

justify its positions. Meanwhile, intellectual dueling is the very essence of talk radio.

It's also a longstanding conceit of liberalism that it is the authentic voice of the people. Talk radio completely spoils this fantasy. Tune in any day, and you'll hear the opinions of ordinary Americans on these shows—views that don't bear much relation to those of the people dominating the mainstream media.

North puts it bluntly: liberals "hate what the American people are saying." They hate it even more "because they can't control it." Rosen believes that liberals shun accountability, and says talk radio "is the first effective platform that common people can utilize to hold liberals accountable for what they say and do."

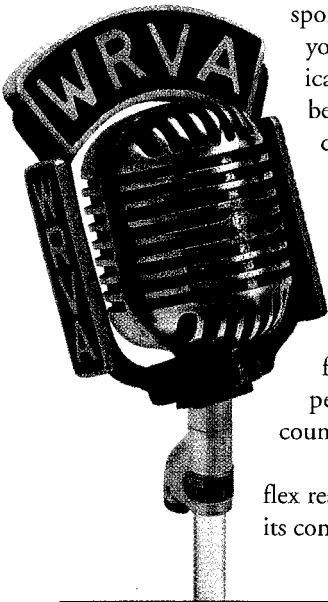
Is liberal abuse of talk radio the reflex reaction of a political creed that is losing its constituency? Talk may simply be the con-

venient fall guy, due to its visibility, for a decades-long trend that has seen large segments of the American people peel themselves off from the liberal coalition.

Clearly, the liberal critique of talk radio reflects more than mere disagreement. "Rush Limbaugh... is a cretinous liar," splutters CNN's Peter Arnett. If radio talkers "ever got real power," warns left-wing poet Allen Ginsberg, the result would be "concentration camps and mass death."

There are certainly rough edges to talk radio, which in many ways is still in its infancy. Programs range from cogent and informative to banal and puerile. Hosts come in every shape and size—from the diligent and informative who can structure a floating conversation like a conductor waving his baton, to the screamers and out-and-out goof-balls. Listen long enough, and you'll hear both some occasional far-out stuff from callers, and lots of interesting and enlightening analysis.

Public opinion can be unsettling.



## Limbaugh in the Ivory Tower

If you think Rush Limbaugh's listeners are found only in isolated truck stops, rural pool halls, and whitewashed churches with snake pens, think again. His admirers can even be found at Ground Zero of the intellectualoid class, Harvard University, where Harvey Mansfield, Jr., the William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of Government, is an avid listener.

Writing in the highbrow British journal *Government and Opposition*, Prof. Mansfield cited Limbaugh along with Newt Gingrich and William Kristol as the three "stars" in the Republicans' 1994 success: "Republican leaders could find out what to say by listening to Rush... he has converted many, many waverers and legitimized conservatism as a doctrine of the people, not just of businessmen and intellectuals. The Democrats grind their teeth in frustration, having found no answer to his successful diatribes."

A former student of Mansfield tells how the famous historian of political philosophy—whose credits include translations of Niccolò Machiavelli and seminal works on the Constitution—began taping the Limbaugh TV show after losing too much sleep staying up late to watch it.

Nor is Mansfield alone in academe. James Schall, a Jesuit priest and professor of government at Georgetown University, admits he often schedules his day around Rush's radio show. "Rush Limbaugh is a man of good humor and good sense who has not been educated out of his capacity to see things as they are," says Schall, whose usual musings involve classical and medieval political theorists like Aristotle and Augustine.

Another student of Rush and Thomas Aquinas is Russell Hittinger. A professor of philosophy at the Catholic University of America and an adjunct research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, Hittinger relished the prospect of a long drive the day after the 1992 elections because it meant hearing all three hours of Rush's celebration. Hittinger worries, however, that Rush is becoming too professorial of late: "I like the spoofs and songs better than the lectures," he says, "I hear too many academic ones as it is."

Daniel J. Mahoney, chairman of the department of politics at Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts, agrees. He loves Rush's sarcastic animal-rights and condom-distribution updates (accompanied by the song lyrics "up, up, and away in my beautiful balloon"). Best known for his work on French political theorists, Mahoney worries that the threatened return of the Federal Communication Commission's "fairness doctrine" would discourage broadcasts of Limbaugh and his imitators, a "typical manifestation of a kind of totalitarian liberalism that limits liberty and undermines real diversity."

Adding that not all of his leftish colleagues are close-minded, Mahoney recalls the time he pulled alongside an English professor friend at a red light. "She was very agitated, and when I asked what was irritating her, she said, 'I'm listening to Rush!'" As Harvey Mansfield summarizes, "Gifted with a motor mouth and a fine sense of emphasis, he is a compelling presence even if you cannot abide him."

None of these erudite academics expects to see a left-wing competitor challenge Rush for king of the radio hill. "Contemptuous liberals with hang-ups about identity just don't have senses of humor," Mahoney explains.

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# The Return of Partisan Journalism

Anyone who raises the proposition that today's media are mostly partisan must gird himself for a barrage of protests from journalists. "We are not, have not been, never will be, partisan," they will bark. They will concede that there once was a partisan press, in the evil days of Republican press lords like Henry Luce and Colonel McCormick and William Randolph Hearst. But it will be said that today's media—led by national giants like the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, ABC, NBC, and CBS—are scrupulously objective.

This is nonsense. And the most honest journalists acknowledge as much. Famed columnist Walter Lippmann understood that pure objectivity was impossible: "The truth is that in our world the facts are infinitely many, and that no reporter can collect them all, and that no newspaper could print them all...and nobody could read them all. We have to select some facts rather than others, and in doing that we are using not only our legs but our selective judgment of what is interesting or important or both." *Washington Post* political reporter David Broder notes that "Our range of vision is limited by the bureaucratic definitions of our beats, by the perceptions of what is news, and by ingrained values and biases that shape the way in which we see the world." Or as journalism professor Mitchell Stephens explains, "As they tell their stories, all journalists are encumbered with belief systems, social positions, workaday routines, and professional obligations—all of which affect their selection and presentation of facts."

Recognizing the impossibility of complete objectivity, newspapers openly acknowledged and defended their partisan positions throughout most of American history. Newspapers subsidized by Andrew Jackson's Democrats and Henry Clay's Whigs were reliable supporters of those parties. In time, newspapers became ideological forces in their own right. Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* became a national publication as the guiding voice of one wing of the Republican party. William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer developed yellow journalism as explicit supporters of the Democratic party. Hearst was elected to Congress as a Democrat, and was the Democratic nominee for governor of New York in 1906. Had he been elected, his next move would surely have been to run for president. Henry Luce, the founder of *Time*, became a leading force in Republican politics: Wendell Willkie's campaign for the Republican presidential nomination was first sparked by a July 1939 cover story in *Time*, and was managed by *Fortune* editor Russell Davenport.

By Michael Barone