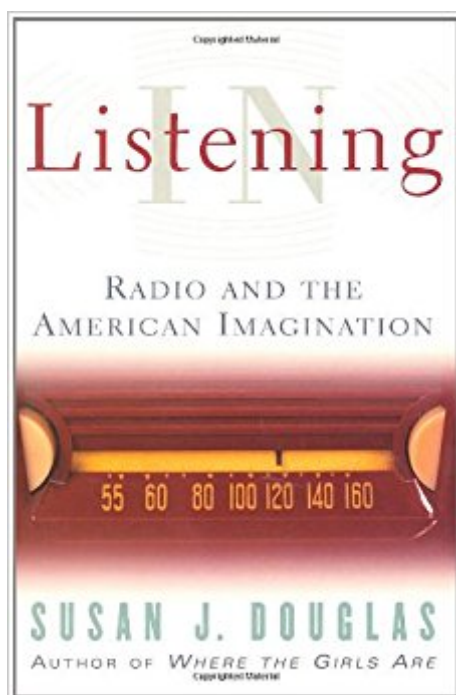


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# Listening In: Radio And The American Imagination



## Synopsis

At the beginning of this spirited and engaging cultural history, Douglas (communication studies, U. of Michigan, Ann Arbor) refers to Erik Barnouw's three-volume *History of Broadcasting in the United States* (published between 1966 and 1970); she covers much of the same ground only quicker (one volume) and points out that each chapter could have been

## Book Information

Paperback: 432 pages

Publisher: Univ Of Minnesota Press; 1st University of Minnesota Press Ed edition (February 25, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0816644233

ISBN-13: 978-0816644230

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 0.9 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 14 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #212,787 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #12 in [Books > Humor & Entertainment > Radio > History & Criticism](#) #172 in [Books > Humor & Entertainment > Television > Shows](#) #1769 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Communication & Media Studies](#)

## Customer Reviews

Tracing radio's development from the early days of wireless to the shock jocks and NPR commentators of the '90s, Douglas (*Where the Girls Are*) delivers a carefully researched and well-documented look at the medium and the people who listened. Although Douglas's prose can be sluggish, occasionally mired in statistics, her subject matter is always engaging. She finds that each new technological innovation in radio was pioneered by amateurs, resisted by the mainstream media, made popular by a daring few and finally watered down and exploited by commercial interests. Douglas's main interest is not in the innovations themselves, however, but in how they affected the Americans who were listening to shows from Victor Lopez's jazz band broadcasts in the '20s to Eddie Cantor's *Chase and Sanborn Hour* in the '30s; Alan Reed's mixed-race rock 'n' roll broadcasts in the '50s; "White Rabbit" on KSAN in San Francisco in the late '60s; Larry King in the '80s; and Dr. Laura and Rush Limbaugh in the '90s. She shows us how radio has opened up new worlds, and how its persistent presence (in the kitchen, in the car, at work) continues to influence

the nation despite being taken for granted. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It's not just video that killed the radio star but images in general (e.g., TV, the Internet), says Douglas (media and American studies, Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor). Douglas argues that through radio Americans can still revive their imaginations. Her thesis will seem obvious to older generations that listening to the radio shaped the American psyche socially, politically, and economically. But the generations raised on MTV, CNN, ESPN, and personal computers must still be convinced. It may be difficult to draw their attention to a book with only eight photos, but Douglas re-creates the wonder of having an invisible friend (or enemy) in forgotten and fading stars like Jack Benny, Edward R. Murrow, Harry Caray, and Alan Freed. Unfortunately, today radio belongs to overstuffed "suits," overplayed singles, and pinched formats, which can musically and geographically "re-segregate" people. Douglas points out that listeners are partly to blame for radio's dismal state. Owners are simply trying to air what their audiences want, but listeners are sending mixed messages: they want variety but lack the imagination to accept it on one station. A persuasive study of the power that radio has had and can still have; essential for all communications collections. A Heather McCormack, "Library Journal" Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I liked the book because it reprised my childhood memories in a sense. However, the slant was away from the subjects that mattered the most to me personally, mainly on the entertainment side other than comedy. Namely the adventure dramas, the scary shows, the crime dramas, children's programs, etc. Of course the emphasis of the book MUST be the important issues such as the politics, coverage of W II and the rest. The adult radio world of the period was something that I did not experience, myself, but I wanted to learn about what was going on. It is an education.

A critical look at the way radio helped to shape an emerging industrialized, middle class America. Outside of my field, but yields insight into technology, and its contribution to modern history. A must read for those in radio, for a greater appreciation of how the field began. Jill C. Nelson MA  
GRAD Mississippi State University

I ordered the book I wanted to find out all about America's love affair with radio. Especially before the advent of Television. These things I want to know about. That was a time when radio was the big

communicator for the average American. Americans received all their information via the Radio Dial and that fascinates me. That's why I ordered this wonderful book.

If you like early American television, radio, and media, this should be on your reading this.

Like very much

A keen insight into how media shapes the times and how listeners shape the media. A must read for all with an interest in radio and in media in general.

ARRIVED QUICKLY. EXCELLENT CONDITION. VERY HELPFUL BOOK. ENJOYABLE AND ACCURATE.

Very good reading. I really like the way the author delves into the imagination of radio listening. What a loss that America has not allowed good radio programming to coexist with television.

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