**Rise of Radio in 1920s America**

Lewis Allen writes that although radio broadcasting had been publicly available since 1920, it wasn’t until the spring of 1922 that radio sales took off. It was a veritable craze, amounting of $60,000,000 in sales that year, climbing higher after- ward

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Radio_Commission#The_Radio_Act_of_1927>

The Radio Act of 1927 divided the country into five geographical zones. Each zone was represented by one of the five Commissioners. The 1928 reauthorization of the Radio Act included a provision, called the "Davis Amendment" after its sponsor [Ewin L. Davis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ewin_L._Davis), that required each zone to have equal allocations of licenses, time of operation, station power, and wavelength. This greatly complicated things for the Commissioners; they were required to deny station applications to otherwise qualified candidates simply because the new station would put a particular state or zone over its quota. For example, the northeast had a greater population than the southwest, but was limited to the same number of stations as more sparsely populated areas. Likewise, many small communities in the southwest could have added a local station without increasing interference (because of their remoteness), but were prevented from doing so by the Davis Amendment.

<http://www.mortaljourney.com/2011/04/1920-trends/radio-history>

When KDKA transmitted the first commercial radio broadcast (the election results of the Harding-Cox race) on November 2, 1920, that sound could travel magically through the air to a location many miles away must have seemed magical to the people of that era. Unfortunately, few people heard the broadcast because there were not many radio receivers around at the time.

Between 1923 and 1930, a whopping sixty percent of American families purchased radios and a custom where families gathered around a glowing box for night-time entertainment took root, forever changing American culture.

As radio ownership grew, so did the number of transmitting stations. In January 1920, there were only four radio stations around the United States and only a handful more around the entire planet. By the end of 1922 there were six hundred radio stations the United States alone.

When NBC and CBS were founded in 1926 and 1927 respectively, radio programming became national and Americans from coast to coast heard the same shows.

[**Early Radio**](http://www.ipass.net/~whitetho/index.html)

Radio's so-called "Golden Age" was very short. It lasted from 1926, the year that NBC was formed, until 1949, the year after television's revenues surpassed radio's and the older medium's revenues declined for the first time.

Information was also important in early radio. News at early radio stations was often no more than reading newspaper stories on the air. Broadcasters soon figured that if they had access to the wire services, they could develop their own news departments. At first, newspapers tried to limit radio's access to the wire services. This was successful until United Press International [(UPI)](http://www.upi.com/) broke ranks in 1935 and began serving radio stations. Newspapers soon found that radio helped sales. People wanted to read in-depth what they had heard about on the radio.

During the Depression, radio began to assert itself as an information medium. On March 12, 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt began his series of fireside chats. He saw radio as a way to reach the masses and calm their worries during the economic downturn. Roosevelt also set wheels in motion to create a government agency to regulate the new medium. The Communications Act of 1934 established the Federal Communications Commission [(FCC)](http://www.fcc.gov/).

Radio carried the war action from Europe and the Pacific into American homes. The names Larry Lesuer, Charles Collingwood and [Eric Sevareid](http://www.otr.com/sevareid.html) became familiar to radio listeners. Radio reporters landed along with the troops on the beaches of Normandy on D-day and covered the war throughout Europe. On the Pacific front, radio reporters island hopped with the troops. Americans were informed of everything from MacArthur's return to the Philippines to the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.