

Record Cultures

The Transformation of the U.S. Recording Industry

Record Cultures tells the story of how early U.S. commercial recording companies captured American musical culture in a key period in both music and media history. Amid dramatic technological and cultural changes of the 1920s and 1930s, small recording companies in the United States began to explore the genres that would later be known as jazz, blues, and country. Smaller record labels, many based in rural or out of the way Midwestern and Southern towns, were willing to take risks on the country's regional vernacular music as a way to compete with more established recording labels. Recording companies' relationship with radio grew closer as both industries were on the rise, propelled by new technologies. Radio, which had become immensely popular, began broadcasting more recorded music in place of live performances, and this created profitable symbiosis. With the advent of the talkies, the film industry completed the media trifecta. The novelty of recorded sound was replacing film accompanists, and the popularity of movie musicals solidified film's connections with the radio and recording industries. By the early 1930s, the recording industry had gone from being part of the largely autonomous phonograph industry to being major media industry of its own, albeit deeply tied to—and, in some cases, owned by—the radio and film industries. The triangular relationships between these media industries marked the first major entertainment and media conglomerates in U.S. history.

Through an interdisciplinary and intermedial approach to recording industry history, *Record Cultures* creates new connections between different strands of media research. It will be of interest to scholars of popular music, media studies, sound studies, American culture, and the history of film, television, and radio.

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