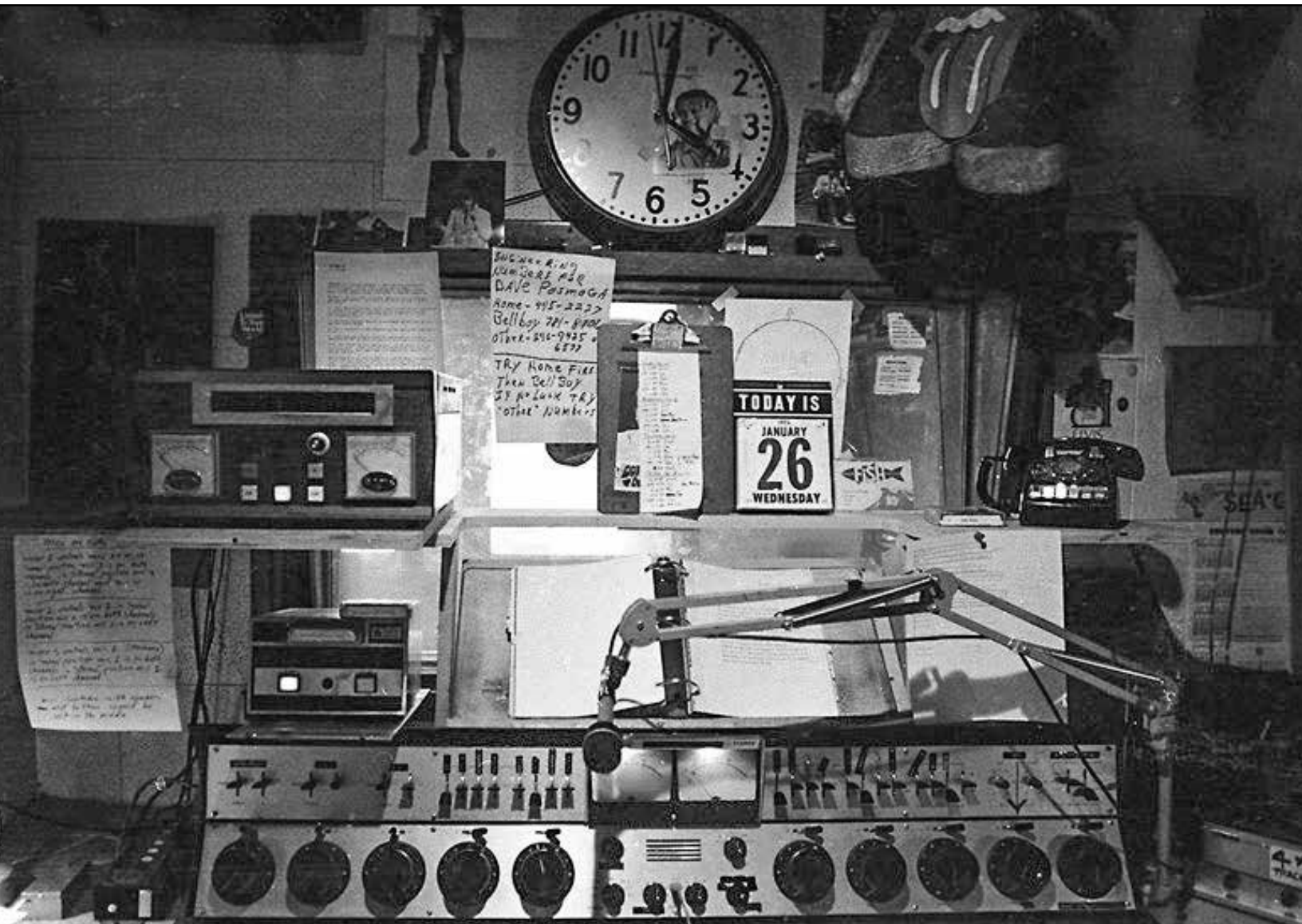


WBCN AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

A film and book by Bill Lichtenstein

www.TheAmericanRevolution.fm

TABLE OF CONTENTS

4

INTRODUCTION

5

FILMMAKER STATEMENT

“Why I made the movie and wrote the book . . .”

6

BROADCAST RADIO HISTORY

Community radio from 1933 to present

11

GUIDE FOR FACILITATION

Discussing the film and book with your community

For Radio Stations

For Community Screenings

For Classrooms

15

RESOURCES

WBCN AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



+ INTRODUCTION

WBCN and The American Revolution is the award-winning, feature-length documentary that tells the amazing, untold story of the radical underground radio station WBCN-FM, set against the dazzling and profound social, political, and cultural changes that took place in Boston and nationally during the late-1960s and early-70s, one of the most transformative periods in American history.

The story is told through the actual sights, sounds, and first-person accounts of a compelling cast of characters who connected through the radio station, exploding music and countercultural scenes, militant anti-war activism, civil rights struggles, and the emerging women's and LGBTQ-liberation movements.



Peabody Award-winner Bill Lichtenstein, who began working at WBCN at age 14 in 1970, it's "the incredible, true story of how a radio station, politics, and rock 'n' roll changed everything."

The film and companion book provide a powerful tool to facilitate conversations in classrooms and in the community about the power and uses of media, specifically community radio, to help create social change and to promote greater media literacy. For community radio stations and local film and media arts organizations, screenings of the film coupled with discussions also present a valuable and powerful tool to help engage listeners and members of the public, including potential new audiences, in discussions about the missions and work of the organizations, and to engage new volunteers and supporters.

To this end, this guide provides strategies, tips and resources for hosting live or virtual screenings of **WBCN** and **The American Revolution** along with how to create a robust and engaging community or classroom discussion to follow the film.

FILMMAKER STATEMENT BILL LICHTENSTEIN

On a summer evening in 1968, I was watching the local evening news on my family's television in our living room in Brookline, Massachusetts. As a 12-year-old, I was aware of the psychedelic, LSD-fueled youth revolution which had exploded in San Francisco the summer before in the city's Haight Ashbury district as part of the "Summer of Love," and concurrently in New York City's East Village.



But in Boston, even with its 250,000 college students and more than 80 colleges and universities, the youth revolution that would soon upend the world had yet to arrive. And then, suddenly, it did.

In the summer of 1968, "the hippies," as they were called, appeared on the Boston Common. They were thousands of young people, dressed in rainbow colors, barefoot with long hair, playing guitars and Frisbee, and they took up residence on "the Common," the plot of land that had traditionally been the backyard of the Boston bluebloods who lived on exclusive Beacon Hill.

Like the story of the Pied Piper, the presence of the hippies sent out a clarion call to young people throughout the city and suburbs. As for me, I remember getting up and leaving my family's living room after seeing the hippies on the local evening news and taking the train from Brookline to the Boston Common to see the hippies and the scene for myself.

Soon after, in 1970, I was in a 9th grade alternative educational program in Newton, MA, where students were given the chance to get a volunteer job one day a week.

Being a devoted fan of radio, albeit the only radio available that played rock and roll at the time, which was Top 40 radio, I called what was then a newly-launched underground radio station in Boston, WBCN-FM, and asked if they needed help. My timing couldn't have been better as they had recently started a "Listener Line" staffed by volunteers, to handle the flood of calls the station was receiving from listeners to answer questions about everything from how to help a roommate on a bad LSD trip to how to respond to a draft notice, to people looking for a ride cross-country or help finding a lost cat or dog.

I began answering the station's Listener Line, and soon after I was recruited to cover demonstrations for the news department. I helped develop a distinctive sound for news reports that combined highly-edited sound bites, often of President Nixon or other politicians, with music and comedy, a style that would remain a signature of the radio station. Soon after, I was given my own weekly four-hour radio show. It left me with a keen sense of belief in the power of media -- especially radio -- to create and fuel political, social and cultural change, to give a voice to those who didn't have one, and to serve as the connection between all of us.

With everything going on in the world today, it's a lesson and story as relevant -- and timely -- now as it was then.

Bill Lichtenstein, Filmmaker and Author, **WBCN and The American Revolution**

SELECTED HISTORY OF RADIO

1934: The Birth of Commercial Radio and Broadcasting. In 1934, in order to address the increasing number of people who wanted a spot on the radio dial, and the limited number of frequencies available, Congress passed the Communications Act, which established the Federal Communications Commission in order to oversee broadcasting, including the issuance of broadcast licenses to operate radio (and later TV) stations. Since the number of licenses was limited, those who were fortunate enough to receive one did so in the name of the public generally, and had to agree to operate stations in the “public interest, convenience and necessity.” In many ways, WBCN in the 1960’s and early 70’s, and community radio stations today, remain truest to this original vision of radio and how it could and should serve the public interest.

1920’s - 1950’s: Radio becomes most popular form of family entertainment and source of news and information. This was radio’s “golden age,” as families across America gathered in front of the radio each evening to listen to dramas, game shows, and soap operas, intermixed with news programs. These were mostly national productions, often with live orchestras and audiences, which emanated largely from New York City and Chicago. On CBS, Edward R. Murrow brought the sounds of World War II and the bombing of London home to listeners, and the careers of a generation of stars, from Lucille Ball to Arthur Godfrey, and Duke Ellington and Paul Robeson took off on the radio.

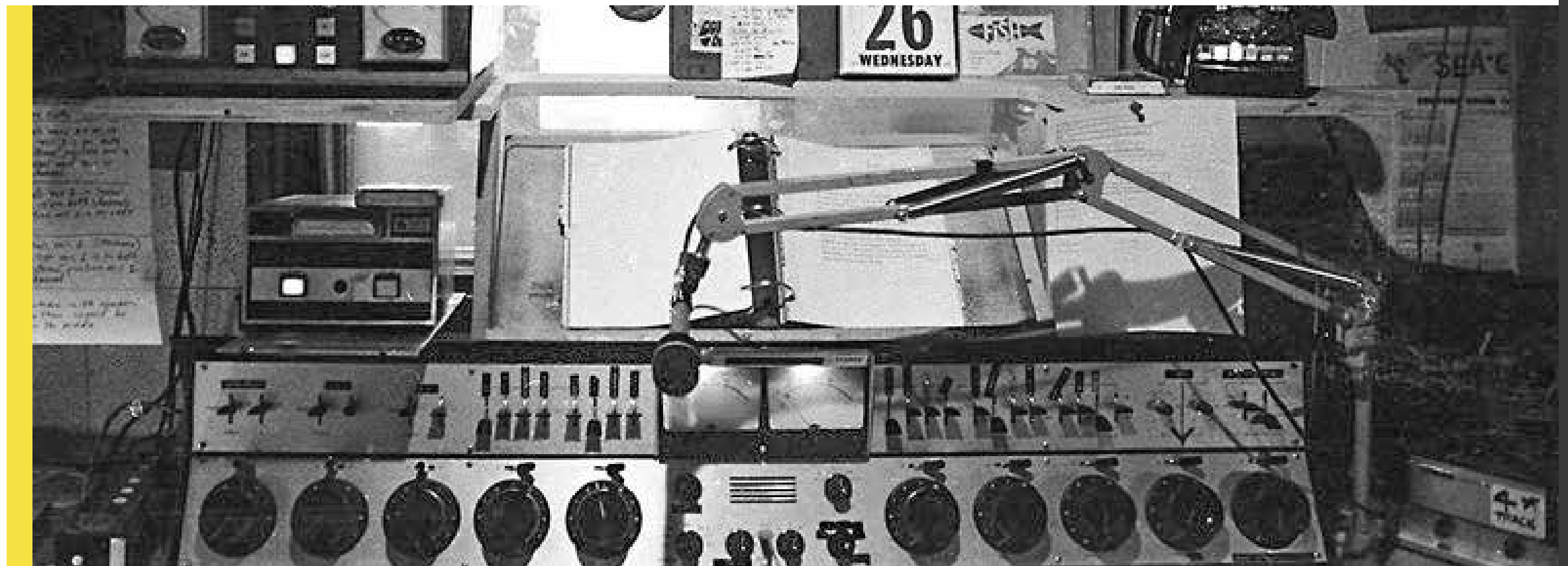
1950’s - 1960’s: With the arrival of television, radio focuses on music. With the advent of television, radio was displaced as the centerpiece of America’s living rooms, and its programming switched to predominantly music-based. Regional hits could rise with local airplay, and those songs would often garner the attention of the bigger stations and record labels, allowing for a breakout hit record. For young people, rock and roll was played on “Top 40”, a format that started in Nebraska in the early 1950s, and then spread nationwide, which featured fast and loud-talking DJ’s playing the same 40 “hits” over and over again. Still, FCC requirements mandated that stations offer news and public affairs as part of their community service.

1968: A revolution in radio reflects a revolution in society. When WBCN went on the air in March, 1968, it was one of only a few radio stations in the U.S. that began to play rock music on the newly launched FM band, which offered music in stereo with limited static – initially making it perfect for classical music. WBCN was the Boston station of the failing “Classical Network” radio chain, along with WNCN in New York, and WHCN in Hartford. On March 15, 1968, it went on the air featuring its new format targeting young listeners, and soon after called itself “WBCN: The American Revolution.”

1970s and 1980s: The community roots of radio are lost. In 1987, the FCC revoked the Fairness Doctrine. As a result, radio stations were no longer responsible for broadcasting opposing points of view on issues in the public interest, spurring the explosion of right-wing talk radio (largely on the AM dial).

1996: The Telecommunications Act. The 1996 Telecommunications Act allowed for the ownership of multiple radio and TV stations, and newspaper outlets in each market. Previously, going back to 1953, any one owner could only have seven AM radio stations, seven FM stations, and seven TV stations. In 1984, that number was raised to 12 each.

And in 1996, the limits were removed, allowing for the dominance of huge corporations in radio, such as Clear Channel (which became iHeart Media) which owns 1,207 radio stations, located in 201 of the top 281 radio markets. Other such corporate conglomerates are Cox, Infinity and Radio One.



1996 – 2010: Radio consolidation. Over the past three decades, radio consolidation continued. Fewer and fewer owners controlled “the public airwaves.” Over time, music formats became more regimented. Formats such as Top 40, Adult Contemporary, Album-Oriented Rock (AOR), and Urban R&B determined what types of music each station would program. The programming was fairly uniform per format in each city. You could tune into an AOR station in Boston and one in San Francisco and hear the same playlist, due to the fact that, despite being local stations, they are both owned by large corporations that control their programming:

- The music is programmed by a central office. There is limited support for local bands and artists, and the DJs (if there are announcers) aren’t able to know each community in which they are broadcasting;
- The news reports are crafted by a central news desk. When they do have local news teams, the content and scripts are typically tightly controlled by the central office; and
- There are few to no opportunities for local groups, musical artists, community groups or their members or others to interact with the station in any meaningful way or to have access to the airwaves. There are rarely music request lines or call-in shows, and virtually no way to get to know the hosts of a show who likely live in another part of the country, with limited or no possibility of getting local content of interest on the air.



WBCN staff circa 1971

2010: The rise of community radio. After significant pushback from the public about radio consolidation and the lack of local content, the Obama Administration signed the Local Community Radio Act into law in January 2011. The act authorized the FCC to issue low power broadcast licenses for FM community radio stations. Hundreds of Low Power FM (LPFM) stations were created in the first round of applications, but were restricted to smaller markets. The FCC opened new rounds of applications for LPFM licenses, including large cities, and more of these community stations began broadcasting. The last round closed in 2014, and the number of new stations nearly doubled. No new round has been announced since. According to the FCC, to date there are 2,186 LPFM community stations operating across the country.



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COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT



Around the country, WBCN and The American Revolution is being used by:

- COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS to engage their listeners and members in a discussion about the importance of local broadcasting;
- EDUCATORS to facilitate discussion with students about how media can create social change and give voice to those who don’t have one;
- COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT GROUPS to help promote discussions about the role of community radio and media in creating social change.

If you’re with a COMMUNITY RADIO STATION:

If you are a community radio station, hosting a screening of the film can be a great tool to start a conversation with your audience about the value and importance of community radio and the role of media in advancing social change.

Consider hosting a virtual online Q&A for your members and listeners with filmmaker Bill Lichtenstein, staff from your station, and individuals from your community interested in media literacy. The conversation could touch on such topics as

1. How your station is serving the community through its programming?
2. The power of radio and other forms of media to affect social change?
3. Examples of people in your community whom you give voice – or issues that get exposure -- through your station? What about people in your community that don’t have a voice that you could lift up?
4. Issues or situations in your community that could be addressed through attention from your community station.
5. The legacy and history of your station, and community radio in general?
6. Parallels and differences between WBCN and your station?
7. How do people get access to your airwaves? How difficult is it and can it be made easier?

You can find ideas for specific discussion questions in the Discussion Prompts section (below.)

This could also be a valuable opportunity to elicit feedback from the audience about your station. What are you doing right and what could the station be doing better? And more specifically, in what ways does your station forge the sense of community that we saw in the film?

Share with the audience the methods that your station uses for feedback - do you have a feedback form on your website? An email address or phone number to share? Open community meetings? Listening sessions?

Look for stories in the film that resonate with your radio station to share with the audience to get the discussion started. For audiences who may be unfamiliar with your station’s work, this is a great opportunity to communicate your station’s value and to invite new community members into your work and to gain public and media exposure for your station.

Interested in inviting the filmmaker to be a part of your Q&A? Email LCM@LCMedia.com and a member of our team will be in touch!

No community station in your community? Consider starting your own station! Use the film as a means to explore what a community station would look like. Who is your target audience? Invite representatives from local government to the event. Reach out to the nearest college station to participate. Reach out to journalists, podcasters, local musicians, activists, and grassroots organizers. Invite audience members to propose what kinds of shows they’d like to see created, and if they’d like to create one themselves. Use this opportunity to gather signatures and emails.



IF YOU’RE AN EDUCATOR OR WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE:

WBCN and The American Revolution provides a great springboard for conversations with students about media literacy, corporate control of media, and community values and organizing.



DISCUSSION PROMPTS IN THE CLASSROOM

1. How is radio different from social media?
2. How was radio in the early days of WBCN (late-1960s and early-70s) different than radio today?
3. Can you imagine building a social movement without the internet or social media? How would you do it?
4. Why do you think music from the 1960s remains relevant today?
5. People in the 1960s brought their talents to the effort to create social change, from song writers, to artists, to organizers. What are your talents that you can bring to helping change a situation that concerns you?
6. What do you think made people so passionate about social issues at the time depicted in the documentary? Do you see that reflected today?
7. Are there issues that you can see using media to help change? What are they and how would you do it?

Here are some suggested activities to incorporate into your existing curriculum:

1. Lead your classroom in creating a virtual radio station. Imagine that the students themselves are the intended audience. What do they want to hear? What news is important to broadcast and how is that different from what you get on the radio and other media outlets? How and whom would gather the news? Whose stories would you tell who often don’t have access to tell their stories through mass media? What role would the school administration play, if any? Create podcasts that can be listened to and circulated.
2. Choose several local radio stations, perhaps one commercial, one public/NPR and one community station for the students to study. Who is the intended audience?

Where does the programming come from? Does the content serve your community? How?

What is their marketing like? How do the logo and slogan convey who their audience is?

Where does their news come from? How do they cover your local news? Do your students feel that news addresses their needs and interests? Do the news stories about their communities reflect them accurately?

Whose stories are told in news and public affairs programs, and whose are left out? Do people who are in power (elected officials, celebrities, union representatives, etc.) have greater access to the airwaves than those who don’t have power but who have important stories to tell? What are some examples?

IF YOU ARE A COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT GROUP:

The following are questions that can be used for discussion following the screening of the film in a community setting:

1. Were you surprised to learn about the programming at WBCN in the 1960s and 1970s? Did you have a similar kind of radio station in your town growing up? If so, tell us about it.
2. Tell us about a scene, a line, or a moment in the film that resonated with you, and why.
3. What did you think of the film? What did and didn't you like about it?
4. In the film, Ray Riepen refers to the dominance of the commercial stations with obnoxious personalities, "Top 40" playlists and loud commercials as "Ugly Radio". For WBCN, he hired kids who had a passion for music and the "underground culture" as the announcers. How did this make a difference?
5. Do you see news and programming as being objective or subjective?
6. What is your source for the underground or alternative culture in your region?
7. How does the media reflect the values and interest of the organization and/or who owns and controls it? Is that reflected via who is on the air, in the programming?
8. From a statement in the film: "We were treating radio not as a performance, but as a relationship with our listeners". Do you feel that you have a relationship with your favorite radio station?
9. Danny Schechter says in the film "WBCN had a commitment to a diversity in music and ideas." While that may be true, women listeners had to stage an action and demand that their voices be heard at the station. WBCN dedicated one hour a week for a show hosted by women from the liberation movement. They also had "The Lavender Hour" co-hosted by two gay men. That was in the early 1970's. How have things changed since then regarding diverse voices on the radio? Do you feel that the voices of marginalized groups are regularly reflected on the airwaves?
10. WBCN had a relationship with local grassroots organizations, creating PSA's touting their work. They also covered political actions happening in Boston, including the perspective of the activists in the struggle. Do you see any evidence of those approaches existing on the radio now?
11. How might radio be uniquely suited to help break down social, cultural and other barriers?
12. If you don't have a community station in your town, are you interested in getting something started?

RESOURCES

Radio Locator

<https://radio-locator.com/>

There are 44,000 radio stations throughout the world reaching 77% of the earth's population. This radio station search engine has links to over 15,800 station websites and 11,700 audio streams from the United States and around the world.

LPFM Database

<http://lpfmdatabase.weebly.com/>

Community radio stations have become a force in recent years. This website has a directory of low power FM stations across the country, plus web links and associated organizations.

Free Press

<https://www.freepress.net/get-involved/activist-tools>

Media is perhaps the most powerful tool to help create social change. Free Press is an advocacy organization that works to ensure that media and technology are used for justice. Their activist tools include tips for writing an effective letter to lawmakers, editors and your local radio station.

Common Frequency

<http://commonfrequency.org/node/3>

Common Frequency is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to innovative new community and college radio. By providing free and low-cost aid to regular people educating themselves to be the media, Common Frequency (CF) has been supporting the launch of grassroots stations since 2006.

National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB)

<https://nfcfb.org/about/>

Founded in 1978, NFCB is the oldest and largest national organization dedicated to community stations within the public media system.

Future of Music Coalition

<https://futureofmusic.org/issues/campaigns/i-support-community-radio>

Future of Music Coalition (FMC) is a Washington D.C.-based nonprofit organization supporting a musical ecosystem where artists flourish and are compensated fairly and transparently for their work.

Radio Survivor

<http://www.radiosurvivor.com/>

Radio Survivor attempts to shed light on the ongoing importance of radio: from the airwaves (FM, AM, Short-wave, HD, satellite) to online. Their weekly bulletin reports on trends and updates in this space.

Association of Independent Radio: AIR

<https://airmedia.org/>

AIR was founded in 1988 by 10 independent radio producers, and has expanded to more than 1,300 independent audio producers, multimedia journalists, and public media programs, stations and networks across 30 countries, headquartered in Boston.

Airtime

<http://Airtime.pro>

A guide to launching a fully licensed online radio station.

Free Music Archive

<https://freemusicarchive.org/>

The go-to sources for free music and royalty free music.

Prometheus Radio Project: Freeing the Airwaves from Corporate Control

<https://www.prometheusradio.org/>

The Prometheus Radio Project is a non-profit organization founded by a small group of radio activists in 1998. Prometheus builds, supports, and advocates for community radio stations that bring together and empower local, participatory voices and movements for social change.

Common Sense Media

Common Sense Media provides guidance around media and news literacy:

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/search/media%20literacy>

FCC Commissioner Nick Johnson

Website of the legendary FCC commissioner:

<https://fromdc2iowa.blogspot.com/>

Current

Current is the journal of public broadcasting

<http://Current.org>

WBCN AND THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION

This guide was written by Naomi Walker, Eliza Licht, Alice Quinlan and Bill Lichtenstein. Thanks to Ernesto Aguilar, Program Director at the National Federation for Community Broadcasting, for reviewing this guide.

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