

What sustains the narrative is that the old school of radio advocates—Larry Gelbart, Himan Brown, and Erik Barnouw among others—make appearances throughout the book, challenging and questioning the latest trends of radio commercialization. For example, summing up the influence of Stern and other shock jocks, Gelbart hopes that “these guys are preaching only to the perverted.”

These oral exchanges can make for informative reading if the first-hand, sometimes superficial, accounts are put into a larger industry context. A running thread in several chapters is an attempt to understand what passes for political opinion on radio. Several voices lament the passing of such commentators as H. V. Kaltenborn and Edward R. Murrow. Even with the lifting of the FCC ban on editorials in 1950, former news producer Ed Bliss notes that stations and individuals champion few causes. In fact, most opinion today is given by non-journalists, spouting out prejudices with little informed judgement—the heart and soul of talk radio. But is this really the “single most important format development in commercial radio’s history,” as performer Dick Fatherly alleges?

Why did talk radio sweep the airwaves since the eighties? Two theories are offered: host Michael Harrison asserts that it was the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine that allowed stations to tackle controversial issues and personalities while foundation executive Gordon Hastings states that first local and then national radio responded to the average American’s detachment from the electoral process. Much discussion is given over to the significance of this “chatter that matters.” Opinions range from talk radio as a new form of drama, where callers adlib their lines, to an exploitative asylum for ranting fanatics. Whatever its effect, editor Keith

frames the debate by stating that talk radio rescued the AM band and returned the word back to the medium where recorded music had taken over.

The witnesses agree that the major change caused by the dominance of television was that radio did not have to be a mass medium any longer. The airwaves could now serve smaller and smaller demographic groups, appealing to the most limited cultural interests. One gets the sense that most of these so-called experts of radio listen only to programs that conform to their tastes and generation. Syndicated host Joe Cortese states that disc jockeys “helped form my worldview and kept me tuned into what was hip, cool, and necessary.” On the other hand, Studs Terkel, who grew up in another age of radio, thinks that most deejays are “pretty devoid of any identifiable talent.” Even with all the witnesses there are some notable omissions. The compelling monologues of Jean Shepherd are not cited, as is not the transformation of Don Imus from radio clown to political kingmaker.

There seems to be only basic principle of postwar radio: it is never static. Underground, free-form radio of the sixties seems as distant as Fred Allen and *Inner Sanctum*. But the even these 100 voices are not enough to encompass all the changes of contemporary radio. You would have no idea that of the approximately 10,400 stations in America, the most popular format by far is country, heard over 2,400 channels. Although one chapter deals mainly with the advances of African-Americans and women in radio, there is not enough about the significance of ethnic radio, especially Hispanic programming. Hispanic radio is a leader in many markets, especially Los Angeles, and in this new century there are now more Spanish/ethnic stations than Top Forty ones. The inventor of all-hits radio, Todd Storz, is saluted in one chapter, but who is his equivalent in minority programming?