



The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications

Paul Starr

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America's leading role in today's information revolution may seem simply to reflect its position as the world's dominant economy and most powerful state. But by the early nineteenth century, when the United States was neither a world power nor a primary center of scientific discovery, it was already a leader in communications—in postal service and newspaper publishing, then in development of the telegraph and telephone networks, later in the whole repertoire of mass communications. In this wide-ranging social history of American media, from the first printing press to the early days of radio, Paul Starr shows that the creation of modern communications was as much the result of political choices as of technological invention. With his original historical analysis, Starr examines how the decisions that led to a state-run post office and private monopolies on the telegraph and telephone systems affected a developing society. He illuminates contemporary controversies over freedom of information by exploring such crucial formative issues as freedom of the press, intellectual property, privacy, public access to information, and the shaping of specific technologies and institutions. America's critical choices in these areas, Starr argues, affect the long-run path of development in a society and have had wide social, economic, and even military ramifications. The Creation of the Media not only tells the history of the media in a new way; it puts America and its global influence into a new perspective.

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