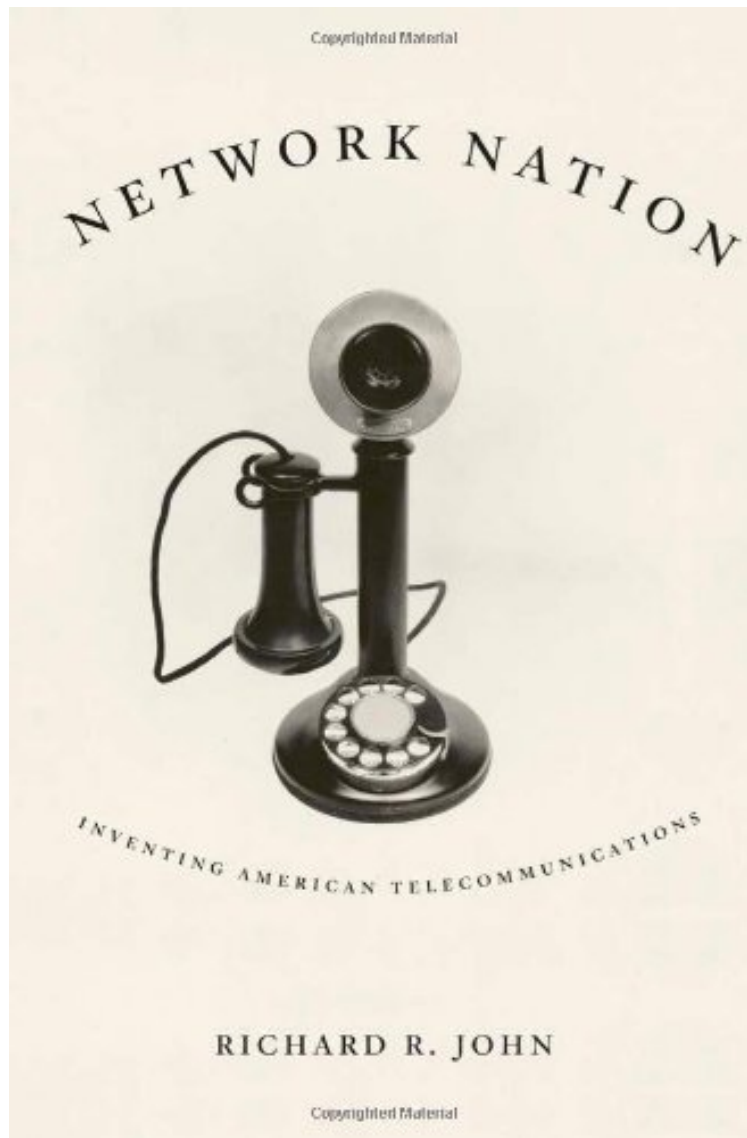


(Library ebook) Network Nation

## Network Nation

*Richard R. John*

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**Richard R. John : Network Nation** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Network Nation:

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Beyond the network effectBy Dan AllossoJohn says "The first electrical communications media--the telegraph and the telephone--were products not only of technological imperatives and economic incentives, but also of governmental institutions and civic ideals." He points out at the outset that the telegraph was no "Victorian internet," and that even the much more popular telephone system was really only used by regular people for local calls until World War II. These tools were mostly used by elites, and the

businessmen who ran them had a very narrow vision of their potential market. John mentions the concept of the "network effect," (that the value of a network expands with its user base), but suggests that historians might be wrong to project our understanding of it onto even the most forward-looking 19th century telegraph developers. He distinguishes between the skills and temperament of inventors and innovators, suggesting that like Samuel F.B. Morse himself, the people who patented the technology were often not the ideal developers of nationwide systems. The issue of patenting, actually, turns out to be a prime example of the intersection of technology, business, and government. Morse built his historic Washington-Baltimore demonstration line with a \$30,000 grant from Congress. And from 1837 through the granting of the all-important patent in 1840, and its subsequent defense and promotion, the "assistance" that patent commissioner Henry L. Ellsworth gave Morse, his friend of over thirty years, was "little short of astounding." Similarly, Postmaster General Amos Kendall actively promoted "the rapid diffusion of intelligence" through telegraphy, and then went to work for Morse defending his patents. But the patenting of technical improvements was new and controversial. "Scientist Joseph Henry...refused as a matter of principle." 15 of 17 people found the following review helpful. New light on an old subject By Tim Wu This book, based on new archives, presents a wealth of new information on Western Union and Bell. An invaluable resource. In particular, possibly the most useful book on Western Union yet published. The Bell sections present new information that threatens many of the existing theories of why ATT came to rule American telecommunications as a private regulated monopoly.

The telegraph and the telephone were the first electrical communications networks to become hallmarks of modernity. Yet they were not initially expected to achieve universal accessibility. In this pioneering history of their evolution, Richard R. John demonstrates how access to these networks was determined not only by technological imperatives and economic incentives but also by political decision making at the federal, state, and municipal levels. In the decades between the Civil War and the First World War, Western Union and the Bell System emerged as the dominant providers for the telegraph and telephone. Both operated networks that were products not only of technology and economics but also of a distinctive political economy. Western Union arose in an antimonopolistic political economy that glorified equal rights and vilified special privilege. The Bell System flourished in a progressive political economy that idealized public utility and disparaged unnecessary waste. The popularization of the telegraph and the telephone was opposed by business lobbies that were intent on perpetuating specialty services. In fact, it wasn't until 1900 that the civic ideal of mass access trumped the elitist ideal of exclusivity in shaping the commercialization of the telephone. The telegraph did not become widely accessible until 1910, sixty-five years after the first fee-for-service telegraph line opened in 1845. *Network Nation* places the history of telecommunications within the broader context of American politics, business, and discourse. This engrossing and provocative book persuades us of the critical role of political economy in the development of new technologies and their implementation.

This is a valuable book on the technological and economic trends that impacted the popularization of the telephone, one of the most profoundly significant inventions in the record of humanity. To understand the history of American telecommunications is to attend to the political economies at the time technological innovation occurred. John brilliantly articulates this context. Shifting municipal and federal sensibilities always shaped the diffusion of technologies, even in times where strong federal governmental oversight did not yet exist. The threat of federal and municipal government ownership of telecommunication systems was real, as seen in the case of the Bell system (and its failure).--Jim Hahn "Library Journal" "A foundational business history that will be an essential component of what well-educated Americans need to know about their society.--Richard White, Stanford University In a compact, learned-yet-lucid, and deeply informed book spanning roughly eight decades, Richard R. John provides an engrossing history of the emergence of telecommunication networks in the United States.--David A. Hounshell, Carnegie Mellon University Could it be that Americans actually like communications monopolists? Do we want dominant firms to run our world? Richard R. John's splendid book helps to answer that question by telling us just where this American affection for info-monopoly came from. John has produced a detailed study of the grand-daddies of it all: ATT and Western Union, the first great info-monopolists, whose role in communications history is similar to that of the Allosaurus and the T. rex in the history of the animal kingdom. A work of careful history based on archival research, "Network Nation" begins with Samuel Morse's construction of the first electric telegraph line in 1844 and concludes with the establishment of ATT (or Bell, a term that can be used interchangeably with ATT) as America's regulated telephone monopoly What "Network Nation" does deliver is a nuanced answer to the basic question, why monopoly?--Tim Wu "New Republic" (06/09/2011) "Network Nation" is an extraordinary feat of scholarly imagination. Richard John's sweeping history of the telecommunications industry reveals as much about the development of the American state and of the culture of technology as about the rise of a troubled monopoly. Like Alfred Chandler's "The Visible Hand", it is one of few institutional studies that anyone with a serious interest in U.S. history should read.--Michael Kazin, author of "A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan" The innovators who built America's telecommunication networks created more than new devices. With elegant prose and exhaustive research, Richard R. John's eagerly awaited masterwork shows how business and governmental institutions shaped the first century of the

telegraph and the telephone.--Pamela Walker Laird, author of "Pull: Networking and Success since Benjamin Franklin" About the Author Richard R. John is Professor of History at Columbia University.