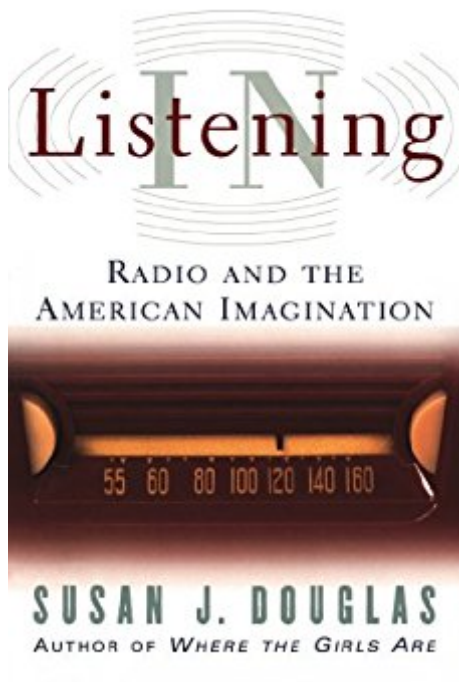


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# Listening In: Radio And The American Imagination



## Synopsis

Few inventions evoke such nostalgia, such deeply personal and vivid memories as radio—from Amos ’n’ Andy and Edward R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern. *Listening In* is the first in-depth history of how radio culture and content have kneaded and expanded the American psyche. But *Listening In* is more than a history. It is also a reconsideration of what listening to radio has done to American culture in the twentieth century and how it has brought a completely new auditory dimension to our lives. Susan Douglas explores how listening has altered our day-to-day experiences and our own generational identities, cultivating different modes of listening in different eras; how radio has shaped our views of race, gender roles, ethnic barriers, family dynamics, leadership, and the generation gap. With her trademark wit, Douglas has created an eminently readable cultural history of radio.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Please take note that Susan J. Douglas' (Times Books, 1999) is no mere history of radio. It was triggered by a request from the Sloan Foundation that was preparing a series of books on

technology and American culture; and the emphasis is not on the details but on the general effect radio has on us from its beginnings. And take another note. This is too enjoyable a read to be considered a textbook. My favorite chapter was the one called "Radio Comedy and Linguistic Slapstick." Here only a few comics are used as examples to support her several theses, one of which is the emasculation of the American male by the use of such high-pitched speakers as Jack Benny and Joe Penner. Of course there is lots of room for argument, but she does let the facts speak for themselves (pun intended). The other chapters are "The Zen of Listening," "The Ethereal World," "Exploratory Listening in the 1920s," "Tuning In to Jazz" "The Invention of the Audience," "World War II and the Invention of Broadcast Journalism," "Playing Fields of the Mind," "The Kids Take Over: Transistors, DJs, and Rock 'n' Roll," "The FM Revolution," "Talk Talk," "Why Ham Radio Matters," and "Conclusion: Is Listening Dead?" Which of us has not been affected in many of the ways Ms. Douglas points out in this book? Therefore, which of us can afford to miss being shown how radio has helped make us what we are? And I do hope she produces a similar book about television.

Radio has become such a background part of our lives, we forget just how astounding an impact it has had on our culture and psyche. Susan Douglas brings it all back to the foreground in her book "Listening In." This is not just a chronicle of the development of the media, this book takes us deep into the social impacts of radio, and how it changed how we react and interact with each other. Douglas has perfectly captured the feel and "tone" of different periods of radio listening, and explores a lot of the psychological aspects of how radio let us sample and explore different parts of our American culture in a safe and nonthreatening way. As a present-day radio fanatic, the book gave me hope: hope that the medium hasn't been corporatized into complete blandness. Radio will continue to evolve, just like our American culture. Whether you're a radio technology type, an old time radio fan, or just a student of American history, you'll find something to love in this book.

I've got Douglas' book today for her take on ham radio (I'm part of the Amateur Radio community) and I was very impressed with the rest of the book. Though I wrinkled my nose at the over-emphasis on the gender conflict in radio, Listening In reminded me of a time when people participate in a common culture instead of idly sitting by listening to the umpteenth Top 40 hit made by over-commercialized "plastic" bands. The ham radio chapter was simply great and I give Dr. Douglas her due for mentioning the American Radio Relay League as the national association for hams. From this chapter, I can see why hams have a nurturing touch in their approach to life! The

section on radio comedy is well done (the comedy bits are good for a chuckle or two). I recommend it to those who have a deep affinity for radio and communications.

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.

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.

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

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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