



# Radio Utopia: Postwar Audio Documentary in the Public Interest (The History of Communication)

*Matthew C. Ehrlich*

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As World War II drew to a close and radio news was popularized through overseas broadcasting, journalists and dramatists began to build upon the unprecedented success of war reporting on the radio by creating audio documentaries. Focusing particularly on the work of radio luminaries such as Edward R. Murrow, Fred Friendly, Norman Corwin, and Erik Barnouw, *Radio Utopia: Postwar Audio Documentary in the Public Interest* traces this crucial phase in American radio history, significant not only for its timing immediately before television, but also because it bridges the gap between the end of the World Wars and the beginning of the Cold War. *Matthew C. Ehrlich* closely examines the production of audio documentaries disseminated by major American commercial broadcast networks CBS, NBC, and ABC from 1945 to 1951. Audio documentary programs educated Americans about juvenile delinquency, slums, race relations, venereal disease, atomic energy, arms control, and other issues of public interest, but they typically stopped short of calling for radical change. Drawing on rare recordings and scripts, Ehrlich traces a crucial phase in the evolution of news documentary, as docudramas featuring actors were supplanted by reality-based programs that took advantage of new recording technology. Paralleling that shift from drama to realism was a shift in liberal thought from dreams of world peace to uneasy adjustments to a cold war mentality.

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