

Group Three: Radio During World War II



If the Vietnam conflict would come to be known as the first “television war” in the 1960s, World War II was the first “radio war.” While Americans could see newsreels about the war at their local movie theater, the most immediate reporting came from radio journalists. Journalists often reported live from Europe and the Pacific; Americans could hear reports from London as it was being bombed and from reporters who were actually on planes during bombing runs over enemy territory.

Edward R. Murrow, who covered the war for the CBS network, was one of the best-known radio journalists during World War II. Listen to the clip of his report on a German air raid over London on August 24, 1940.

Radio also kept Americans informed about important news events surrounding the war. The day after the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed Congress, asking for an official declaration of war. The broadcast was carried live over the radio as millions of Americans listened in. Listen to the two brief excerpts from Roosevelt's speech.

News and issues relating to the war dominated American radio for the next four years. Songs relating to the war and to soldiers, such as the Andrews Sisters' "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy," became big hits. Radio also became a central tool in the propaganda effort to keep support for the war effort strong. The image above is one of a series of posters created by the government. Many radio broadcasts featured speakers discussing the importance of winning the war.

Look at the radio listings from the *Washington Post* for Sunday, March 28, 1943. Then listen to the short excerpt from the ongoing series "You Can't Do Business With Hitler."

Today's Highlights

Invitation to Learning. The poems of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow are discussed by Sara Henderson Hay, author of "Field of Honor," Lieut. Lawrence Thompson, U. S. N., who wrote "Young Longfellow," and Chairman Louis Untermeyer, noted poet and biographer. **WJSV—11:30 a. m.**

Helen Hayes stars in "Human Document," the drama of an Army nurse on Bataan, in the Red Cross series "That They Might Live." **WRC—12:30 p. m.**

Here Is Tomorrow. Charles W. Eliot, director of the National Resources Planning Board, which recently submitted to President Roosevelt and the Congress its plan for post-war security, speaks on "New Jobs for a New Era." **WJSV—1:30 p. m.**

Round Table. "Minorities, During and After the War," is the subject of the University of Chicago discussion. **WRC—2:00 p. m.**

The Greatest of These. The humanitarian work of the Bishop's Relief Committee, national Catholic relief organization, will be told in dramatic form during a special broadcast originating in Hollywood. **WMAL—2:30 p. m.**

Joseph Szigetti, world-famed violinist, is soloist with the New York Philharmonic-Symphony, in a performance of Brahms' "D Major Violin Concerto" under the direction of Fritz Reiner. The program also includes the "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" by Mozart, and William Schumann's "Prayer 1943." **WJSV—3:00 p. m.**

Army Hour. Brig. Gen. Joe M. Dalton, Assistant Chief of Staff of the Army, discusses "How the High School Can Serve the Army." **WRC—3:30 p. m.**

Hitler's Children. A radio version of the motion picture, based on Gregor Ziemer's best seller "Education for Death." **WOL—4:15 p. m.**

Percy Grainger, pianist and composer, and Eleanor Steber, Metropolitan Opera soprano, are guest soloists with Andre Kostelanetz. **WJSV—4:30 p. m.**

NBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Leopold Stokowski, presents selections from the "Passion Music According to St. John" by Bach, "The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian" by Debussy, and "Parsifal" by Wagner in a program of Lenten music. **WRC—5:00 p. m.**

Answering You. Ben Hecht and William March, in New York, will discuss the problems facing "Writers in Wartime" in a transatlantic forum with English writers in London. **WOL—5:00 p. m.**

Discussion Questions:

1. What makes Murrow's broadcast from London so powerful? How does it help listeners understand what is happening? How does this clip demonstrate the power of radio during the war?
2. Listen to the clips from President Roosevelt's speech. Imagine yourself sitting with your family listening to the speech live. How would you feel about the attack on Pearl Harbor after hearing it? About the need to go to war? About being an American citizen? How might this speech have helped to unite Americans?
3. What is the main idea of the government poster shown in the image above? What does it suggest about how important radio was to the average American in this era?
4. How many of the radio listings from the *Washington Post* relate to the war, either directly or indirectly? What does this suggest about the role radio played in the war effort?
5. What is the main message of "You Can't Do Business With Hitler"? How does the show use music and sound to convey its message? Why do you think this sort of program was popular with radio listeners in this era?
6. Overall, what do these sources suggest about how radio helped unite the American public during World War II?