

**Radio and Literacy: A Script**

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You're listening to A.N.D. Radio, UBC's #1 station for ETEC540 Assignments.

(Black Screen)

Sound familiar?

Today our airwaves are packed with information that is at everyone's finger tips. AM, FM, Satellite, Internet, and finally Podcasts. These are the evolution of a technology that as Guy Gugliotta says "initially promised so little" (Gugliotta, 2007).

December 24, 1906 was a day to remember for communication and literacy. A humble Christmas concert for radio operators at sea was broadcast for the first time featuring a human voice.

These few radio operators were blown away with what they had just heard. This broadcast truly began a systemic change to communication within the world as well as provided the illiterate with a new found identity within the world.

However, before going any further let us first take a step back and look at a brief history of how the radio came to be and the people that played an important role.

### **(A Brief History of Radio)**

(1873)- James Clerk Maxwell showed that electromagnetic waves could travel through the air.

(1888)- Heinrich Hertz then became the next pioneer who used Maxwell's mathematics and provided evidence that these waves could be transmitted and received.

(1896-1900) Guglielmo Marconi and Tesla were next and they offered devices that was able to receive information through these wireless airwaves. After patenting their devices Marconi stepped ahead by becoming the first person to transmit radio signals across the Atlantic Ocean. Because of this achievement, Marconi is also credited with the survival of many people when in 1912 the ship named "Titanic" struck an iceberg. "About 1500 people lost their lives. More would have died without Marconi equipment on board" (Bridgman, 2001).

(1906)- Canadian-born inventor Reginald Fessenden came next in 1906 when he became the first person to transmit voice through the radio when he executed the "first two-way radiotelegraphic communication across the Atlantic Ocean" (Wikipedia, 2018). It was not until later that year that his "Christmas concert", previously mentioned, was broadcast.

(1920's ) Fast forward to the 1920's when Crystal radio sets were made widely available in America. Before this invention, the spark gap transmitter was used. Static transmitters were however (Static) short lived as they had too many interference/static issues.

Crystal Radio sets were so successful that companies began to offer DIY instructions to build your own radio out of common household items. Ultimately, it was these publications that were "significant in bringing radio to the general public." (Wikipedia, 2018)

**(Radio Programming)**

Entertainment, world news, politics, religion and education all had regular programs that were broadcast by the Canadian Broadcast Company, founded in 1936. Kids, teens, and adults all had programs that fostered to their needs for information and knowledge. While much of the Canadian airwaves were full of American programming, some notable programs within Canada included, variety shows like “The Happy Gang”, sports broadcasts like Hockey Night in Canada, as well as dramas like “The Craigs”. Post war brought about many changes including programs centered around news and adult education. One particular program, “Farm Radio Forum” was sponsored by the Canadian Association for Adult Education.

“Farm Forum provided an antidote to the hard times of the 1930s economic depression, and meeting and discussing new ideas in neighbours' homes helped restore rural confidence, often leading to positive group action in the community” (Shugg, 2001).

The golden age of Canadian radio informed the masses from 1945- 1952. However, televisions took away much of the lustre once associated with radio with it's mass introduction in 1952. Much of the programs the radio offered at the time were replaced by moving pictures and sound from televisions. The radio shifted and became the resting place of music and its success sored with the rise of FM radios popularity.

(Radio and Literacy)

Prior to the invention of the radio, newspapers were the main source of news and entertainment that were provided to the masses. Newspapers were for the literate. With the introduction of the radio came a world of information and knowledge that many who were illiterate could not have experienced before. Social class, education, or location was no longer a barrier. In one sense, the term pop culture was created because everyone could now have the same information. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, during the 1900's the illiteracy rates amongst Caucasian people was 6.2%. The starting figure that is of more importance is the illiteracy rates of black and minority people. In this same time frame the illiteracy rate of minorities was 44.5%. Concordia University says it best within their article titled Crisis Point: The State of Literacy in America :

“When someone cannot read, they are excluded from many of the things that allow us to be fully functional citizens with choices. Those who are illiterate can lack access to information, are excluded from making choices about their rights or government through voting, and have less opportunities for employment. Illiteracy keeps people trapped in a cycle of poverty and subjugation, limiting life choices and making it difficult to achieve social mobility. Literacy truly is power—power over one's own life.”

Radio's played a large role in shortening the gap between those with information and those without. By the mid 1920's RCA released statistics that indicated that 77% of the general public were regular broadcast listeners (L.O.C., ND). Because of this new information outlet people began to have more understanding of the situations at large, especially within current events and politics. Radio changed the progression towards mass literacy, it caused more people to become informationally empowered both socially and politically which in turn caused uprising within the

illiterate community. A demand for rights, equality and education were all factors into the American illiteracy rates falling to an average less than 1% by 1979.

(Conclusion)

A technology “initially promising so little” (Gugliotta, 2007), ended up being a culturally transformative device. Allowing all people, rural or urban, rich or poor, literate or illiterate to have equal access to information that once was not there. Today radio is not as culturally popular because of the rise of Television. However, TV inventors and scientists have to be indebted to radio because as Gugliotta states, radio gave birth to the entire field of electronics.

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