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“The More They Listen, the More they Buy”: Radio and the
Modernizing of Rural America, 1930-1939

Steve Craig

Department of Radio, Television and Film
University of North Texas
Denton, Texas 76203
(940) 565-2537
rsCraig@unt.edu

Abstract

Radio was one of several technologies that early Twentieth-Century reformers promoted as a means of modernizing and improving rural American life. Although the new medium was introduced in the 1920s, it was during the Depression decade of the 1930s that most rural families bought their first set. With the coming of radio, formerly isolated rural homes had access to world news, current weather and market reports, and a host of USDA-produced agricultural programs. However, it was the national network entertainment programs with their many advertisements that promised Depression-era rural listeners a better tomorrow in the form of a modernized urban consumer lifestyle. This article explores the coming of radio to rural areas during the 1930s and reviews some contemporary industry research findings on rural radio usage and consumer behavior.

By the beginning of the 20th Century, many Progressive Era reformers had become concerned that rural America was being left behind in the nation’s rapid technical and social evolution. Fears were such that in 1908 President Theodore Roosevelt appointed a Commission on Country Life to study the nation’s rural problems and make recommendations for change. Underlying these concerns was growing alarm over the steady migration of rural dwellers into urban areas where the demand for factory labor was growing. As an increasing number of marginal farms were abandoned, there was apprehension over both the loss of the agrarian lifestyle and for the economic consequences such changes might bring. Many reformers concluded that the solution was rural modernization—a transformation of rural life into something more nearly like that enjoyed by the growing urban and suburban middle class.¹

Initially, reform focused on such goals as modernizing farming methods, improving rural schools, and upgrading health services, but as time went on, the introduction of new technology was seen as a key to addressing many rural problems. Kline argues that four innovations in particular—the telephone, the automobile, radio, and electricity—were seen by reformers as essential to modernizing rural life. In fact, he argues, these technologies were inscribed “with a largely unquestioned power to transform an old-fashioned rural society into an agrarian version of middle-class, urban consumer culture. . . .”²

By the 1920s, all four technologies had been introduced in rural areas, and by 1930 over half of farms had automobiles, about a third had telephones,

and smaller percentages had electricity and radio. However, the coming of the Great Depression altered adoption patterns considerably. Throughout the 1930s, the percentage of farm homes with automobiles remained flat while the number with telephones substantially declined. Yet during the same period, the number of rural families owning radios nearly tripled, and by 1940 more farm homes owned radios than had telephones, automobiles, or electricity.³

There were several reasons for radio’s rapid adoption during the Depression years. By the early 1930s, sets had become affordable. Not only did prices drop dramatically, but many retailers offered easy credit. Once paid for, the radio provided an endless supply of seemingly free programming.⁴ At the same time, the development of specialized battery-powered “farm radios” meant that rural families did not have to wait on the construction of local power lines before buying their first set. The 1930s also saw the maturation of the radio broadcasting industry, resulting in improved signals and more and better programs.

For many rural families, radio’s real attraction during the Depression years was its promise of a better life—a modern new age just to come. While other new technologies made life physically easier or more convenient, radio opened a new window on the outside world. News and information programs kept rural listeners in touch with current events and issues, while entertainment and advertising presented images of a modern urban consumer lifestyle many rural families found compelling. It was this ability to supply daily contact with rest of the world

that was radio's most important feature for rural America. In 1925, one farm housewife expressed it this way:

The radio service is a godsend to isolated families. When something happens, as something may do, and the receiver is temporarily disabled, it's like a sickness in the house. Perhaps it isn't the entertainment that counts so much. I'm ready to say that it isn't. But just the human contact, the privilege of getting next to folks, of learning another's voice well enough to say, "That's Jeff." It's so comfortable.⁵

As radio helped dispel rural isolation, it also served to convey and reinforce the notion of a single American national identity. The economics of the radio industry favored national networks that provided the same programs to large areas of the country. As a result, network producers and advertisers tended to emphasize national commonalities over regional interests. In so doing, radio presented America to its listeners as a single people, albeit with a diversity of backgrounds and tastes.⁶

Radio helped modernize rural life by bringing formerly isolated families into the cultural and economic American mainstream. This article examines the impact of radio on rural American life during the decade of the 1930s, the period during which most rural families bought their first radio. Contemporary audience research is reviewed to provide a picture of the part radio played in daily rural life and in the creation of a modern consumer culture.

Radio's remarkable potential had been recognized from the very start. First introduced in the United States in the early 1920s, the new medium was a national sensation. The number of stations on the air grew quickly and by 1930 there were 618 licensed stations on the air and an estimated 14 million U.S.

homes owned radios. Three national broadcasting networks had been established and radio advertising revenues topped \$40 million a year.⁷

Yet the radio boom of the 1920s was largely an urban phenomenon. While half of U.S. urban homes had a receiver by 1930, only 27% of rural homes did. There were also large regional differences in ownership; most notably, only 9% of rural southern homes had radios. However, by 1940 nearly 70% of rural homes had radios and outside the impoverished South, that figure was 84%.⁸

The later adoption of radio by rural families was the result of several factors. Sets of the 1920s were expensive and most rural families were simply less able to afford them. Furthermore, to get good reception from distant stations, rural listeners had to invest in better, more expensive receivers. With the onset of the Depression, deflation and streamlined manufacturing techniques dropped the average price for a new radio from \$136 in 1929 to just \$47 in 1932 and by 1938, the average price for a set was down to \$35.⁹ In addition, major retailers began offering time payment plans that allowed customers to purchase radios with small monthly payments.

Another factor that slowed rural adoption was the uneven geographic distribution of early radio stations. Radio evolved primarily as a profit-making enterprise and most stations were constructed in urban areas to reach the maximum number of listeners. Early transmitters were relatively low-powered and often had limited range. While some rural homes were close enough to population centers to receive strong signals, many were not, and the unpredictable propagation of AM radio waves in the standard broadcast band

meant reception in more remote areas was often unreliable.¹⁰ The lack of effective government regulation until after the passage of the Radio Act of 1928 added to the problem. Reception was especially spotty in the impoverished southern states where few entrepreneurs found it profitable to operate stations.¹¹

With the implementation of new federal broadcast regulations in the late 1920s, the situation slowly began to improve. Interference was reduced, more radio stations were built, and others were permitted to increase transmitting power. The newly-created Federal Radio Commission (FRC) set aside 40 frequencies specifically for the use of high-powered stations whose nighttime signals would be able to cover large areas of the country with a minimum amount of interference. Most of these “clear channel” stations could be heard at night several hundred miles away. While there were also lower-powered local and regional stations that many rural listeners could receive, a 1936 survey showed that 76.3% of rural radio owners tuned to a clear channel station as their first choice.¹² Most of these powerful clear channel stations were affiliated with one of the major networks and provided rural audiences many of the same programs—and commercials—heard by urban listeners.

As time went on, receiver technology also improved so that newer sets were better able to pick up weak signals and reject interference. However, radio signals remained unreliable in some areas, and as late as 1946 nearly a third of rural listeners still reported having reception difficulties.¹³

Rural radio owners were also faced with the problem of providing electrical power for their sets. Virtually all early radio receivers used inefficient vacuum

tubes that consumed large amounts of electrical current. In 1930, only 10% of farm homes had electricity and it would not be until the mid-1940s that even half were on the power grid.¹⁴ Aware of this problem, radio set manufacturers began constructing special “farm radios” with circuitry designed to pull in distant stations while operating on battery power. Although set technology constantly improved, a typical farm radio of the 1930s required batteries weighing as much as 50 pounds.

In spite of these difficulties, by the 1930s many farm families began to consider radio a necessity and throughout the decade, the percentage of rural homes with radio steadily increased. Although the continuing hardships of the Depression years meant that money was tight, rural families bought radios, often by working extra hours or sacrificing other purchases. In addition, communal listening was common, with neighbors often gathering to listen to special programs. In some communities public receivers were placed in central locations such as schools and town halls, and rural businesses often installed radios so that customers could hear news, weather and market reports.¹⁵

One driving force behind the purchase of new radios was the Depression itself. The economic downturn touched every aspect of American life, and the radio provided a much-needed way to stay in touch with news of the crisis and the government’s response to it. In rural areas, newspapers and magazines could only provide information that was days or weeks old, but owning a radio meant up to the minute news was constantly available.¹⁶ With the election of Franklin Roosevelt in 1932, many found a new incentive for radio ownership.

FDR was a master radio speaker and throughout his administration, he used his “fireside chats” to discuss national problems in a warm and personal style. Radio was the first medium to allow such intimate contact with the people, and the president found a receptive audience.¹⁷

The fact that the radio was not just for entertainment helped many farm families justify the purchase of their first set. Current weather forecasts and agricultural market reports helped guide farm decision-making, and numerous magazine articles and radio advertisements of the time tell of farmers who, thanks to radio, were able to save a crop from an early freeze or increase profits through better timing of market deliveries.¹⁸

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recognized the value of radio at an early date. A special Radio Division was organized and beginning in the 1920s it supplied stations free radio scripts on a variety of agricultural and home economics topics. By 1930, some 214 stations were carrying USDA-supplied programs each day, but the centerpiece of the agency’s effort was *The National Farm and Home Hour*.¹⁹ Carried weekly over NBC, the program was a blend of entertainment and agricultural information. Between acts such as “The Homesteaders Orchestra” and country comedienne “Mirandy of Persimmon Hollow,” listeners heard talks from the Secretary of Agriculture, reports on new pig feeds, and interviews with winners of national 4-H competitions. Although broadcast times for the show varied, the audience for *The National Farm and Home Hour* was estimated at one point to be as large as 10,000,000.²⁰ The

program also had a significant listenership in urban areas and was credited with making city dwellers more aware of farm problems.

Although rural listeners found agricultural information programs useful, they, like their urban counterparts, were mostly attracted to the entertainment radio provided. By the mid-1930s, the networks and larger stations had fully-developed prime time schedules of shows featuring big-name stars, and rural Americans became avid listeners. The Cooperative Analysis of Broadcasting (CAB), an industry-sponsored audience measurement group, found that rural and urban audiences favored many of the same programs. For example, during the evening hours, *The Chase and Sanborn Hour*, a comedy variety show hosted by ventriloquist Edgar Bergen and his dummy Charlie McCarthy, was ranked first in popularity among both rural and city audiences. Likewise, *The Jack Benny Program* was ranked second among both audiences. However, there were a few programs that clearly had a distinctly rural appeal. *The National Barn Dance*, a country music variety show, ranked fifth in popularity among rural audiences, but 30th in the cities.²¹ Conversely, *Kraft Music Hall*, starring crooner Bing Crosby, ranked fifth in large cities, but 18th among rural audiences. In general, rural listeners were found to have a stronger preference for news and drama programs and a weaker preference for variety shows and dance music than urban dwellers.²²

The CAB study was a rare early attempt to measure program preferences among the rural audience. Radio audience ratings surveys of the 1930s were routinely conducted by telephone calls placed only in the larger cities. Rural

regions were omitted due to the prohibitive cost of long distance calling and the relatively low percentage of rural homes with telephones.²³

By the end of the decade, the paucity of rural listenership data had become a concern to the radio networks. As one industry group put it, "it was apparent that radio programs were receiving wide circulation throughout the rural areas, but how wide and how intensive were matters of conjecture" (Joint Committee, 1939, p. 4). Although it was known that the number of rural radio listeners had grown during the 1930s, few national sponsors were willing to pay increased rates to reach an audience they considered to be made up of relatively unimportant consumers. Low Depression-era farm incomes, geographic isolation, and the backcountry traits of thrift and self-reliance meant rural dwellers traditionally had been seen as marginal consumers, purchasing far fewer store-bought goods than their urban counterparts.

Yet by the late 1930s, patterns of rural consumption had begun to change, and broadcasters were eager to exploit this emerging market by convincing advertisers of the wisdom of targeting rural audiences. In a 1937 report distributed to its major clients, NBC pointed out that farm income was at its highest level since the beginning of the Depression and that rural business was "strongly on the upgrade." Half the nation's consumers lived in rural areas, the network argued, and so national advertisers should be looking to radio as "the best new approach to this vast and reinvigorated market. . . ." In addition, the network pointed out that

. . . the favorite programs of rural listeners include many of the same sponsored network programs which rank highest with the

industrial and city population—evidence that the farmer does not belong to a race apart, and that his tastes are becoming increasingly similar to those of the city dweller.²⁴

To bolster such claims, the major networks funded several special research projects during the late 1930s that sought to document rural radio listening and consumer behavior. While these studies were clearly designed to support radio industry claims and their results must be approached with caution, they represent the only systematic attempts to examine rural radio audience behavior during the 1930s.

One of the first of these projects was carried out in summer, 1936, and funded by NBC. To conduct the research, the network hired Charles Morrow Wilson. Wilson was a writer who had gained national attention two years earlier for his book *Backwoods America*, a look at contemporary life and society in the Ozarks. In what the network called “a nation-wide observational study,” Wilson visited farm families and rural shopkeepers in 25 states to conduct informal interviews on radio listening and its impact on rural life. Wilson’s published findings included such generalities as “radio is building for itself a distinctive place in the routine of farm living,” and “farm interests are broadened to a point where they are genuinely cosmopolitan.” He also selectively reported comments by rural merchants regarding the effectiveness of radio advertising. Several of these mentioned an increasing demand by rural consumers for heavily advertised name-brand items. One rural drugstore owner reported that “the *National Barn Dance* has changed Alka-Selzer from next to nothing at all to one of the fastest-selling items in this store,” and that “*Amos ‘n’ Andy* built up

Pepsodent sales to a point where there have repeatedly been times when I simply couldn't get the merchandise through my jobbers." Other merchants provided anecdotes of how radio advertising had boosted sales of other national brands such as Jello, Chase and Sanborn Coffee, and Ovaltine.²⁵

A year after the Wilson interviews, NBC and CBS formed "The Joint Committee" to oversee a much more ambitious study. To insure the credibility of their research among potential advertisers, the survey methodology was carefully designed and executed with some twenty thousand personal interviews conducted among rural radio owners living in a sample of 96 rural counties in all parts of the country. Professional radio researchers from the Hooper-Holmes Bureau were employed to conduct the face-to-face interviews conducted in a single nine-day period in October and November, 1937.²⁶

The published results presented few surprises, but the study did help to document the contention that, with relatively minor exceptions, rural radio listeners behaved much like their urban counterparts. The major findings focused on radio ownership and time spent listening.

1. It was estimated that some 69% of all U.S. rural families owned radios, although there were substantial regional differences. For example, more than 96% of rural homes had radios in California, Washington, Oregon, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, but less than 50% did in most of the relatively poorer states of the Old South.
2. Rural radio families tended to use their sets somewhat more than their urban counterparts. For example, 88.5% of rural radio families said they

listened to radio at some time every day compared to 79.8% of urban radio owners. In rural radio homes, the set was reported to be on a median of 4 hours and 47 minutes daily, compared to just 4 hours and 9 minutes in urban radio homes. At any given time on an average weekday evening, about half of all rural radio homes were tuned in.²⁷

Six months after the Joint Committee survey, CBS funded a new survey which used similar methodology but focused on documenting changes in rural consumer behavior. Broadcasters theorized that as the Depression weakened and farm incomes rose, rural families were increasingly traveling to town to purchase the products touted on radio commercials.²⁸ The CBS study found considerable evidence to support this claim. Overall, a correlation was found between the amount of radio listening and the number of advertised goods purchased. As CBS concluded, "the more they listen, the more they buy." Over 90% of the respondents said they purchased advertised brands of toilet soap and toothpaste and over 80% bought brand-name kitchen cleanser, cereal, bread, coffee and face powder.²⁹

Although the major network studies were methodologically sound, the findings were proprietary and not all were made public. CBS released some results in a lavish, heavily illustrated promotional book aimed at catching the attention of national advertisers. Not unexpectedly, the volume contained only those findings CBS found most compelling in its arguments.

The real value of the networks' studies may be less in the findings they chose to publish and more in what their actions reveal about the changing

attitudes of advertisers and broadcasters toward the rural radio audience. By the late 1930s, the networks were urging advertisers to think of rural listeners as part of a unified national audience who were becoming more like their urban counterparts, both in the programs they listened to and in the products they purchased.

Despite the onset of the Great Depression, during the 1930s rural Americans fell in love with radio. In a decade that saw many families struggling just to feed and clothe their families, rural radio ownership climbed from just 27% of homes in 1930 to nearly 70% by 1940. Of the new technologies seen as key to the modernizing of rural America, radio alone gave rural families a new vision of their place in the world. While developments such as the automobile made it easier to travel to town, radio opened a window on the future. Although instant access to news, weather, and agricultural information was important, it was radio’s entertainment programming with its tantalizing advertisements that showed Depression-era rural families the lifestyle a modernized rural America would bring.

Stuart Ewen argues that early Twentieth Century advertisers discovered how to create “fancied need” for the products they sold. Increasingly, he argues, ads focused less on the product and more on what it could do for the consumer:

A given ad asked not only that an individual buy its product, but that he experience a self-conscious perspective that he had previously been socially and psychically denied. By that perspective, he could ameliorate social and personal frustrations through access to the marketplace.³⁰

With radio came advertising, and rural families began to be inundated with modern commercials designed to create a need for a whole range of manufactured goods many had never previously purchased. These ads presented a modernized American consumer lifestyle where problems could be solved by purchasing products. Although rural families had long been exposed to manufactured goods through mail order catalogs and print advertising, radio ads were sophisticated, ubiquitous, and unavoidable. Furthermore, radio commercials, especially those heard on the national networks, were for products that symbolized the essence of modern urban culture—prepared foods, toiletries and cosmetics, and automobiles.

Although radio was not solely responsible for the modernization of rural attitudes during the 1930s it played a pivotal role in improving the quality of daily rural life. By the beginning of the 1940s, the groundwork had been laid for radio to provide the national communication link essential to bringing the country together to meet the challenges that lay ahead.

Notes

1. Commission on Country Life, *Report of the Commission on Country Life* (New York: Sturgis & Walton, 1917).

2. Kline, Ronald R., *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2000), 2.

3. Kline, 5.

4. By the 1930's, radio programs were increasingly advertising-supported. Because advertising costs are ultimately passed on to the consumer, radio programming only seems free. In addition, radio owners had the ongoing costs of tube and battery replacement.

5. Unger, F.H., "What Radio Means to the Farmer," *Rural New-Yorker*, 1 August 1925, 1049-50.

6. Anderson has written that a "nation" should be seen as "an imagined political community." "Imagined," he writes, "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." Drawing on this definition, Hilmes argues that early radio helped bring about a Twentieth Century national American identity by enabling a diverse and widespread population to share common cultural experiences simultaneously, thus creating and reinforcing the imagined community. See Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 15; and Hilmes, Michele, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

7. The three networks were NBC-Red, NBC-Blue, and CBS. In 1934 a fourth network, Mutual, was formed. For broadcasting statistics see Sterling, Christopher H., and John M. Kittross, *Stay Tuned: A History of American Broadcasting*, 3rd ed. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002).

8. The term "rural" as used here follows the Bureau of Census definition of all those homes outside population centers of 2,500 or more. See U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Vol. VI, Population* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1933), 53. The rural South was the nation's most economically depressed region throughout the period.

9. These are national averages. Many rural families paid higher prices due to the need for better sets that could be powered by batteries. See Maclaurin, William Rupert, *Invention and Innovation in the Radio Industry* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 139.

10. AM radio broadcasting in the U.S. takes place in the Medium Wave (MW) frequency band. After sunset, radio waves in the MW band can travel hundreds of miles due to atmospheric refraction, greatly extending a station's nighttime range but also creating interference with other stations. The amount of atmospheric refraction can vary with the season and other factors, making distant reception unpredictable. After 1928, government regulations required most radio stations to reduce power or go off the air after dark as a way of minimizing interference with the larger "clear channel" stations (see below). FM radio broadcasting was only on the air experimentally during the 1930s.

11. For a fuller discussion of factors affecting radio adoption, see Craig, Steve, "How America Adopted Radio: Demographic Differences in Set Ownership Reported in the 1930 -1950 U.S. Censuses," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 48, no. 2 (2004): 179-95.

12. Although the number of clear channels was later reduced to make way for more regional and local stations, many still operate today. See United States Federal Communications Division Engineering Department, "Report on Social and Economic Data Pursuant to the Informal Hearing on Broadcasting, Docket 4063, Beginning October 5, 1936" in *Special Reports on American Broadcasting, 1932-1947*, edited by Christopher Sterling (1938; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1974) 75-77; and Sterling & Kittross, 144-145.

13. United States Federal Communications Commission, "Fifth Annual Report of the Federal Communications Commission, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1939" (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1940) 178; and U. S. Department of Agriculture, *Attitudes of Rural People toward Radio Service; a Nation-Wide Survey of Farm and Smalltown People* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1946), 66.

14. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1975), pt. 2, p. 827.

15. On rural communal listening, see Barfield, Ray, *Listening to Radio, 1920-1950* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1996); Podber, Jacob J., "Early Radio in Rural Appalachia: An Oral History," *Journal of Radio Studies* 8, no. 2 (2001): 388-410; Podber, Jacob J., "The Electronic Front Porch: An Oral History of the Early Effects of Radio, Television, and the Internet on Appalachia and the

Melungeon Community," Ph.D. diss, Ohio University, 2001; and McVey, Frances Jewell, "Backwoods Kentucky Listens In," *Forum and Century*, July 1934, 51-53.

16. A 1946 survey of rural radio listeners conducted by the USDA found that more than 80% of men and 70% of women listed "news" as the type of program they would miss most. See USDA, *Attitudes of Rural People*, 74.

17. While Roosevelt made many radio speeches, only about thirty or so were considered "fireside chats." See Winfield, Betty Houchin, *FDR and the News Media* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 103-125. On listener reaction to FDR's speeches, see Craig, Douglas B., *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 188-189.

18. One early survey of rural radio owners found that 46% of respondents could give specific examples of how using radio had saved or made them money. See "What the Farmer Listens To," *Radio Broadcast*, August 1926, 316-17. Many articles about radio's practical advantages appeared in farm periodicals of the era and were often authored by personnel from the USDA's Radio Division. The USDA was a major promoter of rural radio and urged the purchase of sets at every opportunity. See, for example, Eisenhower, Milton S., "Uncle Sam Chats with His Dairymen," *Radio Age: The Magazine of the Hour*, October 1926, 37-40.

19. The USDA's efforts were augmented by programming produced by state and local agricultural agencies. See Eisenhower, Milton S., "Coordinating Radio Programs," *Extension Service Review* 1, no. 2 (1930): 17. For an example of one state's local agricultural programming, see "Station T-E-X-A-S Broadcasting," *Extension Service Review* 8, no. 7 (1937): 100.

20. Martin, Jackie, "Farmers' Favorite," *Country Gentleman*, October 1943, 13. For more on the USDA's radio programming see Craig, Steve, "'The Farmer's Friend': Radio Comes to Rural America, 1920-1927," *Journal of Radio Studies* 8, no. 2 (2001): 330-46; Kline (2000); and Wik, Reynold M., "The USDA and the Development of Radio in Rural America," *Agricultural History* 62, no. 2 (1988): 177-88.

21. There were numerous "barn dance" format shows broadcast by clear channel stations around the country. Usually airing on Saturday night, many had strong regional followings among rural audiences. *The National Barn Dance* originated at WLS in Chicago and was especially popular since portions of the weekly show were carried nationally on NBC. See Biggar, George C., "The WLS National Barn Dance Story: The Early Years," *John Edwards Memorial Foundation Quarterly*, August 1971, 105-12.

22. Based on data evidently gathered during the 1937-1938 radio season and reported in Dygert, Warren B., *Radio as an Advertising Medium* (1939, reprint, New York: Garland, 1985), 83-85. Although program preference clearly reflects rural-urban social differences, at least some of the difference during the 1930s was due to the inconsistency of rural reception. That is, not all rural listeners could reliably receive all network programs all the time.

23. On radio ratings methodology in the 1930s, see Beville, H.M., Jr., "Social Stratification of the Radio Audience" (New York: National Broadcasting Company, 1939).

24. Wilson, Charles Morrow, *Money at the Crossroads: An Intimate Study of Radio's Influence upon a Great Market of 60,000,000 People* (New York: National Broadcasting Company, 1937), 5-6. Wilson's Appalachian study can be found in Wilson, Charles Morrow, *Backwoods America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1934).

25. Wilson, *Money at the Crossroads*.

26. Hooper-Holmes was the marketing research firm that conducted the urban phone calls on which national radio program ratings were based. National advertisers were becoming increasingly sophisticated in their use of research data and would have found unpersuasive any data produced using suspect methodology.

27. The survey attempted to measure the time spent listening to radio by asking respondents to furnish an estimate. Later audience research using mechanical devices attached to radios demonstrated that respondent estimates were almost always overstated.

28. The percentage of farms with automobiles hovered at just under 60% during the 1930s. See Kline, 5.

29. Columbia Broadcasting System, "Columbia's RFD Audience: An Analysis of the Columbia Broadcasting System Rural Audience" (New York: The Hooper-Holmes Bureau, Inc, 1938), 23.

30. Ewen, Stuart, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), 36.