

CARNEGIE FALL 2006 Results

Carnegie Results is a quarterly newsletter published by Carnegie Corporation of New York. It highlights Corporation-supported organizations and projects that have produced reports, results or information of special note.

Soundscapes: The Evolution and Challenges of National Public Radio

If only the order in which radio and television had been invented and exploited had been reversed, so that there had first been television and then, bursting out in the second half of the 20th century, radio! How delighted and entranced and overwhelmed we would all be by radio! and we would say, "What a marvelous thing it is, you can get the programs and you don't have to watch it!"

—Peter Goldmark

While radio had existed as a medium of mass communication for nearly half a century, the arrival of National Public Radio programming to the U.S. airwaves in 1971 marked the beginning of an era of radio broadcasting that would provide American and international listeners with unprecedented, enriched access to information.

Today, NPR produces more than 130 hours of weekly programming, including 34 original shows, distributed and broadcast via satellite through 810 member stations in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and Puerto Rico. An average weekly national audience of 26 million people listens to NPR. Its signature show, *All Things Considered*, is second only to *Morning Edition*—also an NPR staple—as the most listened-to program on public radio.

Much of NPR's programming is available on the Internet via its web site and a highly successful venture into podcasting begun just a year ago. Sirius satellite radio's five million subscribers can listen to two NPR stations. NPR broadcasts in 147 countries and, while other major U.S. media have reduced their global presence in recent years, NPR has expanded its number of foreign correspondents and bureaus. August 2006 saw the opening of its seven-



MORE >

teenth international bureau, matching the number the *Washington Post* now operates abroad.

Aiming to be both innovative in terms of its programming and aggressive in disseminating content, NPR's combination of editorial consistency and rigorous revenue management have helped the organization hold its own against commercial and noncommercial competitors as well as today's dominant medium—television.

“We all know the images that television presents are phenomenally powerful,” says Kevin Klose, NPR's President and CEO. “Those images are repeated many, many times, and they hardly ever lose their sense of power or immediacy, and that's a visual reality. But precisely because we cannot use a camera—a camera is an observer and is, to some extent, inert—radio can be extremely inquisitive and probing in ways that television cannot.”

Alongside its effectiveness, Klose also takes pride in NPR's funding formula, which includes member-station pledge drives, private foundation sponsorship and corporate underwriting. “Nobody is funded the way we are in this country,” he says. “The idea of something that is voluntarily funded delivering such wide-ranging and powerful service to millions of Americans is a great statement about the power of public radio.”

Beginnings

If NPR has helped determine the soundscape of American radio as many believe, its influence is rooted in the fundamental need of men and women to communicate, to exchange ideas and information. Kevin Klose says radio represents “the oldest information paradigm in the history of humanity: one transmitter

to scores, tens, hundreds of thousands of listeners, one to all. It's the same paradigm as the town crier, as the Gutenberg printing press, to a hundred readers of the Bible to a high-speed newspaper press, to a community of readers.”

To explore the educational potential of radio, from 1929 to 1936 Carnegie Corporation of New York made grants totaling nearly \$400,000, helping launch such ventures as the National Advisory Council on Radio in Education (NACRE), which worked “to further the development of the art of radio broadcasting in American education.” The idea of educational—now public—radio has always aligned perfectly with the Corporation's mission, mandated by its founder, Andrew Carnegie, of promoting “the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding.”

NACRE championed the idea of radio stations providing informational programming, for example, fifteen- or thirty-minute segments on such topics as “Our Government,” “Our World Today,” “Fundamentals of the Law,” “Short Course in Finance” and “Language Lessons” (German, Italian, Spanish, French). By 1932, NBC and CBS affiliate radio stations had presented some 96 lectures on economics, psychology, vocational guidance and government, with the University of Chicago Press distributing more than 260,000 copies of supplemental pamphlets and books. While educators and the U.S. public demonstrated a budding interest in educational radio, it was not enough to sustain the medium on a long-term basis. Before disbanding in 1937, NACRE declared in an internal review that efforts to promote radio as a source of educational programming were “experimental and demonstrational in character.”

Then, as now, commercial broadcasting was king. Statistically and legislatively, the country's preference has always been for-profit enterprise. The Radio Act of 1927 dealt with the regulation of "all forms of interstate and foreign radio transmissions and communications within the United States, its Territories and possessions." This legislation—reaffirming the federal government's earlier declaration of its ownership of the airwaves, while at the same time allowing private interests to operate broadcasting facilities under licenses it issued—did not allocate any channels for educational programming.

Attitudes hadn't changed in 1934, when Congress created the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and gave it jurisdiction over the radio (and later television) spectrum. And in 1945, when the FCC was awarding frequencies to the fledgling television industry as well as to radio stations, it allocated only 20 of 100 radio channels for noncommercial purposes.

The first listener-supported model was Pacifica Radio, established in 1946. Its maiden station, KPFA in Berkeley, went on the air three years later, just as television sales and viewership were taking off and making this flashier medium a fixture of American culture. Given television's ascendancy, formalizing public broadcasting and finding effective ways to compete with TV in delivering information and entertainment presented a formidable challenge.

Many Ideas, Many Channels

In 1964, Ralph Lowell, a Boston philanthropist and founder of WGBH educational television and radio, began making a case for the formation of a commission to evaluate public

broadcasting. The idea was floated to Carnegie Corporation, which led to the creation of the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television two years later. Charged with studying the prospects for developing noncommercial television broadcasting "of diversity and excellence," the Commission was endorsed by President Lyndon Johnson. "From our beginnings as a nation we have recognized that our security depends upon the enlightenment of our people; that our freedom depends on the communication of many ideas through many channels," Johnson wrote. "I believe that educational television has an important future in the United States and throughout the world."

Headed by James Killian—a former president of MIT and science advisor to President Dwight Eisenhower who later became director of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (1968–1974)—the Commission produced a landmark report in January 1967, *Public Television: A Program for Action*. The Commission's recommendations, covering independence, funding, oversight, and reach, were underscored by its central conclusion that "a well-financed and well-directed educational television system, substantially larger and far more pervasive and effective than that which now exists in the United States, must be brought into being if the full needs of the American public are to be served."

Implicit in the report was a belief in the intellectual and cultural yearnings of the American public who, the Commissioners suggested, would welcome educational broadcasting as a means of gaining "a fuller awareness of the wonder and the variety of the arts, the sciences, scholarship, and craftsmanship, and of the many roads along which the products of man's mind and man's hands can be encountered."

James Reston wrote in *The New York Times* that the Carnegie Commission report was “one of those quiet events that, in the perspective of a generation or even more, may be recognized as one of the transforming occasions of American life.”

National Educational Radio, a division of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (at the time, public broadcasting’s primary advocate organization) noted the public interest stirred up by the Carnegie Commission report and undertook a study of radio, which was funded by the Ford Foundation. Published in April 1967, *The Hidden Medium: a Status Report on Educational Radio in the United States* (New York, 1967), pointed out that the nation did have an existing infrastructure of noncommercial radio stations, but that they had marginal funding and most were able to broadcast only a few hours a day.

The Hidden Medium helped to spur growing support for public radio. “Indeed, there are signs that educational radio has begun at last to respond with a budding aggressiveness to the almost overwhelming challenge posed by television,” the report said. “Like its commercial counterpart of a decade earlier, it is awakening to the realization that no one medium can be all things to all men all the time, that there is a legitimate, important role that it, too, can play in this complex, changing American society.”

While the Carnegie Commission’s report neither considered nor recommended radio, its work eventually would lead to passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, which established the foundation for a national public broadcasting system in the United States. Initially, with President Johnson supporting the idea and Congress willing to consider it, the preliminary draft of the new bill

began going through standard legislative procedures. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), now the Department of Health and Human Services, was charged with codifying the new legislation. It was during this period that the entire existence of NPR hinged on the fate of two words. The preliminary bill included the words “and radio” after most mentions of “television.” As the bill progressed, those words would be intensely debated: Radio proponents obviously wanted the words left in, while public television’s supporters, buoyed by the prospects of a “Public Television Act,” campaigned to keep the bill radio free. “Those fighting for public television thought including radio in the bill would drag down the legislation and reduce funding for television,” explains Bill Siemering, a charter member of NPR’s board of directors and, recently, founder of Developing Radio Partners, a nongovernmental organization dedicated to supporting independent radio stations in young democracies.

In *Listener Supported: The Culture and History of Public Radio* (Praeger Publishers, 2005), Jack Mitchell, who served 12 years on NPR’s board of directors and is now a journalism professor at the University of Wisconsin, writes that “a very few crusty old radio guys” fought to leave the words “and radio” in the legislation, in a manner that was “noble in intent but shady in implementation. To win a place in the future of public broadcasting, the radio guys would use misrepresentation, temper tantrums and connections with a Johnson administration insider.”

That insider was Dean Coston, deputy undersecretary of HEW and the bill’s main author. Before moving to Washington, Coston had been a radio engineer at WUOM, the educational radio

station at the University of Michigan. Working with him was Jerrold Sandler, a former program director at WUOM who, in 1967, as National Educational Radio's executive director, had overseen *The Hidden Medium*. Sandler, widely regarded as public radio's main champion, had organized the relentless campaign on behalf of radio.

In the end, not only did radio remain part of the bill, but in the spring of 1967 a Senate committee also changed the bill's title from the Public Television Act to the Public Broadcasting Act, which, in turn, helped bring into being the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. "Amazing those words got into the bill," says Jack Mitchell. "There was a great deal of money out there supporting public television, particularly from the Ford Foundation. We had a few radio stations at the universities, but they didn't have the moxie to go out and find the funding they needed. Suddenly, with the Public Broadcasting Act, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was forced by law to give some of that money to radio."

Still, Congress had altered some key Carnegie Commission recommendations. For instance, the Commission had proposed that a fundamental tenet of public broadcasting should be "the need for insulation from governmental interference." Building on that idea, the Commission proposed that the public broadcasting oversight board—now known as the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB)—comprise 18 private citizens, 12 nominated by the President and 6 nominated by the board itself. Instead, Congress mandated a nine-member board, all to be nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate.

The Commission also proposed a tax on television sales, akin to the British licensing fee that

supports the BBC, to fund CPB on a long-term basis and further contribute to insulation from governmental interference. Congress chose instead to support CPB with federal appropriations, rendering the budget process susceptible to political machinations. (Some argue that this lack of independence has politicized CPB regardless of who is in power.) President Johnson signed the Public Broadcasting Act into law in November 1967, allocating \$20 million in federal funds to the fledgling Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and Carnegie Corporation seconded the motion with a grant of one million dollars.

Informed Citizens of the World

Funding accounted for, public radio now needed format. Soon after the Public Broadcasting Act became law, CPB and the Ford Foundation sponsored the "Public Radio Study." The report, released in 1969, was written by broadcaster Samuel Holt, who later would direct NPR's programming division (1977–1983). It called for a formalized national public radio network and production center.

In 1970, Bill Siemering, NPR's first program director, wrote the "National Public Radio Purposes" mission statement, which established NPR's organizational infrastructure and bolstered its funding requests from CPB. Siemering conceived of public radio as serving the individual: "it will promote personal growth rather than corporate gains; it will regard individual differences with respect and joy rather than derision and hate; it will celebrate the human experience as infinitely varied rather than vacuous and banal; it will encourage a sense of active constructive participation, rather than apathetic helplessness. The total service should be trust-

worthy, enhance intellectual development, expand knowledge, deepen aural esthetic enjoyment, increase the pleasure of living in a pluralistic society and result in a service to listeners which makes them more responsive, informed human beings and intelligent citizens of their communities and the world.”

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting had set strict criteria for those stations aspiring to NPR membership, regarding broadcasting power, programming hours and depth of staff. Of the 457 noncommercial stations then in existence, 91 qualified to become member stations when NPR incorporated in March of 1970. On average they broadcast 84 hours a week, approximately 90 percent educational, information or cultural programming and the remainder entertainment. The new NPR board appointed as president Donald Quayle, a former general manager of Boston’s WGBH public radio station and a consultant to CPB. Quayle hired Siemering as NPR’s first programming director, and he began coordinating work on the program that would become *All Things Considered*.

NPR, unlike its television counterpart PBS, was structured to produce national programming in addition to picking up programming from member stations across the country and international programming such as rebroadcasts from the BBC. *All Things Considered* made its debut on May 3, 1971, broadcasting in 32 states. The inaugural broadcast included a report on a 26-year-old woman’s attempts to deal with heroin addiction; a report from Ames, Iowa, on a novel means of supplementing business at a barbershop (shaving women’s legs); a discussion with two NPR reporters and a correspondent from the

Christian Science Monitor regarding that day’s massive protest in Washington, D.C., against U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War; the reading of three antiwar poems; and a conversation between the poet Allen Ginsberg and his father about the legality of drugs.

The show began, though, with a remarkable and dramatic 20-minute sound montage of the demonstration in Washington introduced by *All Things Considered*’s first host, former *New York Times* staff member and NBC correspondent Robert Conley. Bill Siemering says, “Considering it was the largest protest in Washington ever—5,000 people arrested—all in all, with two weeks of rehearsal, it is a good documentary of that day, bringing multiple points of view to the story, a sense of being there.”

Clearly, from the very start *All Things Considered* had a distinctive style—characterized by longish pieces, vivid descriptions, musical interludes between segments, immediacy and in-depth analysis of events—still recognizable today. Yet, some things have changed between then and now, most noticeably the addition of underwriter announcements and the absence of editorializing. (“Today in the nation’s capitol,” said a reporter in the montage, “it is a crime to be young and have long hair.”)

Struggle and Growth

From its inception, public broadcasting—radio and television—has had an uneven, sometimes contentious relationship with government. In the early 1970s, fueled by distrust of public broadcasting’s attention to politically charged current events (NPR,

for example, was providing live coverage of the Watergate hearings) the Nixon Administration tried to terminate all of PBS and NPR's political coverage. In response, the American Civil Liberties Union issued a report asserting that the White House was attempting to "intimidate" and "starve" public television and radio.

Without a substantial endowment or sufficient foundation backing, public broadcasting was forced to subsist on one- and two-year federal allocations. President Nixon vetoed congressional authorization of \$65 million in federal funding to CPB in 1973. As Bill Moyers commented in the *Boston Globe* on June 10, 1973, "Uncle Sam isn't a benevolent philanthropist; when he gives you an allowance he expects to be invited to Sunday dinner, at least. Anybody who says you can get money from Congress and the White House with no strings attached must have been reading a 1950 high school civics book."

Eventually, signs of expansion and financial stability started to appear. In 1975 CPB began a Coverage Expansion Grant program designed to assist new noncommercial stations in qualifying for NPR membership. The following year Congress appropriated a landmark three-year funding plan, a first for public broadcasting. In 1977 NPR merged with the Association of Public Radio Stations, the successor to National Educational Radio, which advocated on behalf of public radio to Congress and federal agencies.

With the merger, NPR was able to evolve from its initial role—largely a production and distribution center—into leadership of a full-fledged membership organization providing member stations with training, program promotion and management, and representing the interests of public radio stations before Congress, the FCC and other regulatory

organizations. At that time, NPR had a network of 198 public radio stations, 65 percent of them licensed to universities. Fifty percent of its national programming was produced by NPR, 25 percent by its member stations, and another 25 percent came from other sources. Through CPB, the federal government provided one-third of public radio's \$65 million budget; the rest came from state, local and subscriber contributions, and from foundations.

In 1977, at the request of NPR and the CPB, Carnegie Corporation convened a new commission to revisit the funding issues and review the progress and technological possibilities of public broadcasting. The Carnegie Commission on the Future of Public Broadcasting, chaired by Columbia University president William J. McGill, issued the report, *A Public Trust*, in January 1979, addressing what it called a fundamental dilemma: "How can public broadcasting be organized so that sensitive judgments can be freely made and creative activity freshly carried out without destructive quarreling over whether the system is subservient to a variety of powerful forces, including the government?"

The Commission recommended replacing CPB with a new entity, the Public Communications Trust, a private, not-for-profit, nongovernmental organization with a nine-member governing board appointed by the president. For National Public Radio, the Commission proposed adding an additional 250 to 300 stations to assure a truly national reach. Although CPB was not abolished by Congress, NPR soon experienced unprecedented growth, with Frank Mankiewicz (son of *Citizen Kane* screenwriter Herman Mankiewicz) as its new president. He oversaw the opening of foreign news bureaus, the 1979 debut of *Morning Edition*, a sharp increase in programming hours and in 1980, the linking to

a satellite network—greatly enhancing the sound quality for its membership of 250 stations and an audience of over 8.5 million people.

Those successes were tempered, however, by unchecked expansion, insufficient support from Washington and programming decisions that could now be considered shortsighted. For example, NPR passed on the opportunity to distribute a new show produced by Minnesota Public Radio, *A Prairie Home Companion*, which contributed to the creation of a new noncommercial production and distribution entity, American Public Radio (now known as Public Radio International), a significant public broadcasting competitor.

In 1981 threats of reduced federal funding and the possible elimination of CPB led Mankiewicz to respond with Project Independence, a strategy of new fundraising initiatives that would enable NPR to wean itself from government support by 1988. Project Independence comprised three separate campaigns: a fundraising drive to secure donations from grants, foundations and corporations; NPR Ventures, which would create commercial partnerships to utilize the unused portions of NPR's satellite radio channels; and NPR Plus, designed to increase programming and charge a fee to member stations for broadcasting rights. Setting these ambitious ventures in motion cost NPR money it simply did not have. With morale low and NPR running on a multi-million-dollar deficit, Mankiewicz resigned in the spring of 1983. Soon thereafter NPR made painful yet necessary budget cuts (including the layoff of some 60 staff members), secured a \$6.4 million loan from CPB and orchestrated a pledge drive in which member stations raised \$2 million.

In testimony before a House committee in early 1984, Frederick Wolf of the General Accounting Office said, "NPR's financial problems...occurred because the organization was not properly prepared for and, in fact, failed in its ambitious plan known as Project Independence." In his view, the key causes of failure were that management operations were not properly structured to undertake the major expansion, and that NPR's ability to raise funds from private grants and contributions had not been fully developed, meaning revenue goals were not realized. Additionally, NPR did not have a functioning financial management information system to provide essential reports, such as comparisons of budgeted and actual revenues and expenditures, to enable management to monitor operations during a critical period.

In 1985 NPR's new president, Douglas Bennet, oversaw the completion of its financial restructuring, which included having member stations receive funds directly from CPB—not through NPR—to acquire national programming. Listeners heard *Fresh Air* and *Car Talk* debut on NPR in 1987, while news shows began broadcasting seven days a week along with gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Iran-Contra hearings.

In the 1990s, NPR initiated more new programming, established a presence on the Internet and began to build a more reliable funding base. It was a productive decade, as this timeline illustrates:

- 1991: *Talk of the Nation* made its debut. NPR provided round-the-clock coverage of the First Gulf War.
- 1992: The NPR Jazz Initiative was launched

distributing, among other programs, *Jazz Profiles*, *JazzSet*, *Marian McPartland's Piano Jazz* and *Jazz from Lincoln Center*.

- 1993: NPR began broadcasting its programming to Europe through an international satellite system. The NPR Foundation was established to achieve greater financial stability.
- 1994: NPR.org arrived on the Internet.
- 1995: *All Things Considered* expanded from ninety minutes to two hours.
- 1996: The NPR Foundation reached the \$5 million mark in assets. *Performance Today* highlighted classical music seven days a week.
- 1997: *On the Media* and *The Diane Rehm Show* debuted.
- 1998: *Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me!* was launched. NPR News opened bureaus in the Midwest and New Delhi. NPR Worldwide began, sending programs throughout Asia, Africa and Europe.
- 1999: *Morning Edition* celebrated its 20th anniversary.

Funding Matters

Today NPR's member stations operate on funds derived from, approximately, 34 percent listener support, 24 percent corporate underwriting and foundation grants and 13 percent federal support through CPB allocations; the remainder comes from state and local governments and other sources such as return on investments and sales of transcripts and merchandise.

NPR's current financial stability is attributable to several sources:

NPR member stations: An established "non-compete" policy keeps NPR from soliciting listeners

directly; this is the domain of its 810 member stations, which rely on pledge drives, direct mail and telemarketing campaigns, online fundraising, and programming fees to build membership and revenue.

Corporate sponsorships and foundation grants: Corporate underwriting of NPR programming has grown substantially in recent years. In 2004, more than 150 corporations and associations—including Blue Note Records, *The Economist*, General Mills, HBO, Nike, PBS, Penguin Books, Toyota, Travelocity, and Wal-Mart—have provided funding from \$1,000 to more than half a million dollars to NPR. Underwriters are recognized in 10-second spots delivered by NPR announcers, with wording that adheres to FCC guidelines.

The federal government: While still sensitive to the possibility of programming bias—left or right—the government continues to support NPR through grant distributions to member stations from CPB and federal agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Science Foundation.

The NPR Foundation: This endowment, formed in 1993 to support new initiatives, was bolstered ten years later when it received the lion's share of McDonalds heir Joan Kroc's bequest to NPR of \$229.8 million, possibly the largest private gift to a cultural institution in U.S. history. This impressive bequest caused quite a stir in public radio. "I think everybody was completely caught off guard by the size of it," says public radio consultant John Sutton, a former NPR research director. "[NPR] knew she was a fan and was likely to do something at some point, but nobody knew that this would be the scope of it."

According to Barbara Hall, vice president for development and executive director of the NPR Foundation, "Mrs. Kroc's bequest to the endowment helps to ensure the longevity and financial security

of NPR.” But she explains, “Because she designated her gift as permanently restricted, the Kroc endowment must never fall below the historic dollar value of the original gift. For example, the [annual] payout represents only 4 percent of our \$136 million budget for fiscal year 2006. Looking ahead, we do not anticipate that contribution to support more than 10 percent of NPR’s operating costs. Even with the revenue from the endowment, NPR must raise more than \$55 million from foundations and corporations each year.”

To prevent potential donor influence on programming content, NPR has separated its fundraising and editorial departments. “People who give money may not lobby for causes in the news,” says Jeffrey Dvorkin, former NPR ombudsman. “Money given generously to NPR is placed into a broad bucket. There cannot be strings attached to the money. If it goes to foreign coverage, for example, it cannot go specifically to Middle East coverage.” Along with that policy comes what Dvorkin calls the “danger of self-censorship, one that we always have to keep in our consciousness. If we’re doing a piece that involves a funder, are we being unduly hard on them because we know they are an underwriter, or are we pulling our punches? The best approach is to talk openly about it in the newsroom so that we are able to do the story fairly.”

Through the years, Carnegie Corporation’s role as a supporter of NPR has been, “episodic but substantial,” according to Corporation research that led to the report, *A Public Trust*. “The Corporation’s early willingness to stand up and be counted as a generous supporter of NPR made an enormous difference in the organization’s survival and success,” says Hall. “Because

of Carnegie Corporation’s leadership role in the philanthropic community, other foundations have noted the Corporation’s strong support for NPR and given generously themselves.”

In addition to its \$1 million grant to help establish the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Carnegie Corporation has since 1975 made contributions to NPR totaling approximately \$3 million, much of it toward specific programming, including coverage of Third World development, presidential and congressional campaigns, the war on terrorism, education reform, international security and nonproliferation, and financial influence in political decision making. An interesting snapshot of the relationship between listenership and funding came about in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks. Carnegie Corporation and several other foundations upped their support when a dramatic increase in the number of listeners coincided with a decrease in corporate sponsorship due to economic uncertainties.

Hall believes that “Carnegie Corporation has helped NPR in two vital ways: First, the Corporation’s support strengthens NPR for news crisis periods that are often an enormous drain on NPR’s financial and human resources. Second, the foundation’s generosity has allowed NPR news to cover important subjects that have not always been widely covered elsewhere, such as our pioneering reporting on money and politics.”

The Sound of NPR

Reporting is undeniably subjective. What the producer chooses to cover, what the reporter records, where the editors cut—all shape the unique identity of each

station and each report, and reflect its overriding ideology. All of those elements come together in the unmistakable voice of NPR and its member stations. Even “NPR’s tonal quality is identifiable,” says Mike Calvo. Blind since the age of 18, Calvo is president of Serotek, manufacturer of FreedomBox, a voice-controlled device that assists blind and visually impaired computer users with e-mail and surfing the Internet. “They once interviewed me about the FreedomBox. I heard the interview that afternoon on my radio, and I was amazed how much I sounded like NPR.”

As for content, critics of NPR’s point of view run the gamut, some saying it’s too liberal, others too conservative—even too neutral. Former NPR ombudsman Jeffrey Dvorkin points out, “NPR’s job is not to provide informational comfort food but to help people understand the issues of the day, and I think NPR does that more often than not. We have achieved a large audience in part because NPR does a good job in a reliable and somewhat more sophisticated way than large commercial broadcasting.”

Has NPR maintained the spirit of its mission statement, to “regard the individual differences among men with respect and joy rather than derision and hate”? Bill Siemering says, “I think so, though perhaps we haven’t had enough diversity on the air. There has certainly been diversity of gender, but I’m not so sure in terms of ethnicity. But I believe there has been a spirit of respect for people and for hearing different voices.” Siemering maintains, “Even though NPR is often characterized as liberal by the conservatives, I think composite analysis shows that it’s really balanced. One of the problems has been in story selection. For example, NPR was one of the first in media to deal with

HIV/AIDS, a story that originally didn’t get much play within the conservative talk radio circle, probably because it was viewed as ‘the gay disease.’ That’s a philosophical perspective as opposed to a journalistic perspective.”

Other criticism of NPR focuses on its audience demographics, which tilt heavily toward a white, middle class, college educated listenership. To attract a more varied audience, NPR debuted *The Tavis Smiley Show* in 2002. A respected African-American broadcaster with an established following, Smiley delivered a spirited combination of news and analysis, and the show’s ratings had promise. But Smiley left NPR in 2004 when contract negotiations stalled. In “Good, Gray NPR” (*The Nation*, May 23, 2005) Scott Sherman writes, “It has to be said that the reasons behind Smiley’s divorce from NPR remain murky: On one side is his assertion that NPR wasn’t doing enough to promote the show. But NPR, which rushed to create a new black-oriented show hosted by Ed Gordon, claims that Smiley insisted on a \$3 million promotional budget for his show, when its entire advertising budget is less than \$200,000.”

Says Kevin Klose, “When Tavis unexpectedly pulled out of negotiations for his contract, very quickly there were a number of accomplished men and women of color who were eager to host a show in that time slot on NPR with that perspective... Tavis helped us create that.” Klose admits, “What we need, for sure, is greater diversity of perspectives and participants in programming and content inside NPR and in the listeners and the web site visitors. I think there needs to be a redefinition of public radio and how to increase public support, particularly in a financial sense. There are many challenges, and we need to be much more in a learning mode about

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Carnegie Corporation of New York is a philanthropic foundation created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding among the people of the United States. Subsequently, its charter was amended to permit the use of funds for the same purposes in certain countries that are or have been members of the British overseas Commonwealth.

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how to connect to listeners and others who realize the great public service that NPR provides to the nation.”

As listeners connect in new ways, NPR is keeping pace, actively creating and tailoring content for high-definition radio, podcasting, cell phones and satellite radio. It is researching the use of radio as a textual medium for the hearing impaired and exploring the possibilities of enhanced user-designed programming. As NPR moves through its fourth decade of operation, it continues to gain public support (from 1999 to 2004, for example, listenership increased 66 percent) but many challenges still loom: financial, certainly, but also the need to remain relevant, even cutting-edge, in an era of fast-evolving media. But Klose is confident that NPR is on the right track. Likening their mission to that of Carnegie Corporation of New York he says, “The advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding is what nurtures the human mind. And that’s what NPR does.”

Written by: Klopper often writes about the intersection of social, religious and political issues. His story “Nonfinito” is forthcoming in *The Long Meanwhile*, a literary anthology (Hourglass Books). He lives in Brooklyn and is working on a novel, *West of the Equator*.

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