



Calling All Cars: Radio Dragnets and the Technology of Policing

Kathleen Battles

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Calling All Cars shows how radio played a key role in an emerging form of policing during the turbulent years of the Depression. Until this time popular culture had characterized the gangster as hero, but radio crime dramas worked against this attitude and were ultimately successful in making heroes out of law enforcement officers.

Through close analysis of radio programming of the era and the production of true crime docudramas, Kathleen Battles argues that radio was a significant site for overhauling the dismal public image of policing. However, it was not simply the elevation of the perception of police that was at stake. Using radio, reformers sought to control the symbolic terrain through which citizens encountered the police, and it became a medium to promote a positive meaning and purpose for policing. For example, Battles connects the apprehension of criminals by a dragnet with the idea of using the radio network to both publicize this activity and make it popular with citizens.

The first book to systematically address the development of crime dramas during the golden age of radio, *Calling All Cars* explores an important irony: the intimacy of the newest technology of the time helped create an intimate authority—the police as the appropriate force for control—over the citizenry.



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