

(Download pdf) Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935

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Robert W. McChesney
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Robert W. McChesney : Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935:

3 of 5 people found the following review helpful. History RepeatsBy doomsdayer520Robert McChesney has become one of our leading media critics and activists, and in this debut book from 1993 he was already adept at exploring why concentrated corporate media is an affront to democracy. Granted, at the time of this book McChesney was not yet wearing his democratic (small "d") politics so prominently on his sleeve, and was more concerned with the historical forces that have shaped the media mess that we're in now. While media reform is a struggling, yet growing, movement today, it was a force to be reckoned with the last time media policy was a source of widespread public concern in this country. That was way back in the 1928-1935 period, when the federal government was still trying to figure out how to regulate the airwaves, resulting in the 1934 creation of the FCC. At the time, it would have still been possible to create a true public broadcasting system in America, with benefits for civil society and social justice, as well as for-profit companies who would be encouraged to use the system wisely. But instead we ended up with the current

advertiser-driven lowest-common-denominator system, in which mega-conglomerate corporate profits are the main (and usually the only) concern for federal media and telecommunications policy. McChesney provides plenty of evidence that this emergence of a corporate media system was not inevitable and was instead the result of government deliberations in which fairly well-organized non-profit activists (especially religious, educational, and labor groups) were unable to resist an onslaught of self-serving rhetoric and influence peddling by the big media companies. Here we can see how history really does repeat itself, and knowledgeable readers will be painfully familiar with the false arguments about democracy and freedom that big media used then and now. The only problem with this book is that while it is intricately and impeccably researched, the straight chronological history and voluminous government documents used by McChesney result in a very repetitive and unexciting read. McChesney's later works are more passionate and readable, notwithstanding their increased polemics. Here the monotonous reading is not entirely rewarding for the interested scholar until an excellent concluding chapter, in which McChesney lays out how much we can learn from this deceptively dry political history, and finally delivers on the book's weighty title.

[~doomsdayer520~] 3 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Here come the Martian Marxists By Mr Paralleland I wouldn't be surprised if they're riding on their Martian bike. This book is a sad joke and a frivolous, ideologically-poisoned waste of thousands of hours of archival research. McChesney, whose reputation as the academic pundit King of All Media is based on the rickety foundation of this misbegotten work, imagines himself to be doing muscular, old-school political economy, and this, I surmise, is what licenses him to write his narrative in a hermetic cultural vacuum. But that's messed up on both counts. What do I mean by cultural vacuum? Click through to the "Search Inside" function and enter "jazz" as a search term. You'll get exactly two hits. Two. This is . . . problematic for a book about broadcasting in the Jazz Age. That's because people never shut up about jazz and its implications for broadcasting. Jazz, you see, signified at the time as evil set to melody: it was gangsta rap, death metal and punk rock rolled into one. But McChesney doesn't want to talk about that, because all of his bourgeois reformers were on the wrong side of history where jazz was concerned. But if you were against commercialism in 1928 through 1935, you were also against jazz, because it was catchpenny commercial garbage in league with the Devil, as opposed to the philanthropically-subsidized cultural spinach that it is today. Now run a search on vaudeville: One solitary hit. Now run a search on Tin Pan Alley: Zip. Zero. Nada. Sweet Fanny Adams. Not a sausage. Mayor McCheese has never heard of America's gargantuan, world-conquering, popular music industry, not its signature weapon of conquest, which we would call payola but was then known as song plugging. This means that his book is worthless as a work of political economy, because vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley were major cultural and economic institutions that exerted unparalleled influence on the evolution of radio programming. You may as well write a history of cooking without reference to farming and fire. Other things missing from McChesney's dire saga about the corporate theft and desecration of the airwaves: Programs. There are four hits for Amos 'n' Andy (virtually unavoidable) but otherwise the Bobcat really doesn't want to go near any specific radio shows, especially not popular ones, because that would raise all kinds of difficult questions about the social class of radio listeners and their cultural preferences. For McChesney, early programming was bluntly divided into two simple categories: "commercial" (bad) and "educational" (good). This is an ideal way to spin things if you're looking to persuade academics that you're preaching true Gospel. Guess which class of programs they like better. There are no actual listeners in this book. "The people," on whose behalf McChesney presumes to speak, are not consulted. Which is strange, because early radio listeners were a vocal and opinionated lot who wrote zillions of letters of protest and praise about what they were hearing, and sent them to magazines, newspapers, federal officials and broadcasters. McChesney isn't going to touch this deep and vital vein of evidence, because not one word of it supports his melodramatic story of mustache-twirling top-hatted villains stealing the family farm of the airwaves. I've got lots more epistemological muck to rake here, but I gotta go to work now. Later.

This work shows in detail the emergence and consolidation of U.S. commercial broadcasting economically, politically, and ideologically. This process was met by organized opposition and a general level of public antipathy that has been almost entirely overlooked by previous scholarship. McChesney highlights the activities and arguments of this early broadcast reform movement of the 1930s. The reformers argued that commercial broadcasting was inimical to the communication requirements of a democratic society and that the only solution was to have a dominant role for nonprofit and noncommercial broadcasting. Although the movement failed, McChesney argues that it provides important lessons not only for communication historians and policymakers, but for those concerned with media and how they are used.

"This highly informative study gives an illuminating account of the formation of the mass media, the forces that determined their character, and the implications for functioning democracy. The questions addressed and the insights offered are also of great contemporary relevance, as telecommunications moves to a new stage, and problems of a very similar nature arise in new forms."--Noam Chomsky, Massachusetts Institute of Technology" His study succeeds in introducing us to the principled opposition to commercial broadcasting that existed during America's 1930's, and in so doing, makes a worthwhile contribution to the ongoing discourse on how mass media can be made to best serve a

democracy."--American Historical "Backed by impeccable scholarship, Robert McChesney's voice deserves to be heard. His book explodes the myth that the radio-TV environment of today was produced by some 'natural evolution' nurtured by the inherently democratic free market. This realization is especially relevant as Congress and the FCC make policy for constructing the Information Superhighway."--The Progressive"Robert McChesney's contribution to our understanding of media history and reform movements is enormous."--Against the Current"A valuable scholarly assessment of a critical period of policy decision-making....Important reading--perhaps the best telling of this short but centrally-important period."--Communications BooknotesAbout the AuthorRobert W. McChesney is at University of Wisconsin, Madison.