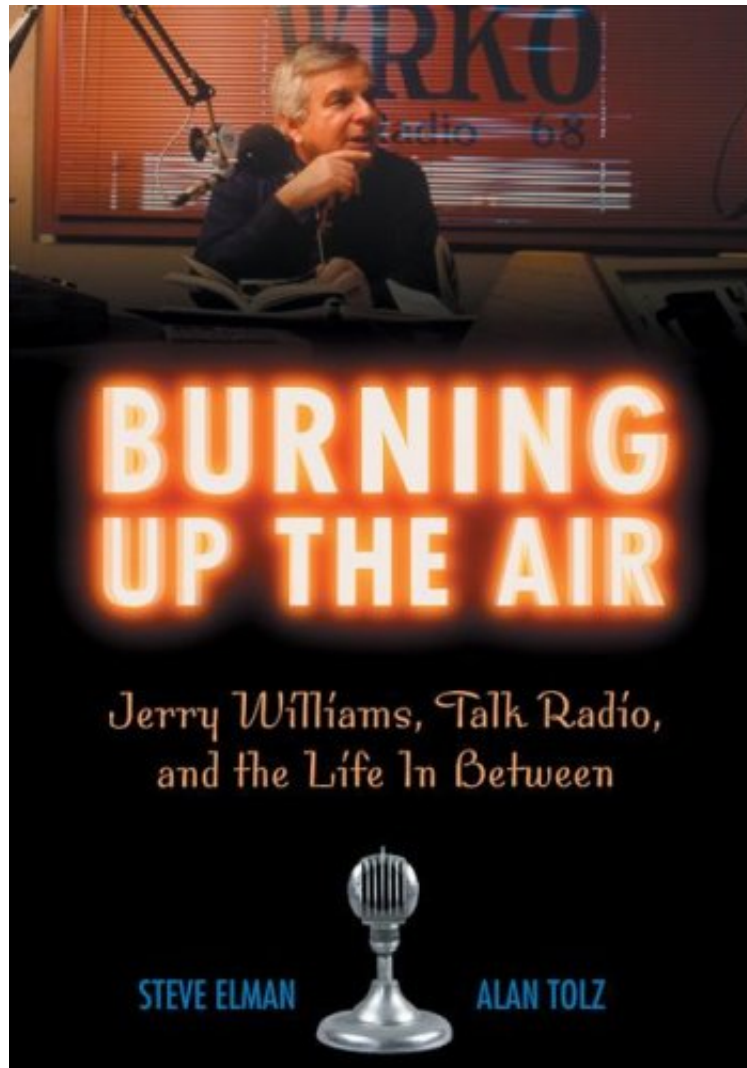


(Read free) Burning Up the Air: Jerry Williams, Talk Radio, and the Life In Between

## Burning Up the Air: Jerry Williams, Talk Radio, and the Life In Between

Steve Elman, Alan Tolz

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**Steve Elman, Alan Tolz : Burning Up the Air: Jerry Williams, Talk Radio, and the Life In Between** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Burning Up the Air: Jerry Williams, Talk Radio, and the Life In Between:

9 of 11 people found the following review helpful. The real world is so much more interesting! By Paul Tognetti No doubt about it. Jerry Williams was the real deal. As a young broadcaster in the early 1950's Jerry Williams recognized the enormous potential of two-way talk radio. Rock roll was great for young audiences but with the demise of network

radio and the emergence of television what would radio have to offer adult listeners? Before just about anyone else, Jerry understood the fascinating dynamic at play between callers, the host and the audience. And for the better part of the next four decades Jerry Williams would play a major role in shaping and molding the format we now call talk radio. "Burning Up The Air" chronicles the life and times of this legendary radio icon. My introduction to Jerry Williams came on July 29, 1968 when the highly touted "Jerry Williams Show" debuted on WBZ-TV in Boston. I remember it like it was yesterday. Although that television show would be short-lived, the host sure made one hell of an impression on this 17 year old. Within a matter of weeks I found "The Spirit of New England" WBZ--1030 on my AM radio dial and I quickly became hooked on Jerry's nightly radio program. By this time, Jerry Williams had already spent more than 15 years in the business. He was a master at his craft. One of the co-authors of "Burning Up The Air" is Steve Elman. Steve had the distinct privilege of producing "The Jerry Williams Show" for a time during the programs eight year run on WBZ radio from 8:00 P.M. to midnight. This was appointment listening for sure. What made the "Jerry Williams Show" so compelling during those troubled times was that WBZ's booming 50000 watt signal reached 38 states at night. This was in effect a national issues-oriented radio talk show, most likely the first of its kind anywhere. "Burning Up The Air" recalls all of the hot-button issues that were being discussed on the program during those tumultuous years. From the Vietnam war and the anti-war activists to Dita Beard and the ITT scandal and on to Tricky Dicky and Watergate, Jerry Williams covered it all! In fact, he was even a proud member of Richard Nixon's "Enemy's List". More than three decades later I would have to point to those shows as the best talk radio I ever heard! Sadly, in 1976 WBZ chose not to renew Jerry's contract. For the next five years Jerry Williams was in radio limbo searching for just the right situation to get back on top. It was one of the most difficult periods of his life. The worm would finally turn for Jerry in the summer of 1981. WRKO radio in Boston was dumping music in favor of a new all-talk format and they wanted to feature Jerry Williams in the afternoon drive slot from 2:00 to 6:00. This was a time slot that Jerry had always coveted. He jumped at the opportunity to return to the Hub and within a matter of months Jerry was on top of the heap once again. But in this incarnation of his program the focus was radically different. Jerry would primarily discuss local issues. In those days his primary targets were Boston mayor Kevin White and Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis. Of course when circumstances dictated Jerry was still quite capable of discussing topics of national concern. The other co-author of "Burning Up The Air" is Alan Tolz. Like Steve Elman before him, Alan would produce the "Jerry Williams Show" during a good portion of its highly successful run on WRKO. You will learn just what issues made the show tick during the 1980's. There was the attempt to make wearing seatbelts mandatory in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the proposal to build a maximum security prison facility in the rural community of New Braintree. Once again, this was compelling radio that reached a huge audience. The program would continue to be a ratings success until late in the 1980's when Jerry's increasingly acerbic style began to wear on listeners. Within a few years Jerry was consigned to weekends only on WRKO and his run on The Talk Station would finally come to an end in October 1998. While most of the focus of "Burning Up The Air" is on Jerry's radio career, the authors chose to spend a fair amount of time discussing his personal life. I was quite surprised and extremely disappointed to learn that in many ways it was a mess. It would appear that Jerry always put his work and career ahead of the interests of his wife Teri and his three daughters. He was simply never there for them. Likewise, he seemed to have no qualms about cheating on his wife and even on his live-in girlfriend of many years. It was a side of him that I knew nothing about. It also appears that Jerry was very tight with a buck. But one must try to separate the private life from the public persona. As a lifelong fan of the man I greatly appreciated the work that Steve Elman and Alan Tolz put into this book. For them, writing "Burning Up The Air" appears to have been a labor of love. For both of these men had the distinct honor of working with one of talk radio's true pioneers. Jerry Williams was inducted into the Radio Hall of Fame in the fall of 1996. There will never be another quite like him. I found this to be an extremely well written book that I enjoyed from cover to cover. It belongs on the shelves of every public library in the Bay State! Very highly recommended! 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Boston Radio and Beyond By Victor W Okay, this was written by a buddy of mine, and I worked in Boston radio for a number of years, years ago. And so I'm biased. But for anyone into talk radio, Boston radio, business history (Westinghouse Group W) and of course Jerry Williams, this is a must read. Nicely put into historic and personal context, the stories illustrate the times and the people, not necessarily in a nostalgic way, but in a way that brings the times alive once again. Nice job Steve! and the other guy... Vic Wheatman ex-WBUR, WNTN, WBZ-FM3 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Not a bad guy By Richard Morchoe The year was either 1957 or 1958. The volume on my radio was low enough so that my parents could not hear it downstairs. I was listening to early rock and roll when I should have been sleeping. Usually, I tired quickly, turned off the red motorola set and fell asleep. One night, not being sleepy after the 10:00 p.m. news, I heard the promo for the next show. Thinking it might be more music, I kept listening. It wasn't song, it was a force of nature. It was Jerry Williams, the man who was pioneering talk radio in the Boston area. He can claim as much as anyone to have invented the genre. From the mid-fifties to the new millennium he was on Boston Radio with a few breaks for a mid-life crisis here and there. For much of the time, Williams was the dominant radio personality in the market. Two of his many producers have collected everything that could be found about the man and have talked to everyone they could to put together a biography that is a page turner. Burning Up the Air, Jerry

Williams, Talk Radio and the Life In Between reads as if it were a labor of love. Not that the authors, Steve Elman and Alan Tolz, were likely to be above wanting to throttle the man on occasion. From their tales, it is obvious Williams could try the patience of a saint. Its all in the book. How he probed callers to get a story or an answer. Occasionally, when he found himself battling with a particularly, unreasonable caller, he would shoot out a familiar line: Theyre out there tonight! Later, as he aged, and even though you knew he would do nothing else but radio, he would vent his frustration by shouting, Im getting out of the business. A high school drop-out, actually, a high school flunk-out, Jerry still had an expert knowledge of many issues. But it was not only mere knowledge, it was what he knew how to position that information that set him apart. The authors make the point about how he knew how to select the hottest topics for discussion, how to set things up in an hour, how to strike sparks in an interview, how to smoke out and shape good calls, how to keep the momentum going. Todays crop of talkers dont really seem to be as skillful as Williams. There is another aspect of his popularity that I had never thought about before reading this book. While one may not call his voice operatic, it was pleasant and in no way grating as are many on the radio today. Elman and Tolz discussed his training under a mentor. Jerry had a voice described as a high baritone. His acting coach, Bob Breyer, told him how to use the voice and through training in radio plays, Williams must have learned something. Through the book, one can recognize the political changes in Massachusetts and the nation such that Jerry, uber liberal through the first part of his career, was by the end considered a conservative by many. He never thought he went through a metamorphosis from one political view to another. The authors describe his outlook, Jerry had always presented himself on and of the air as his own man. Since the late sixties, hed been uncomfortable with labels of all sorts. When forced to choose from conventional terms, he might opt for liberal, even when he felt that what had come to be known as liberalism had moved toward something completely alien to his feeling about the role of government. He was uncomfortable with Dukakis in power as he had been with Nixon. He probably gagged at the description by a Boston Globe writer, Clea Simon, that he had purveyed conservative chat. The structure of the book is chronological except for the last chapter. The authors intersperse a timeline of the major national and world events that are happening contemporaneously so one is never lost for the era. Event follows event in sequence and the reader will be through it in no time. He was not a perfect man and the authors present him, in the words of Oliver Cromwell, warts and all. Im not sure how it will resonate with anyone who has never heard of him. After all, his show, no matter the issue and the impact, was personal. The authors have a website ([...]) with a lot of audio clips that might give a small flavor for the man. Many folks in this area got to experience Jerry during the campaign to stop the New Braintree prison. There was a big Saturday on the New Braintree Common. Williams was there as more or less MC. Next to him was a mock up of Michael Dukakis. During a lull, Jerry all of a sudden, with perfect delivery, said, and now a word from Kitty (Dukakis). Pause. MEOW. The crowd convulsed in laughter. It should have been in the book. One other item that should have been in the book was that he was the only supporter of busing who ever admitted that it had all been a mistake. He always seemed to be full of himself, but Ive never heard anyone else admit it. As Jerry used to say of people he felt okay about, he was not a bad guy. Of course, Elman and Tolz couldnt include every minute of his life. No matter, there is a lot covering an interesting man and his times. He did not engender neutrality in people. You either loved or hated him. I dont know what was written as the cause of death on his certificate, but Im sure it was not a dearth of personality.

One of the pioneers of talk radio was also one of Boston's most controversial commentators. This biography follows Williams's colorful fifty-year career from the mid-1950s until his recent death.

"Long before Imus and Carr, there was Jerry Williams, a talk-radio pioneer who took aim at the Hub's politicians and the outrages they trafficked in. This bio (the authors are both former producers for Williams, who died in 2003) makes like quality radio: no cheap superficiality, or lingering on any one point. Fast-paced and crisply written, it succeeds at placing William's rise and fall in vivid historical context. As the host would have wanted, there is no dead air in this show." -- Boston Magazine, March, 2008

About the Author Steve Elman was born in Rochester, New York. In 1972, he began producing "The Jerry Williams Show" for WBZ in Boston and worked with Williams through the end of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. During his thirty years with public radio station WBUR, he was host of music programs and became assistant general manager as the station became one of Boston's most important sources of new information. He lives in Brighton, Massachusetts. Alan Tolz was born in Philadelphia. In 1979, he became executive producer for WWDB-FM in his hometown, where he began producing "The Jerry Williams Show." At WRKO in Boston, he was William's right-hand man during the anti-seatbelt law campaign. He is presently executive vice president and chief operating officer for Marlin Broadcasting. He lives in Bedford, New Hampshire.