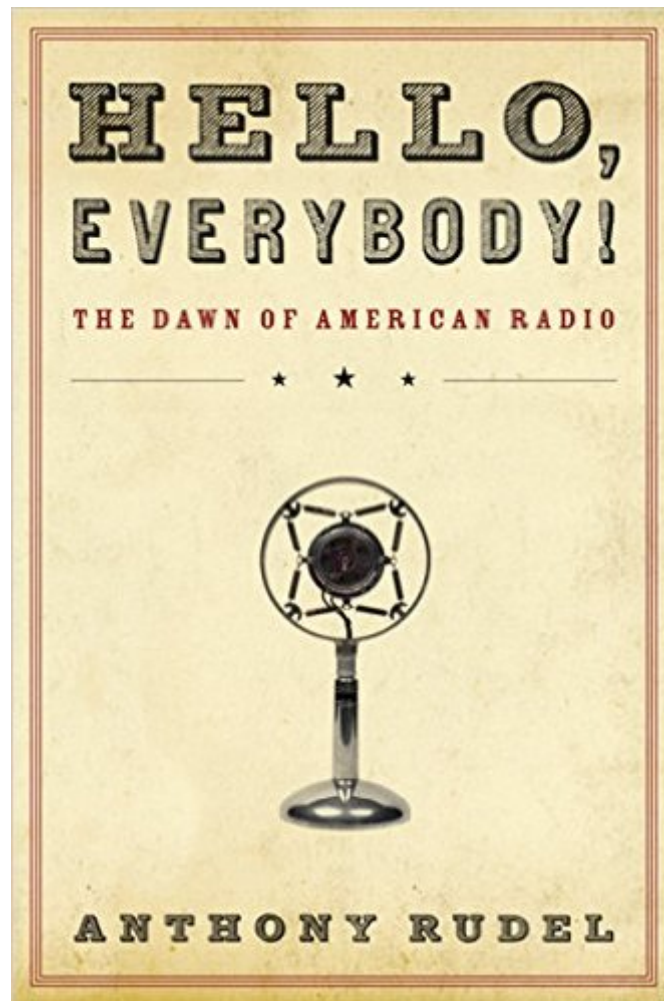


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Hello, Everybody!: The Dawn Of American Radio



Synopsis

Long before the internet, another young technology was transformed--with help from a colorful collection of eccentrics and visionaries--into a mass medium with the power to connect millions of people. When amateur enthusiasts began sending fuzzy signals from their garages and rooftops, radio broadcasting was born. Sensing the medium's potential, snake-oil salesmen and preachers took to the air, at once setting early standards for radio programming and making bedlam of the airwaves. Into the chaos stepped a young secretary of commerce, Herbert Hoover, whose passion for organization guided the technology's growth. When a charismatic bandleader named Rudy Vallee created the first on-air variety show and America elected its first true radio president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, radio had arrived. With clarity, humor, and an eye for outsized characters forgotten by polite history, Anthony Rudel tells the story of the boisterous years when radio took its place in the nation's living room and forever changed American politics, journalism, and entertainment.

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Customer Reviews

Was radio the second-most important communication medium that came into widespread use in the twentieth century? Many would say that only television was second to the Internet in its revolutionary impact, but it was radio that inaugurated the age of real-time mass communications. In "Hello, Everybody!", Anthony Rudel examines the history of radio from Marconi's first transmission in 1895 through the early 1930s. The author provides details about the amateurs who dabbled in

radio as a hobby early in the 1900s and cites some little-known pre-1920 experiments in radio transmission. Rudel examines the rapid growth of radio in the 1920s (even Presidents Harding and Coolidge became avid listeners), with the explosion in the number of radio stations, the formation of the CBS and NBC networks, and station frequency assignments. The 1920 election returns, widely regarded as the first radio program, are mentioned, and the author talks about early radio programming in areas such as music, entertainment, sports, politics, religion, and agriculture. Rudel discusses some important early stations and important personalities such as Graham McNamee, Aimee Semple McPherson, and Father Coughlin that were heard then. In Rudel's closing remarks, he states that "radio provided the formidable foundation for all of the electronic mass media that followed". Those who are fans of both radio and history will enjoy this look back at an important chapter in American social history.

I often wish American schools would use regular books instead of textbooks for the teaching of history. The former are populated with thousands of great reads that cover just about any subject under the sun. This is one of them. This chronological study of the development of the radio business in America links together sports, politics, business, science, pop culture, mass entertainment and sociology into one amazing synthesis. By following key individuals within government, business, and among the masses, the author shows how radio turned from a novelty into a key feature of American society. Some of the people covered include presidents Hoover, Coolidge and FDR, sports greats Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey and Jack Tunney, religious figures such as Charles Coughlin, quacks such as Dr. John Brinkley, and others. The book shows how radio made some of them, broke some of the others, but affected them all. For a book on a technical subject, the amount of science is kept to a minimum as the focus is on the people who drove, or were driven by the business. Overall, a great and entertaining book.

The past couple of years I've been reading nearly every "old time radio history" book I could find. They all tell about the same story with the same characters, and I thought I was about saturated. "Hello, Everybody" is different. It has the IN DEPTH stories of major radio personalities (mostly performers, but also the "radio quack doctors" and evangelists) in an informal, narrative style. The other books I had read only scratched the surface of these interesting people. I recommend "Hello, Everybody" as a follow-up to the other old time radio books, or even as an introduction to this fascinating subject.

I noticed that one reviewer complained that the book was not about the entertainment in early radio shows but about the history of the technology. Absolutely right. This book is about how radio developed from a hobby for enthusiasts (my father was a teen-aged radioholic) into the dominant world-wide communications medium of its time - in fact the history of radio is strikingly similar to that of the computer, which went from a hobbyist medium to the Internet. From the "Goat Gland" medical quack, to Aimee Semple McPherson, Rudy Vallee, the beginnings of sports broadcasting and on to the development of network radio, the stories are fascinating. I gave the book 4 stars only because the writing style is less than compelling. It's not bad by any means, but it tends to resemble a very well written college thesis, and like a thesis it sometimes includes much more results of research than is needed. But the stories are compelling.

The first chapter of the book completely threw me off. After finishing the book it's apparent why John Brinkley was featured so prominently as the first anecdote of the book but frankly the whole goat story threw me off. I would've preferred he had done a more conventional first chapter (detailing the technology or the inventors of radio) and saved Brinkley and his goats for the second chapter after we had been settled in. Obviously Brinkley was a huge character in the history of radio but it felt so out of place as the first chapter. It felt so off-topic and frankly kind of gross. The rest of the book was great, a chronological recap of the rise of radio from its humble origins to the mass communications device it would become. I was struck by three things: 1. How isolated people must've been without radio. 2. How radio was dismissed as a fad similar to how people dismiss websites like Twitter. 3. How there was no broadcast infrastructure before radio. There were newspapers but no reporters or crew to deal with a live broadcast. It made me realize that all the stuff we have today: 24-hour cable news, sports broadcasts, show sponsors, the concept of breaking news and the practice of listening/watching something at a specific hour M-F all originated from radio. It is kinda nice to know that even back then people were crazy about getting the news as fast as possible. It's a great book and highly recommended. It makes you appreciate all the technology we have now compared to back then.

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