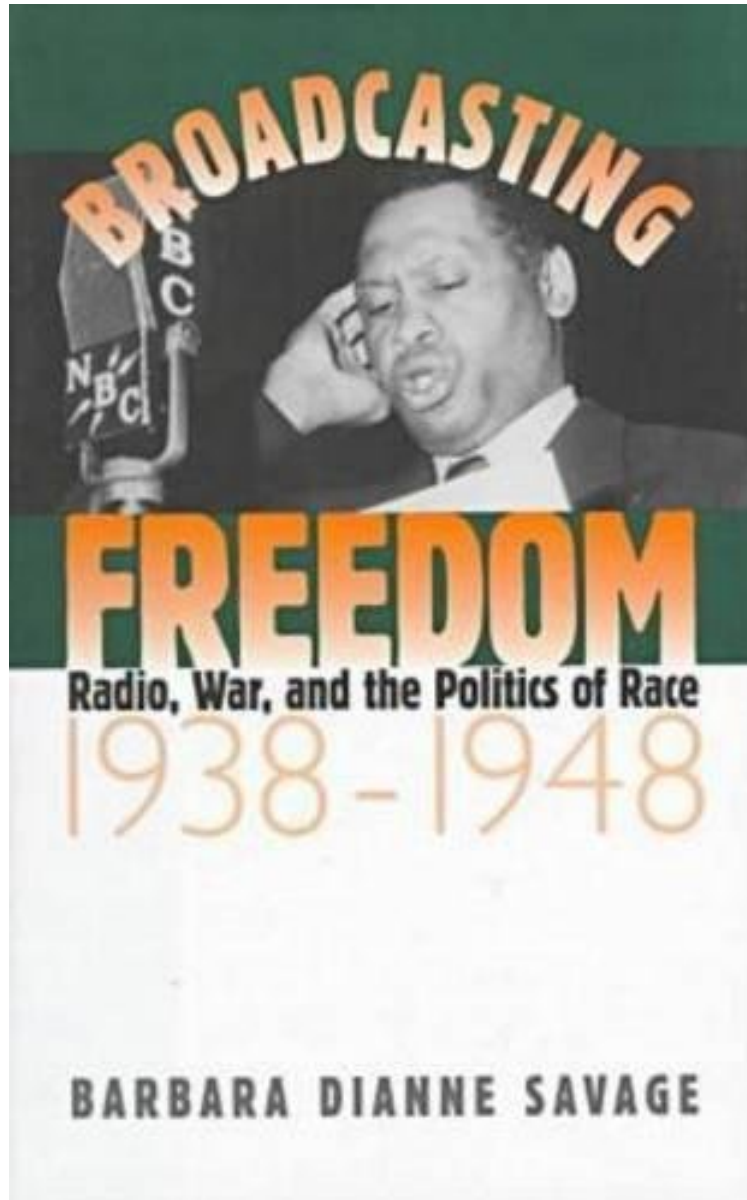


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Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948 (The John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture)

Barbara D. Savage

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Barbara D. Savage : Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948 (The John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948 (The John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture)*:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An Interesting Take on Some of the Beginnings of Civil Rights
By Daniel A. Stone
The group portrait of Afro-Americans painted in popular media during the first half of the twentieth century was one composed overwhelmingly with stereotypical images on top of a background of bigotry—needless to say, it is not flattering, and radio was no exception. This fact is so overwhelmingly documented in the public record and within historical scholarship that it barely needs enunciation here, and Professor Savage does not dwell upon it. What she does dwell upon is how radio was used by activists, artists, and entertainers, very often with the assistance of the federal government, during the period in question. As Savage argues, through the efforts of a great many people forgotten within the dominant narrative of the Civil Rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's, new ground was broken which would yield much greater fruit than before, during, or immediately after the Second World War—the period when it was first aired. Savage is interested primarily in how a few radio programs, nearly all produced with no, or next to no, commercial backing, bucked, but sometimes also skirted, the dominant perceptions of blacks in the popular media. That Savage only concentrates so thoroughly upon less than a dozen programs during this period would at first seem reasonable cause for concern that a good deal of primary documentation had been left out. What becomes depressingly clear over the course of Savage's narrative is that programs she details represent virtually the only broadcasts of their kind. Namely, programs that acknowledged there was a race problem in the United States, and, that with the increasing likelihood of war, something needed to be done about it. Savage shows in her descriptions of the programs *Americans All*, *Immigrants All*; *Freedom's People*; *New World A' Coming* and *Destination Freedom*, that the contributions of black men and women were unknown or unacknowledged. These programs were certainly inadequate to task of overthrowing on-air racism, but each one attempted in their own novel ways to counter racial stereotypes. When Savage describes how radio roundtables and panels, not dissimilar from those we still see on Sunday mornings, approached questions of race in the months before American participation in the Second World War commenced, the timidity of the national networks is nearly comical. Very often the programs would broach the subject of black America without the presence of a single black person. The sort of milquetoast conversation that one would expect from a completely "objective" and moderate circle of people with little or no personal stake in the status of a subject is how Savage describes the first, and lily-white, discussion of race that the popular University of Chicago Round Table broached—being a non-confrontational conversation between three people who nearly completely agreed with each other and reflected the mainstream opinion that discrimination was bad, but having no idea of what to do about it except accept it—garnered very little controversy. As black intellectuals began to find their way onto these programs, Savage shows through her study of listeners' letters just how virulent and widespread white supremacist and visceral anti-black feelings were when they were confronted head on—just virulent these feelings were is one of the surprises of Savage's study and goes along way towards showing what blacks and racial progressives were up against. Savage is a part of what is today the dominant school of the thought on the Civil Rights Movement, namely, that it had its roots in the struggles of the 1930's and that the Second World War were the biggest social catalysts behind the Movement's parts coalescing—equal to, if not more important than, *Brown v. Board of Education*. Rightfully, Savage does not make any grandiose claims for the effectiveness of the radio broadcasts in laying the groundwork of the Movement's imperatives or goals, but instead shows how the changing dynamics of American racial politics made possible the first baby steps in what Americans today would recognize as the continuous dialogue on what is the most intractable problem in American politics; racial inequality and injustice. As such the book deserves nothing but praise.
1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Starts Slow and Finishes Strong
By Terance R.

Broadcasting Freedom focuses on national public affairs programming from 1938 to 1948. It explores the dependent relationship between the infant electronic media and government against the backdrop of African American struggles for equality and respect. Savage dramatically describes how radio's national broadcast networks initially resisted the black community's efforts to air programming aimed at challenging America's paternalistic notions about Negro culture. As she recounts the efforts of blacks in the 1930s and 1940s to gain access to this nascent electronic medium, Savage highlights how trailblazing African American activists, public officials, intellectuals, and artists struggled for opportunities to utilize the power of radio to spark a national debate about racial inequality. It wasn't until the Roosevelt administration gave its blessing that the networks finally consented to the production of programming featuring black history, culture, and achievement. The author's central argument is that government sponsorship and assistance—catalyzed by the specter of war and the Roosevelt's need for domestic unity—was needed to provide impetus for the production of radio programs for and about blacks. Even so, radio remained cautious about engaging the political issue of race until the race riots of 1943 and President Truman's racial reform proposals of 1947 and 1948 provided sufficient justification for the inclusion of "the black problem" in national broadcasts. Savage also contends

that much of the eventual success of the '60s civil rights struggle can be traced to the insights learned by African American leaders in the 1940s as they honed their presentation and debate skills on radio, making the case that many of the lessons learned during this earlier era propelled the civil rights movement forward. Tracing the origins, content, and reception of selected programs, the first half of the book focuses on public affairs programs produced by the federal government and aired over national networks. The second half focuses on programs produced privately by radio networks and nonprofit organizations - broadcast both nationally and locally. Included at the end of the book is an appendix listing the name, broadcast dates, networks or stations, and sponsor of every radio program discussed in the text. Savage combines archives of radio material with personal interviews in this heavily researched book. She makes liberal use of the manuscripts, audiovisual collections, personal papers, and archives. Also listed in the bibliography are hundreds of books, articles and dissertations. Savage's arguments are effective and persuasive. She shows how the African community "worked within the system" to overcome the radio industry's reticence, and developed the methods of mass communication needed to change the hearts and minds of white America. In the process, African American leaders made a place for themselves at the table of radio programmers and broadcasters through sponsorship by FDR during World War II, and leveraged this initial victory into a national movement. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This is a stunning work of original scholarship. By Christopher R. Kerr Savage brilliantly demonstrates that much of the eventual success of the 60's civil rights struggle can be traced to the insights learned by African American leaders in the 40s as they began to master the presentation of their cause on radio. By shifting the movement's earlier focus on "converting" individuals to developing methods for intervening with the media which reach virtually every citizen, African American leaders were able to introduce a new black voice on the radio, especially programming sponsored by the federal government during WWII. This programming challenged accepted stereotypes of black abilities and placed African American accomplishments at the heart of American history. Using seldom seen archives of radio material and the recollections of surviving participants in this dramatic phenomenon, Savage makes the case that many of the lessons learned during this era served the civil rights movement well. Just as radio became a forum for debates about race in the 40s, so too television functioned in the 50s and 60s. While black leaders could not control either radio or television, they understood from their earlier work with radio how television needed "images" only they could supply. The awareness of the potential power of an "alliance" between African Americans and television was one of the legacies of the 40s radio programming Savage unearthed.. I have to say that Savage is an especially fluid and engaging writer. A lot of the material would have been a painful slog in a less capable writer's hands. I suspect that this book will become a "core text" on the evolution of the civil rights movement. Personally, I can't wait to see what else Savage tackles.

The World War II era represented the golden age of radio as a broadcast medium in the United States; it also witnessed a rise in African American activism against racial segregation and discrimination, especially as they were practiced by the federal government itself. In *Broadcasting Freedom*, Barbara Savage links these cultural and political forces by showing how African American activists, public officials, intellectuals, and artists sought to access and use radio to influence a national debate about racial inequality. Drawing on a rich and previously unexamined body of national public affairs programming about African Americans and race relations, Savage uses these radio shows to demonstrate the emergence of a new national discourse about race and ethnicity, racial hatred and injustice, and the contributions of racial and immigrant populations to the development of the United States. These programs, she says, challenged the nation to reconcile its professed egalitarian ideals with its unjust treatment of black Americans and other minorities. This examination of radio's treatment of race as a national political issue also provides important evidence that the campaigns for racial justice in the 1940s served as an essential, and still overlooked, precursor to the civil rights campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s, Savage argues. The next battleground would be in the South--and on television.

From *Library Journal* As the first national mass medium, radio emerged as a forum for debating racial injustice. Savage (history, Univ. of Pennsylvania) focuses on national public affairs programming from 1938 to 1948 and explores the interactions of radio, race, and politics. Tracing the origins, content, and reception of selected programs, Savage reveals the battle lines and hardworking heroes of the struggle to assure blacks a popularly accessible and politically acceptable place in the discourse of U.S. history and culture. Her deft treatment of the activists, programming, public policies, and symbolic politics broadens views of the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s and pioneers new scholarship in radios rich but virtually ignored historical role. Savage's work complements Melvin Patrick Ely's *The Adventures of Amos N Andy: A Social History of an American Phenomenon* (Free Pr., 1991. o.p.), Herman Grays *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (Univ. of Minnesota, 1995), and Sasha Torres *Living Color: Race and Television in the United States* (Duke Univ., 1998). Highly recommended. Thomas J. Davis, Arizona State Univ., Tempe Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Booklist* Savage, a University of Pennsylvania history professor, draws on largely unexplored material in tracing the efforts of African Americans between 1938 and 1950 to use radio to contradict stereotypes and develop a more inclusive history of the U.S. Part 1,

"Federal Constructions of `the Negro,'" covers federal radio projects in the late 1930s and the early 1940s as well as efforts to win support from the Office of War Information. Part 2, "Airing the Race Question," addresses programs on network radio, including those developed by the National Urban League, African American involvement in network discussion programs, and notable local series--"New World A'Comin'" in New York and "Destination Freedom" in Chicago. An involving story, heavily documented; appropriate for larger media studies collections. Mary Carroll This extraordinary book will help shape the way we think about both [civil rights and the development of radio]."Journal of American History"