians (16, p. 270; 160, p. 12).

The other side of the coin, however, was reflected in the equally dramatic decline in nonprofit and noncommercial broadcasting. Nonprofit broadcasters found themselves in a vicious cycle. The FRC, noting the nonprofit broadcasters' lack of financial and technological prowess, lowered their hours and power (to the advantage of well-capitalized private broadcasters) and thus made it that much more difficult for them to generate the funds to become successful. "Now the Federal Radio Commission has come along and taken away all of the hours that are worth anything and has left us with hours that are absolutely no good for commercial programs or for educational programs," wrote the despondent director of the soon-to-be-extinct University of Arkansas station. "The Commission may boast that it has never cut an educational station off the air. It merely cuts off our head, our arms, and our legs, and then allows us to die a natural death" (79). The number of stations affiliated with colleges and universities declined from 95 in 1927 to less than half that number by 1930, while the total number of nonprofit broadcasters declined from some 200 in 1927 to less than a third that total in 1934. Moreover, almost all of these stations operated
with low power on shared frequencies. By 1934, nonprofit broadcasting accounted for only two percent of total U.S. broadcast time (Congressional Record 78, May 15, 1934, pp. 8830–8834; 64, pp. 180–249; 170).

In defending the reallocation in its Third Annual Report, the FRC equated capitalist broadcasters with “general public service” broadcasters, because their quest for profit would motivate them to provide whatever programming the market desired. In contrast, those stations that did not operate for profit and that did not derive their revenues from the sale of advertising were termed “propaganda” stations, more interested in spreading their particular viewpoint than in satisfying audience needs. Hence the FRC argued that it had to favor the capitalist broadcasters, since there were not enough stations to satisfy all the “propaganda” groups; these groups would have to learn to work through the auspices of the commercial broadcasters. Moreover, the FRC’s emphasis upon the need for the highest-quality technical equipment tended to work to the advantage of the capitalized broadcasters (67, pp. 31–36).

As the contours of modern U.S. broadcasting fell into place with astonishing speed, a coherent and unrepentant opposition to the emerging capitalist domination of the airwaves developed for the first time. “The battle was begun in earnest,” noted one of the leading groups that arose to oppose the status quo, “in the summer of 1928 soon after the enactment of the Commission’s General Order 40” (Education by Radio, May 7, 1931, p. 49). The primary opposition came from the ranks of the displaced and harassed nonprofit broadcasters, particularly those affiliated with colleges and universities. Many educators felt their stations were being left “unprotected” by the FRC as they were “attacked constantly by commercial broadcasters” (98).

In 1929 and 1930, educational broadcasters repeatedly protested to the U.S. Office of Education and the FRC that they were “being driven off the air at a rate that threatened their complete extinction” (126, p. 20). In 1929, at the urging of the National Education Association (NEA), Secretary of the Interior Ray Lyman Wilbur authorized a group of educators and commercial broadcasters to study how to promote educational broadcasting, but the group split predictably along institutional lines, with the network representatives claiming that, since they were more than willing to accommodate the needs of educators, independent educational stations were unnecessary. The final report of the Wilbur Committee, issued in early 1930, presented both sides of the matter but refused to recommend reserving a fixed number of channels for educational broadcasting. It recommended, instead, that the educators learn to cooperate with the commercial broadcasters (see 2). The commercial broadcasters were delighted and thought the report settled the matter; the educators thought the report simply ignored the crisis of survival in which they were enmeshed.

Finally, in the summer of 1930, after repeated demands by educators, U.S. Commissioner of Education William John Cooper called a conference of educational and nonprofit broadcasters to organize a plan of attack before Congress for “new radio legislation” that would protect nonprofit broadcasters before the “commercial stations will have practically monopolized the channels open for
radio broadcasting” (41; 147, p. 7). The October meeting in Chicago led to the creation of the National Committee on Education by Radio (NCER), which would comprise representatives of nine leading national education organizations. Although this would be a nongovernmental body, Cooper arranged for the NCER to receive a five-year $200,000 grant from the Payne Fund, and he appointed Joy Elmer Morgan, editor of the NEA Journal, as the NCER’s director. The NCER was established for the purpose of having Congress reserve 15 percent of the channels for educational use, assisting the educational stations in their seemingly endless hearings before the FRC, and conducting research to enhance education by radio (see 122).

For the next five years the NCER would lead a relentless fight to arrest the commercial domination of the ether. The NCER had a full-time staff of at least three people, and it published a monthly newsletter, Education by Radio, with a controlled circulation that reached 11,000 by 1934. To the NCER, it was axiomatic that cooperation between educators and commercial broadcasters was “not possible.” “That practice has been tried for nearly a decade and has proved unworkable,” Morgan stated in 1931. “It is no longer open to discussion.” Although the educational community was not unanimous or necessarily vociferous in its support of the NCER, the majority of educational organizations formally supported the NCER legislative agenda. And, at times, some educational groups—like the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, which resolved for the complete nationalization and decommercialization of broadcasting in 1932—called for much more radical reform of broadcasting than that proposed by the NCER (58; 121, p. 128).

It would be inaccurate, however, to characterize the NCER as a trade organization trying to make the best possible deal for itself. Morgan, a Midwest populist who had cut his teeth in the public utilities movement of the progressive era, brought to the broadcast struggle a missionary’s zeal for reform and a very broad and deeply political definition of education and educational broadcasting (see 121, pp. 123, 128; 127). “As a result of radio broadcasting,” he informed one audience in 1931,

there will probably develop during the twentieth century either chaos or a world-order of civilization. Whether it shall be one or the other will depend largely upon whether broadcasting be used as a tool of education or as an instrument of selfish greed. So far, our American radio interests have thrown their major influence on the side of greed... There has never been in the entire history of the United States an example of mismanagement and lack of vision so colossal and far-reaching in its consequences as our turning of the radio channels almost exclusively into commercial bands (121, pp. 120–121).

1 The nine organizations were the NEA, the National University Extension Association, the American Council on Education, the National Council of State Superintendents, the Association of College and University Broadcasting Stations, the Jesuit Educational Association, the National Catholic Educational Association, the Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities, and the National Association of State Universities.
"I believe we are dealing here," Morgan told the national convention of the National University Extension Association in 1932, "with one of the most crucial issues that was ever presented to civilization at any time in its entire history" (123, p. 79).

In addition to the NCER, participants in the fight for broadcast reform included other nonprofit broadcasters, members of the newspaper industry, and civic groups. The two most active nonprofit broadcasters were the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL), whose WCFL was the only labor station in the nation, and the Paulist Fathers religious order of New York, which operated WLWL, the only Catholic station in the northeast United States. Both stations had begun in the mid-1920s with tremendous public service aspirations; by the end of the decade they were both struggling for survival as the FRC assigned most of their hours to affiliates of NBC and CBS, respectively. In the early 1930s both WCFL and WLWL, after continued frustration before the FRC, would lead efforts to enact reform legislation (see 76, 105).

Although the American Federation of Labor (AFL) hierarchy resisted the idea of establishing a national nonprofit labor radio channel throughout the 1920s, the more militant CFL, responding to membership pressure, regarded a labor station as essential since, as one union local observed, the commercial stations were generally "used by the enemies of organized labor for the spreading of anti-union propaganda" (cited in 76, p. 149). Indeed, throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, opposition to private, commercial broadcasting was nearly uniform in the resolutions of various labor unions and federations across the nation—except for the AFL executive council (7, 115).

The director of WCFL, Edward Nockels, also represented the AFL on broadcast legislation on Capitol Hill in the early 1930s. After General Order 40, Nockels stated that "all of the 90 channels for radio broadcasting" had been "given to capital and its friends and not even one channel to the millions that toil" (135, p. 13). Nockels brought the same sense of mission to the battle for broadcast reform as the NCER's Morgan. "With the exception of the right to organize," Nockels enthused in 1930, "there is no goal more important of attainment to the American labor movement than one radio wavelength with a nation-wide network over which it can broadcast Labor's message to all citizens of our country. This is the modern phase of the right of free speech." Nockels concluded that "whoever controls radio broadcasting in the future will eventually control the nation" (133, p. 414).

In addition to displaced nonprofit broadcasters, some elements of the newspaper industry agitated for restrictions on the commercialization of the ether, which they regarded as a prime reason for the economic woes of the print media in the depths of the Great Depression. In both Britain and Canada, for example, the daily newspapers played major roles in encouraging the noncommercial development of their national broadcasting systems (105, p. 78; 140, p. 77). And in the United States in the early 1930s, major newspaper trade unions frequently resolved for the complete or near-complete nationalization and decommercialization of broadcasting on explicitly selfish grounds (78). Among
the newspaper publishers, there was considerable hostility to the increasing use of the ether as an advertising medium, especially in the late 1920s and at the beginning of the 1930s (8, 23, 114, 118). The American Newspaper Publishers Association (ANPA) even formed a radio committee in the 1920s to address the threat to newspaper publishing brought about by the development of commercial broadcasting. The most active daily newspaper publisher in the fight to reform broadcasting was H. O. Davis, owner of California's Ventura Free Press, who published two books critical of the status quo, promoted reform ideas before the ANPA, and even hired a full-time lobbyist to work on behalf of broadcast reform throughout the early 1930s (see 45, 186).

Davis's efforts notwithstanding, an alarmed commercial broadcasting industry was able to defuse any threat to their control in short order; indeed, by 1932 or 1933 Davis had been effectively marginalized, and the major newspapers had become allies of the commercial broadcasters in their efforts to thwart the opposition movement. The commercial broadcasters approached the newspaper industry on two levels. First, they emphasized that government restrictions on commercial broadcasting could easily be extended to newspapers. As an NBC vice-president told the San Francisco Advertising Club in 1932, he and William Randolph Hearst had discussed the reform efforts and had agreed that "any threat to commercial advertising on the radio is a threat to all forms of advertising" (153).

Second, the commercial broadcasters strongly encouraged newspapers to either purchase their own stations or affiliate with local stations. By late 1931, 139 radio stations had newspaper owners or affiliations, and another 100 stations would be added to this fold in the next twelve months (149). The networks were especially aggressive in their efforts to establish newspaper affiliations; 35 of the 90 CBS network stations had newspaper owners or affiliations by 1932. "We only know here that newspaper-owned stations have increased their revenues through network broadcasting," CBS president William S. Paley commented, citing instances of newspapers tripling their broadcast advertising revenues in a single year. "Nor are these examples exceptions" (93). This strategy paid off quickly. In 1932 the chairman of the ANPA's radio committee quit in disgust, noting that the newspapers that owned radio stations were stonewalling all of his efforts to develop a coherent broadcast anticommercialism platform for the organization (59). "So long as a goodly array of journalists are close corporate allies of radio," the trade publication Broadcasting assured its readers, the broadcasting industry need "pay no heed to the tempest in the teapot that certain press interests have been trying to create" (149).

The opposition to the status quo was also joined by many civic groups with no particular material stake in the outcome of the fight. The most important of these was the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Prior to 1932, the ACLU had stayed out of the legislative efforts to recast U.S. broadcasting, not regarding it as a free expression issue. However, by early 1933 the ACLU had become overwhelmed with criticism of U.S. broadcasting for its censorship of radical and nonmainstream opinions and for its unwillingness to air controversial public affairs broadcasting. "Censorship at the stations by the managers is con-
stantly exercised in a most unenlightened fashion," ACLU director Roger Baldwin observed in a 1933 memo,

all this with an eye to protecting the status quo. Only a comparatively few small stations voice critical or radical views, and these are in constant danger of either going out of business or being closed up. Protests by the Civil Liberties Union when the larger stations censor programs have resulted in no relief. The Federal Radio Commission pays no attention to such complaints (14).

Shortly thereafter the ACLU established its Radio Committee to deal with "the restrictions on broadcasting inherent in the American system" (13, 188). The Radio Committee was advised to study the "whole matter" of broadcasting and develop a "practical plan" to reform the system and better meet the free expression requirements of a democratic society (15). For the balance of the decade the ACLU would be active in the battle for broadcast reform.

The ACLU's response to network commercial broadcasting mirrored that of the U.S. intelligentsia in general. The NCER's Morgan was not far from the truth when he stated in 1933 that it was impossible to find any intellectual in favor of the status quo, unless that intellectual was receiving money or air time from a commercial broadcaster (124, p. 82). Given the economic and political crisis embracing the world during this period, broadcasting was not foremost on the minds of U.S. intellectuals. Nonetheless, more than a few, including such prominent figures as John Dewey, Walter Hale Hamilton, Alexander Meiklejohn, Charles A. Beard, Norman Thomas, Jane Addams, Upton Sinclair, Frederick Lewis Allen, E. P. Herring, Bruce Bliven, and H. L. Mencken, published articles and gave speeches arguing on behalf of major reform (see, e.g., 48; 49; 81; 82; 116, pp. 86-87). Others, like William Orton of Amherst College, Jerome Davis of the Yale Divinity School, social critic James Rorty, and pioneer radio scientist Lee DeForest, published and spoke actively on behalf of the opposition movement, often coordinating their activities with the NCER, the ACLU, and other opposition groups (46, 136, 158, 159).

Three themes underscored virtually all criticism of the status quo by the various elements of the opposition movement. First, the opposition movement argued that the airwaves should be regarded as a public resource and broadcasting as a public utility. By this reasoning, turning broadcasting over to a relative handful of private broadcasters who sought to satisfy selfish goals was a scandalous misuse of a public resource. Moreover, the FRC had established the existing system entirely outside of public view; even Congress seemed largely oblivious to what had taken place. Hence, the public had yet to exercise its right and duty to determine broadcast policy.

Second, and perhaps most crucially, the opposition movement argued that a network-dominated, for-profit, advertising-supported broadcast system would invariably shade its programming to defend the status quo and would never

4 For Hamilton's influence, see (166). For Sinclair's position see (Education by Radio, December 24, 1931, p. 156; 4; 22; 86).
The Battle for the U.S. Airwaves

give fair play to unpopular or radical opinions. The entire opposition move-
ment was propelled by a profound desire to create a broadcasting system that
would better promote its vision of a democratic political culture.

Third, the reformers criticized the nature of broadcast advertising and the
limitations of advertising-subsidized programming, particularly in regard to the
lack of cultural, educational, and public affairs programming that the system
seemed capable of profitably generating. Some of this criticism had a distinctly
elitist tone.5

Moreover, the opposition movement was insistent in its belief that increased
regulation of the existing system could not produce the desired social results.
At best, noted the NCER's Morgan, "this kind of arrangement would result in
perpetual warfare" (121, p. 122)—a warfare that the opposition movement
must lose. As one naval captain who was amenable to a government-owned
communications system on national security grounds noted in 1933, the "large
companies" would invariably triumph in any regulatory scheme that left the
ownership and support mechanisms of the industry unaltered. "With clever
executives and high-priced lawyers, the Government administrators have little
chance in the long run to resist such pressure, due to the ever-changing per-
sonnel in the Government, regardless of the unquestioned faithfulness of the
employees" (87). Few among the opposition movement were willing to con-
cede the "unquestioned faithfulness" of FRC members and employees, many of
whom went on to lucrative careers with the networks, with the NAB, or as com-
mercial broadcasting attorneys (88). One trade publication even commented in
1934 that Washington had become a "happy hunting ground" for "former
members of the FRC legal staff" as they parlayed their government experience
into lucrative retainers from commercial broadcasting interests (cited in 152).

Armed with this critique and perspective, the opposition movement advo-
cated any number of plans to recreate U.S. broadcasting, but three in particular
received the most attention in the early 1930s. One plan was to have the gov-
ernment set aside a fixed percentage of channels—generally either 15 percent
or 25 percent—for the exclusive use of nonprofit broadcasters. The second plan
was to have Congress authorize an extensive and independent study of broad-
casting with the aim of providing for an entirely new broadcast system. This
plan was based on what had transpired in Britain and, particularly, Canada,
which in 1932 announced—to no small extent due to its distaste for what it
saw taking place to its south—the establishment of a nonprofit and noncom-
mercial broadcasting system (31, 36, 130). To the opposition movement, it was
axiomatic that any independent study of broadcasting would resolve to alter the
status quo. The third plan was to have the government establish a series of
local, regional, and national nonprofit and noncommercial stations that would
be subsidized through taxes and operated by a congressionally approved board
of directors of prominent citizens. This plan also was inspired by the experi-

5 Much of this criticism, which has been largely overlooked by subsequent media critics, ages rather
well and anticipates much of the best modern media criticism, from Herbert Gans (73), Gaye Tuchman
(176), and Ben Bagdikian (12) to Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman (80).
ences in Britain and Canada and, indeed, in most of the world. The government stations would supplement, not replace, the existing commercial networks.

Indeed, with the exception of one or two isolated comments, none of the elements of the opposition movement advocated the complete nationalization and decommercialization of broadcasting. All the plans pointedly created what the opposition movement regarded as a dual system. "And out of the competition between them," one reformer told Congress in 1934 as he outlined his plan for a series of government stations, "there would unquestionably issue a much higher program standard and far less discrimination against vast sections of the public who are now substantially excluded from genuine enjoyment of radio" (181, p. 284). The NCER characterized Australia, which had one commercial network and one noncommercial network, as a "listener's utopia" (104). Interestingly, with but one exception, throughout the early 1930s no proponent of the status quo took seriously the opposition movement's proposals for a mixed system; all efforts to create space for nonprofit and noncommercial broadcasting were approached as if they were specific efforts to eliminate for-profit, commercial broadcasting in its entirety.

One basic and overriding problem plagued the opposition movement throughout its existence: how to subsidize high-quality nonprofit broadcasting. Clearly, the existing system of nonprofit stations with dilapidated facilities, restricted hours, and low power, attempting to rely upon donations from listeners, handouts from philanthropists, and grants from nonprofit groups, had proven unsatisfactory, particularly as the economy was grinding to a halt. To many members of the opposition movement the answer was obvious: Have the government subsidize nonprofit broadcasting by establishing a series of government stations (à la Britain) to be bankrolled by annual license set fees. "A charge of $1.00 per set would provide America ten times the funds which we would need for a generous program of broadcasting," the NCER's Morgan informed a convention of educators in 1932 (123, p. 83). This was a touchy subject in U.S. politics, however. Some elements of the opposition movement, like the ACLU, were more than a little skeptical of granting the government a larger role in communications. Even those that did not share the ACLU's innate skepticism toward the state, like the NCER, began lobbying for a state-subsidized system only years after most of their leaders, including Morgan, had gone on record in its favor (120; 121, p. 124; 125, p. 206). "A government-controlled radio system," two members of the opposition movement noted in 1931, "whether or not hypothetically desirable, is highly impracticable, almost impossible" (100, p. 364).

The only real alternative to having the government play a larger role was having advertising subsidize nonprofit broadcasting. This idea was anathema to the NCER, the ACLU, and much of the opposition movement, which regarded

See Herring (84, p. 308), who concluded that any competition would be "unequal" and favor the government because its stations would not have to carry advertising, "which in most cases detracts from the appeal of the program."

40
The Battle for the U.S. Airwaves

advertising as every bit as bad as network domination. But nonprofit stations like WCFL and WLWL repeatedly defended their right to sell advertising to subsidize their operations (1; 184, p. 186). This became the basis of the fundamental tactical split in the opposition movement. The NCER, the ACLU, and the *Ventura Free Press*, among others, dropped the fixed percentage idea to promote a government study or a government network. WCFL and WLWL, on the other hand, were not especially interested in schemes that did not address the specific plight of their stations. Hence, they showed little enthusiasm for the government plans or for any program that might restrict their sale of advertising.

In addition to the opposition movement being divided over tactics, it faced at least three other major barriers. First, the radio lobby—NBC, CBS, and the NAB—had quickly emerged "as one of the most effective trade associations in the United States" (110, p. 1) and one of the most powerful lobbies in Washington (54, p. 69; 177; 190). Its control of the airwaves gave the radio lobby greater than customary leverage over publicity-conscious politicians—a point lost on neither the commercial broadcasters nor the opposition movement (125, p. 204; 171, p. 5).

In addition, the commercial broadcasters spared no expense in the early 1930s in a public relations campaign to establish the status quo as the only innately "American" and only truly "democratic" method for organizing broadcasting services (see, e.g., 128, 129). With their abundant resources, the radio lobby was able to overwhelm the underfunded communications of the angered opposition movement (124). Finally, each network established an "advisory council" of prominent citizens to offer advice on public affairs programming and to reassure the public that the network would be responsible and socially neutral in its broadcasting. Although even the most cursory examination of these advisory groups indicates that they had little effect on network operations, they were heavily emphasized by the commercial broadcasters before Congress and the public (see 16, pp. 204–206; 55; 63, p. 2; 178; see also 20). As one NBC internal memo observed regarding the network's advisory council, "a great deal of weight will be put to it in the public mind" (138).

Second, given the clear contrast between the political strength and financial wherewithal of the radio lobby and that of the opposition movement, the reformers obviously needed extensive (and preferably sympathetic) print coverage. Unfortunately, what little coverage the press offered was strongly oriented toward presenting the position of the commercial broadcasters. This delighted the radio lobby, which provided the press with a continual stream of press releases (see 142, pp. 222–223). It angered and puzzled the opposition movement, for the most part, which could not understand why their cause seemed to be getting short shrift (see, e.g., 32). In any case, this proved to be a formidable obstacle for the reformers.

Third, the legal community, with few exceptions, rallied to the defense of the status quo (see 108). The American Bar Association (ABA) established a Standing Committee on Communications in the late 1920s with "the duty of
studying and making recommendations on proposed radio legislation" (52, p. 144). This ABA committee was chaired by Louis G. Caldwell, who had been the FRC's first General Counsel during the implementation of General Order 40 and had emerged as one of the leading commercial broadcasting attorneys in the nation (9, 30, 69). The ABA committee, staffed almost entirely by commercial broadcasting attorneys, turned out annual reports ranging from 40 to 100 pages that argued in no uncertain terms that any reform of the status quo would be disastrous. Although these reports were never voted upon by the ABA, they were relied upon by Congress and presented to Congress and the public as the expert, neutral opinion of the U.S. legal community. The opposition movement was appalled by this apparent conflict of interest but had little success in challenging the ABA committee's legitimacy (102, 151).

Curiously, from 1928 to 1933 the ABA committee, like the commercial broadcasting industry, was opposed to any congressional involvement with broadcast policy and favored granting the FRC unconditional power to act as it pleased. "The radio administration within a nation," Caldwell wrote in 1930, "must have a life-and-death power over the radio conduct of its subjects such as it neither has nor desires over their conduct in other matters." Caldwell argued that "such matters cannot safely be prescribed by statute" and were "unsuited for decision by a legislative body" (26). As for the seeming threat to free expression implicit in granting the FRC arbitrary power to license broadcasters, the legal community was not particularly concerned. "If all this be censorship," the ABA committee reported in 1929, "it seems unavoidable and in the best interests of the listening public" (6, p. 459).

The campaign to restructure U.S. broadcasting experienced three distinct phases over the period 1930–1935. The first stage, from 1930 until President Herbert Hoover left office in the spring of 1933, was clearly the high watermark for popular discontent with U.S. broadcasting, far surpassing anything that would develop subsequently. Public distaste for commercial broadcast fare was being repeatedly communicated to members of Congress. "Many members on both sides of the Capitol are aroused by local conditions," Broadcasting informed its readers, and they "have heard protests from constituents" regarding the nature of the U.S. system (171, p. 6). WCFL's Edward Nockels estimated that 70 percent of the Senate and 80 percent of the House supported legislation to set aside channels for nonprofit broadcasters, and there is little evidence to contradict his assessment (134).

Nevertheless, reform legislation failed to get through Congress during this period, for two reasons. First, this was the trough of the Great Depression, and the preponderance of congressional activity was dedicated to legislation for economic recovery. "Were it not for the disturbing economic situation," Broadcasting observed in 1931, "Congress might blunder into the political radio morass camouflaged by these lobbying factions" (171, p. 5). Second, while there was considerable support for reform among the rank and file members of Congress, relevant committee leaders were nearly unanimously opposed. "We have been lucky," modestly observed NAB president Harry Shaw in a speech to
The Battle for the U.S. Airwaves

the NAB Board of Directors on the legislative situation in 1932. "We have been content to leave the protection of this industry to a few of our friends in certain places" (146). "If it were not for a little group of reactionary leaders in both branches of Congress," an incensed Nockels observed in 1931, reform "legislation would have been passed by this time" (134). And, indeed, when the Senate passed a rider to a bill in 1931 that would have established a national, non-profit labor network, the congressional leaders were able to have the bill tabled at the end of the session (95, 96).

The most important congressional leader in this regard was Senator Dill, who by the early 1930s had established himself as, in the words of Broadcasting, "unquestionably... the most influential voice in federal radio control of any figure in public life" (37). As ACLU counsel Morris Ernst stated emphatically in 1931, "There is no use in drafting material which will not be acceptable to him" (62). Behind a veneer of progressive rhetoric, Dill repeatedly stonewalled all efforts to get reform legislation through his Senate Committee on Interstate Commerce. In January 1932 he and another senator, responding to the public outcry for broadcast reform, had the Senate pass a measure authorizing the FRC to study the opposition movement's criticisms (Congressional Record 75, January 4, 1932, pp. 1194-1195; Congressional Record 75, January 7, 1932, pp. 1412-1413; 172). The FRC report released that summer, Commercial Radio Advertising, was based largely on the uncritical acceptance of the responses of commercial broadcasters to a short questionnaire. Predictably, it praised the status quo and dismissed the opposition movement's concerns as without merit (68). The commercial broadcasters were elated (see, e.g., 89), while the opposition movement labeled the report "not a fact-finding document but a defense of the present radio system" (39). The FRC report successfully defused the momentum for reform and left the opposition movement soberly regarding its prospects. By 1933, the ACLU and the NCER would agree that Senator Dill was a "weak sister" who would provide no assistance to the opposition movement (177).

The second stage of the campaign, which lasted from March 1933 until the Communications Act of 1934 was signed into law in June of that year, was the decisive period when Congress finally enacted permanent broadcasting legislation. The opposition movement was initially quite encouraged by the change in administrations and hoped that President Roosevelt would assist their cause. Indeed, many key members of the New Deal were outspoken critics of commercial broadcasting and advocates of sweeping reform. Moreover, one of Roosevelt's closest political and personal friends, Ambassador to Mexico Josephus Daniels, was an unabashed proponent of completely nationalized broadcasting. "There is no more reason why other communications industries should be privately owned than the mails," he wrote the president in one of numerous letters on the subject (44). Nevertheless, Roosevelt chose not to take a public position on the broadcast debate, while his aides worked behind the scenes to

7 Most prominent were Eddie Dowling; Dr. Arthur Morgan, Chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority; and economist Adolph A. Berle (see, e.g., 54; 119, p. 81).
assist the commercial broadcasters with their legislative agenda (see below). Clearly Roosevelt was in no mood to take on an uphill fight against a powerful and entrenched communications industry, particularly when he enjoyed less than perfect relations with the nation's largely Republican newspaper industry. As even Daniels advised him, he had more important battles to fight (44).8

By 1933 the broadcasting industry had largely stabilized after the shake-up following General Order 40. The commercial broadcasters determined that the time was ripe for permanent broadcasting legislation that would eliminate the annual forum on Capitol Hill for “attacks by unfriendly groups” and “speed up the movement toward a more thoroughly stabilized broadcasting industry” (173; see also 5, p. 452). They sought, ideally, to have the Radio Act of 1927 reenacted verbatim and to have a body similar to the FRC established permanently; indeed, the commercial broadcasters were the only group uniform in its praise of this otherwise most controversial body (see, e.g., 184, pp. 53–55; see also 18). Yet the industry had no desire for Congress to debate or discuss how best to organize the U.S. broadcasting system, let alone have any public discussion of the issues involved (see 160, pp. 173–174). Avoiding such discussion would have been impossible in earlier sessions of Congress, but the commercial broadcasters were confident of their support among the key figures in Washington, most notably Senator Dill and the president.

In the fall of 1933 President Roosevelt had Secretary of Commerce Daniel Roper appoint a committee of government department representatives to prepare recommendations for the “construction of needed legislation” in the area of communications (90). This Roper Committee operated in secrecy, took no outside testimony, and recommended in January 1934 that the status quo be maintained but that all communications regulation be housed under one administrative agency (40, 90). This was precisely what the commercial broadcasters had desired (42; 160, p. 178). Although the Roper Committee did not even discuss broadcasting in its deliberations, the subject nevertheless was included in the report's final recommendations. (This point was brought to the president's attention by a member of the Roper Committee who filed a “minority report” to indicate his displeasure with the lack of attention broadcasting had received [87].)

At the request of Secretary Roper, in January 1934, President Roosevelt authorized Roper to establish an independent Federal Committee to Study Radio Broadcasting (FCSRB) under the Office of Education, which would take up the structural and regulatory issues that the Roper Committee had neglected (145; 174, p. 6). The opposition movement was elated; for once it would have a forum to present its case. The commercial broadcasters and Senator Dill, on the other hand, were confounded. They informed the president in no uncertain terms that such a study was unnecessary, due to the 1932 FRC study, and that it would not be used in the drafting of legislation, as was its ostensible purpose (24, 25, 51). The president quietly canceled the FCSRB in late February. The

* For a more complete analysis of the Roosevelt administration and broadcast policy, see (107; 160, pp. 170–180).
NCER was informed that "this matter, for the time being, will be entirely handled by the Congress" (157).

Dill and his counterpart in the House, Representative Sam Rayburn, Democrat of Texas, now sought to rush the proposed legislation through committee hearings and have it brought to the floors of the House and Senate for a vote as quickly as possible (38). Their bills essentially reenacted the Radio Act of 1927 and established a new Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to regulate all the communications industries; in short, with minor qualifications, these bills were precisely what the commercial broadcasters had desired. Dill hoped to stem any potential opposition to the proposed legislation by having his bill authorize the new FCC to thoroughly study communications and report any suggestions for reform legislation the following year. "If we leave out the controversial matters," Dill stated, "the bill can be passed at this session" (156). Indeed, Dill announced that he would not permit broadcasting to be discussed during the upcoming committee hearings on the legislation, since the unresolved broadcasting issues would now be taken up by the new FCC (174, p. 5). The commercial broadcasters crowed their approval of this tactic; they had long felt more secure with their fate in the hands of regulators rather than elected officials (New York Times, February 10, 1934, p. 12; 184, p. 106).

Although some elements of the opposition movement had become demoralized and had given up any hope for immediate attention from Congress, the Paulist Fathers' John B. Harney submitted an amendment to the Dill communications bill during the committee hearings that would have required the new FCC to set aside fully 25 percent of the channels for nonprofit broadcasters. The committee voted against the Harney proposal, but Senators Robert Wagner, Democrat of New York, and Henry Hatfield, Republican of West Virginia, agreed to introduce the amendment on the Senate floor. Father Harney and the Paulists engaged in a whirlwind campaign to generate support for the measure, particularly from Catholic organizations and parishes around the nation. Within a few weeks the Paulists had over 60,000 signatures on petitions supporting the measure and had the active support of Edward Nockels and much of the labor movement (94; 97; 111, p. 896; 185). In April the trade publication Variety reported that the now-termed Wagner-Hatfield amendment stood "better than a 50–50 chance of being adopted" (3).

The radio lobby attacked the Wagner-Hatfield amendment in late April and early May as if, as an NAB representative later explained, its passage "obviously would have destroyed the whole structure of broadcasting in America" (19, p. 618). Both the White House and the FRC lobbied members of Congress against the legislation (112; 160, p. 179; 175).

After it became apparent that Father Harney would have his amendment introduced in the Senate, Senator Dill installed a clause in his communications bill, section 307(c), that would require the new FCC to hold hearings concerning the idea of reserving 25 percent of the channels for nonprofit broadcasters and then report to Congress with their recommendations the following year. This was enough to convince wayward senators that the Wagner-Hatfield amendment was not necessary (160, p. 179). The amendment was defeated on
the Senate floor on May 15 by a vote of 42–23. Immediately thereafter, the Senate approved Dill’s communications bill with section 307(c) by a voice vote. In the House, which had stricter rules, Representative Rayburn was able to keep the Harney amendment from getting to the floor for a vote or even being discussed in the floor debate. After the House passed the Rayburn communications bill in early June, the bills went to conference, where the differences were ironed out; Dill telephoned Henry Bellows, the NAB’s chief lobbyist, and informed him, “We have been very generous to you fellows.” Bellows would later comment: “When we read it, we found that every major point we had asked for was there” (19, p. 618).

President Roosevelt signed the Communications Act of 1934 into law on June 18. The bill was lost in the media coverage of the stack of New Deal bills that had been passed at the end of the congressional session. When it was covered, it was characterized as a “New Deal in Radio Law” that was aimed at “curbing monopoly control in radio” and that boldly harnessed antagonistic private power and forced it to act in the public interest. Neither the Roosevelt administration nor Senator Dill did anything to discourage this patently bogus interpretation (56, 132).9

With the passage of the Communications Act of 1934, Congress effectively removed itself from substantive broadcast policy issues for the balance of the century. The only “legitimate” opportunity remaining for the opposition movement to present its case was in the October 1934 FCC hearings mandated by section 307(c), which required the FCC to evaluate the Wagner-Hatfield fixed percentage concept. The outcome of the hearings was never in doubt; most elements of the opposition movement regarded them as a “set-up for the broadcasters,” and, indeed, two of the three FCC members who would be at the hearings announced to the NAB convention in September that there was no way they would alter the status quo, regardless of what transpired at the upcoming hearings (77, 154). In January 1935, the FCC formally issued its report to Congress: There was no need to alter the status quo, and efforts should be made to assist disenfranchised nonprofit groups in utilizing commercial broadcasting facilities (65). In effect, this was the cooperation thesis advanced by the Wilbur Committee in 1930 and rejected at the time on its face. The opposition movement had, at best, delayed the full stabilization of the airwaves from 1929 or 1930 to 1935.

Ironically, precisely as the window for reform was being slammed shut, the NCER formally proposed the creation of a federal chain of noncommercial stations (43). The proposal was ignored, and the opposition movement quickly unraveled. The Paulist station WLWL sold its license to Arde Bulova in 1937

---

9 For an immediate response by a liberal FCC member to the asininity of this interpretation, see (139, p. 42). Some broadcasting historians assert this argument despite the fact that the Communications Act of 1934 restated the Radio Act of 1927 virtually verbatim and had been the conscious result of keeping the public and Congress itself as far removed as possible from any debate over broadcasting issues (60).
and went out of business. Labor station WCFL abandoned its efforts for membership contribution support and became an advertising-supported NBC affiliate by the mid-1930s; despite its labor pedigree, it became largely indistinguishable from the capitalist broadcasters. The NCER attempted to improve relations between educators and commercial broadcasters and the FCC but finally closed down in 1941. The ACLU Radio Committee remained active with a somewhat radical broadcast legislative platform well into the second half of the decade, when it finally discontinued these efforts in view of their complete lack of success (see 106). By the end of the decade the ACLU had formally accepted the legitimacy of the industry's capitalist and commercial basis, as much for pragmatic reasons as for any philosophical change of heart, and it began to resume its traditional concern with government censorship. The broadcast system was now deemed fundamentally sound rather than fundamentally flawed.

In the second half of the decade, as the industry became economically and politically consolidated, the commercial broadcasters strove for ideological closure. In this campaign they triumphantly located commercial broadcasting next to the newspaper industry as an icon of American freedom and culture and, with considerable historical revisionism if not outright fabrication, removed it from critical contemplation. The opposition movement was correspondingly written out of the dominant perspective on the development of U.S. broadcasting, and the conflict of the early 1930s was erased from the historical memory. “Our American system of broadcasting,” Radio Corporation of America president David Sarnoff informed a nationwide audience over NBC in 1938, is what it is because it operates in the American democracy. It is a free system because this is a free country. It is privately owned because private ownership is one of our national doctrines. It is privately supported, through commercial sponsorship of a portion of its program hours, and at no cost to the listener, because ours is a free economic system. No special laws had to be passed to bring these things about. They were already implicit in the American system, ready and waiting for broadcasting when it came (cited in 91).

The implications of this logic were not always left unspoken. “He who attacks the fundamentals of the American system” of broadcasting, CBS president Paley informed an audience in 1937, “attacks democracy itself” (137, p. 6).

Also quickly forgotten was the position of the legal community and the commercial broadcasting industry in favor of arbitrary and unchecked commission regulation of broadcasting prior to 1934. Now that the industry was entrenched and beyond political challenge, any further regulation was determined to have more negative than positive possibilities for the industry. Suitably, Louis Caldwell led the campaign, beginning in late 1934, to recognize existing property rights in the ether and eliminate government licensing and regulation of broadcasting, all in the name of the First Amendment. Caldwell compared the Communications Act of 1934 to “the ordinances of the Star Chamber” and argued that with the legal recognition of the government's right to regulate broadcasting, “the clock of liberty has been set back three hundred years” (28, 29). The campaign for deregulation was unsuccessful, but the resulting system by the
late 1930s acknowledged the government's right to regulate broadcasting only after the marketplace and industry self-regulation had proven abject failures. In effect, there developed a de facto privatization of the airwaves and, with that, what broadcast historian Philip Rosen has termed the "myth of regulation" (160, p. 180).

By the end of the decade, and thereafter, the notion that the American people had a right to determine whatever broadcast system they deemed superior for society was effectively dead. In 1945 Paul Lazarsfeld would observe that the American people seemed to approve of the private and commercial basis of the industry. "People have little information on the subject," he noted; "they have obviously given it little thought" (101, p. 89).

This article has documented that the U.S. system of broadcasting emerged not as the result of a consensus but rather as a result of conflict in which there were clear winners and losers. Because much of U.S. broadcasting history has underemphasized this opposition, it has had the earmarks of a history written by the victors. Even the otherwise outstanding critical scholarship, with its emphasis on the period preceding 1928, seemingly has accepted the notion that the American people went along willy-nilly with the establishment of the status quo.

It is true that the opposition movement was unable to generate popular momentum for its cause. Certainly, the might of the commercial broadcasters made any alternative system highly problematic. Nonetheless, it is an error to argue that the system was thoroughly consolidated by the middle 1920s or to assume that Americans were ignorant of, apathetic toward, or even enthusiastic about commercial broadcasting. The commercial broadcasters and their allies did everything within their (substantial) power to monopolize the process of making broadcast policy throughout the period in question. And, in this sense, there has never really been a legitimate public debate over the issues the opposition movement attempted to raise.

Moreover, it is a debate that is still worth having. The concentration in the 1990s of not only broadcasting but all mass media in the hands of some two dozen enormous corporations would wrinkle the brows of Joy Elmer Morgan or Edward Nockels (see 11, 12). Advertising has continued its seemingly unshakeable course, in the words of Stuart Ewen, into "every nook and cranny" of American, and, indeed, international life (cited in New York Times, October 3, 1989, p. 1). The concerns of the 1930s opposition regarding the limitations of the modern media system for the exercise of a democratic political culture have moved front and center in the contemporary critiques of U.S. political culture (see, e.g., 61). Now, more than ever it would seem, researchers must be willing to analyze what is arguably the root cause of the problem rather than concentrate solely on marginal effects. As this article has endeavored to show, there is an important legacy for this approach and a rich American tradition of

10 For a more theoretical discussion of why fundamental media issues have remained "off-limits" in U.S. political culture, see (109).
The Battle for the U.S. Airwaves

no-holds-barred communications analysis. With the recognition of this tradition, adherence to time-worn but unproven presuppositions may seem less tenable.

References


90. Interdepartmental Committee [Roper Committee]. *Study of Communications by an Interdepartmental Committee*, Letter from the President of the United States to the Chairman of the Committee on Interstate Commerce Transmitting a Memorandum from the Secretary of Commerce Relative to a Study of Communications by an Interdepartmental Committee. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1934.


The Battle for the U.S. Airwaves


112. Maloney, Francis T. Correspondence with Eugene Sykes, April 25, 1934, April 28, 1934. Federal Communications Commission Manuscripts, National Archives, Suitland, Maryland, NARG 173, Legislation, Acts-Radio, FCC General Correspondence, Box 38.
114. Mann, Robert S. "After All, Why Radio Advertising?" Editor & Publisher, June 6, 1931, p. 12.


The Battle for the U.S. Airwaves


151. "Radio From the Citizen’s Point of View." *Education by Radio,* October 8, 1931, p. 112.


The Battle for the U.S. Airwaves


Announcing the National Broadcasting Company, Inc.

National radio broadcasting with better programs permanently assured by this important action of the Radio Corporation of America in the interest of the listening public

The Radio Corporation of America is the largest dealer in radio receiving sets in the world. It handles the entire output of the General Electric Company.

It does not use this buildingly to do more than a part of the market in the future. It must be for the purpose of making the products it manufactures and the products of its associated companies better known and more acceptable to the public.

Radio for 26,000,000 Homes.

The market for receiving sets is the center of all improvements in the industry. The public wants more of the same kind that it has had in the past. The public wants more of the same kind that it has had in the past.

We are coming to you today to announce that the National Broadcasting Company now has the right to broadcast over the nation wide network of the National Broadcasting Company, the largest broadcasting system in the world.

The National Broadcasting Company has decided on this new policy because it is in the public interest. The National Broadcasting Company has decided on this new policy because it is in the public interest.

The Public Advisory Council.

The President of the National Broadcasting Company now has the right to broadcast over the nation wide network of the National Broadcasting Company, the largest broadcasting system in the world.

In the public interest.

M. H. Ayerworth to be President.

The President of the new National Broadcasting Company will be M. H. Ayerworth, who has been for many years Managing Director of the National Electric Light Association. He will perform the executive and administrative duties of the corporation.

Announcing the National Broadcasting Company, Inc.

National radio broadcasting with better programs permanently assured by this important action of the Radio Corporation of America in the interest of the listening public.

Radio Corporation of America

Owen D. Young, Chairman of the Board

James G. Marshall, President