



Radio's Intimate Public: Network Broadcasting and Mass-Mediated Democracy

Jason Loviglio

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In the 1930s, radio's wide popularity created an important shared experience among Americans, from motorists and pedestrians on the city street to families on the living room couch after dinner. In *Radio's Intimate Public*, Jason Loviglio shows how early network radio produced a new type of community marked by the contradictions and tensions between public and private, mass media and democracy, and nation and family.

Radio voices were thrilling, Loviglio argues, because they moved with impunity back and forth between private and public. As a result of this new intimacy, the dichotomy between the two realms was challenged, the idea of mass-mediated democracy arose, and the definition of "the public" was called into question. Examining a broad range of radio programs, including *The Shadow*, soap operas, *Vox Pop*, and FDR's Fireside Chats, *Radio's Intimate Public* illustrates how this new and contradictory media space promised listeners a fantasy of social mobility and access—even as it reminded them of the hierarchies that protected their own relative privilege.

Bringing theories of the public sphere to bear on American cultural history, Loviglio explores early network radio and the tension between intimacy (interpersonal communication) and publicity (mass communication). In doing so, he unearths the origins of today's reality television where people are invited to participate vicariously in official transgressions of the boundary between public and private existence, even if only to help police it.

Jason Loviglio is assistant professor of American studies and director of the Certificate in Communications and Media Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. He is the editor (with Michele Hilmes) of *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*.

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