

## True Crime Radio and Listener Disenchantment with Network Broadcasting, 1935-1946

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In Depression-era Oklahoma, at a remote farmhouse in Comanche County, local sheriffs caught up with two small-time armed robbers, George Sands and Leon Siler. A gunfight ensued, and the owner of the farm died in the cross fire. Three years later, in February of 1939, a popular “true crime” radio program, *Gang Busters*, reenacted these events over the national CBS network.<sup>1</sup> After the broadcast, producers received a letter from the farmer’s widow, Berniece Medrano, who declared *Gang Busters*’ rendition of the gunfight a fraud. Medrano insisted that the lawmen deliberately shot her husband:

In the first place, the Bandits did not order us to cook dinner, there was much more shooting than you had in the play—and my husband *was not* killed in cross fire—one of those honorable, and noble, Gang Bustin’ laws did it—*deliberately*—and I can prove it if given a chance. . . . I don’t know that you have any right using my name without permission concerning a bunch of *lies*.<sup>2</sup>

The broadcast failed to depict the social order as Medrano saw it—rigged against farmers, with lawmen cast as villains and bandits as victims. Eyewitnesses interviewed for the broadcast also objected to the script. They insisted that one of the deputies killed Adrian Medrano, a farmer of Mexican descent, solely because of the dark color of his skin, mistaking him for a Choctaw criminal on the loose. The widow’s letter thus at once indicted cops’ casual racism, the legal order that condoned it, and the radio system that elided it. Medrano’s arguments hinged upon both her sense of racial justice and her way of listening to radio.

Between 1926 and 1950, during the “golden age” of network radio, many Americans extended communal values to increasingly complex national economy and politics. Populist movements revolted against the rise of the impersonal bureaucratic nation-state and the modern industrial society. The industrial union rank and file believed in “moral capitalism,” a social order in

which industrial employers had a responsibility to provide a fair share for workers. Large corporations advertised themselves as friendly neighborhood stores to appease restive consumers. And the expanding federal government had to meet rising expectations of fairness from the loyal citizenry. This informal moral economy governed the development of radio as an industry and a mass medium.<sup>3</sup> The industry operated on informal assumptions that held broadcasters responsible to their audiences.

*Gang Busters'* conflicts with its publics between 1939 and 1942 marked the point when this moral economy broke down. To be sure, as a true crime program, *Gang Busters* spurred a unique set of conflicts between broadcasters and their publics. Between 1935 and 1957, the program dramatized the lives, crimes, and captures of famous and small-time bandits. The show's correspondents split four ways: broadcasters—advertisers, scriptwriters, investigators, and local station managers; law enforcement officials—state troopers, beat cops, and police chiefs; lay “informants” or “witnesses”—bandits' relatives, friends, neighbors, and bystanders like Berniece Medrano; and listeners in no way connected to the crimes.<sup>4</sup> Ordinary people's lives literally became part of the story, but broadcasters often interpreted and edited these lives contrary to their subjects' opinions. Informants' objections to inaccurate reporting and interpretation of particular cases set the show apart from entirely fictional comedies, soap operas, and radio music.

Yet these informants' worldviews may have been characteristic of the show's audience, which in turn represented the majority of the entire American radio public. Many gangsters grew up and operated in urban immigrant or down-and-out rural neighborhoods. Consequently, broadcasters appropriated stories of poor bandits, witnesses, and victims. The show's audiences came from the same humble background. *Gang Busters* appealed most to working-class and nonwhite men and children. Among ten thousand Minnesota men questioned in December 1936 and January 1937, only 20 percent of professionals but 45 percent of “slightly skilled” workers listened to *Gang Busters*. A California survey found that while wealthy kids preferred historical plays and middle-class kids soap operas, low-income “Oriental” and Mexican children favored crime and mystery stories like *Gang Busters*. And a Chicago sociologist observed his black working-class informants listening to “‘Gang Busters’ on the radio at nine o'clock.” These fans belonged in the majority of the entire U.S. radio audience. A 1935–1937 ratings analysis showed that listeners earning less than \$3,000 a year predominated in the *Gang Busters* audience, while those earning more than \$5,000 usually tuned out the program. It also showed that four-fifths of the total radio audience earned less than \$3,000 a year.<sup>5</sup> As

a top-rated program with an important radio constituency, *Gang Busters* spurred heated legislative, academic, and public debates. Because the program reenacted actual confrontations between poor people and state authorities, it inspired its working-class and nonwhite listeners and informants to articulate popular dissatisfaction with the emerging impersonal corporate power in the broadcasting industry.

These listeners' writings provide a unique record of vernacular social imagination—the ways ordinary Americans conceived and enacted their relationship to large media institutions. All strands of the story I will tell here—the breakdown of reciprocity in network radio production, *Gang Busters*' public meanings and production practices, and the conflict between broadcasters and Oklahoma farmers in the Medrano case—aim to get at lay listeners' analysis of radio's crisis. To explain why the radio industry no longer let audiences participate in production, letter writers drew parallels between political, economic, and cultural domains.<sup>6</sup> When radio upset listeners' expectations, it lent them modes of perception and argument that enabled them to critique the broadcasting industry in relation to other modern institutions and economic, racial, and gender inequities of modern America.

### The Moral Economy of American Broadcasting

The idea that listeners' sense of entitlement shaped broadcasters' production practices goes against the grain of established historical accounts. Historians have documented and analyzed how advertising and network monopoly stifled radio programming and technological innovation. Participatory amateur radio in the early 1920s gave way to one-way local commercial, educational, and nonprofit broadcasting. From the time of the Radio Act of 1927 and especially the Communication Act of 1934, national networks dominated broadcasting and consolidated American national culture. Since the ratings services, based on telephone listener surveys, appeared in the early 1930s, broadcasters rarely confronted real listeners, only "demographics" classified by gender, race, geography, income, and purchasing habits. Ad agencies bought airtime, and potential audiences, from the national networks and produced most commercial radio programs.<sup>7</sup> According to these compelling top-down accounts, listeners had no impact on everyday organization and operations of the broadcasting industry in the 1920s and 1930s, but bore the brunt of its cultural influence.

In fact, not until the 1940s did reciprocal relations between listeners and broadcasters give way to a closed production process based on ratings and

scientific surveys. Until then, the radio industry's operations incorporated listeners' responses. In the 1930s, clerks at ad agencies and sponsor corporations compiled summaries of fan mail. Radio writers used these summaries to flesh out formulaic elements for the emergent radio genres. N. W. Ayer ad agency did not consider ratings "useful" because "a precise method of gauging the quantity and quality of the audience . . . has not yet been devised." Instead, sociologists reported, radio shows were "made to order" after producers studied fan letters. Because letters presented detailed opinions on program story lines, advertiser H. King Painter could assert "from the mail" that his show's "falling off" in ratings could be explained by listeners' dissatisfaction with the "child delinquency" story line. Because letters came from an identifiable core audience, broadcasters considered audience mail "superior to any survey yet undertaken" and lauded "constructive criticism" of responses. Because listeners articulated beliefs embedded in their "real lives," writer Gertrude Berg used their stories in writing scripts. Informal correspondence allowed listeners to bring their views of the social order to bear directly on program producers' creative process.<sup>8</sup>

By the 1940s radio genres had standardized and networks and ad agencies came to evaluate programs primarily by ratings averages and market segments. "I feel we are arriving at a definite cross-roads in the matter of radio entertainment," Niles Trammel of the NBC Program Department reported in 1940 about a new analysis of relative popularity of NBC and CBS genres by rating. Hooper and the Cooperative Analysis of Broadcasting ratings services did not reveal the majority opinion. These companies benefited from the public acclaim for George Gallup's representative sampling polls, which in 1936 correctly predicted Franklin D. Roosevelt's victory. But unlike Gallup polls, telephone ratings surveys of major cities ignored rural audiences and left out radio owners who had no telephone—by 1940 more than 80 percent of Americans owned a radio but only 40 percent had a telephone. Ratings services helped networks to compete for sponsors. They also allowed broadcasters to ignore the cultural and political beliefs behind lay views on radio shows. In vain, observers warned that statistical studies glossed over "the underlying standards and social needs" that listeners' answers expressed. Armed with established genre formulas, producers no longer invited audiences to participate in the creation process but allowed them to express only taste preferences. "The very idea of arranging a broadcast," CBS marketing specialists declared in 1942, was "foreign to the listener's experience."<sup>9</sup> Listeners were reduced to voting on a limited number of existing programs, whereas earlier they could shape radio shows' conception and meanings.

At the same juncture, the American public grew disaffected with national commercial broadcasting. Between the Munich crisis and V-Day, Americans consistently praised the role of the networks in covering the war. As soon as the war ended, however, listeners abandoned their loyalty to the networks, at the same time as they left behind rationing and other wartime obligations. The share of respondents who thought that radio was doing an “excellent” job dropped from 28 percent in 1945 to 14 percent in 1947, while the share thinking that radio was doing only a “fair” or “poor” job rose from 11 to 22 percent. This rapid disillusion with radio in the postwar period becomes less surprising if one notes that listeners began to tune out network radio before the war’s end. Between 1943 and 1947 independent stations boosted their winter daytime and summer audiences by nearly 100 percent. Already by wartime listeners wrote fewer fan letters. “The tendency to write letters concerning radio programs is waning sharply,” Ayer ad agency reported in 1940. According to NBC press releases, in 1936 the network’s mail department handled “an average of 39,000 letters daily,” but NBC daily mail in 1942 added up to only “more than 1,500.” Letters that did come became more critical and less welcome. By 1941 CBS Chairman William Paley warned that people were most “likely to write and mail a letter because of violent disagreement.”<sup>10</sup> Postwar polls reflected an earlier trend—commercial radio became less interactive and personal. Pollsters, however, did not allow listeners to articulate their moral judgments of radio’s economy. *Gang Busters*’ producers did.

### ***Gang Busters*’ Sounds and Meanings**

*Gang Busters*’ formula opened the show up to conflicting interpretations. For advertisers and officials, *Gang Busters*’ producers rattled off anticrime rhetoric, for listeners, sounds of gunfights and stories of rebels and outlaws. At the outset, the narrator reminded the audience that crime does not pay. After the bandit got his comeuppance, *Gang Busters* aired “clues”—national alerts for actual criminals wanted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation or the police. In between, robberies, gunfights, and getaways served up as much action and suspense as possible. During the half-hour of the “Sands-Siler” case, bandits George “Choc” Sands and Leon Siler kidnapped a taxi driver, killed one policeman, kidnapped another, robbed a bank together with Sands’s girlfriend, “gun moll” Grace Turner, and after a vicious gunfight surrendered to lawmen when traced by a police plane to a remote farmhouse.<sup>11</sup> Reviews and listener interviews showed that details of gangsters’ lives and sensational sound effects at the core of the story undermined the official authority affirmed at the beginning and the end.

A stint with FBI director J. Edgar Hoover taught *Gang Busters'* creators that bombastic sound attracted audiences and sponsors. Between 1933 and 1936, Hoover waged a "war on crime" media campaign to promote federal agents and counter public admiration for urban mobsters and midwestern bandits. In 1935, he collaborated with the independent Phillips Lord, Inc., production company on *G-Men*, a radio program based on actual FBI cases. Hoover insisted that his own writer, Rex Collier, draft the outline of each case. Then Lord would write the dialogue, complete a production script, check again with Collier, and clear it with Hoover. Only then the script was ready to go. Convinced that Collier's outlines "left out all the color," Lord packed his opening with sirens, women's shrieks, slamming doors, police calls, and newsboys' cries. Hoover dismissed Lord's scripts as "too sensational." By the last *G-Men* episode, Hoover's effects-free opening praised "the giant eraser" of the FBI that "rubbed the outlaw and his henchmen out of the headlines." Hoover deep-sixed the gunfights and instead had an agent look for a moll's marriage license for six weeks to demonstrate that "this methodological research is part of our job." After one thirteen-episode season, the collaboration collapsed, the sponsor (Chevrolet) dropped the show, and Hoover disassociated himself from the program. The new incarnation, *Gang Busters*, began broadcasting the following fall and ran as a sponsored program for over twenty years, its basic style and content unchanged through the war and its aftermath. It started from unused *G-Men* scripts but focused on gangsters at lawmen's expense. It reenacted less-known cases not from FBI memoranda but from police files, detective pulps, original interviews, and special investigator's reports. Lord acted as a narrator of *Gang Busters* until 1938, reviewed all rehearsal recordings, and wrote revision suggestions for many episodes. In comparison with Hoover's flat-footed directing, Lord's style left much more room for interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

*Gang Busters'* producers let their penchant for style eclipse their avowed political loyalties. To be sure, the opening din trumpeted producers' allegiance to state crime fighting:

(POLICE WHISTLE)

ANNOUNCER: Palmolive Shave Cream and Palmolive Brushless Shave Cream—the shave creams made with olive oil, Nature's first skin conditioner, present:

(MACHINE GUN)

GANG BUSTERS!

(SIREN)

(MARCHING FEET)

(MACHINE GUN)

JOHNSON: Calling the police . . . Calling the G-men . . . Calling all Americans to war on the underworld.<sup>13</sup>

But most often, writers composed and actors delivered lines to amuse rather than instruct the audience. “Don’t forget that the opening speech of the script,” an internal memo for writers advised, “must be the hook on which the script is hung. . . . Do not moralize here—our purpose here is to interest the listener in the case to follow.” Producers espoused effects for effects’ sake. “The whining of brakes was good, but there should be a final big crash of glass and debris,” Lord typically requested. “The revolver shots throughout the entire scene should be intermittent,” Lord wrote about the shootout in the Medrano farmhouse. “This, after all, is a gun fight.” This approach grabbed listeners’ attention but left them to fend for their own meanings. It worked. “I like a radio program to be exciting,” New York children praised *Gang Busters* to interviewers. The show’s opening inspired the colloquial expression “to come on like gangbusters”—“to enter, arrive, begin, participate, or perform in a sensational, loud, active, or striking manner.” In presenting “life with the dull bits left out,” *Gang Busters* announced its own artifice. Fans listened for sensational sound effects and plot twists rather than for an authoritative narrative defined by its conclusion.<sup>14</sup>

Public admiration for robbers held the show’s meanings hostage. Bandits and gun molls like Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker became heroes for many Americans who coped with the hardships of the Depression. Millions consumed true detective pulps, gangster movies, and sensational newspaper coverage of gang shootouts and bank robberies. *Gang Busters* benefited from the popular appeal of the gory details, the first-person eyewitness accounts, and the tough masculine style of crime writing. It also absorbed the populist politics of printed and performed bandit lore. Gun molls’ autobiographies in pulp magazines described bandits as former farmers or laborers driven to crime by unjust laws and gangs as informal family units governed by a strict code of honor and personal obligation in opposition to state authority. Radio episodes about notorious Oklahoma bandit Pretty Boy Floyd and lesser southern and midwestern gangs recalled Woody Guthrie’s song “The Ballad of Pretty Boy Floyd,” popular in California migrant camps in the late 1930s, which described Floyd as a friend and benefactor of farmer families on relief. The penultimate stanza summed up the relationship between bandits, farmers, corporate bureaucrats, and the law, as many laborers and tenants saw it: there were two types of crooks, “some will rob you with a six gun/And some with a fountain pen.” *Gang Busters* never justified banditry as resistance to farm foreclosures as explicitly as Guthrie’s ballad. But interviews and criticism showed that the program could not escape associations with such populist beliefs.<sup>15</sup>

Using radio writing rules common across radio genres, *Gang Busters* placed bandits at the center of every broadcast. Guidelines to “make all explanations clear and concise” required pithy, vivid, easily recognizable stories. Robbers hardly appeared weak or daft when producers required writers to bring out “a tough quality” appropriate for outlaw characters and lifestyles. Hair-raising sketches of rugged and clever outlaws inspired curiosity rather than fear. Asked to describe *Gang Busters*, young New Yorkers stressed bandits’ lives and personalities as much as, if not more than, police work. *Gang Busters* “shows you all the facts about a person—a criminal, how he had scars in his face and all,” a teenage daughter of working parents from the Lower West Side reported, then remembered, “and then they tell you how they found him.” A twelve-year-old boy opined, “[the program] shows how they catch bandits after they escaped from the pen,” then added, “I want to know what bandits are like.” Pithy jargon seeped into everyday speech. Producers instructed writers to “give leading criminal several minor characteristics or pronunciations or expressions which will occasionally designate him.” Critics reported that young offenders used *Gang Busters* “as a sort of lexicon,” greeting officers with, “listen, flatfoot, I ain’t talkin’ to you coppers.”<sup>16</sup>

As a result, legislators, listeners, and reviewers charged that producers advertised gangsters’ methods to the audience. In a letter to New York City mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, a concerned Long Island citizen complained that the program taught young men how to break locks, pick pockets, hide corpses, and evade the police “by changing the criminal’s clothes or if riding in a car to throw away and change license plates.” Phillips Lord hastened to assure LaGuardia’s office that these details were “simply a statement of fact; not a statement of method as to how to go about it.” Reviewers disagreed. Magazines described the show as a how-to manual for would-be gangsters rather than a “crime does not pay sermon.” A probation officer reported to *Time* magazine that in 1939, among the juvenile delinquents caught on his watch, “forty-six young law busters admittedly took their cues straight from *Gang Busters*.” Broadcasters aired a “solid moral lesson”; listeners heard a “noisy, blood-and-thunder” gangster tale.<sup>17</sup>

Aware of such criticism, broadcasters nevertheless refused to change their formula. They tabled advertisers’ requests to tone down details of crimes and hired writers who cited pulp journalism among their credentials. One self-proclaimed “expert in libel” and “drama,” offering his services, claimed to have written “20 accounts of crime and criminals for the detective magazines.” He went on to compose case summaries for *Gang Busters*. Writers scoured true detective pulps and crime news reports for broadcasting material. To charges



of too much gore, producers retorted, “in no instance do we ever treat a case where the criminal comes out ahead of the police.” Far from being fooled by such an excuse, many listeners used the lawful ending to justify outlaw barge and banter at the core of the story. Among Wilmette, Illinois, grammar school children interviewed about *Gang Busters*, grade one students liked “the shooting in it,” grades three and four thought it “exciting,” and grade five appreciated “the true story of criminals.” Older students, however, reeled off expected reasons such as “it teaches that crime does not pay.”<sup>18</sup> These kids tuned in to hear the “blood and thunder” yet gave the standard answer to the uninitiated sociologist.

Thus listeners, critics, and broadcasters agreed that in New Deal America populist sentiments constituted the dominant meaning of *Gang Busters*. When old *Gang Busters* episodes went into syndication in the 1960s, the show flopped as police propaganda. In the 1930s and early 1940s, a listener would not have to stray far from *Gang Busters*’ social prescriptions to adopt a critical view of the Depression-era social order. Fans made their critical sentiments explicit when they applied the program to their own lives. After five months of “seeking a position with no avail,” Samuel Zucker, an unemployed college graduate from Brooklyn, confessed in 1940 that he came to a point at which he had “planned the robbery of almost every large store in the neighborhood. If something doesn’t break soon for me,” he warned, “perhaps some time in the distant future, you will be presenting my story on your program.” Not content to make their own meanings in private, letter writers like Zucker assumed radio’s responsibility to broadcast listeners’ analyses of their own lives.<sup>19</sup>

*Gang Busters*’ producers had used listener criticism to define the up-and-coming true crime show’s signature sound—the very feature that made the program popular and open-ended—but by the time Zucker sent his letter they were less likely to live up to listeners’ expectations. In 1935, their first year on the air, broadcasters collected personal responses from listeners, newspaper and fan magazine radio editors, and station managers, who reported their own and their local listeners’ reactions. After the first *G-Man* program, Lord’s assistant, John Ives, forwarded a set of telegrams from station managers to Joseph Neebe, an executive at Campbell-Ewald ad agency, including both compliments and “genuine critical angles.” Lord, Ives, and Neebe studied listener responses on transition music, dead air, sounds of cars, guns, and dialogue color. “Criticism of the use of chords as made by station managers in telegrams you received, as well as by radio editors in their printed comments check with most comments by listeners,” Neebe reported to Lord about the second episode of *G-Men*. In this broadcasters continued common practice—

Lord had used fan mail summaries for his earlier popular program, *Seth Parker*. Once *Gang Busters* became the highest-rated detective show, however, the correspondence between program producers and the agency more often included lists of stations that aired the program, with data on Crossley rating service coverage, network affiliation, and station transmitter range.<sup>20</sup> By the 1940s, producers rarely used personal responses in negotiations with ad agencies and networks and consequently paid less attention to listeners' requests.

### ***Gang Busters'* Production Process**

To complete each episode, *Gang Busters'* creators had to placate ad agencies, sponsors, and networks, and to negotiate their true crime story lines with government law enforcement agencies, from the FBI to a small-town sheriff's office. In 1939, the *Gang Busters* show was produced by Phillips Lord, Inc., for the Columbia Broadcasting System, and sponsored by the Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company, the latter represented by Benton and Bowles advertising agency. To produce the "Sands-Siler" episode, Lord employed program supervisor Leonard Bass, who supervised the scriptwriter Stanley Niss and the "local representative" George Norris, who researched the case. The crew also included nine actors, one announcer, two sound technicians, and specially invited police narrator Colonel Norman Schwarzkopf. Lord, his staff, the agency, the sponsor, state officials, witnesses, and listeners all wanted to author a piece of the final script. By the time producers got around to listeners' concerns, few aspects of a given episode remained open for negotiation.

Lord worked hard to make the *Gang Busters'* production crew more independent and credible. He reported writing his *G-Men* scripts in a Department of Justice office and launched *Gang Busters* from "a special office, turned over . . . by [New York] Commissioner Lewis J. Valentine." He hired eminent law enforcement officials to serve as speakers and narrators. Valentine delivered short talks on the opening *G-Men* broadcast and several subsequent episodes. "We have had over two hundred telephone calls in our office alone during the last two days, expressing approval of the address you made," Lord informed Valentine after one "fine speech." As thanks for the "courtesy," he enclosed "our check in the amount of \$100, which I should like to have you use in any way that you see fit." As a superintendent of the New Jersey State Police, Colonel Schwarzkopf vied with Hoover for jurisdiction over the investigation of the 1932 Lindbergh kidnapping. In 1938, Lord hired him as the *Gang Busters'* narrator—the man Hoover believed epitomized "the obstacles" the FBI "confronted in conducting this investigation."<sup>21</sup> Schwarzkopf's son, Gen-

eral H. Norman Schwarzkopf, would become famous during the first Persian Gulf War. Paid to enhance the show's authority, Schwarzkopf and Valentine had no intention of controlling production. Unfortunately, everyone else did.

Sponsors and advertisers routinely took over directing episodes, as they often did in commercial radio. When Tom Revere of the Benton and Bowles agency expected the sponsor, Colgate-Palmolive, to attend a *Gang Busters* dress rehearsal, he commanded Lord, who acted as a narrator at the time, to also read the commercials. "Give it in your best and most sincere voice," Revere directed, "so they can have a good impression of the entire show, with you in the commercial," and "be sure to get at least two mentions in the script of 'our Palmolive Shave Cream audience.'" Bass complained to Lord that the agency's "integrated" commercials extended from their allocated time and took over the main narrative. The agency's announcer interviewed the case officer while "the narrating chief [was] indirectly plugging the product." Instead, "the announcer should stick to his commercials and the Colonel to his interviewing," Bass proposed. For their part, producers bucked the agency's attempts to change the direction of the show. When Benton and Bowles asked for more stress "on police work and less emphasis on horror and crime," Lord outlined thirteen possible ways to do it.<sup>22</sup> Once he placated the agency, he used none of them.

Local officials assumed final authority on plot details—an impediment unique to true crime radio. For every deputy who praised the way broadcasters "brought out the fact that the small town sherriff is as good a servant of the public and just as smart as any other officers," there were several who railed against "grossly misrepresented" cases. "I was already in the furniture store and had Underhill handcuffed," one slighted deputy objected, "when Sheriff Rogers and other officers entered the place." Because Bass could not always control the many people who researched, told, and rewrote the case, he demanded a lot of paperwork to verify ordinary people's stories. "Sign the usual warranty and also have your resume okayed on official stationery by a competent police official," demanded Bass of his investigators. "There are always repercussions about the facts," he complained to one of them, "I want to protect myself by knowing in advance the source of your information."<sup>23</sup> Listeners and witnesses had to contend with the demands of these officials and other competing authorities.

In addressing the program, then, ordinary Americans encountered a complex bureaucratic structure. In 1940 a farmer family from Vale, North Carolina, asked *Gang Busters* to broadcast an appeal to their missing son instead of a criminal's clue. Their son, James Houser, left his small town in June and was last seen in September heading from Baltimore to Washington, D.C., in search



of work. His missing person's card listed his "aptitudes" as "Public works such as Automobile mechanics or filling station work, grocery or drygood store work." His trade made him a typical *Gang Busters* listener. "The boy always listened to Gangbusters," his father wrote, "and where ever he is he might hear the information wanted and will write home." *Gang Busters'* "regulations" did not make this easy. Bass agreed to broadcast the appeal, but requested duplicate copies of release forms for the husband, the wife, and their son, and "a letter from your local Chief of Police or Sheriff, as well as a letter from your local minister. Both these letters are to be on official stationery." The Housers' hometown ordinarily bypassed such formalities. "I am sorry I do not have official stationery," the Housers' pastor apologized in his letter. "I hardly have need for it in my Rural work here."<sup>24</sup> Like the Housers, many witnesses and listeners did not get a satisfactory reply on the first try and had to exchange several rounds of letters, telegrams, and forms with broadcasters. The program greeted citizens with the same red tape as Depression-era government welfare agencies, national banks, and industrial corporations.

To be sure, producers as a rule answered listeners' letters. But they refused to let listeners' views of the social order dictate radio story lines. When an Italian jeweler, Donato Cugino, heard that *Gang Busters* planned to reenact his little brother's crime career, he wrote to explain his brother's violent temper. A drunken neighbor, he insisted, had fractured his kid brother's skull in a poor Italian district in Philadelphia. Instead of sending eleven-year-old Tony Cugino to a hospital, authorities shipped him off to reform school, where he became a criminal. The jeweler invited producers to use his letter to test the official version of the story—"to make notes of any information you think necessary to question the police." Producers carefully read the letter and underlined every relevant point. But they incorporated the information into the script in a way that portrayed his brother as a remorseless killer. Cugino argued that his brother killed a man in prison "*purely [in] self-defense* he was duly *acquitted* of the charge." On the air, his brother stabbed the inmate on purpose—"I hate him," he declared. "I made me a knife out of this spoon, and I'm gonna stick it thru his heart." Cugino believed in vain that the true-crime show entailed fairness to bandits. "I'm convinced," he concluded his letter, "that *Tony is just another victime of environment slum living conditions, reform schools, [and] curropt public officials.*" The broadcast instead blamed his brother's incorrigible temper.<sup>25</sup> Producers made sure to include such popular features as tough immigrant milieu and criminal lingo, but retold the case following their own class and ethnic notions against this listener's advice.

In case after case, broadcasters fell short of their correspondents' expectations. Listeners asked for assistance in finding relatives, and offered corrections, social criticism, and life histories because the show's raucous sound and outlaw characters—elements created in part with listeners' input—appealed to their social imagination. Yet when it came to social analysis of particular cases, the radio industry was no more likely to fulfill its obligations to the public than were other national business and political institutions.

### Oklahoma Farmers Confront *Gang Busters'* Producers

In 1939, the radio industry failed to meet its obligations to the Medrano listening family. The farmers' story, as reported by the *Gang Busters'* investigator George Norris, provided ample raw material for a thrilling radio skit. Adrian Medrano lived with his wife and children on a small farm near Elgin, Oklahoma. After robbing a bank, two bandits hid in the Medrano farmhouse. The Ambrose family walked over from a neighboring farm with their children and became hostages. A group of deputies descended on the house and, after bandits shot one of them, opened fire. Adrian Medrano got hit and died the following day. A farm family with soon-to-be-fatherless children made for perfect innocent victims of radio banditry. The same quaint rural background led *Gang Busters'* producers to ignore farmers' interpretation of these events. Having seen officers mistake Adrian Medrano for an Indian bandit, shoot him, and cover up the murder, farmers in turn discovered parallels between lawmen's and radio men's indifference to their lives and opinions.

As they shaped the episode for public transmission, *Gang Busters'* creators enacted their own fantasies about their informants and, by extension, audiences. The scene in the Medrano house took up more than three minutes of a half-hour broadcast. The show depicted farmers as piteous, helpless victims: a mother of three cooking dinner at gunpoint and a hard-working father coming home from the fields only to meet his untimely death. In fact, Berniece Medrano received no orders to cook that night and had only one child at the time of the gunfight. Anxious to cull data to fit their preconceptions, producers showered Norris with requests for more research. "Is it OK to say Medrano had been plowing referring to Medrano's coming into the house just prior to the bandits' entry," Leonard Bass worried. "Please check very carefully and rush your answers." The public broadcast did not mention Medrano's skin color, but production correspondence dwelled upon his racial identity. "Medrano was rushed to the Indian Hospital at Lawton, he being part Indian," Norris stressed in his case summary. He chronicled "a rather romantic"

family history: “Bonney Medrano, Adrian’s father was a Mexican stolen as a child by the Comanche Indians. He was raised by the Indians and made a member of the tribe.” This tale called up stories of nineteenth-century Comanche raids into lands on both sides of the Mexican border. In the 1930s, many adopted captives still lived, as field-workers discovered when they interviewed former Comanche raiders, their New Mexico trade partners, Comancheros, and former Mexican captives in Oklahoma and the Southwest. As mixed-race agrarian innocents—both Bonney Medrano’s parents were born in Mexico—the Medranos appealed to producers’ perceptions of Indians as noble savages untouched by technology, a common image from Wild West shows to ethnography and modern art. Producers’ ethnic notions tinged their relations with Oklahoma farmers.<sup>26</sup>

In molding the episode according to popular views of Indians, producers betrayed their own fascination with native cultures. An encounter between a primitive Indian tribe and a modern police plane had nothing to do with the main plot, but it launched the “Sands-Siler” episode. Norris claimed Sands was a Choctaw nicknamed “Choc,” but local authorities insisted he was an Arapaho. Bass asked Norris to “check very carefully and let us know immediately” because “we play up this ‘Choc’ business.” Oklahoma radio station personnel and the ad agency pointed out that the Choctaw, like other so-called Five Civilized Tribes, had established their own modern American-style literacy, law, and polity in the nineteenth century, only to lose their institutions and lands to the U.S. government and white speculators by the early twentieth. “It must be realized that there are few illiterate Indians in this state,” argued Waymond Ramsey of KOMA, Oklahoma City, “and as the Choctaw Tribe was on the Five Civilized Tribes the beating of tomtoms and the broken English which your script writers have given to the Indians does not adhere to the actual conditions.” Chester MacCracken of Benton and Bowles agency balked at the contrast between the modern airplane and backward Indians. “Oklahoma Indians see a lot of planes,” he pointed out, “and I sincerely doubt that in 1935 even an old Indian Chief would call a police plane a ‘big red bird,’ as on page four.” Despite these objections, the script changed very little. Tom-toms stayed. Choctaw Chief Lone Bear “played the part in person,” enunciating lines such as “good man in sky—bad men down here.” Police radio warned to “watch for cunning Indian known as Choc . . . full-blooded Indian—extremely dark.” But the revised script mentioned no birds and the chief asked, “You take big red plane into the sky now?”<sup>27</sup> Producers admitted they owed some fairness to Oklahoma Indians only when represented by station managers and admen.

Broadcasters recognized no such obligation to Oklahoma farmers. Eyewitnesses insisted in vain that the deputies deliberately killed Adrian Medrano. “Ambrose says,” Norris reported, “that Medrano was killed by the officers by mistake because they thought he was an Indian and a member of the gang, rather than being shot by accident. Old man Medrano is very bitter about this.” During the trial, deputy sheriff Everett Agee—the man Berniece Medrano believed shot her husband—and another officer involved in the gunfight swore that neither of them shot Adrian Medrano. Newspapers reported their testimony without comment. “The Ambroses seemed bothered by the fact that the newspapers at the time did not blame the officers for Medrano’s untimely death,” Norris noted. “As I informed you, they thought it deliberate rather than accidental, because Medrano looked like the Indian that the banker had described.” The Ambroses offered a logical explanation, given that since the mid-nineteenth century, white officials and settlers often mixed up dark-skinned captives and Comanches and called all swarthy captives “Mexicans,” applying the term to captured Mexican and American citizens alike. In Oklahoma’s Comanche County, “Mexican” meant “dark like an Indian.” Yet in the final version of the script, Berniece Medrano accused an armed robber, Leon Siler: “You shot *my husband!*”<sup>28</sup> Like government officials, deputies, and reporters before them, broadcasters refused to consider farmers’ views of social relations.

Every stage of production chipped away at farmers’ authority. When researching the case, Norris believed news reporters and deputies before farmers. Newspapers placed “the Ambrose girl . . . at the Medrano home during the battle,” but Mrs. Ambrose insisted her daughter went to see her grandmother. “I did not know which to believe,” Norris confessed, “there fore I did not change the newspaper account.” Norris reported, at length, that both Bonney Medrano and the Ambroses thought a deputy killed Adrian Medrano, then concluded, “I am inclined to believe [deputy sheriffs’] statement that Medrano was fatally wounded accidentally.” After the broadcast, Bass declared to Berniece Medrano that *Gang Busters* would not have aired her version of the story even if it was true: “If we had known that the facts in the case were such as you say, we probably would not have done the case.”<sup>29</sup> *Gang Busters’* creators made it plain to their ordinary informants that their radio stories were no longer open to negotiation.

For their part, witnesses sided with bandits against lawmen. During the gunfight, officers riddled the house with bullets, targeting not only Medrano and Sands, both dark-skinned men in their early twenties, but also other bandits, farmers, and children huddled inside. “I personally made an examination

of the Medrano house,” Norris proudly reported later, “and counted 32 visible bullet holes.” After such an experience, it is not surprising that both Berniece Medrano and the Ambroses emphatically denied that outlaws coerced them in any way, the widow adamant that robbers “didn’t ask us to cook dinner” and the Ambroses describing robbers’ failed efforts for a bloodless outcome, “when the officers could not hear Siler’s cries that they surrendered Sands pulled off his shirt and waved it out the window.” The officers, the widow concluded, “could have taken the bandits without firing a shot.” Instead, they “took an innocent man’s life, and left two fatherless children,” forcing them into itinerant life—since the gunfight, the widow moved between her farm, the elder Medrano’s farm in Apachee, and her mother’s in New Mexico. By the time of the broadcast, she lived in El Paso, Texas.<sup>30</sup> These witnesses empathized with bandits and resented people in power and officers of the law, in a way similar to *Gang Busters* listeners interviewed by academics and reporters.

Broadcasters’ indifference then led farmers to draw parallels between injustices in media and society. Norris “spent several hours” interviewing the Ambrose family, and Bass showered the Ambroses and Berniece Medrano with consent forms to sign and requests to “send us in your own words exactly what took place in the Medrano farm.” The Ambroses signed the forms but asked that Norris “submit a copy story to us to read before broadcasting.” Once they realized that broadcasters accepted the officers’ version of events, the Ambroses withdrew their consent to broadcast their names. “We learned [the investigator] & others had cooked this story up,” they explained. “We don’t want our names used unless facts are stated.” The broadcast did not mention them at all. Berniece Medrano also objected, “I don’t know that you have any right using my name without permission concerning a bunch of *lies*.” Broadcasters, she concluded, get things “crooked.”<sup>31</sup> These farmers made it plain that they no longer expected fairness from the radio industry. *Gang Busters* established moral outrage at broadcasters as an appropriate response to its own social prescriptions.

\* \* \* \* \*

Within four years of the Medrano case, in 1943, *Gang Busters*’ ratings slipped and other shows superseded it in popular imagination. By this time, *Gang Busters*’ creators dealt with listeners and witnesses in ways that matched the changing attitudes and practices in the entire radio industry. Convinced, as audience researchers were, that radio-making was “foreign to the listener’s experience,” they dismissed their correspondents’ demands for reciprocity and



justice. When in 1940 Samuel Zucker related to a *Gang Busters* broadcast about “the Ape Bandit,” like Zucker, a college graduate out of work, he argued that any man was justified to become a robber if he could not find work: “The fault, I assure you, did not lie with him but with the weakness and fallacies in the structure of society.” Bass calmly retorted: “. . . can assure you from past experience that it is not weaknesses and fallacies in social structure that can be blamed. Many times it is more personal.” When in 1939 Elsie Detrich, a stenographer from St. Louis, protested an episode featuring her brother as a member of a gang, Bass sent her his regrets but no apologies, citing the authority of “an eminent criminologist” and official police files. They left unanswered Detrich’s economic point about true crime radio’s propensity to “commercialize” people’s lives.<sup>32</sup> In every exchange, listeners attempted to tease out the underlying logic of the show, broadcasters, to foreclose debate.

As *Gang Busters’* correspondents saw it, this indifference violated a long-standing arrangement between broadcasters and listeners. Like the Ambroses, many listeners who initially trusted the strident populist program may have felt betrayed when broadcasters discarded their opinions. This sense of entitlement extended beyond just one true crime show. In the 1930s, the radio industry had encouraged expectations of reciprocity by explicitly courting women consumers. Accordingly, *Gang Busters’* women correspondents—sisters, mothers, and widows like Bernice Medrano—most adamantly demanded attention and objected to broadcasters’ brush-offs. At the same time, only one author, Elsie Detrich, directly threatened the sponsor—to have “no more Palmolive Soap, Shampoo or Palmolive Beads in my home.”<sup>33</sup> Most letter writers transcended the terms of consumer entitlement set by admen and sponsors. Like Medrano, who applied her sense of racial justice to media economy, they held the radio industry complicit in the larger system of power relations.

One letter made this plain. In 1930, Nanny Roy sold dresses at a ready-to-wear shop in Cedar Rapids, Iowa; her husband, a German immigrant, operated an electric train at a factory; and her stepson, Virgil Harris, was a starch works laborer.<sup>34</sup> By 1942, Harris had become an armed robber, escaped from prison, died gunned down by state police, and was featured in a *Gang Busters* episode. Upon receiving the usual unapologetic regrets in response to her protest against the broadcast, Roy put broadcasters in the same category with corrupt functionaries and industrialists. “I cannot except your regrets,” she retorted:

I understand perfectly if I were a mother with high financial standing this would never of happened. you can’t deny the crime of all sorts the worst of all the *robbery* that happens every

day thru the rich and mighty from the poor. why not expose them. put your investigator at work on the people who are stealing thru their capacity officially. . . . This sort of crime is worse to me than if a person point a gun at me and demand all I have. Yet it goes on. An 18 year old boy steals a sack of feed an inner tube or a tire and he gets sentenced to 20 years in an institution. let the big feller rob in his undermining way there's no publicity he goes on lectures to society and is met by the broadcasters with a hand-shake.<sup>35</sup>

Most *Gang Busters* correspondents either implicitly or explicitly adopted this bird's-eye view of radio. Disenchanted with radio, they drew conclusions about the nature of big institutions, the location of social power, and the future of both market and political democracy.

Working-class letters to *Gang Busters* provide an unorthodox view of radio's crisis and transformation in the 1940s. Listener alienation from national radio occurred in the midst of government investigation of the radio industry. The Federal Communications Commission, an independent agency overseeing radio since 1927, began investigating the networks in 1938, forced NBC to sell its second, "Blue," network in 1943, and attacked the radio advertising system in a controversial 1946 report. Intellectuals and regulators contended that the public needed less sponsored entertainment and more educational and public affairs programs. Conversely, *Gang Busters'* listeners did not see how curbing sponsored radio would redress their grievances. Instead, they believed that commercial broadcasters of a "blood-and-thunder" show like *Gang Busters* could and should be accountable to their core lower-class audiences. They showed how the legitimacy of national radio in this period depended on relations of class, race, gender, and state power. Their reasoning helps explain the rise of local commercial radio in the 1940s, before television, and the popularity of disk jockeys who were more accountable to their local constituencies and less to national corporations. As television and niche marketing made national radio less viable, popular perception of radio as a system of reciprocal social relationships framed new local formats.<sup>36</sup> When the networks abandoned their constituencies, their publics in turn helped reshape the radio industry.

#### Notes

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1. "Sands-Siler," *Gang Busters* (hereafter *GB*), episode 154, final script, CBS, February 15, 1939; George Norris to Leonard Bass, January 15, 1939 (farm's location); both in box 7, folder Gang Busters (hereafter GB) 154, WOR Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter WOR).
2. Bernice Medrano to Leonard Bass, February 16, 1939, box 7, folder GB 154, WOR. For the sake of clarity, I do not use *sic* to mark numerous spelling and grammatical errors in letters. Except where noted, all emphasis in sources is by the author of the letter or script.
3. See Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1978), on community; Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), on populism; Lizbeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), on workers; Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), on corporations; James Sparrow, "Fighting over the American Soldier: Moral Economy and National Citizenship in World War II" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2002); Meg Jacobs, "'How About Some Meat?': The Office of Price Administration, Consumption Politics, and State Building from the Bottom Up, 1941–1946," *Journal of American History* 84 (December 1997): 910–41, on wartime government; and E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 50 (1971): 76–136, on the concept of "moral economy."
4. This summary is based on my research in the WOR collection. For an overview of the history of *Gang Busters* radio program, see Martin Grams, *Gang Busters: The Crime Fighters of American Broadcasting* (New York: OTR Publishing, 2004); Kathleen Battles, "Calling All Cars: Radio Crime Dramas and the Construction of Policing during the Depression Era" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 2002); and John Dunning, *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 277–78.
5. Claire Potter, *War on Crime: Bandits, G-Men, and the Politics of Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998); K. H. Baker, "Radio Listening and Socio-Economic Status," *Psychological Record* 1 (1937): 140 (Minnesota); I. K. Tyler, "Radio Studies in the Oakland Schools," in *Education on the Air* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1934), 5, 297–312, cited in Herta Herzog, *Survey of Research on Children's Radio Listening* (New York: Columbia University, Office of Radio Research, 1941), 25 (California); St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 608–609 (Chicago); and Hugh Beville, "Social Stratification of the Radio Audience," a report printed by Princeton Radio Research Project, New York, 1939, 39, 41, 42.
6. On parallels, "homologies," or "lateral connections" between different social domains, see Raymond Williams, "Typification and Homology," in *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 104–105; Pierre Bourdieu, "The Intellectual Field: A World Apart," in *In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity, 1990), 140–41; and Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 126–27.
7. See, for example, Susan Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899–1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920–1934* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994); Robert McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U. S. Broadcasting, 1928–1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Michele Himes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922–1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Times Books, 1999); and Kathy Newman, *Radio Active: Advertising and Consumer Activism, 1935–1947* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
8. "Fan Mail—September 12th to 25th Inclusive," September 25, 1935, box 4, folder 1, Jane Crusinberry Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin (hereafter SHSW); N. W. Ayer, "A Confidential Statement of Policy and Practice in Radio Broadcasting," January 5, 1938, 20, box 6, Thomas McDermott Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming at Laramie, Laramie, Wyoming (hereafter AHC); Rudolf Arnheim, "The World of the Daytime Serial," in *Radio Research, 1942–43*, ed. Paul Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944), 34–35 ("made to order"); H. King Painter to Irna Phillips, June 30, 1944, box 62, folder Knox Reeves

- Correspondence, Irna Phillips Papers, SHSW; Gertrude Berg to *Radio Guide*, December 24, 1938, 16; and Frederick Lumley, *Measurement in Radio* (New York: Arno Press, 1934), 86–87 (“criticism”).
9. Niles Trammell to John Royal, April 29, 1940, box 95, folder 24, NBC Records, SHSW; Peverill Squire, “Why the 1936 Literary Digest Poll Failed,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 52 (Spring 1988), 125–33; Claude Fischer, *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 22 (radio and telephone ownership); Herzog, *Survey of Research*, 3 (“multiple meaning”); Tore Hollonquist and Edward Suchman, “Listening to the Listener: Experiences with the Lasarsfeld-Stanton Analyzer,” in *Radio Research, 1942–43*, 320 (CBS research).
  10. *Fortune*, August 1938, 75; Paul Lazarsfeld and Harry Field, *The People Look at Radio* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1946), 5–6, 82, 96–97, 100–101 (1945 survey); Paul Lazarsfeld and Harry Field, *Radio Listening in America: The People Look at Radio—Again* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1948), 46 (1947 survey); *Billboard*, December 6, 1947, 5, 9 (independent stations); N. W. Ayer, “Bell System Radio Program ‘The Telephone Hour,’” program proposal, April 1940, box 6, 46, Thomas McDermott Collection, AHC; “Million Letters Set All-Time Record for NBC Audience Mail,” New York, April 30, 1936, series 134 box 381, folder 2, George Clark Collection, Archive Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; “WFAF Gets a Letter,” August 7, 1942, box 139, folder 1, NBC Records, SHSW; and William Paley, “Broadcasting and American Society,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 213 (January 1941): 67. I analyze the transformation from reciprocal to alienated relations between broadcasters and listeners in greater detail in my book *The Voice of the Listener: American Radio and Its Audiences, 1920–1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).
  11. “Sands-Siler,” script, February 15, 1939, box 7, folder GB 154, WOR.
  12. Phillips Lord, quoted in Richard Powers, *G-Men: Hoover’s FBI in American Popular Culture* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 210 (“left out all the color”); Hoover quoted in Powers, *G-Men*, 208–211 (“too sensational”); “The Eddie Doll Case,” *G-Men*, episode 13, October 12, 1935, script, box 58, folder G-Men 13, WOR; Powers, *G-Men*, 211–213; John Ives to Joseph Neebe, July 22, 1935, WOR.
  13. “Sands-Siler,” script.
  14. “Gang Busters Writing Rules,” [1940], WOR (“moralize”); Phillips Lord to Leonard Bass, September 14, 1942, box 16, folder GB 281, 2 of 2, WOR (brakes); Phillips Lord, “Comments on Sands-Siler Rehearsal,” January 1939, box 7, folder GB 154, WOR (“shots”); Herzog, *Survey of Research*, 77–79; Harold Wentworth and Stuart Flexner, eds., *Dictionary of American Slang* (New York: Crowell, 1967), 117; Alfred Hitchcock quoted in John Taylor, *Hitch: The Life and Times of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 119 (“dull bits”).
  15. On detective pulps and gangster movies, see, for example, Erin Smith, *Hard-Boiled: Working Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000); and Jonathan Munby, *Public Enemies, Public Heroes: Screening the Gangster from Little Caesar to Touch of Evil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Claire Potter, “‘I’ll Go the Limit and Then Some’: Gun Molls, Desire, and Danger in the 1930s,” *Feminist Studies* 21 (Spring 1995): 41–66 (autobiographies); “Pretty Boy Floyd,” *G-Men*, episode 11, September 28, 1935; song quoted in Potter, *War on Crime*, 9.
  16. “Gang Busters Writing Rules” (guidelines and “minor characteristics”); Lord, “Comments on Sands-Siler Rehearsal” (“tough quality”); Herzog, *Survey of Research*, 77–79 (“scars”), 65 (“catch bandits”); *Time*, April 8, 1940 (“lexicon”).
  17. Joseph Kovon to Mayor LaGuardia, May 6, 1937, box 3, folder GB 69, WOR (“plates”); Phillips Lord to Byrnes MacDonald, May 20, 1937, box 3, folder GB 69, WOR (“method” and “lesson”); *Time* (“sermon” and “busters”); and Mrs. M. J. McCall to *Radio Guide*, June 11, 1938, 16 (“blood-and-thunder”).
  18. Phillips Lord to Gang Busters Department, April 15, 1940, folder GB 1, WOR (advertisers’ demands); John Franchey to Phillips Lord, February 21, 1937, box 3, folder GB 79, WOR (“libel”). For a pulp article used for *Gang Busters*, see *Real Detective*, clipping, used for “Case of Virgil Harris,” *GB*, episode 281, September 18, 1942; box 16, folder GB 281, 1 of 2, WOR. Lord to MacDonald, May 20, 1937 (“in no instance”); B. L. Mitchell, “The Home Radio Listening of Wilmette Grade School Children,” Wilmette, Illinois, 1940, quoted in Herzog, *Survey of Research*, 14.
  19. Dunning, *On the Air*, 278; Samuel Zucker to Colonel Schwarzkoff, November 4, 1940, box 11, folder GB 212, 2 of 2, WOR.

20. John Ives to Joseph Neebe, July 26, 1935, WOR (“critical angles”); John Ives to Joseph Neebe, July 22, 1935, WOR (editors); Joseph Neebe to Phillips Lord, July 30, 1935, WOR (chords, cars, guns, dead air, and dialogue color); John Ives to Joseph Neebe, July 30, 1935, WOR (music); “Seth Parker Fan Mail Analysis—Week 10-2-38,” October 10, 1938, box 4, folder 2, Phillips Lord Papers, AHC; “List of Stations Now Being Used on ‘Gang Busters’ Network” (1938); “Gang Busters Network Season 1939–1940” (1939); “Gang Busters Network 1941–1942” (1941); “Gang Busters 1943 Network (Crossley Cities)” (1943); Tevis Hunh to Leonard Bass, September 20, 1943; all in WOR. For *Gang Busters* ratings, see Harrison Summers, ed., *A Thirty Year History of Programs Carried on National Radio Networks in the United States, 1926–1956* (New York: Arno, 1971).
21. Sands-Siler,” final script, 2 (“office”); Phillips Lord to Lewis Valentine, January 24, 1936, box 1, folder GB 2, WOR (“calls”); and J. Edgar Hoover to Homer Cummings, May 22, 1934, quoted in Potter, *War on Crime*, 115.
22. Tom Revere to Phillips Lord, March 29, 1937, box 3, folder GB 63, WOR; Leonard Bass to Phillips Lord, September 12, 1942, box 16, folder GB 281, 2 of 2, WOR; and Lord to Gang Busters Department, April 15, 1940 (“horror”).
23. W. F. Byrd Jr. to Phillips Lord, March 24, 1937, box 3, folder GB 63, WOR (“servant”); W. E. Agee to Leonard Bass, January 21, 1939, box 7, folder GB 154, WOR (“misrepresented” and “handcuffed”); Leonard Bass to George Norris, April 29, 1942, box 16, folder GB 281, 2 of 2, WOR (“stationery”); Leonard Bass to George Norris, April 14, 1942, box 16, folder GB 281, 2 of 2, WOR (“clips”).
24. Description of James Hillard Houser; H. H. Houser to *Gang Busters*, November 4, 1940; Leonard Bass to H. H. Houser, November 13, 1940; release form signed by parents of James Hillard Houser, November 18, 1940; Rev. W. J. Roof to Leonard Bass, November 17, 1940; all in box 14, folder GB 220, WOR. Housers owned a farm in 1930: Howards Creek, Lincoln, North Carolina, roll T626-1703, page 3A, enumeration district 6, 1930 Federal Population Census, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereafter 1930 Census).
25. Donato Cugino to Phillips Lord, June 28, 1936 (emphasis in the “self-defense” quote by broadcasters; emphasis in the “victim” quote by Cugino); and “Tony ‘The Stringer’ Cugino,” *GB*, episode 25, July 1, 1936, script; both in box 1, folder GB 25, WOR.
26. “Sands-Siler,” final script, 21–27 (three children); Medrano to Bass, February 16, 1939 (one child); Leonard Bass to George Norris, February 7, 1939; George Norris, “Sands-Siler,” resume, 1939 (“part Indian”); George Norris to Leonard Bass, January 20, 1939 (“family history”); all in box 7, folder 154, WOR. For interviews, see Waldo Wedel’s interview with Post Oak Jim, July 17, 1933, cited in Curtis Marez, “Signifying Spain, Becoming Comanche, Making Mexicans: Indian Captivity and the History of Chicana/o Popular Performance,” *American Quarterly* 53.2 (June 2001): 267–307. On Bonnie Medrano’s parents, see Apache, Caddo, Oklahoma, roll T626-1894, page 7A, enumeration district 7, 1930 Census. On white Americans’ attitudes toward Indians, see, for example, Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
27. Leonard Bass to George Norris, February 7, 1939; Waymond Ramsey to Leonard Bass, February 1, 1939; Chester MacCracken to John Ives, February 6, 1939; and “Sands-Siler,” final script, 3–4 (Chief’s lines); all in box 7, folder GB 154, WOR.
28. Norris to Bass, January 20, 1939 (“bitter”); “Admits Robbery,” newspaper clipping [1935]; and George Norris to Leonard Bass, January 30, 1939 (“Indian”); all in box 7, folder GB 154, WOR; Marez, “Signifying Spain,” 278; and “Sands-Siler” script, 26.
29. Norris to Bass, January 30, 1939; and Leonard Bass to Berniece Medrano, March 3, 1939; all in box 7, folder GB 154, WOR.
30. Norris to Bass, January 20, 1939 (“bullet holes” and Ambroses’ testimony); Medrano to Bass, February 16, 1939 (“fatherless children”); and George Norris to Leonard Bass, January 28, 1939 (Apache and New Mexico); all in box 7, folder GB 154, WOR.
31. Norris to Bass, January 30, 1939; Leonard Bass to Mrs. C. L. Ambrose, January 26, 1939; Leonard Bass to Berniece Medrano, January 26, 1939; Mrs. C. L. Ambrose to Manager of Gang Busters, January 19, 1939; and Medrano to Bass, February 16, 1939; all in box 7, folder GB 154, WOR.
32. Zucker to Schwarzkoff, November 4, 1940; and Leonard Bass to Samuel Zucker, November 14, 1940, box 11, folder GB 212, 2 of 2, WOR. Elsie Detrich to Palmolive Company, June 6, 1939; and Leonard Bass to Elsie Detrich, June 28, 1939; both in box 9, folder GB 168, WOR; *St. Louis City Directory* (1935) (Detrich’s occupation).

33. Detrich to Palmolive Company, June 6, 1939. On radio and women consumers, see Newman, *Radio Active*; Hilmes, *Radio Voices*, 315–16.
34. Cedar Rapids, Linn, Iowa, roll T626-665, page 6B, enumeration district 50, 1930 Census.
35. Mrs. W. W. Roy to Leonard Bass, October 18, 1942, box 16, folder GB 281, 2 of 2, WOR.
36. On the investigation and criticism of the networks between 1938 and 1946, see Michael Socolow, “To Network a Nation: NBC, CBS, and the Development of National Network Radio in the United States, 1925–1950” (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2001); Socolow, “Questioning Advertising’s Influence over America Radio: The Blue Book Controversy of 1945–1947,” *Journal of Radio History* 9 (2004): 282–302; Douglas, *Listening In*; and Newman, *Radio Active*. On 1940s local radio and early disk jockeys, see, for example, Arnold Passman, *The Deejays* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

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