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Dead Air:

A History of NPR's Creation & Exclusion of Marginalized Communities

A Senior Thesis

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ways NPR failed to serve marginalized communities by analyzing the history and creation of the National Public Radio network. NPR was created on the founding mission statement that promised to represent the diversity of America and to provide programming that would supplement a lack of representation or opportunities on American airwaves, such as adult education programs. This mission statement was to also uphold the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) requirement of serving the public interest in order to justify NPR's programming being on air. However, using the research study, *Audience 88*, conducted by NPR's lead Research Analyst, David Giovannoni. NPR's main audience was revealed to be educated, middle to upper class, older White people. This thesis asks the question, how did a radio network built with a focus on diversity fail to capture and serve a diverse audience?

I argue that NPR was constructed in an environment that set the network up to fail the network's marginalized listeners immediately. NPR was created under the assumption that it would provide something unique and different to American radio culture, and thus could provide programming that served all. The "clean slate" concept that coupled with NPR's creation did not exist. NPR inherited the culture of radio broadcasting, a historically White medium that excluded marginalized voices for decades.

The creation of NPR's founding staff perpetuated the exclusion of diversity within the internal organization itself, as the overwhelming majority of the network's staff were White men. This environment resulted in the creation of "diverse" programming made through a White habitus lens. NPR focused on decentralized programming that covered recorded stories from a distance. This digestible format allowed for the exclusion of marginalized voices to appear on-air

in favor of White researchers and representatives. NPR’s programming caused the further suppression of marginalized voices through intentional exclusion within its Membership requirements, its founding goals, and the network hiring process.

This thesis examines the ways public broadcasting has always excluded marginalized voices, and consequently, caused counter-publics to suffer from the misallocation of financial resources. NPR’s part in this history expresses the greater need for marginalized communities to have adequate resources, funding, and support to create the media and news needed to represent the diverse face of America. NPR’s exclusion of marginalized voices is a trend, unfortunately, continued into the network’s later years, and can still be felt today.

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Dead Air: A History of NPR's Creation & Exclusion of Marginalized Communities

Radio broadcasting has been a publicly consumed medium since its conception. Starting as a widely accessible medium to those who could afford transmitters, many amateur broadcasters could find themselves on the airwaves. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover found that radio broadcasting needed rules and regulations to establish order to the chaos of early broadcasting practices. Tensions rose between amateur broadcasters fighting for space on the airwaves, a change was needed (Severin, 485). The solution to this organizational dilemma was the Radio Act of 1927, created and enforced by the Federal Radio Commission (FDC). The Radio Act was created to allocate the scarce frequencies to the many contenders. The allocation of frequencies and licenses resulted in time-sharing, restriction of power, limited hours of operation, and denial of re-licensing. From the Radio Act of 1927, a standard for broadcasting was instilled into the medium.

The Radio Act of 1927 defined a standard that every radio station and program must meet in order to receive a license. In section nine of the Radio Act, the FDC states that "The licensing authority, if public convenience, interest or necessity will be served thereby, subject to the limitations of this act, shall grant to any applicant a station license provided by this Act" (5). The Radio Act defines the allocation of licenses as determined by the quality of programming offered within a station, but excludes Black and other marginalized groups from receiving licenses. This locked out marginalized communities from broadcasting and accessing media that correlated to their lived experiences. Only until 1949 did the first Black-owned and operated station receive a federal broadcasting license. The 1927 Radio Act allowed for a further divide in radio programming that continued to exclude and oppress marginalized voices.

WERD, America's first Black-Owned Radio Station. Est. 1949.

The 1927 Radio Act helped propagate the distinctive spheres of radio broadcasters. The most significant of these spheres were commercial and non-commercial educational radio. These two forms of broadcasting entailed different consuming experiences for their audiences. Educational radio situated itself as low-frequency stations housed on predominantly White university campuses. Educational stations operated as low as 10-watt frequencies, only the general campus community would receive the programming, thus serving its already educated audience. This educational programming, fit with campus representatives, interviews with professors, or professional appearances would not serve those lacking university resources.

Commercial radio quickly developed into having priority over the airwaves. Operating at greater frequencies, and drawing in more listenership, commercial overtook much of the limited resources available for public broadcasting. Paul Hutchinson wrote in *Christian Century* in 1931, that the more the commercial stations developed, the "educational stations were more and more restricted. The tendency was to drive them off the air in the evening hours and confine their

operation to the daylight hours." (Hutchinson, 21). Efforts were made to preserve space for educational radio by Senator Simeon D. Fees of Ohio, who attempted to reserve “15% of radio frequencies in the United States for educational broadcasting” (Senate Bill 5589, 71st Congress, 3rd Session). This bill did not pass, leaving the educational stations to fight for their spot on the airwaves. A bias toward serving the public interest was noted by Senator Clarence C. Dill of Washington, stating that “the Commission seems to take the view that the 'public interest is best served when stations whose owners have large amounts of money and are able to put on popular programs are given the cream of the radio facilities” (1760). Marginalized communities attempting to access the airwaves were increasingly locked out by White commercial broadcasters that received an abundance of governmental support. Radio frequencies, channels, and money went to supporting commercial radio which was argued as being able to serve more of the public. However, these commercial programs included harmful depictions of marginalized communities that shaped the commercial broadcasting sphere.

Commercial broadcasting found value in a host's ability to perform racial ventriloquism on air. Shows such as *Amos ‘N’ Andy* featured white men performing sonic Black-face through stereotyped dialect. *Amos 'n' Andy* began as one of the first radio comedy series, originating from the radio station WMAQ in Chicago. The radio show became extremely popular and was later broadcasted through NBC Radio. NBC’s platform grew *Amos ‘n’ Andy*, and totaled to half of the nation's radio audience tuning in to the show (Internet Archive, 1). *Amos ‘n’ Andy* later was broadcasted on CBS Radio and Television. Similarly, Moran and Mack: *The Two Black Crows*, another Blackface radio show, grew in demand and popularity. Moran and Mack became famous enough to be featured as guest stars on Fred Waring's highly popular radio show in 1933. Black face was practiced and praised on American airwaves until the early 1950s. Racial ventriloquism

and Blackface dialect comedy was the predominant image of Black communities in early radio broadcasting. The exclusion and oppression found on the radio dial enforced the medium as being a racially charged space, owned and operated by White broadcasters. Radio broadcasters and networks began to shift with the monopolization of the airwaves.

Moran and Mack The Two Black Crows ad from The Film Daily, 1932

The U.S. government began to crack down on networks and broadcasters due to antitrust charges of monopolizing the airwaves. The National Broadcasting Company (NBC), the oldest major broadcast network in the U.S. was thought to guarantee "adequate program material" and assure the achievement of "adequate financial strength" that would "ultimately [be] self-sustaining" (Scovronick, 166). Much criticism came from program duplication, where two stations in the same locality were broadcasting the same program at the same time. This resulted in attempts to curb growing network control over U.S. radio which typically failed, for example,

reserving space for non-commercial radio or creating new issues for national radio. Additional problems came from the investigation of the Roosevelt administration into media and news outlets, including radio. Concerned that these outlets were swaying to a democratic perspective, Roosevelt put pressure on the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) through a 1938 investigation of the broadcast medium.

This 1938 investigation revealed the manipulation and control NBC possessed over the broadcasting industry. The investigation was pressured by the Roosevelt Administration but was conducted by the FCC. According to Michael Socolow, author of *Radio's Waves of History*, this investigation revealed the ways "NBC exploited contractual restrictions, their relationships with national advertisers, and political alliances, to control the economics of the general radio industry and restrain trade specifically in national network radio." (8). From these investigations, antitrust laws were developed and implemented by the FCC to maintain and promote market competition in hopes to deconstruct the monopolizing grip NBC had at the time. From this divestiture, NBC had split the company into two networks, the "Blue Network" (which was later sold in 1942 and renamed the American Broadcasting Company) and the "Red Network". By splitting into two companies, NBC was able to navigate the new FCC antitrust laws and continue to dominate the airwaves, leaving very little time and space for those attempting to broadcast.

The Blue Network tended to place its focus more on news and public affairs programming, as well as the "sustaining", or non-sponsored shows. The Blue Network typically focused on non-sponsored shows. However, some sponsorships took place by large companies and industries for a positive public image. For example, Standard Oil of New Jersey (Esso) sponsored the program the *Five-Star Theater*, which presented a new show in different formats each weekday. The Blue Network's programming consisted of almost entirely White casts and

crew. The top programming for NBC, supposedly serving the public interest, included *Amos 'n' Andy, Flywheel, Shyster, and Flywheel, Fibber McGee and Molly* (Spectroom, 1). All three programs excluded a diversity in favor of representing White, heterosexual relationships, or performing in Black face. These popular titles did not embody the face of America and continued to make a hostile space for marginalized communities on the airwaves. Commercial programming began to feel the dissatisfaction of the general public. This turmoil was not caused by the recognition of race disparities within radio broadcasting. Instead, White audiences were becoming upset with the commercial broadcaster's overwhelming focus on advertisements instead of content.

"Fibber McGee and Molly" Radio Broadcast (1931)

In the 1940s, public discourse grew around commercial programming. It was felt that programming had become too reliant on popular titles to satisfy the public interest. The public felt that the networks, which "owned and operated the most important commercial stations,

proved most deficient in satisfying their licensed public responsibilities" (Erickson, 6). On March 12, 1945, Chairman Paul A. Porter addressed the issues of commercial broadcasting to the National Association of Broadcasters. These findings and discussions led to the creation of the FCC report, *Public Service Responsibilities of Broadcast Licensees* (1946), otherwise known as the "Blue Book". According to Porter, the pledges made for stations to broadcast "civic, educational, agricultural and other public service programs were not fulfilled in a three-year license contract" (8). Records showed that though stations promised programming that benefited and stimulated public interest, the majority of programming went to broadcasting commercials. For example, the Cannon System, Ltd., applied for a construction permit for a new standard broadcast station in Glendale, California. The Cannon System justified a license renewal on the grounds of promising to cooperate with all local civic, educational, fraternal, and religious institutions in donating air time without charge, in addition to one-third of time would be devoted to educational matters such as agricultural and news programs. It was promised that this programming would also reflect and stimulate the larger Spanish-speaking communities of Glendale. According to the Blue Book report, upon review of the station's records, in a 3-day span of time (representing 26 hours of broadcast time).

> "Only 23 minutes were devoted to programs other than records and commercial announcements. The alleged policy of the station had been to limit commercial announcements to 160 announcements for each 10 -hour day but it appears that the manager, employed on a commission basis, permitted a greater number to be broadcast…Little effort was made to promote any programs other than those characterized by purely commercial continuity" (6).

No effort was made to assist and aid civil, fraternal, or religious organizations in the preparation or production of programs. Other stations and broadcasting networks mirrored the trend of prioritizing commercial endeavors than fulfilling public enrichment. This created a strain between radio consumers and their broadcasters. In exposing how commercial radio had not fulfilled its promises to both the public and to the FCC, restoration of public radio was needed. Already, commercial radio was criticized internally and externally by the FCC and its audiences for failing to uphold the agreements and justifications the stations set.

With the emergence of television, radio listenership steadily decreased during the early-mid 1950s to early 1960s. The competitive displacement of radio surrendered a portion of its niche topics to television, however, it survived as an industry because “radio itself shifted to providing more specialized entertainment and news functions" (Dimmick and Rothenbuhler, 299). Though television drew away some of radio’s listenership, internal turmoil and critique were being made about the radio industry by hosts, as well as by the listening public. Outrage over entertainment mediums grew deafening with the Quiz Show Scandals and the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s. White audiences felt lied to, marginalized audiences felt under-served and underrepresented. From this uproar of dissatisfaction with broadcast media, the newly elected FCC Chairman Newton Minow delivered his “Vast-Wasteland” speech that changed the face of broadcast media.

Minow, voicing his dissatisfaction with TV’s quality, expressed that “when the television is good, nothing — not the theater, not the magazines or newspapers — nothing is better. But when the television is bad, nothing is worse” (Minow, 1961). Minow believed that during the time of the Cold War, American broadcast mediums needed to be utilized to their fullest potential in helping defeat communism, not squabbling over the “old complacent, unbalanced fare of

action-adventure and situation comedies" (Minow, 1961). Minow had no intention of applying a heavy censorship law over broadcast mediums. Instead, it was understood by the public and industry workers that Minow "took the speech as a deliberate tactic to scare stations and networks into better programming, and as a hint that they should do something about it soon" (TIME, 54). Minow wanted to achieve a new structure and standard for American media, "one that gave a new priority to broadcasting without fundamentally altering the legal framework of regulation" (Curtin, 1). A new goal of restructuring broadcast practices to link public interest and the national interest together was put into motion for television, but subsequently changed the face of radio broadcasting as well.

Newton N. Minow, FCC chairman, testifies before a Senate subcommittee on May 23, 1961, weeks after delivering his 'vast wasteland' speech.

The role of broadcast journalism during a time of civil unrest, Cold War tensions, and the development of televised media led to the discourse around the idea of broadcast journalism. Minow set out to not only establish new broadcasting standards but also change the way the

public thought about broadcasting practices. Minow explained that "I felt that many broadcasters, who naturally had a vested interest in the medium, had, in the flush of enormous financial success, too quickly grown complacent and closed their eyes to their responsibilities and trust." (3). Minow revisited the "public interest, convenience, and necessity standard of section 301 of the Communications Act by putting his efforts in the three spheres: 1) the public at large, 2) Democratic Party circles, and 3) the broadcasting industry." (Communications Act, 12) (Curtin, 6). Minow felt that "Serving the public interest was the price of broadcasters' access to publicly owned airwaves" (Minow, 2021). Minow determined that a greater focus on marginalized communities was needed.

Minow's decision to stress the need for inclusion was not fully agreed upon. In a time when public turmoil was brewing, a fair few "people in the business" were not in support of Minow's "imposition of 'minority tastes' on the public" (Minow, 2021)(Curtain, 18). According to the June edition of Television Magazine (1961), overall, agreement outweighed "disagreement in appraisals of the FCC chairman's fiery speech. But among those who agreed with Minow, there was considerable disagreement as to where the finger of responsibility should be pointed" (19). The National Association of Broadcasters' president, Leroy Collins agreed that broadcasts needed to be improved, but this action should not come from the government, and instead a voluntary action of broadcasters. Collins explained that "first we must improve broadcastings relationship with the federal government. Second, we must improve broadcasting's relationship with the American people. And, further, we must improve the broadcasting profession itself" (Television Magazine, 17). To improve the quality of radio broadcasting, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) was authorized to improve the public television system and to develop public radio through the distribution of governmental funds.

The supervisor of the "Public Radio Study", Samuel Holt, found that non-commercial radio was weakened by the problems of internal organization and financing. The lack of finances resulted in the issues of recruiting and retaining staff at non-commercial stations. Holt advised that a group consisting of public radio managers be formed to better understand the needs of non-commercial stations. The Radio Advisory Council (RAC) was created, all consisting of White men despite Black non-commercial stations existing within this era. The RAC elected Al Hulsen to be the first radio director, and entrusted personnel to investigate the needs of public radio stations. Hulsen visited over 100 stations to understand how and where to distribute the CPB funds. Hulsen discovered that “more than half of the stations were "10-Watters," and more than half of them had no permanent staff or resources. The average yearly budget was under $10,000.” (Kirkish, 24). With the RAC and CPB, a set of standards was created in order to allocate the funds to non-commercial radio stations.

The criteria to receive the CPB funds heavily excluded minority-owned and operated radio stations despite the Act shifting the emphasis from educational to "public" radio. The "CPB-qualified" stations met the following criteria:

1. An adequately-equipped control room and studio for program production.
2. No less than three full-time, paid, staff employed at all times.
3. Operating 8 hours a day, 6 days a week for 48 weeks per year.
4. A minimum of approximately half of a station's broadcast schedule should be devoted to educational, informational, and cultural programs for a public audience.
5. Operating at no less than 250 watts, and educational programming for the general public.

The ideology behind the requirements was to encourage stations to improve the quality of their programming and facilities before achieving government funding. Many minority-owned stations

did not meet these requirements due to the systematic racism built into the radio broadcasting medium. Obtaining quality facilities, equipment and a budget for paid staff was not a given for Black-owned and operated radio stations. The lack of financial allocation to Black stations continued to slow the development of marginalized voices and exclude minority broadcasters from accessing greater broadcasting frequencies to serve the public interest. The CPB consequently failed to accomplish this aspect of its own mission.

Hulsen then turned his focus to the creation of a national network. He aimed to improve radio's quality at a local and a national level through the creation of a network that could serve the broader public interest of American audiences as a whole. The CPB approved the creation of the National Public Radio network that would act as this uniting force. The CPB elected the first NPR members: William (Bill) Siemering, William Kling, David Platts, Karl Schmidt, Joe Gwathmey, and John Witherspoon. Three more members were added soon after the initial election, including Richard Estell, Bernard Mayes, and Marvin Segelman. (Kirkish, 16). Eventually, after much deliberation and debate among candidates, Donald Quayle was selected as NPR's first president, thus completing the founding members of the network.

NPR, created and operated by predominantly White men, was developed with their understanding of diversity in mind. However, NPR, operated by White men who grew up in central or midwestern America, only knew inclusivity as it was expressed around them in their daily lives. Garbes explains that NPR's founders were socialized into a White habitus "that oriented their actions. As central to this habit was a recognition of civic duty to 'the public interest,' coupled with misrecognition of the 'public' and its 'interest' in largely White (middle-class) terms" (84). Explained by Michael McCauley, NPR was a "network founded by well-educated baby boomers and targeted toward listeners with similar demographic and

psychographic profiles" (12). White habitus persisted beyond the directors and was also embodied in the general staff within the network.

Despite affirmative action measures in place during the 1970s, the FCC loosely required networks and stations to uphold inclusivity within a given space but did not enforce consequences if diversity was not achieved. NPR's embodiment of White habitus was fostered by the lack of diversity within the internal network space. Following the demonstrations of the civil rights movements and riots within the U.S. demands by marginalized communities provided the impetus for social change and to address the issues of minorities being locked out of the mainstream media. Due to the large uproar and efforts made by marginalized communities, in 1968, a year before NPR's establishment, the Kerner Commission Report and the FCC's notice of proposed rules required that broadcast stations and networks must create and enforce policies to hire Black people and other minorities. Eileen Shanahan states in her 1968 article, *F.C.C. Says Licenses May Not Be Renewed if They Discriminate in Hiring F.C.C. Warns Stations on Hiring Bias*, that the FCC asked station owners to "adopt affirmative recruitment and training programs for Negroes for jobs in broadcasting" (1). This was seen as a measure for expanding minority voices in the media. However, the FCC also provides a loophole for its traditionally White station owners and networks. Shanahan continues to state that "there will be no penalties for stations that fail to seek negroes actively" within a station or network (1). This passable offense of discrimination and exclusion allowed for radio stations and networks' staff to remain predominantly White.

The occurrence of hiring predominantly White staff was continuously practiced with the general staff of NPR. Elizabeth Young, NPR's Relations Associate, described Quayle's hiring strategy as an "intuitive factor." Quayle operated predominantly on personality and then

qualifications. However, this resulted in the hiring of more White workers into the network than focusing on hiring a diverse staff for NPR. Quayle continued on to hire Lee Frischknecht, George Geesey, Charles Herbits, Wayne Gray, Cleve Mathews, Jack Mitchell, Robert Conley, James Barrett, Deborah Campbell, and Elizabeth Young. All new members of NPR's general staff were White. This contributed to the White habitus environment created within the Network. There were few people of color within NPR, thus diversity and public interest as defined by White people whose nation operated in favor of their race.

NPR. The staff of All Things Considered celebrating the 10th anniversary of the program (1981).

NPR's Habitus upholds and reinforces harmful practices of the Diversity Industrial Complex in its flailing attempts to be inclusive within the organization and on the airwaves. Dean Spade, author of *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the*

Limits of Law explains that “When movement organizers, activists, and intellectuals use various terms that end in ‘industrial complex,’ like ‘military-industrial complex’ or ‘prison industrial complex,’ they are pointing to this kind of multivector analysis of *law*, *power*, *knowledge*, and *norms* [emphasis mine]” (5). Diversity Industrial Complex, therefore, encompasses long term power structures within organizations and individuals “invested in framing discrimination as an apolitical tolerance for difference through linguistically downplaying bigotry, social norms, and business practices, while avoiding historical contexts of power and oppression” (Springer, 2). Due to the White habitus and Diversity Industrial Complex, NPR’s mission statement was created with diversity in mind but understood and adapted to White limitations.

Bill Siemering, NPR’s first director of programming, created the mission statement to uphold notions of diversity deemed fit for 1970s America. Siemering established that NPR should strive to provide a holistic look at America through a diversity of voices. NPR was to place value in unique experiences and understanding and to provide learning opportunities where they were lacking in American culture at the time. A special focus of adult education and diversity was stressed within NPR’s mission statement. Siemering stated that:

> “In its cultural mode, National Public Radio will preserve and transmit the cultural past, will encourage and broadcast the work of contemporary artists and provide listeners with an aural aesthetic experience that enriches and gives meaning to the human spirit.
>
> In its journalistic mode, National Public Radio will actively explore, investigate and interpret issues of national and international import. The programs will enable the individual to better understand himself, his government, his institutions, and his natural and social environment so he can intelligently participate in effecting the process of change.” (Siemering, 3).

The mission statement was observed to be a true stride in American broadcasting culture in its commitment to uplifting marginalized communities and experiences. However, NPR's mission statement was set up to fail due to the network's inability to create diversity within its internal organization. Without diverse voices within the network, true inclusion, support, and social change can not take place.

NPR continued to fail its own mission statement since its conception through the agreement that the network was not going to represent marginalized communities. Within a Board of Directors meeting conducted in October 1970, it was quickly agreed that NPR should not program for highly specialized groups despite the network wanting to achieve a diverse audience. Within this meeting, it was determined that specialized communities such as Black ghetto residents, Spanish-speaking Americans, etc. were to be excluded from their target audiences (Quayle, 2). Instead, an agreement was made between Siemering and Quayle that the dominant audience would be adults, White and middle-class. NPR immediately adapted its notion of inclusivity as meeting the following criteria:

1. Unity of people, events, and ideas is natural to the unique characteristics of the medium growing out of the need to present a reality that is believable to all segments of the total population
2. People will be valued and treated with respect and positive regard and not as adversaries by program staff
3. The listener will have a sense of reality, of authentic people sharing the human experience with emotional openness
4. Each unit will be related to the whole, with form following function, division of time growing out of content rather than arbitrary walls evenly spaced between units

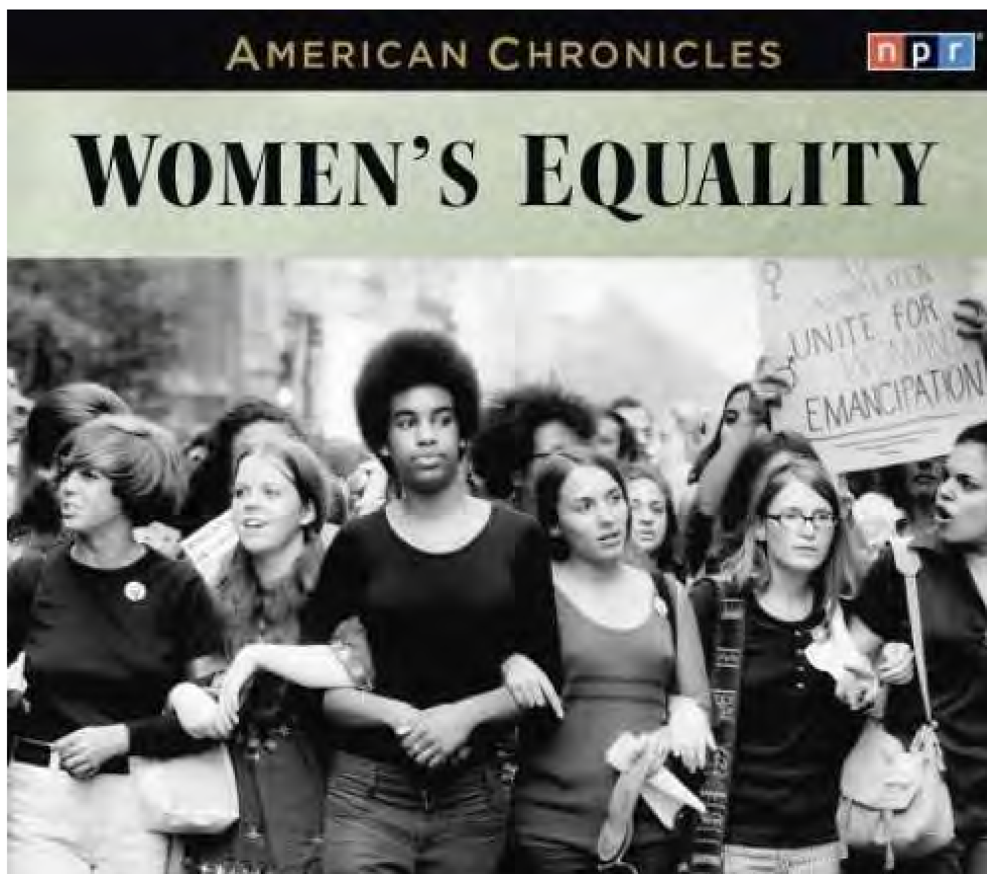
5. There will be significant participation by the public as artisans and citizens

The new definition of diversity determined within the *NPR Informational Book* intentionally ignores race as a factor of diversity. This new adaptation of "diversity" allowed for White NPR staff to remain comfortable within their own limitations. Remaining comfortable and looking at diversity at a distance was achieved through NPR's signature show structure.

NPR's style was created using a centralized programming method, allowing for shows to be recorded on tapes and edited for later broadcasting dates. Additionally, the programming style characteristic of NPR's most popular programming, All Things Considered, operated in a "digestible" format. Instead of interviewing people who were directly experiencing a societal change or event, a representative of academia would often fill their place. This mode of digesting material rather than capturing it live was NPR's main mode of communication to its American audiences. Few acceptions of this format were made, for example, NPR's first broadcast of *All Things Considered*, featuring the Anti-Vietnam War protests. This broadcast was reported on the ground more so than most, but still maintained qualities of the digestible format.

Operating in an embodied direct address to the listener, Robert Conley describes the setting of the protests in Washington D.C. during the Vietnam war. Conley's narration overlaid on top of on-site audio of protesters cheering "stop the war now" calls attention to the self-reflexivity, pre-recording, and partial editing that was distinct to the style of *All Things Considered*. With this first broadcast, *All Things Considered,* immediately associated itself with a left-leaning audience. Conley achieves this effect by describing the protestors as "American", stressing the constitutional right to protest thus marking the protestors as patriotic despite the negative outlook on war (00:00:32). However, Conley does not engage further as to why protesting the war is important. Instead, he remains looking at surface-level information.

The show navigates actions taken by protestors to hold their ground and the response from the police. The segment does make a significant contribution to Vietnam-war history but fails to acknowledge how police violence is perpetrated and used within the setting. In the segment, a protester explains that the cops chased the protestors with mace, stating that “they were already running and they were chasing them with the mace in their hair and in their ears and on the back of their neck. They were running away, not towards.” (00:07:09-15). Conley does not see the opportunity to discuss police brutality in-depth, or the historical mistreatment of communities facing forms of police violence. Instead, he captures the actions of the police as though he were not trying to form biases for either side.



NPR’s American Chronicles: Women's Equality. Featuring 29 shows encompassing Women’s movements within the U.S.

Conley provides air time for policemen who have to keep the roads clear. Policemen refuse to acknowledge Conley or his requests to know why certain individuals are being arrested, to which the protests explain “I'm trying to figure that out too” (00:10:33-38). Though Conley does not make race a central factor as to why the protests were brutal, he instead discretely weaponizes race when getting a statement from a Black officer. Conley puts the Black officer under a microscope, and “others” him due to his unique position as an authority figure and a marginalized community member. In the eyes of the Black policeman, the only way change can happen in favor of the protestors is if

> “they get rid of these old policemen. A lot of the old policemen I talk to believe in the old ideas of grabbing somebody and just beating the hell out of them. I believe if you talk to a man, talk to somebody, man to man, and they can understand you then everything should be fine. (00:17:50-18:05)

As a host trying to uphold the new standards, expectations, and promises of NPR, Conley missed, or seemingly avoided speaking about the racial intersections that were occurring during the Vietnam War protests. He did not uphold the preservation of the cultural past, thus he did not actively explore, investigate and interpret issues of national and international import as in-depth as he could have. Engaging with the racial aspect would have uncovered the social disparities and inequities deeply rooted within American society. This was not a new occurrence, as seen with the Civil Rights Movement taking place right before NPR began broadcasting. The navigation around race was a common occurrence within NPR’s content and network setting. Programs that followed similar patterns were distributed to member stations that met NPR’s criteria. These criteria continued to exclude marginalized voices from influencing the network’s understanding of diversity and inclusivity.

NPR programming was distributed to member stations that met NPR's criteria and standards. NPR's staff determined this criterion as needing to broadcast at least 10 watts or higher. A higher watt station also entailed higher quality equipment within the given station, thus worthy of receiving NPR programming. Additionally, the station must have an average operating budget of $75,000 per year in order to qualify as a member station. However, this standard entailed that the majority of the Black-owned radio outlets, being 16 radio outlets nationally in 1970, could not be selected for NPR programming membership distribution. Black-owned or operated stations struggled to meet these requirements due to discriminatory practices and broadcasting policies in place that prevented minority groups from attaining the resources needed to develop their stations. However, NPR's Station Relations Associate, Elizabeth Young, found that this exclusion of minority groups through NPR membership criteria would provide motivation to strive toward NPR's membership standard. Young states that's in an interview that

> "We now have stations that are owned and operated by minority groups, like American Indians, Eskimos, what have you. Sometimes those communities are finding it difficult to meet the criteria . . . having them has thrust forward the thinking: well, if this is what we have to do to get the money and get the programs, we'll do it. Which is probably not all bad." (8)

Young's statement can be understood through the notions of White habitus that ignore the historical, systemic racism that had been built into the American broadcasting medium. Even when governmental support was allegedly allocated to public broadcasting stations through the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, minority-owned radio stations were heavily excluded due to a similar standard determined by the U.S. government. Thus, only seven of forty Black-owned stations were CPB qualified and NPR affiliated by the end of the 1980s. The first financial

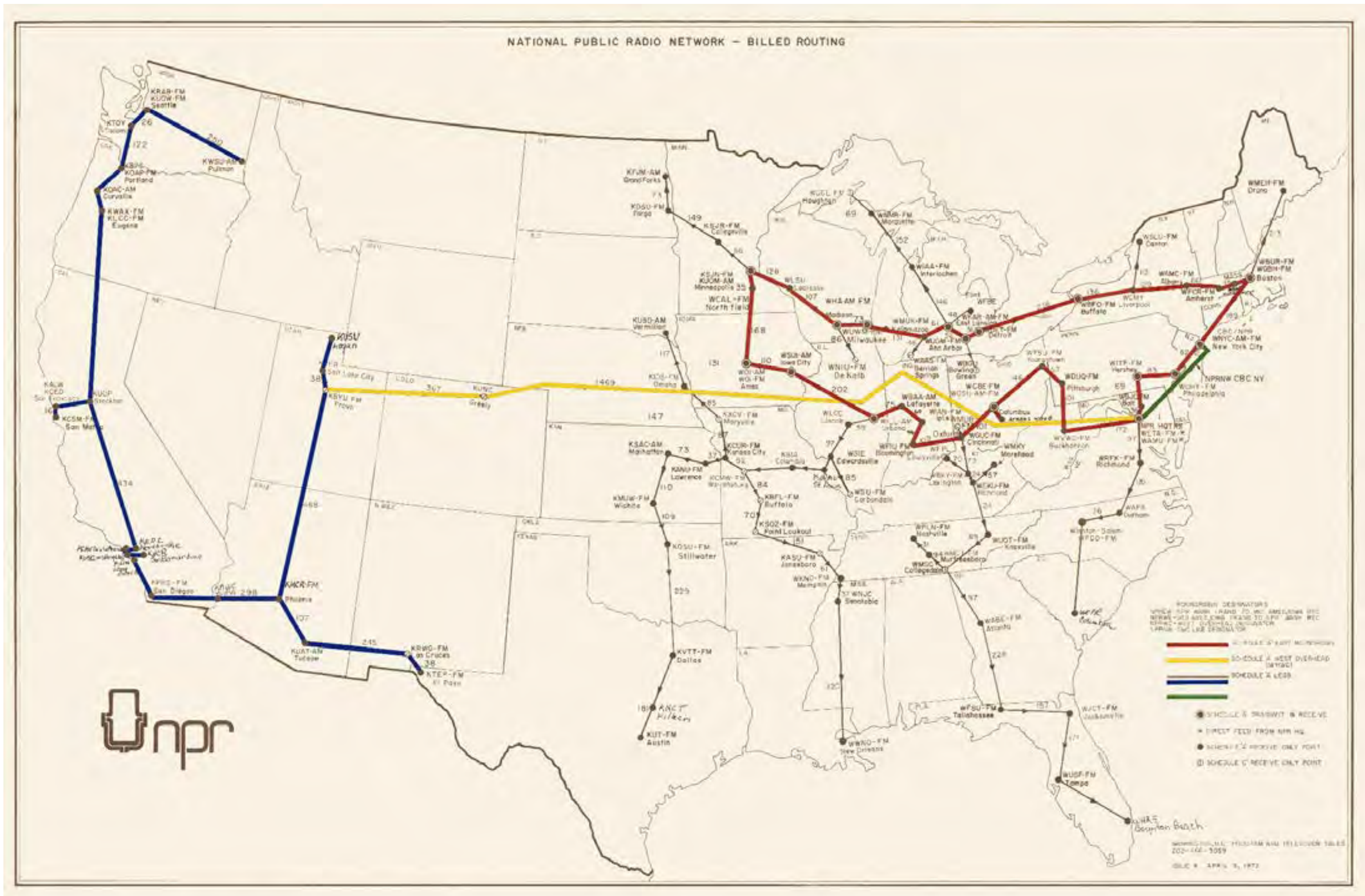
distribution was given to seventy-three stations, or 17 percent of the noncommercial outlets, qualified. Consequently, the CPB subsidized the wealthiest stations, while neglecting the smaller ones.

Black stations were unable to be selected for NPR membership, let alone influence NPR programming practices. When Black-owned and operated stations, such as Clark College's WCLK-FM in Atlanta, attempted to model their programming after NPR in an attempt to secure funding, the Department of Mass Communication was mandated to create a format that was "distinctly different from other stations in the market…" arguing that duplicating programming is to waste air time and misuse public money provided to non-commercial stations (2). Instead, Black stations continued to navigate societal barriers instilled by racist institutions and policies. Due to both NPR struggling to capture experiences of marginalized communities, and communities of color being excluded from broadcasting resources, the airwaves continued to be absent of national coverage that encompassed a holistic American experience. This issue of unacceptable coverage was expressed in 1973 by Mayor Richard B. Hatcher of Gary, Indiana, stating that

> "The mass media has failed miserably in reporting accurately and honestly the day-to-day news emanating from the Black community. The media has failed miserably to adequately portray Black people and Black perspectives. The media and its allies have failed to allow equal access to information necessary for full participation in a democratic society" (Hatcher, 1973).

At this time, the public interest of Black Americans was not satisfied, and NPR was not remedying this due to the active decision to not represent marginalized communities. This exclusion from the airwaves and inequitable resource allocation hindered communities of color

from making their own sub-audience or market.



Map of NPR's 88 Member Stations, (1970).

This issue of under-representation of marginalized communities was a growing need to both the underserved communities and the FCC itself. Despite NPR being created for diversity and inclusion, and labeled as "diverse" by Jack Mitchell in his book, *Listener Supported: The Culture and History of Public Radio*, the FCC found that even with this radio network, additional action is needed to be taken. NPR was not delivering inclusive content that yielded diverse audience numbers, therefore the FCC found solutions by encouraging Black radio ownership instead. In 1978, leading to the *Audience 88* report, the FCC was already receiving complaints about under-serving public interest needs. The FCC states:

> "We are compelled to observe that the views of racial minorities continue to be inadequately represented in the broadcast media. This situation is detrimental not only to the minority. audience but to all of the viewing and listening public. Adequate representation of minority viewpoints in programming services not only the needs and interests of the minority community but also enriches and educates the non-minority audience. It enhances the diversified programming which is a key objective not only of the Communications Act of 1934 but also of the First Amendment" (3).

Within this same statement, the FCC expresses that a potential solution to the undeserving of the general public was to encourage minority groups to achieve ownership of their own radio stations. Many institutional procedures encoded in racism proved to be difficult for minority groups attempting to gain ownership of their own stations. During the 1970s, "more than 7,350 commercial broadcast stations on the air in the United States in 1970, only 13 were Black-owned", while only "only six public radio stations" were operated by nonWhite managers with little improvement in the following decade (Ferretti, 1970; Forkan, 19)(Garbes, 86). With the intentional exclusion of marginalized voices from accessing the airwaves by having one organization like NPR represent all communities, counter-publics were slowed or prevented from being created.

Counterpublics, a term defined by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge as being understood as the divide between the bourgeois sphere and the proletarian counter-public. However, counter-public within an American broadcasting context is better understood through Henry Louis Gates Jr S study of counter-publics. Louis Gates Jr defines counter-public as a "simultaneous but negates parallel discursive (ontological, political) universe [that] exists within the larger White discursive universe" that colludes with the dominance of the standard White

public (49). Counterpublics emerge when groups are excluded from or marginalized within dominant publics and communicate about their marginality or exclusion within this counter-space.

From the counter, spaces come oppositional communication, dialogue that develops from assessing, processing, and navigating the exclusion of resources or representation from the dominant White public. Gregory J. Shepherd and Jeffrey St. John, authors of *Communication as Counterpublic: Perspectives on Theory*, explain that those who constitute oppositional communication “need to speak among themselves in moments of retreat, regrouping, reflection, or rejuvenation in preparation for or an anticipation of engagements with other publics" (Shepard & John, 197). This counter-public space allows for “oppressed and/or marginalized groups arenas for deliberation outside of the surveillance of the dominant group” (Squire, 3). However, this crucial form of oppositional communication and counter-public cannot form on the airwaves when radio networks such as NPR, deemed representational of all, examines intersectional matters of discrimination, inequity, and sexism from a de-centralized distance. The inability to accurately capture diversity in NPR’s programming resulted in an extremely skewed listener demographic.

NPR parallelled the commercial station’s use of audience demographic research. Public broadcasting stations conducted early surveys of demographic information, but not to the extent of commercial radio broadcasters. Public radio stations and programming relied on small-scale research that surveyed for shallow information, such as the acceptability of signals and in addition to other data gathering systems such as the Nielsen rating system. However, commercial approaches to audience research were more large-scaled and in-depth. Commercial stations sought to find information that would help sell sought-after programming to audiences or create

new programming that was known to sell based on answers that were collected. Telephone surveys conducted by the Cooperative Analysis of Broadcasting and C.E. Hooper, as well as A.C. Nielsen's Audiometer conducted more in-depth research that allowed for a greater depth of information harvesting. Typically, audience demographic research was reserved for larger radio stations and networks that could afford this research to be conducted. This left many smaller stations interested in audience research, but unable to obtain it.

NPR was struggling to keep itself afloat with consistent funding. NPR was not wealthy enough to invest in consistent research on demographics like commercial radio stations, and instead, selected one large-scale audience research project titled *Audience 88*. To go forward with the study would mean the staff of NPR would know exactly who their listener demographic was. Operating under the guise that NPR served all, it was believed that going forward with audience research would challenge the original mission statement of serving all without bias. The idea of *Audience 88* served as a sight of conflict for internal staff members of NPR. Described by Larry Josephson, an independent producer for WBAI in New York explains that an "obsession with audience size, revenue and format has replaced the spiritual underpinnings of public radio, which sought to maximize intellectual and moral growth, passion, variety and pleasure," (personal communication, May 7, 1994). Though staff members contested the idea to *Audience 88*, the need for money was greater for the anonymity of listenership for content creation.

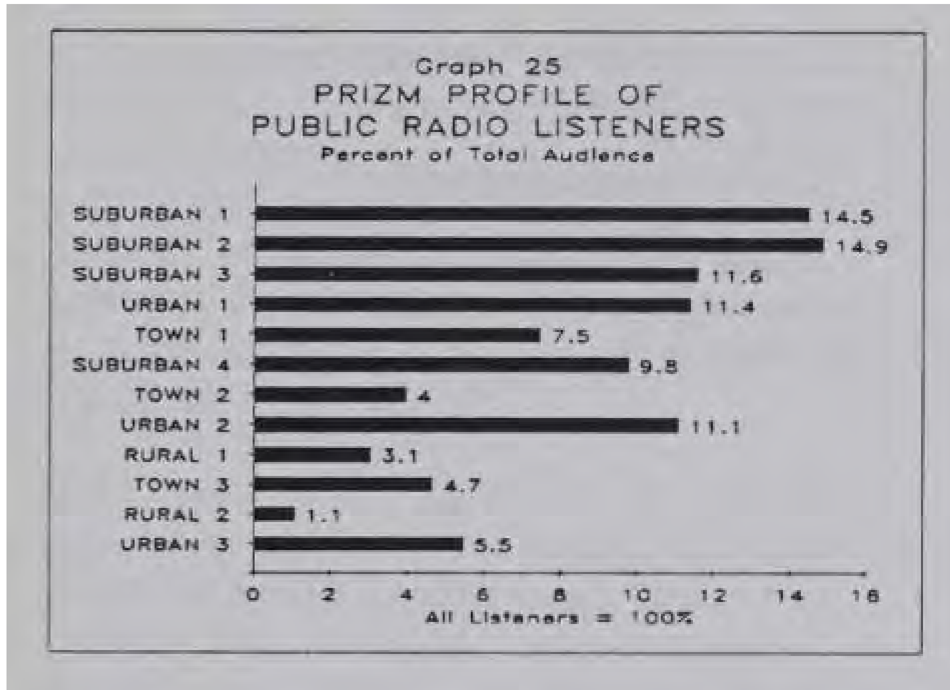
The dedicated staff of NPR felt that *Audience 88* provided too much information to NPR that directly conflicted with the initial goals set out by NPR to serve and represent diversity on American airwaves. Without knowing the race, education levels, gender, or age of your audience meant that staff could, hypothetically, serve a greater community. In reality, this was not happening regardless due to the lack of diversity within the NPR network, but some staff held

out hope for their “inclusive” programming untouched by audience research. When *Audience 88* was conducted by David Giovannoni, NPR’s lead data analyst, a permanent rift was created within the internal organization.

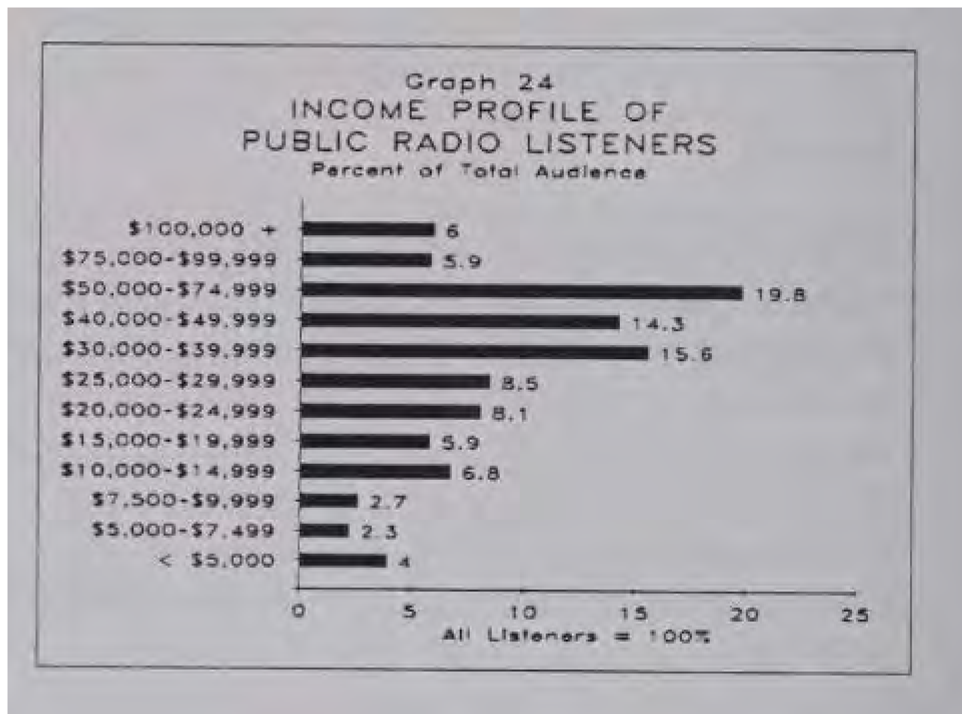
Audience 88 revealed that NPR’s primary audience was educated, upper-class, White audiences despite NPR’s goal of representing the broader and diverse face of America. The report states that “91% of *Audience 88* respondents are White, 6% are Black, 2% are Asian and 1% is Hispanic" (*Audience 88*, 6) NPR’s team of audience researchers published an individual analysis of the *Audience 88* report to further develop their understanding of their listenership. However, during the breakdown reports of *Audience 88*, data analysts blamed that by design, public radio is not meant for everyone instead of analyzing their content for patterns that served White consumers. Giovanonni explains in his *Audience 88* analysis that:

> “AUDIENCE 88 makes it clear that people who are attracted to public radio are different from people who are not; people who listen more to public radio are different from people who listen less; people for whom public radio is the station of choice are quite different from other Americans” (2)

Giovannoni makes the distinction between those who listen to the radio as being coded as typical, whereas those who don’t are deemed as typical. However, Giovannoni's *Audience 88* report makes this distinction almost entirely on race. Thus Giovannoni’s findings are encoded in the separation and sonic segregation as those who listen (White audience) are normal and representative of the true American experience, whereas those who don't (audiences of color), are othered.



Audience 88: A Comprehensive Analysis of Public Radio Listeners. The image expresses the profiles in which participants lived. The majority of those participating live in upscale suburbia.



Audience 88: A Comprehensive Analysis of Public Radio Listeners. The image expresses the income levels of participants. The majority of participants fall into the upper-middle-income brackets.

Within Giovannoni's report, NPR does not take responsibility for this skewed demographic, and instead, fellow NPR data analysts blame cultural factors as the reason for this result. Linda K. Liebold, writer for the Washington, DC Corporation for Public Broadcasting and *Audience 88* analysts argues that the reason there is a race disparity in audience demographics was that the more education people have, the more likely they are to be public radio listeners. In this context, it is critical to understand the significant differences between Blacks and Whites with respect to educational attainment" (36). In contrast to Liebold's statement, the U.S. Census records state that during this time 68.8% were White, 51.2% were Black, 74.8% were Asian and Pacific Islander, and 55.5% Indeignious Americans received their high school diploma in the 1980s. Though the range between White and Black communities diverges more with bachelor's degrees, Liebold's argument cannot hold up when compared to White and Asian bachelor's degree attainment. During the 1980s, 32% of Asian and Pacific Islanders received a bachelor's degree, whereas only 17.1% of White people received a bachelor's degree. However, in the Audience 88 report's findings, Black audiences were the second greatest demographic for the majority of their programming. Asian audiences barely made it onto the network's research radar for the majority of NPR's programming. If Liebold's argument were to hold true, NPR would have a greater Asian American audience but fails for this demographic.

Table 3. Percent of the Population 25 Years and Over with a High School Diploma or Higher by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin, for the United States: 1940 to 2000

[1950 to 2000 data based on a sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, and definitions, see http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf]

Sex, race and Hispanic origin	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Both Sexes							
White	26.1	36.4	43.2	54.5	68.8	77.9	83.6
Black	7.7	13.7	21.7	31.4	51.2	63.1	72.3
Asian and Pacific Islander	22.6	40.8	48.8	62.2	74.8	77.5	80.4
American Indian and Alaska Native	7.8	12.8	18.5	33.3	55.5	65.5	70.9
Hispanic (of any race)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	44.0	49.8	52.4
White non-Hispanic	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	69.6	79.1	85.5

Image of the United States Census statistics on High School Diploma attainment by race (1940-2000).

Table 4. Percent of the Population 25 Years and Over with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin, for the United States: 1940 to 2000

[1950 to 2000 data based on a sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, and definitions, see http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf]

Sex, race and Hispanic origin	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Both Sexes							
White	4.9	6.6	8.1	11.3	17.1	21.5	26.1
Black	1.3	2.2	3.5	4.4	8.4	11.4	14.3
Asian and Pacific Islander	4.0	7.5	11.3	20.4	32.9	36.6	44.1
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.8	1.3	1.9	3.8	7.7	9.3	11.5
Hispanic (of any race)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	7.6	9.2	10.4
White non-Hispanic	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	17.4	22.0	27.0

Image of the United States Census statistics on Bachelor Degree attainment by race (1940-2000).

NPR's mission statement continues to enforce the failure to support its underserved audiences. Instead of programmers finding value in targeting these underrepresented, or untapped, communities, NPR programmers pivoted towards their primary consumers to ensure a continuous stream of funding despite the fifth facet of NPR's mission statement. The original mission statement states that NPR will "develop and distribute programs to specific groups, adult education and structural modular units for local productions, which meet the needs of individual regions or groups" (3). NPR's mission statement entails that if Liebold's statement was true,

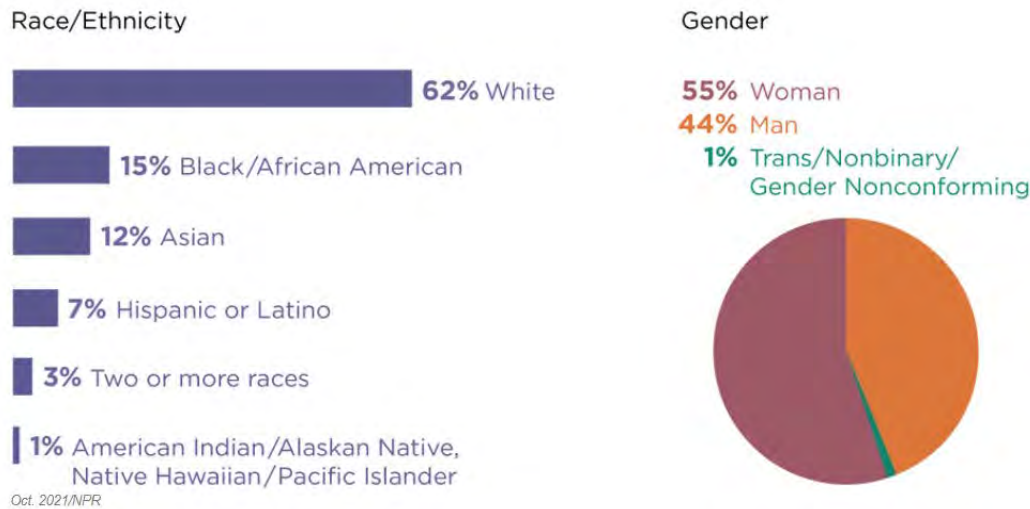
NPR should have developed programming that served communities not receiving the same educational opportunities that their White audiences did.

NPR's failure to identify and serve their underrepresented audiences fails both their original mission statement and the 1927 public broadcasting acts as an expression of quality programming. NPR's mission statement was made to also uphold the promise of public interest, convenience, and necessity through its ability to represent America holistically. However, NPR cannot serve the public interest when the 1927 Public Broadcasting Act states that "it is in the public interest to encourage the development of programming that involves creative risks and that addresses the needs of unserved and underserved audiences, particularly children and minorities" (8). NPR fails both on a public level, and on a governmental level. NPR was unable to achieve servitude to the broader American public due to its predominantly White infrastructure that harbored modes of White habitus and performative actions.

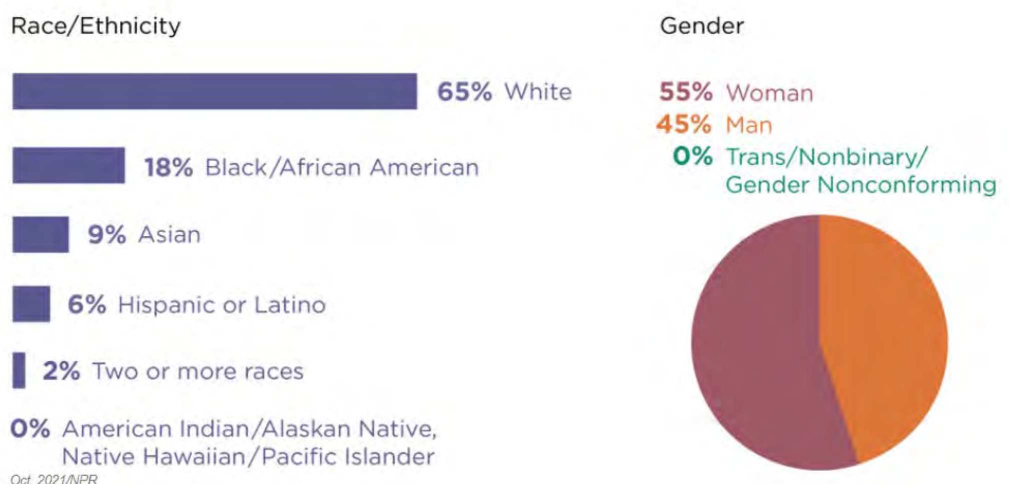
Though NPR argued that the network served the wider audience of America and provides programming services to those who are underrepresented, NPR has always served well-educated, middle to upper-class White people. According to Tom Church, "noncommercial stations may define success in more esoteric terms than profit, the bottom line for all radio stations is that a mission...cannot be achieved if there are no listeners' (Radio Research Consortium, 1986, p. 1). Thus tax-based and publicly-funded support unfairly subsidizes upper-class tastes. Though NPR achieves an audience, the network serves a demographic that has always been catered to throughout the history of commercial and educational radio. NPR fulfills its need for money by targeting the network's White audience in promotions, show formats, and content, but NPR justifies itself by upholding the original mission statement.

The lack of marginalized voices both within the network's content, and in the

headquarters, and the lack of historical accountability result in the accomplishment of the original mission statement. This inability to accomplish the original mission statement promising a more holistic look at the American experience through broadcasting practices is felt beyond NPR's early years and well into recent years with staff lawsuits and social movements against the organization. NPR's goal of being a new face of broadcasting can be understood as simply repeating the same broadcasting experience prior to the organization's conception, thus not offering true change for marginalized voices and communities of color.



NPR's statistics on the network's overall staff members (2021). The proportion of White staff members is still disproportionate to other races within the Network.



NPR's statistics on the network's supervisors (2021). The proportion of White staff members is still disproportionate to other races within the Network.

This understanding of radio history and representing the true face of American diversity is crucial, as NPR continues to struggle with these goals even now. NPR's staff breakdown still reflects a large number of employees as being predominantly White. NPR's 2021 staff breakdown states that 62% of NPR's staff are White, 15% are Black, 12% are Asian, 7% are Hispanic, 3% are of two or more races and 1% are Indigenous. Additionally, NPR has virtually erased its own history according to the network's timeline. NPR does not take accountability for its historically exclusive practices despite the ongoing lawsuits against the network for workplace racism and harassment. Erasing this history removes the marginalized voices from history and allows for people to be ignorant of the obstacles that are still felt today in public broadcasting. By acknowledging how NPR excluded marginalized voices, public broadcasting practices can change to foster a truly inclusive environment.

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