

TELEVISION QUARTERLY

VOLUME XXXVI
NUMBER 2
WINTER 2006

An Emmy for a Podcast!

BY JOHN CAREY AND LAWRENCE GREENBERG

What Now for Audience Ratings?

BY SUSAN WHITING

How to Save Public Broadcasting

BY MARY G. F. BITTERMAN

Eyewitness to History

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
WITH PETER JENNINGS
BY EVERETTE DENNIS AND
HUNTINGTON WILLIAMS



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And the Emmy Goes to.... A Mobisode?

The potential impact of such non-traditional viewing devices as computers, mobile phones, iPods, PDAs and portable media players.

By John Carey and Lawrence Greenberg

In November, 2005, the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences announced that it is establishing a new Emmy category for original programming created specifically for non-traditional viewing devices such as computers, mobile phones, iPods, PDAs and portable media players. It cannot be repurposed programming such as an episode of *Lost* that is distributed to iPods as well as carried on regular television. It must be original made-for-broadband or made-for-mobile programming. The Emmy announcement challenges many of our assumptions about the economic models for television, how to produce appealing content, and who controls the television industry. In simple terms, it has expanded our perspective about what we mean by “television.”

Emmys have been awarded for advances in technology but this is

the first time the National Television Academy has designated an Emmy for content that is distributed through non-traditional viewing technologies — devices other than television sets. The new Emmy category covers a broad range of video content and will require that we all learn the terminology for these new forms of programming, such as vlogs (video Web logs), mobisodes (video episodes for mobile devices), and IPTV (internet protocol television).

The Emmys were created to recognize creative expression in a new technology: television.

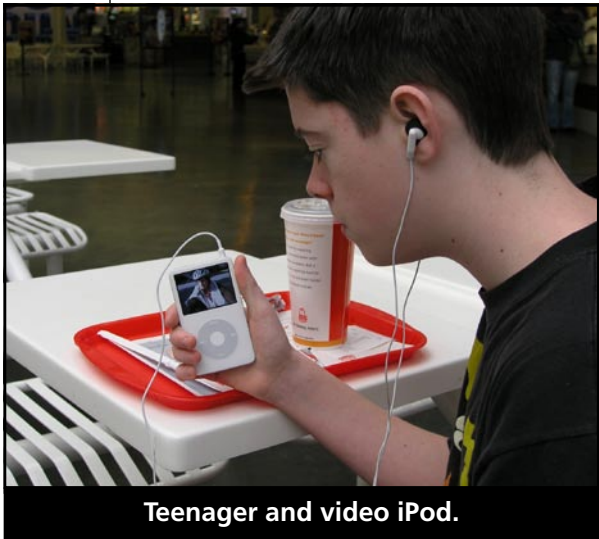
The Emmys have a long association with new technologies. Indeed, the Emmys were created to recognize creative expression in a new technology: television. The term Emmy is actually a feminized version of “Immy,” a nickname for the image-orthicon camera tube that was used in early

TV cameras. In the 1950s, Emmys were awarded for live programs and programs on kinescope, the latter a means of recording TV before the advent of videotape. Later, many Emmys were awarded for advances in technology and engineering. However, there were no awards for content that appeared on videocassettes or cable television when they entered the scene. There was very little content created specifically for videocassettes. Cable at first had little original programming. When new content began to appear on cable, it became eligible for Emmys as part of the mix of broadcast and cable content.

The latest Emmy signals that we are entering a new ballgame for video content with many characteristics of viewing and production that are very different from traditional television. As NATAS president Peter Price observed, “The new video environment is boundary-less. There is no local, no national, no daytime, no prime time.” It is largely without a schedule and can be viewed almost anywhere since many of these devices are portable. Another important characteristic of the new viewing environment is that most of the mobile devices have very small screens. What do these characteristics mean for the content that will be created and how people view it?

Small TV Screens Make A Comeback

Television historians will point out that the new small-screen TV environment is a throwback to the earliest days of television Television



Teenager and video iPod.

was introduced to the world about 80 years ago as a small screen medium. In one of the first public demonstrations of television – a mechanical system using spinning discs – on April 7, 1927, Herbert Hoover, then U.S. Secretary of Commerce, was televised giving a speech over a 2” x 3” screen. Most televisions before World War II consisted of very small screens encased in large, ornate, radio-like cabinets. For the privileged few who watched the new medium, television screens were synonymous with tiny pictures.

Mobile television was also envisaged in the early days. In 1941, *Radio Craft* magazine proclaimed “Car Television Is Here!” offering circuitry details and featuring a photograph of a man attempting to tune a tiny television embedded in the middle of the dashboard. There is no evidence that a working version was ever built. In fact, it was almost two decades later, in 1959, that Philco introduced the first practical consumer mobile television to the market – a battery-powered model known as the Safari. Accessorized with a leather carrying case, it had a two-

inch projection screen that offered a narrow viewing range.

Over the decades, the popular press periodically reported on advances toward what was considered the holy grail of portable electronics – the Dick Tracy television watch, modeled on the fictional comic strip. In 1982, Seiko introduced such a watch with a 1 1/4-inch black-and-white screen and attachable ear piece (it was not, however, the two-way TV transmitter depicted in the Dick Tracy comics.) Around the same time, looking to create a video companion to its highly successful audiocassette Walkman, Sony introduced its Watchman, with a 1.5-inch screen.

None of these devices caught on with the public. One possible reason is that the TVs were designed to play only local stations. This would have meant sporadic, fuzzy reception as users moved from one place to the next. An even greater challenge – and one still faced by the latest generation of portable video devices – was limited battery life.

One of the key selling points of these new devices is that they free a viewer from schedules.

Today's small-screen mobile televisions aren't televisions at all – they're cell phones, iPods, laptops and a host of other devices that were originally designed to do something else — make a phone call, answer emails or listen to music. As storage capacity and processing power increased, along with improved battery life, they became multifunction devices, including in some cases, the ability to store and display television content. In this sense,

mobile TV is a stealth application, arriving inside the Trojan Horse of other platforms.

While it is still very early in the development of video content for these services and usage patterns by consumers, there are some clues in the characteristics of the devices and feedback from early users about where things may be headed. Aside from small screens, these devices generally have lower frame rates than regular TV sets, typically 10 to 15 frames per second versus 30 frames per second on regular TVs. This means that some details can get lost, wide-angle shots may not work so well and fast action such as sports can be blurry. Over time, as broadband gets even faster and a next generation of cell-phone networks is deployed, frame rates and resolution will improve. A second key feature of these devices, related to small screen size and the shape of the devices, is that people must *hold* them at a close distance. This compensates for small screen size but it places a burden on the viewer to hold the device steady and

at close range. It may affect the length of time people are willing to watch video content without taking a break and putting the device down or in a pocket. Some people we have interviewed say that if they are watching a 30-minute show on an iPod or cell phone, they break up the viewing time into 5- or 10-minute segments, opting to multitask — that is, receive a phone call, check email or listen to music between video sessions. This viewing pattern may impose program lengths for handheld video devices that are much shorter than the typical 30- or 60-minute programs on regular

television. In fact, much of the current content for these devices is only a few minutes long.

Current wisdom is that mobile video is not conducive to group viewing and this appears to be generally true. It is not just the case that the screen is small, but people often listen to the video with earbuds or earphones that can only be used by one person at a time. However, we've observed some video "segment sharing" behavior with these devices, much like the way teenagers share a photo they've just taken on a cellphone, or received via email, with others. With video, it is often a funny segment or a clip about something a person thinks a friend would like to see.

One of the key selling points of these new devices is that in most cases they free a viewer from schedules. Content is available anytime through streaming or it can be downloaded, stored and viewed whenever and wherever a person wants. This means that television programming can fit into a person's schedule, rather than having to arrange one's schedule in order to catch a favorite show. It also means that content can be viewed anywhere: on a train, during a lunch break at work, while waiting at a doctor's office and even in the bathroom (new competition for newspapers and magazines). On the downside, what will this mean for "water cooler TV" — the often-reported phenomenon of people who like to chat around a water cooler at work or over the phone about a show that everyone watched *last night*? Depending on how business models, technology and the law evolves, some forms of water-cooler TV may be replaced by "shared TV" in which a person shares favorite content

with others and then chats about it with them later.

In terms of sheer numbers, the bulk of available content comes from amateurs.

In reviewing the content on the new devices, some critics have offered comments about what works and doesn't work visually — for example, how bright objects in a scene can wash out and obscure darker objects. It will take time for the program producers — both professional and amateur — to develop the technical and artistic skills to create visually appealing content for these new media.

Some of the content available for streaming or download to a laptop, iPod, cellphones or other non-traditional video players is repurposed content from entertainment conglomerates such as NBC Universal, Time Warner and Viacom. Episodes of *Lost* or edited clips from *Survivor* will not be eligible for the new Emmy. Original content comes from many sources, including some of the media giants, independent production groups, and amateurs. For example, The News Corporation, parent of Fox Television, has created an original, spin-off series of its popular show *24* (the new series is called *24: Conspiracy*), that contains 60-second mobisodes designed to be downloaded and viewed on cell phones. Apple has announced that Pixar Animation Studios will create six short animated films that will debut on the video iPod. Independent production company JibJab Media has created a series of animated films available for download. Their popular animated spoof of the last presidential campaign received

80 million downloads. In addition, the Knight Foundation is funding public television to create video for the Web and other non-traditional TV environments. In terms of sheer numbers, the bulk of available content comes from amateurs. One aggregator of video blogs, MeFeedia.com, has over 100,000 videos created primarily by more than 3,000 amateurs. Ithaca College has even created a video festival for 30 second programs that must be shot on and distributed to cell phones (see www.cellflixfestival.org).

Amateur videos vary considerably in quality, from boring monologues to creative and unique stories that are well designed for the new media. Anyone creating original content for the new video technologies is eligible to submit their content for Emmy consideration. This opens a door for content producers who would find it difficult to break into the established media. It is an opportunity to be discovered and to introduce change, which the major media groups should welcome.

In a sign that this is a serious endeavor, the major U.S. cell phones carriers have adopted a content rating system, modeled on the TV and film rating systems, for all content that they sell to subscribers. This doesn't affect content that is downloaded from the Web to cell phones.

In the 1960s, Canadian scholar Marshall McLuhan shook up the media world with a series of bold theories and claims. It was McLuhan who coined the phrase, "the medium is the message," to indicate that media are not just conveyers of content but shapers of the content they transmit. He argued that television strongly influences how we perceive the world through our



habitual use of this medium over time and that this had a major impact on attitudes about the Vietnam War, race relations and others issues of the day. McLuhan categorized media by degrees of *hot* or *cool*. Hot media include radio and print because little physical interpretation is required by the ear or eye. He described television as a cool medium, since the viewer must become involved in creating an image in the mind from flickering, low-resolution pictures on the screen. In McLuhan's terms, high-definition television would be hotter than regular TV and low-frame-rate video on a cell phone would be cooler than regular TV.

McLuhan believed certain personality types, which he also called *cool*, were suited for the TV screen and others were not. His most famous examples of *cool* versus *hot* personality were John Kennedy and Richard Nixon in their presidential debates. Kennedy had a cool, ambiguous personality that suited him well for television; Nixon was hard-edged and hot, which, according to McLuhan suited him for radio. People who watched the first debate on TV thought that Kennedy came across better; those who heard it on radio

thought that Nixon won. McLuhan also argued that television *selected* entertainers who would become popular because they had cool personalities, for example Jack Paar.

What would McLuhan have made of this new era of high- and low-definition images, wide-ranging screen sizes, and seating distances from TV that vary from several feet to a few inches? In McLuhan terms, large-screen HDTVs provide more realism, create excitement and should favor content with a big impact; small screen TV, watched at a close distance, is more intimate and should support low intensity content. Small-screen TVs may also rely more on the audio track to convey meaning and fill in details that are not clear in the video.

Non-traditional video devices such as laptops, iPods and cell phones are an emerging category and producers are just beginning to carve out a unique marketplace niche. We don't know yet if it will be a substitute for regular television programs when the traditional TV set is not available or a unique medium with unique content. The new Emmy represents a bet that creative and unique content will emerge.

From a business perspective, it is unclear whether the emerging small-screen and often mobile TV environment will be paid for by consumers, advertisers or a combination of both. It is a new market in which the television industry will try to capture a larger share of disposable time, either time outside the home or time within the home that has been lost to Web surfing. Media giants will compete with independent producers and amateurs. Large

budgets and expensive production equipment may not matter as much in the small-screen environment as in large-screen television. Distribution will also be different. Broadcasters, cable companies and satellite operators will not be the powerful gatekeepers for content as they are in traditional television. In their place, we will have cellphone companies, hardware manufacturers such as Apple and open-distribution networks on the Web. In the Web environment, we also have video aggregators and search engines.

From a creative perspective, will the new video environment lead to new types of communication and story telling? Will filmed entertainment for tiny screens consist primarily of talking heads and very simple images, animation or something else? Who will be the stars in the new video environment? Will mobile television be a portable radio with pictures, in which dialogue must carry the weight of the narrative? Given the likely time restrictions for content, will dialogue be constrained or will time become a source of artistic creativity as it has with television commercials, which also have time restrictions?

The outcome is uncertain but it will be an exciting time ahead. By 2010, the world of television – big and small – could be a very different place for content producers and viewers.

John Carey is Professor of Communications and Media Management at Fordham Business School. His research focuses on consumer adoption of new media and the impact of technology on media behavior. Lawrence Greenberg is a New York-based writer and communications consultant.

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What Now for Audience- Measurement Techniques?

Nielsen chief spotlights challenges of the digital revolution that enable viewers to watch in their own time. | **By Susan Whiting**

The autumn of 2005 may well be remembered as television's tipping point. A parade of media deals between Labor Day and Christmas confirmed that change in the industry is not only inevitable, but accelerating.

Apple's agreement with ABC, and subsequently NBC, to deliver several of their programs via the iPod drew the most headlines.

Yet, within a span of just a few weeks, there were a series of groundbreaking handshakes between conventional and new media companies.

For example, NBC Universal announced it was hooking up with Wurld Media to make its movie and television content available over legitimate peer-to-peer services. The network also partnered with Time

Warner Cable to allow cable customers to use Time Warner's "Start Over" service to rewind and watch its shows already in progress. And TiVo planned to let users transfer any recorded program, not just to iPods, but also to Sony's PlayStation Portable.

The TV neighborhood is bound to get even more disruptive as digital technologies dismantle the walls that have historically separated media.

If, as the poet Robert Frost once counseled, "good fences make good neighbors," the TV neighborhood is bound to get even more disruptive as digital technologies dismantle the walls that have historically separated media.

The ability to convert all forms of information into seemingly endless streams of ones and zeroes is enabling a host of media companies to fiercely



The author, Susan Whiting, president and CEO of Nielsen Media Research.

compete for audience attention and advertiser dollars.

The implications of all of this are enormous. Can networks afford to fund high-quality programs if they no longer attract mass audiences? Will advertisers find new ways to connect with consumers at every possible touch point, ensuring their messages are seen and heard no matter how media are used?

The answers to these and a great many other questions depend – in large part – on how well ratings agencies like Nielsen Media Research can accurately measure all forms of television viewing so that a true value can be given to the audiences delivered.

Along with our sister companies at VNU-AC Nielsen, Nielsen Entertainment and Nielsen/NetRatings – Nielsen Media Research measures audience attitudes and advertising exposure to television, radio, music, the Internet, video games, DVDs, DVRs, Video on Demand, iPods, outdoor, movies in the theater and rented on video, book sales, direct mail and

brands that appear in places like sports stadiums and arenas.

In other words, if audiences can watch it, listen to it, read, see or interact with it, we measure their activities.

Change has always been a part of our DNA at Nielsen; and while we have continually enhanced the ways we collect, process and report ratings data for more than a half-a-century, perhaps the most dramatic improvements to our systems can be found, not in the last 50 years, but over the past three.

During this time, Americans have been awash with media.

According to a study by Nielsen Entertainment, the average home currently has nearly 100 television channels from which to choose. Not only do 80 percent of these households subscribe to multi-channel program sources like cable or satellite TV, but the number subscribing to both has more than doubled over the past seven years.

In addition, some 86 percent of households have more than one TV set; while about 44 percent have at least three.

This explosion of media has been abetted by the unmistakable arrival of broadband. Last year marked the first time more American households accessed the Internet via high-speed, broadband than with slower dial-up connections.

The ability of broadband to support multiple systems simultaneously, and its capacity to adapt to different applications, has opened the media floodgates.

Telecommunication firms SBC and Verizon, for example, are spending

billions of dollars to build fiber-optic networks that will deliver on-demand and high-definition programs directly to the home. Hardware manufacturers such as Sony, and software giants like Microsoft, plan to provide the devices and applications that will enable audiences to enjoy TV and other media through single, integrated systems. Plus Internet pioneers are following the lead of Yahoo! CEO Terry Semel, who has vowed to make Yahoo! a media company that will produce and distribute content in entirely new ways.

Wave after wave of new competitors is having considerable impact on television viewing.

When I first started at Nielsen in 1978, it was common for the whole family to get together in front of one TV to watch their favorite shows – from start to finish. Entire prime-time schedules were built on the assumption that once the set was tuned to a particular channel, it probably would stay there all night.

Now, with most homes having multiple TV sets, it's rare for more than a couple of family members to watch a program together. It's even more unlikely they will watch an entire show without flipping to other channels. As a result, few programs regularly attract the percentage of audiences their predecessors once did.

Back in 1978, the most popular show on TV was *Laverne & Shirley*, with a 31.6 household rating. By 2004, however, the number one program, *American Idol*, had a 14.9 rating. In fact, all of the top 20 shows in 1978 had higher ratings than *American Idol*.

If it were just a matter of vying with

competitors, the challenges to television would be formidable enough. But, at times, the medium finds itself at odds with its audiences as well; particularly younger viewers.

They are the first generation to grow up digital, and are often more technologically sophisticated than older viewers. Research by Nielsen Entertainment has found that households with children under the age of 17 are more likely to be early and multiple-technology adopters.

The ability of broadband to support multiple systems simultaneously... has opened the media floodgates.

Moreover, this new generation is just beginning to flex its technological and economic muscles. As their elders wrestle with the implications of transforming all forms of text, sounds and images into ones and zeroes, many more young people are at ease with the process.

They have an almost instinctive ability to take different objects and combine them in entirely new ways, like unbundling linear TV schedules with digital video recorders and Video-on-Demand services. And they have fully embraced the notion of having their TV wherever they go.

Increasing competition and more empowered consumers are recasting television, and no one can say for certain how and where it may end up. But one thing we at Nielsen do know for sure is that neither we nor the industry have the luxury of waiting around for answers. Because any medium that is under-measured is under-valued.

Accordingly, Nielsen has been developing the means to measure

continually changing viewer behavior in an ever-expanding digital environment; tracking audiences wherever they happen to be and on whatever devices they are using, whether it is a television set, iPod, cell phone or other mobile devices.

Over the course of more than a decade, and at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars, we have been exploring and testing a vast array of methods and technologies: set meters and portable meters; software systems and platforms; wireless and infrared; passive and active; measurements that can be mailed or sent via the Internet and measurements that must be installed; measurement devices that deliver enormous amounts of detail, and those that deliver much less.

In the process, we have transformed our ratings systems from a model designed to gauge household fixed media to a click-stream system that tracks individual use and media exposure.

The initial result has been a new metering system we call the Active/Passive (A/P) meter, which will serve as the cornerstone for measuring time-shifted viewing activity.

The A/P meter is the only complete multi-engine metering system that actively tracks audio codes embedded in content, and also reads backup passive audio signatures to ensure all programs and viewing sources are accurately rated.

Once a program's content is encoded, we can track it wherever it goes, and determine what program a viewer is watching, as well as what network, station or distributor is serving up the program. Presently, between 80 and 90

percent of national content is encoded. At the local level, more than half of all content in the major Local People Meter markets also is encoded.

This enables Nielsen to measure a broad range of analog, digital, broadband and high-definition video, including time-shifting devices now and standard Video on Demand in the near future. Before the end of this year, we also will be able to offer ratings for on-demand programs that are not part of regular programming, such as movie libraries and archives of old shows – provided the content is encoded.

We often find that technology demands are dwarfed by the challenges we face getting our various clients to agree on anything having to do with audience measurements.

Furthermore, an advanced generation of portable software engineering, now under development, can measure consumers' remote access to video via a computer or cell phone.

To further enhance our ability to keep track of audiences on the go, we also are working with Arbitron to learn if Portable People Meter technology is suitable for television-audience measurement. The PPM is a small device that is worn or carried like a pager and, in theory, can record what consumers watch on television no matter where they happen to be.

We recognize the potential of a metering system that can effectively estimate how much TV exposure happens outside the home. However, there is still more work to be done before the system proves viable.

These initiatives are just some in a series of ongoing innovations to improve the quality of television ratings. Yet we often find that technology demands are dwarfed by the challenges we face in getting our various clients to agree on anything having to do with audience measurements.

We spend much of our time trying to negotiate a path for change among advertisers, their agencies, broadcast and cable networks, local television stations and syndicators – all with competing, and sometimes conflicting interests. Our decision to measure time-shifted viewing is a perfect example. Last year, we decided to report the ratings data based on three streams of viewing:

- 1) Live** – Those who view programs at the time they initially are aired, excluding any DVR playback.
- 2) Live+SD** – Live viewers and those who played back programs on a DVR within one day of the initial airing.
- 3) Live+7** – Live viewers and those who played back programs on a DVR within a week of the initial airing.

The mere mention of time-shifted ratings raises strong feelings on both sides of the buy-sell equation. But this issue, like so many others, will

ultimately be settled by a combination of forces, including the influence of consumers.

To be sure, no matter how much television changes, viewers will play an increasingly important role; and they remain loyal to the medium.

According to our research, TV viewing was 2.7 percent higher last season than the season before. It also was 12.5 percent higher than 10 years ago; and the highest level ever recorded by Nielsen in 50 years.

What is more, that allegiance continues to attract advertising dollars. Over the past two years, total television ad spending has risen in excess of one billion dollars to more than \$70 billion.

Certainly, audiences will go on splintering; power will increasingly shift to the viewers; businesses will collide and converge in attempts to create new methods for reaching the anywhere / anytime consumer; and television will become different things to different people.

Indeed, for every “early adopter” who has embraced iPods, DVRs and Video-on-Demand, there still are scores of “traditionalists” who prefer to watch TV the old-fashioned way. In the face of this ferment, some things won’t change. Advertisers will still need media. Media will need advertisers. And both will continue to need audience research of the highest quality.

Susan Whiting, President and CEO of Nielsen Media Research, joined the firm in 1978 after graduating from Dennison University, assigned to a unit developing new approaches for measuring the emerging medium of cable television. She has since been General Manager of National Services and Emerging Markets and Chief Operating Officer and also currently serves as Executive Vice President of VNU’s Media Measurement and Information Group.

How to Save Public Broadcasting

A veteran public broadcasting executive prescribes a solution for the beleaguered enterprise.

By **Mary G.F. Bitterman**

Our public television service came into being in 1951, when Frieda Hennock persuaded her fellow FCC commissioners to reserve 209 television channels for educational use. Commercial television was already established — we are the only country in the world in which



The late Fred Rogers, longtime host of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

commercial broadcasting preceded public broadcasting. This put us at a certain disadvantage, but an array of bright, irrepressible people saw the great promise of public television and overcame many difficulties to launch it in communities across America. They started in Houston and East Lansing, then moved on to Pittsburgh, Madison, San Francisco, and in 1963 to Los Angeles. Prominent among these pioneers was James Leaders Loper, whose middle name portended the mark he would make.

Larry Grossman, who succeeded Hartford Gunn as president of PBS, remembers Jim as one of American public broadcasting's most astute programmers — a person who took a weak UHF station in Los Angeles and turned it into a significant player with great productions such as *Hollywood Television Theater* and *American Playhouse*. And that wasn't all. Legendary programs such as *The Advocates* (with WGBH), *The Belle of Amherst*, *Cosmos* (one of the most

watched series in the history of public broadcasting), and *Meeting of the Minds* with Steve Allen, who considered the series his proudest achievement, also were part of the Loper legacy.

New generations have followed in Jim's footsteps, continuing to produce programming of superior quality, both locally and nationally. Children's programming from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, *Sesame Street* and *Reading Rainbow* has been augmented by new programs such as *Clifford*, *Arthur*, *Between the Lions*, *Maya and Miguel*, and *It's a Big, Big World*. Parents continue to appreciate the safe haven provided their children when watching public television. Teachers also are strong fans, using not only the television programs but the web content with curriculum guides, bibliographies, and educational games. Icon series, like *Nova*, *Great Performances*, *American Experience*, *Nature*, *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* and *Frontline* have been continually refreshed and are still recognized as America's truly great programs.

Special series from Bill Moyers, including *Death and Dying* and *Becoming American: The Chinese Experience* and from Ken Burns on the Civil War, baseball, and jazz along with Twin Cities Public Television's *The Forgetting: A Portrait of Alzheimer's* and *P.O.V.* and *Independent Lens*, which let fresh voices be heard, are programs that bring new relevance to the PBS lineup. PBS continues to win countless Emmys for its programs, and, more important, to earn the trust and confidence of the American people. Recent polls indicate that PBS is the most trusted national institution, more than the Congress,

the federal government, the courts, and the newspapers of the nation – truly, the “public trust” envisioned by the Second Carnegie Commission in its report of 1979.

Public broadcasters have been more alert to the promise of new technologies than many of their commercial counterparts.

Public broadcasters have moved forward also with new technologies, more alert to the promise of those technologies than many of their commercial counterparts. They follow in the tradition of the pioneering public broadcasters who took UHF channels and breathed real life into them; who worked with teachers to provide for off-air recording of program material for use in classrooms across America; who developed captioning for the hearing-impaired. They have linked public television stations through satellite interconnection, putting land lines behind them before commercial stations did. They have utilized the Internet as an important and distinctive educational platform, developing one of the most widely used dot-org site in the world (pbs.org). They have moved forward faster than many commercial peers with the federally-mandated but largely federally-unfunded conversion from analog to digital systems that cost nearly \$2 billion, and developed the first full digital channel dedicated to HDTV presentations.

Public broadcasters see the enormous potential in digital technology and are currently participating in a project called the Digital Future Initiative (DFI), which

has been supported by the MacArthur Foundation and PBS and chaired by James Barksdale, former CEO of Netscape, and Reed Hundt, former Chairman of the FCC. If today's public broadcasters can successfully adapt to the realities of an ever more fragmented market and to audience expectations of programming on demand and on whatever platform or device it desires — *and* if adequate resources can be acquired — the DFI panel believes that the “potential for enhanced public service” in areas such as education, civic engagement and emergency preparedness “is vast.”

There are, however, some difficult challenges to be faced. Consider the problem of structure and governance. We have

169 public television licensees in the membership of PBS, operating 348 stations across the country. Each station, whether licensed to a community group, a university, a school board, or a state, is a sovereign entity, with its own Board of Directors, management, strategic plan, broadcast schedule, “culture,” and rate card for production and local underwriting. Each has developed distinctive partnerships within its community and has its own record of public service, along with its own history of successes and failures. America is known for its individualism, and public broadcasting is individualism writ large!

Nonetheless, in the wake of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, public television stations banded together to create PBS — the Public Broadcasting Service — so that they could accomplish together what they could not accomplish alone. PBS was created

to provide for the interconnection of stations, the distribution of programs, and other services to advance the members' interests, both local and national. PBS prepares a national program schedule through acquisition and the commissioning of new programs, mainly from a small number of member stations and selected independent producers, although there are other program suppliers, including APT and NETA. There is also a separate entity, called America's Public Television Stations (APTS), created in 1980, that is responsible for lobbying and representational efforts.

“American public television is really a series of meetings interrupted by an occasional program.”

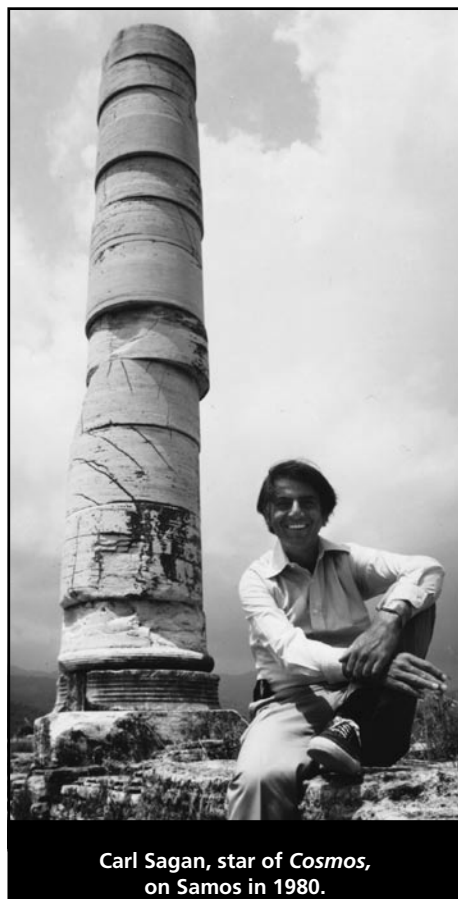
It is sometimes asked whether PBS is a media organization or a membership organization. Is its primary focus on objectives of its own or in furthering the objectives of the member stations? And does it further the objectives of one set of member stations over those of others? These questions must be addressed in order to relieve the persistent tension within the local/national partnership.

To appreciate the complexity of the organizational picture, consider also the affinity groups, as they are called, which have grown up largely around the four different types of licensee: state networks (20), universities (56), small stations, with licenses sometimes held by school boards or municipal authorities (6), and major markets, with licenses held by the communities (87). These affinity groups provide opportunities for same-licensee types to look at the world through a single lens

and to sharing of experience that may be both instructive and reassuring. There is also a group consisting of the non-primary stations in multiple-station markets — stations that are looking for ways to distinguish themselves from the primary stations. Within the public television community, there are more than 20 markets with overlapping stations, including Los Angeles and San Francisco, each of which has four PBS-member stations. Finally, there is an umbrella group known as the Affinity Group Coalition (AGC) that helps to coordinate the work of the discrete groups and that is considered by many as the most efficient and broadest-based mechanism for system consultation. Some people complain that the different licensee groups are often uncomfortable with the agendas and priorities of others, feeling that they have to be at every table to protect their respective interests, which makes representative democracy a less than popular form of governance. There is an old saying that American public television is really a series of meetings interrupted by an occasional program. When one looks at the calendar of public television sessions, the truth in humor is revealed.

CPB was created by Congress to serve as Grand Auditor and a political heat shield.

Proud of living in a democracy, we could say that there is nothing better than a multiplicity of voices and interest groups, but at some point there has to be focus on what is of shared importance and what will benefit the American people, and a clear sense of who speaks for whom and how we can



Carl Sagan, star of *Cosmos*, on Samos in 1980.

go about our business in an intelligent, economical, and responsible fashion. The existing multiplicity of organizations and voices blurs the image of public broadcasting both for audiences and for funders — whether they are individuals, foundations, corporations, State governments, or the U.S. Congress.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) was created by the Congress to serve as Grand Auditor and a political heat shield. (Bill Moyers and Arizona public television executive Jack Parris both complained about the past CPB Chairman's compromising of PBS's editorial integrity in the fall 2005 issue of *Television Quarterly*). A recent headline on its new Chairman

by no less an authoritative voice than the *Los Angeles Times* — “Public Broadcasting Meets the New Boss” — displays and promotes considerable confusion. Neither the Chairman of CPB nor CPB itself holds any broadcast license, operates any station, produces or distributes any programs. Public Broadcasting Boss? What about the leadership of the Public Broadcasting Service and National Public Radio? Some people would argue that there is no public broadcasting boss or chief

— or, put another way, that there are as many public broadcasting chiefs as there are organizations and stations dedicated to public broadcasting. Going forward, we need to exploit the great value of our local/national arrangements while organizing the public television system in a more efficient fashion that redounds to the greatest possible benefit of the communities it serves across America.

And now another substantial problem: From its tender start, American public broadcasting has never enjoyed steady, predictable, or sufficient funding. Funding deficiencies were clearly recognized in 1979 by the Second Carnegie Commission, which recommended the creation of a Public Telecommunications Trust and a Program Services Endowment — sound recommendations that were ignored. There is no media operation in the world funded in the Byzantine fashion of America’s public broadcasting system. Funds are acquired from Congress (representing about 14% of public broadcasting’s revenue, or \$1.30 per citizen), state and local authorities, universities, foundations, corporate underwriters, auction and sweepstakes

proceeds, and individual contributions, including those from members and major donors. Imagine what our public-service broadcasters could do if federal funding amounted to \$85 per capita as it does in Germany — or \$83 per capita in the United Kingdom, \$49 per capita in Japan, or even \$28 per capita in Canada or Australia.

American public broadcasting has never enjoyed steady, predictable or sufficient funding.

Every few years, regrettably, someone in Washington becomes upset with one program or another, or federal finances are in poor shape, and a march begins to defund public broadcasting. With the growing national deficit and the needs of the Gulf Coast, to say nothing of the war in Iraq, there are members of Congress wanting to end all future appropriations for public broadcasting and to use the money for hurricane relief and reconstruction projects, even as public broadcasters are being hailed for providing the most dependable community security networks in the affected areas. In fact, the federal investment in public broadcasting has brought an attractive return. Federal funds administered by CPB have been “matched” sixfold by annual investment from local sources — governmental, corporate and philanthropic (both foundation and individual).

This may be just the time when the “federal interest” in public broadcasting should be seen as a uniquely wise investment. A good case might even be made for a larger appropriation to permit public broadcasting to improve

and extend its services in the areas of education, civic engagement and cultural enrichment: To promote an early and sustained interest in learning aimed at reducing our more than 30% high-school dropout rate and to help the 50 million Americans over the age of 16 who are functionally illiterate and cannot even complete a job application form; to enhance responsible citizenship both domestically and in the larger world, to encourage voting and other forms of civic participation, and to provide inclusive mechanisms for engaging Americans in civic debate; to stimulate individual creativity, to introduce Americans to the power of the arts and to the uplifting of the human spirit, encouraging tolerance, if not respect, for that which is new, different, experimental.

Federal funds are now more important than ever in the public television financial mix. There has been a small increase (ca. 3%) in non-federal funding over the past 15 years, but much of it has been absorbed by digital conversion. State funding has been declining; corporate funding has not returned to the high mark reached in the year 2000; foundation funding, while strong, is limited; individual giving by members is not growing, and in some markets even decreasing, although there has been some sign of increase in major gifts.

While trying at least to maintain, if not to increase, federal contributions to public broadcasting, people throughout the industry are eager to engage the foundation and major donor communities in more meaningful ways. To that end, the PBS Board of Directors recently established the PBS Foundation, which provides “a

mechanism for seeking, cultivating, and receiving extraordinary gifts at the national level.” The Foundation will work collaboratively with member stations across the country to advance the agenda of public television, especially with regard to programming.

There is an element of truth in the complaint that some of our programming is stale – and that only babies and oldsters are interested in it. Lack of resources has tended to keep American public television in a condition of permanent adolescence. Our first concern is to find the funds that will make it possible to reach out to larger, younger, and more diverse audiences with content that is vital, fresh, and daring, that carries new voices, new ideas, and reflects new sensibilities. We need now to fund a wide array of producers whose content will make its way as easily on 60-inch plasma screens as on the Internet and palm-sized nanocasters.

In only a few months of operation, the PBS Foundation has received several important grants: one from the MacArthur Foundation to underwrite the work of the Digital Future Initiative; a five-year award from the Ford Foundation to support new digital projects and the PBS Foundation; and a matching grant from the Knight Foundation for support of “Public Square,” a digital service devoted to public affairs, local and national, and to civic participation.

We must reach out also to major donors who value education, culture, and citizenship, and who recognize how important it is in a democracy to have a strong, fearless, and fiercely independent public broadcasting system. Individual donors who have

the freedom and ability to commit to large projects might be encouraged to support new programs or to underwrite some existing programs of value, freeing station funds for the development of new content. Such contributions would become the donor's legacy to the nation.

It has now been nearly 40 years since the Public Broadcasting Act was signed, and much has been accomplished since then. We have in American public television a great and trusted institution — an institution whose “job description” and good works have led to its being called a “Public Trust” and the “People’s Business.” Over 80 million Americans avail themselves of its offerings on

a regular basis, in addition to the millions of students who benefit from its instructional programming and the community members whose lives are enhanced by its educational outreach activities. Our responsibility now is to build on those accomplishments. We must rationalize our governance, which will require some opening of minds and an infusion of trust in the relationships among colleagues in our multiplicity of public broadcasting organizations, and we must find significantly increased support for programming – programming that will enhance educational opportunity, civic engagement and human dignity for all Americans.

The chairman of PBS, Mary G. F. Bitterman is President of the Bernard Osher Foundation and formerly President of KQED, San Francisco and Director of the Hawaii Public Broadcasting Authority. This article is adapted from Dr. Bitterman's inaugural James L. Loper Lecture in Public Service Broadcasting, presented last November at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California.

An Eyewitness to History

The late Peter Jennings revealed his innermost beliefs in an exclusive interview.

By **Everette Dennis and Huntington Williams**

When ABC's iconic anchor Peter Jennings died in August 2005, much was said about his urbane, cultured approach to the news, his passion for international reporting and his deeply human qualities. Less was said about him as a thoughtful student of television and public affairs and the degree to which he understood both the impact of his own public persona and its influence in shaping television news. And when it came to Jennings as an educated person, much was made of his status as a high school dropout and less of the professionally engaged and cultured family into which he was born and came of age. This ostensibly self-educated man's passion for books and learning did get occasional mention, but his interest in and support for educational enterprises mostly did not.

One of his academic ports of call in New York for the 12-plus years of its existence was the Gannett Center for Media Studies at Columbia University. There he gave frequent seminars, attended conferences—often quietly in the audience, not always as a speaker—and took part in after-hours

conversations with visiting fellows, a mix of journalists and academics. There his penchant for knowledge was always evident. Once he called to ask whether he could attend a conference on coverage of religion because as he put it, “we don't do a very good job on that and need to reconsider our coverage.” He did attend and weeks later hired one of the panelists as ABC's religion reporter. At another session, Jennings mused with the former BBC executive Sir Paul Fox and asked the visitor whether he recalled interviewing a young Jennings decades before when he appeared in London looking for a job. “No,” said Fox, “I don't.” “Well,” said Jennings beaming, “you told me to ‘go back to our colonies and get some experience’ and that's what I did.”

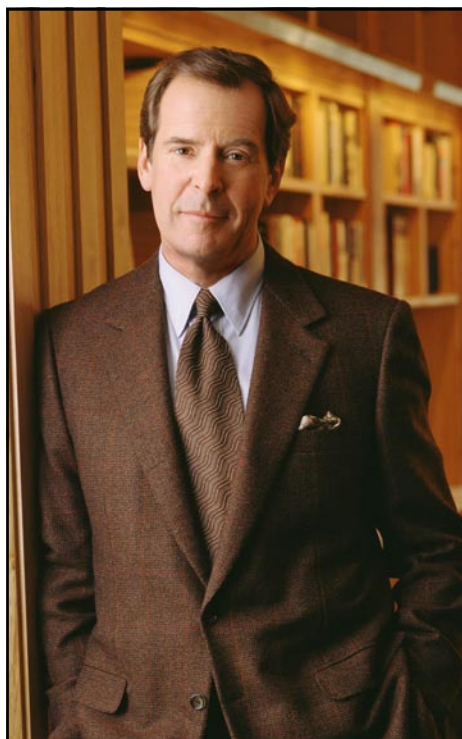
When the *Gannett Center Journal* decided to devote an issue to “The New Media Barons,” we asked Jennings if he'd give his take on media influence, the role of the anchor and television leadership including his own management. He agreed and we GCJ editors (myself and Huntington Williams, III) went to ABC News to interview Jennings on topics he said, he'd “rather not talk about,”

but agreed to entertain. “Given what I do for a living,” I recall him saying, “How could I not.” The result was the interview below, edited to remove a few dated references, but mostly presented intact here.

After more than two decades as an overseas correspondent, Peter Jennings was named anchor and senior editor of ABC’s *World News Tonight* in August 1983, where he had the added distinction of being this country’s most-watched source of live TV news. In the following interview, conducted in January 1989, he opened a uniquely personal window on broadcast journalism, and on the role and responsibilities of the contemporary news anchor.

Q: *What kinds of influence or power accrue to a network anchor?*

A: I think three kinds: you accrue clout which is internal to your network; you accrue influence, in a different way; ultimately, I suppose, you can accrue power, pure and simple, although that’s overrated. An anchor gets clout just by being a symbol. The job has a certain inherent measure of clout internally and externally. Influence you accrue the way I think influence is generally accrued, which is journalistically: more quietly, more doggedly based on the substance. There’s great potential for influence internally if you behave yourself. There is, I think, considerable opportunity for influence outside too. I don’t think we have much external power, though. Our power is generally overrated, in part because we’re in [programs and reports like] Rick Smith’s show *Power in Washington* the other night. They were talking about



Peter Jennings

lobbying, and someone on the show said, “You know what we’ve got to do is influence those lobbyists and those anchormen.” I really have no sense of that. I think that most people court good journalists, and I unabashedly think I am a good journalist—not just adequate, but a good one. But people who court me in an obvious way do so at their peril. I think our real influence on the outside world is in story selection, how we behave in live events, how we position stories in the broadcast, what we put on as news, how much time we spend on the “American Agenda,” for example, on education or drugs.

Q: *Are the corporate leadership of the networks or are producers ever targeted to influence the show on a given day?*

A: I can only speak for my own company, but I think that's highly overstated, as regards my management. People are always writing to me and sending a copy of the letter to [Capital Cities chairman] Murphy and to John Sias, who's the president of the ABC network. Not very often, maybe three times in the last year, letters have been passed down to me, with no comment whatsoever mind you. To give you an example: at the [1988] convention in Atlanta, David Brinkley and I were preparing for the broadcast and not paying too much attention to what was going on. We failed to stand up during the national anthem, because we didn't hear it. A retired brigadier general wrote a vicious letter to Sias saying that he was appalled. It came down from Sias. I could feel his influence, but I didn't know how he felt about this issue. So I wrote the general a terse reply. Sias applauded. I think scholars should look at this question [of corporate control] more seriously, because on the day-to-day basis it tends to become very mixed up with publicity. We were very lucky at ABC. After all, were not taken over by a company that also makes missiles and toasters. We were taken over by broadcasters.

Above everything else, I am an editor.

Q: *Do you ever attend [ABC corporate] board meetings?*

A: Heavens no. I wouldn't. I recently participated in a division meeting on staff changes for correspondents, but it's the first I've ever been to. I think it's not a good place to be. I am not management. I don't have a management title, should not have it, don't want it. I do not want to

be responsible for the hiring and firing policies of this news organization.

I do want to be able to go to my management, as I do on a regular basis, and say, "Do you have any idea how this guy is screwing up on this story?" Or the other way around. I see a lot more of the correspondents' work than management does. I've also worked both sides of the fence, so I often have a better appreciation than management does of what a correspondent can or can't do.

Q: *If you're not management, what are you?*

A: The anchor job can't be described in a single word. In Ed Murrow's day they didn't call them anchormen. A guy showed up and read the news. But that era is long past. I think above everything else, I am an editor. But I'm also a reporter, a producer, a news reader, a rewrite man. I'm an original reporter sometimes. God knows, I am a *talker* — because if you-know-what hits the fan right now, I'm in that studio in five minutes and I may be on the air for seven or eight hours — which means at the very least I had better be semi-in

touch with what the hell's going on in the world. Other than

just being a traffic cop, the part of my job that I really take seriously is getting the best out of my colleagues. All of those jobs, in some ways, are part of the editing process.

Q: *You mentioned Tom Brokaw and Dan Rather. The public has the sense that your jobs are somehow all very much the*

same, just in different places. Aren't they really somewhat different?

A: I think they are. I think they differ in keeping with the general tenor of the [ABC News] division. And I think it's different depending on how one came up in the division. The three different network newscasts can all be radically different on story selection. The reason people say they're all the same is because they see us constantly in this competitive mode on the major stories. Deeper down in the broadcasts it's quite astonishing: the difference in tone, story selection, what parts of the world we emphasize, which secondarily has to do often with the strength of your correspondents.

What you're watching was raw journalism — like it or not.

Q: *In journalism in the past there were times of vigorous, even cutthroat competition. But although you've talked about how you want your broadcast distinguished from the others, at a personal level it would appear that the three of you are, if not friends, certainly civil to each other in public. When [Dan] Rather conducted a contentious — some said disrespectful — interview with [the first] President Bush in the 1988 campaign, was there a closing of ranks around Rather?*

A: No I don't think that was so. First of all, I don't think there is any mileage in one of the three current anchor people slashing out at his competition. We don't live in an age when the whole aim is to destroy the enemy at all cost. But I think you'll find that all of us who were asked

about the subject gave quite carefully crafted answers about Dan and Bush. Mine was twofold. First, I said that Dan and I operate at altogether different temperatures. That's not the way I do things; it's the way he does things. But I also thought it was important to defend him inasmuch as the public watching television gets to see the abuse between interviewer and subject. You never see that in newspapers or magazines. I felt duty bound to say to people, "What you're watching was raw journalism — like it or not."

Q: *But are the three of you then, in effect, statesmen for your public persona?*

A: Well, I think you're all too glib about using that phrase. You asked me what I did for a living; and I don't think there are any statesmanlike qualities about that. If you think you're a statesman, you're up to your knees in mud. You're deeper than your knees. I don't think we should ever be mistaken for statesmen.

Q: *Well, if you're all very conciliatory and civil in public, where does the vigorous competition come?*

A: On the street. Nothing pleases me more than to come to the end of the first four minutes of the broadcast and say to myself, "Those folks at the other networks made the wrong editorial decisions." I pick up the phone to my producer and say, "Hey, we have the right lead." It all comes down to how well our reporters do against theirs.

Q: *You said once that you really preferred going out live to the [news] reader and the dress-rehearsal/performance part of the job. Is that what you like most about [still] being a journalist in your current job?*

A: Now you come to a dimension of anchoring which somehow people haven't yet fixed on. I think it's the most important thing I do. I don't know how to put it, but perhaps when I'm doing what I do as well as I can, which is not terribly often, it is similar to a writer sitting down and writing from top to bottom with no rewrite — just handing it in and being published. That is live editorial television. Anchors are expected to go upstairs and sit down and talk on the Challenger disaster, the Wall Street crash, the State of the Union, Presidential elections, primaries, earthquakes, rape, murder, pillage--at the drop of a hat. It's that one principal example of what I do where you say, "Thank God for the 30 years I spent on the street." And if it's good, it's the most wonderfully exhilarating thing in the world. For example, I know that we did a really sound editorial job on the Inauguration, except for the first half hour, when I was nervous and we couldn't get the electronics to work inside our own building. Everything on the street worked, but we couldn't hear one another inside, so I couldn't talk to [ABC commentator] George Will or [historian] Henry Graff. Anyway, I'm trying to work with [David] Brinkley, and I'm trying to work with Jeff Greenfield, and I'm trying to work with [Sam] Donaldson and [Brit] Hume, and remember what I wanted to say and give it historical context, and have some fun with it. Not to get too serious,

but make sure people understand this uniquely American transition. When the broadcast was over, I turned to our guys and I said, "You were the best," without even seeing the other two networks.

Q: *You knew it?*

A: There is no question. I also know when it's the worst.

Q: *If there is a confrontation between the government and networks — a controversial incident like [the war in] Grenada, where reporters were barred — is it better to have some unity of press opinion? How does that happen, and what role do you personally play?*

A: In my view the government acted outrageously. I hope there's unity on that. As for my role, today we have a "media press." When I first went overseas 16 or 17 years ago, there was no such thing. Oh, there was a critic for *The New York Times* and a critic for the *L.A. Times*, and somebody wrote for the *Washington Post*. People would review sitcoms. But now there's a whole industry out there reporting on ourselves as an institution. When something like Grenada happens, the instinct of some people is to call up ABC and get a quote from Jennings. That usually either makes me run for the hills or sit down and very carefully think what I want to say. It's a good pressure in that respect. There's always the opportunity for making "the speech" on television, but I try not to.

Q: *Roone Arledge is one of the most competitive executives in the TV business. What has Arledge brought to the business and to ABC News? Has he revolutionized it?*

A: No, I wouldn't say he's revolutionized it. There was an incredible shot of energy which went through the division when Roone arrived. Roone continues to bring an urge to win, to energize. What he brought in the first instance was an infusion of money that we'd never had before for news coverage — and access to air time. That was the direct result of the trust which the corporation had in this particular executive's record. Roone also had a real interest in the news division before he took it over. He has been supportive for the most part of people who were here before him. Koppel was here before him. I was here before him. Brinkley came later — and there's another aspect of Roone's vision, let's say. He knew that there was a place for David Brinkley at ABC on Sunday. And he had the sense to figure out how to use Ted Koppel, who has gone on to be an important national asset. And Arledge is a good program maker. He collates well. I've been fighting with him for 20 years, and he can make you listen and fight back and listen and somehow you'll get his point. I don't think he's ever ordered me to do anything. He's always made me see the light.

Q: *A persuasive man?*

A: Yes. That's very important in a leader. Roone is not a confrontationalist.

Q: *There are other news franchises being built up now. What's your impression of Ted Turner?*

We are somehow reluctant to listen to the sounds of other nations... We're really saying that we won't tolerate their point of view.

A: I think Turner's made a very important contribution. CNN is an important new factor in our lives. As a consumer, I like having access to more information presented in a somewhat different way. Different points of light, Mr. Bush might say. But you have to remember when discussing the impact of cable that less than 15 percent of the American public watches cable. Another 15 percent watches independent or public television stations. And 70 percent still watch the three networks. That tends to put it a bit more in perspective.

Q: *What about internationalization? We've got the space bridge; do you foresee a true international market for television news?*

A: No, I don't think so. I think TV can cross borders to the extent that you can now watch the *CBS Evening News* at eight o'clock in the morning in Paris, or CNN at hotels and various places around the world, or Jennings on *World News Tonight* 10 times a day in China.

Q: *But you don't see a random newscast that would go to every English language country in the world coming from a single source under one owner?*

A: No. But if I thought you could pull it off and somebody would finance it, I would want to do it. I really would. In terms of how much you could do — God, it would be spectacular. CNN does a little bit of that with its international edition. But I think we have to make a real cultural breakthrough in America. We are somehow reluctant to listen to the sounds of other nations. And if we're reluctant to listen, we're really saying that we won't tolerate their point of view.

Q: *Thinking of the phrase, "Out of the mouths of babes," tempts us to ask how your own children regard what you do?*

A: People often ask me what my children think when they watch the news. I only recently asked them whether or not they watch.

I open windows on the world...I'm an eyewitness to history, which is what journalism is all about.

Q: *And what do they say?*

A: "Sometimes, Dad!" They are six and nine. By and large, they couldn't care less. I'll call them up if we're doing a piece on dinosaurs or animals, and tell them they might like to watch it. But as a general rule, I try to make it clear to my children that what I do for a living is the same as what their contemporaries' fathers do for a living. You know, somebody else's Daddy goes down to

a law firm or the bus company and Daddy goes down to ABC. It's a little hard to make it that simple because other kids pay attention, but I try to encourage my children that what I do is simply opening windows on the world. Of course, I'm an eyewitness to history, as some say.

Q: *An eyewitness to history?*

A: Which is of course what journalism is all about, and which is why I did it in the first place. If any of my children are going to be journalists, then let them do it for that reason — not to be the anchors, because that's getting miserable at altogether too young an age. Only at my age can you afford to be miserable.

Q: *How would you like people to look back on your career 20 years from now?*

A: Well, I'm very pleased when people say to me, as they sometimes do, "We're never quite sure what you think." I don't mean to be a slave to objectivity. I'm much more interested in balance than I am in objectivity. If you watch, you'll find that I invest a lot of time in trying to get more than one point of view heard. I also would like for it to be said that in some ways I was ahead of the curve, that my mind was on the stories ahead, that I was looking to what was going to happen next year, instead of this year.

Everette E. Dennis is the Distinguished Felix E. Larkin Professor of media and entertainment industries at Fordham's Graduate School of Business in New York City and author of several books about the media. He was founding director of the Media Studies Center at Columbia University.

Cutting Teeth in Front of the Screen

An expert on interactive media for children argues that an electronic toy cannot substitute for face-to-face interaction with a loving parent.

By Carla Seal-Wanner

In last summer's movie, "Meet the Fockers," the grandfather (played by Robert De Niro), an ex-CIA agent put in charge of his year-old grandson for an extended visit, decides he is going to get him to leap over developmental barriers in a single bound by teaching the youngster to communicate through sign language before he can talk. He constructs an elaborate electronic learning environment complete with drill and practice exercises that provoke the child to repeat the signs. For many hours each day the child is placed in this contraption practicing the signs and performing them for the adults around him. Predictably, the onlookers react with ecstasy over every minutia of progress he makes in anticipation of the day he utters his first word. In the end, the "experiment" is ruined by the son-in-law who mistakenly blurts out the word "asshole" in front of his nephew, who enthusiastically repeats it in precisely the correct context! Thus, his first word is uttered without the assistance of this

device, but due to the compelling actions of his highly entertaining uncle.

Obviously exaggerated for comic effect, the movie aptly depicts the change in child rearing over the past decade as interactive media designed for very young children have become pervasive, portable and persuasively marketed to parents anxious to give their children every possible form of assistance for academic success. The reality is that for many children there is little good old-fashioned downtime. When children do not have access to the multiple electronic screens in their homes, the back of the SUV or on an airplane, there is a vast array of wireless digital products available to keep them entertained. As well as educated? Yes, indeed, many are touted as contributing to the intellectual growth of even the youngest members of society.

Historically, two events have influenced the trend to plug the youngest consumer into a regular media diet. In 1996, at the White House Conference

on Early Childhood Development and Learning, Hillary Clinton linked new research evidence that brain development in early childhood required enrichment to achieve its full natural potential, with a national policy initiative to invest heavily in early education. Parents were assaulted with a barrage of media hype that delivered the take-away message that they were not doing enough to take advantage of the “window of opportunity” for their child’s maximal brain development. Poor parents, turns out Mother Nature does just fine on her own and unless a child lives in a deprived environment lacking normal environmental stimuli, little help was needed to develop thought and language. Despite the clarification by many development psychologists at the time, media companies saw this as an opportunity to ease parents’ anxiety as well as lighten their pocketbooks and started developing products to increase the child’s learning potential.

In addition, the success of the British import *Teletubbies*, which began on PBS in 1998, demonstrated that even toddlers are a viable and, indeed, lucrative, target audience. From this time on, children’s media companies recognized that the youngest viewers may be the *most* available consumers. They are either at home or in some day-care situation all day. Many caretakers were more than willing to believe that these programs were useful for developing cognitive skills and, besides, every parent needs some guilt-free downtime to prepare snacks, the family

meal, do the housework, carve out some work done from home, or even sneak in a welcome rest. Since that time infants and toddlers have become a key media-consumer demographic for which many millions of development and production dollars have been spent by the leading children’s media producers. The baby-educating industry is now estimated to be a \$1-billion-a-year business.

With the production of videos/DVD’s targeted at infants to one-and-a-half-year-olds, tripling since 2002, many more babies are spending more of their waking hours in front of an electronic screen. These media companies claim that even the youngest consumers substantially benefit from this mode of cerebral stimulation and many parents purchase these products with the hope that they will develop the cognitive skills necessary for school success faster



Blue's Clues has real educational value.

through this exposure. Whether or not these products add to a child's positive intellectual growth, one thing is certain: these parents want to have the option to try them out. Who knows, if they don't, their child may be behind the curve when they arrive in kindergarten!

The problem is that even producers with the best intention to create worthwhile programs or products have jumped on this bandwagon without the proper baggage. While some of the pioneering programs designed for early learners (*Sesame Street*, *Blues Clues*, *Reading Rainbow*, *Arthur*) were based on developmental theory and ongoing formative evaluation that tested programs' educational objectives, the research and development process for many other efforts has not been as dutiful. However, this has not prevented producers from over claiming the cognitive and social learning that results from exposure to these ubiquitous offerings.

If this grandchild in "Meet the Fockers" were not a fictional character but a child in the real world he would fall directly into the demographic described in two recent Kaiser Family Foundation reports documenting this widespread use of electron media by our very youngest citizens. In both reports — *Zero to Six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers* (2003) and *The Effects of Electronic Media on Children Zero to Six* (2005), a national survey of media consumption, a publication supplementing the findings of the 2003 report with a review of extant research — the media "habits" of this new audience

are well documented. Were he living in the real world, this youngster would be one of the 59 percent of American children under six who spend an average of 2 hours a day in front of a media screen. Thirty percent of children zero to three years old and 43 percent of children four

The optimal way to stimulate brain growth between the age of zero and 24 months is through interaction with parents and other humans...

to six years old have televisions in their bedrooms; these children tend to watch even more TV per day. Those with TV's in their rooms and who are from "heavy television" homes — characterized by multiple sets and television constantly on during the day — read less and learn to read later than those in homes with limited television viewing. They found that not only do children six and under spend an average of two hours per day watching television but this national media-consumption diet includes some new dishes as well. Fifty to 70 percent are using digital media, video games and computers frequently. The children of parents who have strongly enforced media-related rules spend less time with media and more time reading. But, even in those households the children are spending an average of one half-hour less time with media than other children who have less stringent rules about media consumption.

The Kaiser Family Foundation reports verify "the immersion of our very youngest children in the world of electronic and interactive media." The authors found that during the critical developmental years from zero to six many American children are spending too much time in front of an electronic screen of one kind or another. Not only

does the foundation document this increase in programming directed to infants and preschoolers: it questions its value. While clear answers to questions about the impact of these products are not yet known, many child development experts worry that with the greater access to these products (due to the price-point going down and the ease of access as a result of portability) there will be more widespread use of wireless technologies to keep children “busy” too many hours of their day.

Based on these findings, the Kaiser Family Foundation along with the American Academy of Pediatrics sounded a wake-up call to parents and policy makers heralding the need to learn more about the effects of this phenomenon in American society. Very little research has been conducted on the media habits of children from birth until they enter

school. The Kaiser Family Foundation report published in 2005 provides a meta-analysis of the research that has been done from the 1960’s to the present and finds a dearth of studies on this crucial age period when much of the cognitive and social development necessary for school readiness occurs. This literature review suggests that this is not a funding priority for the Federal government, foundations or academic institutions. Kaiser has just released a new report which is highly critical of claims by manufacturers of electronic educational toys that these devices actually help very young children to learn. In fact, there is almost no research to support the idea that educational media are actually educational.

The fictionalized grandpa in “Meet the Fockers” obviously had not read about the Kaiser Family Foundation or the American Academy of Pediatrics’ warning that caretakers should limit the use of electronic media by infants and toddlers. They clearly state that the optimal way to stimulate brain growth between the age of zero to 24 months is through interactions with parents and other humans and simple manipulative tactile toys (like blocks, sand, paper cut-outs). Arguing that electronic media cannot provide this quality of interaction, they state that young children should not be in the habit of using screen media until they are older than two. Further, they recommend that children older than two should be limited to an hour a day and encouraged to engage in creative, imaginative and problem-solving play activities with family and



Dora the Explorer, another example of constructive programming.

peers inside and outside.

It is easy to understand the seductive quality of these products for parents. I recently spent the afternoon with a younger friend of mine who is a first-time parent. Her son is just over two years old and he had every imaginable new interactive toy strewn around their apartment. As we chatted and caught up on our lives he went from one to the other “playing” with them until he lost interest and moved to the next one. Steady chatter from various media characters provided the background for our conversation as her son went from one activity to another. The “talking” was like the b-roll to the central movie track running in the room. It was competing for its own airtime. Every few minutes he would come by, curl up near his mother and me and point to something happening on the screen or with the talking plush. My friend would respond with enthusiasm and play along for a while and then we would resume our conversation and he would resume his — with his “toy.”

I wish all parents understood that their own conversation and affection combine to make the best key for unlocking a child’s ability to jump forward as a learner.

What’s wrong with this picture? Nothing, you could argue. It’s just fine for the child to have his attention held while mom is allowed to be absorbed in some well-deserved adult conversation she so desperately misses being home alone with a preschooler all day long. He may even learn how to pronounce a new word or two. Yet, even if a parent embraces the “it can’t hurt them” philosophy, the

truth is that the jury is still out on the real value of these interactions until more research on the effects of these products is conducted.

I compared this scene to my daughter’s pre-school years, a mere 11 years earlier, when the only toys that talked back to her were the few “interactive plushes” we allowed into our home that had at best two messages (repeated incessantly so as to send the cats running for shelter after just a few minutes of play) and the first iteration of so-called “interactive” books that had side panels which when pressed reinforced words in the narrative and provided sound effects (that only remotely resembled the sounds and were also extremely irritating to the cats and me when played with for more than one run-through at a time). I also have fond memories of knowing that my daughter had awakened from a nap by hearing cooing and giggling coming from her room as she interacted with the “activity center” attached to her crib. Via the baby monitor she sounded the wake-up alarm with the sound of the bell ringing

from the telephone dial, the beeping nose of the clown, and the cranking of the handle that reminded me of the days when we used to insert playing cards in the spokes of

our bikes. There is no doubt that the new interactive toys have graduated to a much “smarter” class. They have multiple branching paths and many more options that *seem* to respond to the child’s individual queries. The result being that the child’s attention is held for much longer and the parent may be persuaded that some “learning” may actually be taking place. Though these

products are more “interactive” and the marketing hyperbole would like parents to believe that interactions with these products will enhance learning, parents need to realize that these products do not supplant the interactions caretakers have with children that help develop the cognitive foundation for language and reasoning.

There is also the question of the cost of these products and the pressure it puts on parents. All parents have to ask themselves if the value-added through interactivity makes them a better choice for their child than say...a book? I also wonder about the psychological impact of the digital divide on families who are equally vulnerable to the marketing campaigns for these products but cannot afford them. While the cost of the technology rapidly decreases it still represents a significant expense when a family has to make choices with a small budget for nonessential purchases. There is no doubt that affluent children have greater access to these products than poor children. In a study I am currently conducting with low-income families one mother told me; “I saved money and got my daughter a ‘Leap Pad,’ but we could only afford one cartridge and she is really bored with it now, but I just can’t afford to keep buying new ones.” Parents with very little disposable income feel the pressure to purchase these ‘learning toys’ for their children as much as affluent parents. This mother suffers twice for her economic disadvantage. Once because she may already feel that her child will have a harder time competing due to being at a substandard pre-school, and, second, because the products *claiming*

to give her child the “leap” forward are financially out of reach.

I wish all parents understood that their own conversation and affection combine to form the best key for unlocking a child’s ability to jump forward as a learner. Seizing natural opportunities like having a simple conversation about what the child is eating for breakfast should not be slighted.

An electronic toy will never be able to provide the immediate and individual feedback that face-to-face interaction with a loving parent provides.

In *Einstein Never Used Flash Cards*, Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff argue that the trend among parents who are overly anxious about their child’s success has made parents more vulnerable to the hyped marketing that surrounds these interactive products. The authors worry that “the cult of achievement” has rendered simple play underrated. Parents forget that it is far better to take out a few pots and pans, cardboard boxes and a roll of tape, or a picture book for some quiet lap time pointing out familiar objects, colors or alphanumeric symbols. An electronic toy will never be able to provide the immediate and individual feedback that face-to-face interaction with a loving parent provides. Time spent with these products should not be mistaken as the equivalent benefit of time spent with a caring adult. Another worry these products raise is that once media habits develop that involve immediate gratification the child’s expectations for constant positive reinforcement may result in them responding mainly to extrinsic rewards rather than developing internally satisfying intrinsic goals.

That said, who can begrudge a parent a bit of downtime, especially when they child seems genuinely engaged? My heart goes out to parents. They only want the best for their children. But we have to be mindful that just as our children are targeted as consumers so are we. In his book, *The Hurried Child* (2001), David Elkind describes the child as a victim of a society that has caused parents to expect inappropriately high levels of academic achievement from their young children. He warned that the pressure to excel intellectually at an early age diminishes the aspects of the child's natural learning environment that results in balanced social, emotional and cognitive growth. Rushing a child's intellectual achievements can cause anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. Children are wired to learn at a developmental pace that allows them to absorb, assimilate and accommodate knowledge. If you overload their system you are likely to cause sparks to fly.

Garrison Keillor ends his weekly radio program, *A Prairie Home Companion*, with his signature sign-off:

"That's the news from Lake Wobegon, where all the woman are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average."

The desire for the "above average" child is precisely the parental wish that makes producers of preschool media salivate. With the average home having multiple TV sets and computers complete with dazzling interactive and multimedia capabilities why not have at least one screen dedicated to content targeted at raising the bar for the success of your children? Besides it might give the wee ones the edge they need to get into Harvard?

Not that I would necessarily endorse

this goal as a smart one for parents, but lets say for the sake of argument that the media producers goals are altruistic and are not just aimed at soliciting the youngest "eyeballs"? Then, I would argue they have to do their own homework before they assign it to the students. If you make educational media you have a huge responsibility to deliver education.

While attention and comprehension research has been so successful in informing educational television programs, the equivalent focus on such studies has not developed for the "new media" targeted at young consumers (computer software, video games, internet services and electronic toys). The positive influences of age-appropriate educational programming on the child's school readiness have been used as the basis for the claims made by these companies. But the new forms of media that involve different attention- and cognitive-processing capacities, the physical and kinesthetic aspects tapped by the demands of eye-hand coordination, the parallel processing of multiple streams of content, and interactivity, require fresh research techniques and models. Most of the research that has been conducted for interactive product development is proprietary and is not available to the public. We don't know what results have been demonstrated.

A national research initiative, the Children and Media Research Act (CAMRA), is currently before Congress. It's purpose is to determine the impact of the new media in our children's lives. This research will no doubt result in better products and services, more informed parents and the healthy cognitive, social and physical development of our children.

Needless to say, children grow up with

many varied experiences that influence their intellectual and emotional growth. Undeniably, media in its many broadcast and narrowcast forms is a strong informal influence. Its right up they're with the primary ones: family, and formal schooling. The many waking hours of each day can easily accommodate the small amount of fun and educational media use that is appropriate for our youngest learners. Media producers should not be greedy for more time in the child's life than is justified. Parents, seize the day: you need not sacrifice the vital hours of contact your children need for the spontaneous learning with the family, caretakers and friends that leads

to balanced, joyful, productive lives.

My first grandchild will arrive this March and the first thing I am going to buy him/her is one of those activity centers for the crib. I justify this low-tech "interactive toy" because one of the greatest moments in a parent's life is when she enters the room after her child's nap to hear the squeals of joy and feel the touch of out stretched arms from the knowing child that is thrilled, literally beyond words, that their favorite playmate has arrived at long last! Ring, Beep, Flip, Flip, Flip. I wonder if they still make them. I suppose I can find a "vintage" one on eBay!

Dr. Carla F.P. Seal-Wanner is the Founder/President of @ccess4@11, a public-interest advocacy organization promoting universal access to quality interactive media for children. A former professor at Columbia University, where she created and directed the graduate program in instructional technology and media, she received her doctoral and master's degrees in developmental psychology from Harvard and her BA in psychology from Hampshire College.

Cool Medium Hot

For a short time during the early years of television, local stations opened their studios to a music whose revolutionary beat advanced the cause of civil rights and other social movements in America.

By Gary Kenton

The action in John Waters' 1988 film, "Hairspray," revolves around *The Corny Collins Show*, a fictional after-school TV dance series, faithfully modeled on *The Buddy Deane Show*, which aired on WJZ-TV, Baltimore, from 1957 to 1964. The film (as well as the successful Broadway play it spawned) owes much of its appeal to a vibrant soundtrack of early rock music and to evocative shots of bouncing bobby-soxers showing off their moves on the dance floor. Dramatic conflict arises when black kids and white kids insist on dancing together on camera (as they do off-camera), a violation of explicit and implicit segregationist policy. The plot is reminiscent of an incident that occurred on Alan Freed's *The Big Beat*, in which singing star Frankie Lymon danced with a white, teenaged girl. In *Hairspray*, the adults see the error of their racist ways, the show is peacefully

integrated, and the kids twist and hully-gully happily into the sunset.

Waters highlights a small moment in the struggle to end Jim Crow, but does not win any prizes for historical accuracy. In reality *The Buddy Deane Show* was canceled in 1964, despite strong ratings, shortly after a group of white students surprised viewers and management by joining a black group on stage during a live telecast. Danny Schechter, a civil rights activist, characterized the incident as "the first—and probably last—civil rights 'dance-in.'" Though "Hairspray" fails to tell the whole story, it successfully captures the liberating exuberance of the golden era of locally televised rock 'n roll. Like many golden eras in broadcasting, it did not last long.

The Buddy Deane Show debuted on September 9, 1957, about a month after Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* series on WFIL-TV, Philadelphia, went

network on ABC daytime. The two shows went head-to-head in the Baltimore/D.C. market for the

Television was exerting a new kind of cultural power that was testing the limits of the status quo.

next six years, with Deane consistently outperforming Clark. Deane also scooped the network show in booking hot talent, including Bill Haley and The Comets, who in their first TV appearance performed their break-out hit, "Rock Around the Clock." In 1962 *The Buddy Deane Show* reached the height of its popularity, posting numbers that made it the most-watched local daytime TV show in the nation. A half century later, mention of the program still elicits strong feelings among viewers old enough to remember it, including envy for the lucky few who survived the fierce competition to become on-camera regulars (a group known as "The Committee" or "The

Buddy Deane's"). Intense nostalgic affection is often expressed for the sense of community that

arose among the young people who gathered after school each afternoon to watch the show in a kind of urban-tribal-social ritual. The dancing, in particular, is remembered as a powerful force that transcended the traditional ethnic, racial, and economic barriers that otherwise divided the city's teenagers (and adults). In retrospect, it is clear that television was exerting a new kind of cultural power that was testing the limits of the status quo.

During the late 1940's and early 1950's, pop-music series arose on local television stations across the country. Several factors contributed to the trend. Stations needed to fill in the gap between the daytime and prime-time network



American Bandstand, 1958, with host Dick Clark in the background.

Photofest

feeds, and the dance-floor format was inexpensive. Record companies were happy to see their artists appear for promotional reasons. The stations, often owned by companies with radio outlets in their markets, already had disc jockeys on the payroll and were glad to promote them.

The pioneer rock artists, whose records were inspiring bonfires by church and decency groups, were sure to be offensive to some viewers and advertisers.

One problem with the rock 'n roll shows was that during the period when television had just gotten a foot inside the doors of American households, it was "risk averse," to say the least. While the occasional ruffling of feathers by network news departments with controversial public-affairs documentaries might be perceived as brave, giving air time to Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard, Bo Diddley or the like seemed downright foolhardy. The pioneer rock artists, whose records were inspiring bonfires by church and decency groups (sensational events widely covered by TV news), were sure to be offensive to at least some viewers and advertisers. Network TV programmers stubbornly held on to tired variety-music formats, lingering in a kind of Big Band twilight zone for decades after the end of that era in popular music. As late as 1969, NBC was trotting out prime-time shows such as *The Kraft Music Hall with Des O'Connor*, a throwback to a bygone era, hoping and praying the rock tidal wave would subside. It didn't. A large and increasingly influential segment

of the TV audience kept clamoring for more. Ed Sullivan on CBS and Steve Allen on NBC, both of whom controlled bookings for their own shows, were the great exceptions to the rule on the networks.

Local stations were more willing to take chances. The first television show designed to appeal directly to a rock audience was probably *Let's Dance* (1947) on KLAC-TV, Los Angeles. Hosted by Al Jarvis, a hugely popular radio DJ at KFVB-AM, *Let's Dance* introduced a crucial concept for inexpensive local television

production of pop music shows: it was the first show to play hit records while artists lip-synched for the camera. The technique was almost universally loathed by artists, but they were powerless to challenge the fact that giving fans the exact same sound heard on a record was essential to effective promotion. No great lover of rock music, Jarvis nevertheless established the thrifty format that Dick Clark would later turn to gold: lip-synching artists performing for a dance floor full of teenagers. Jarvis even introduced a segment devoted to rating new records. The show was set to go national on ABC, but the network's Southern affiliates refused to air the show if it presented any black performers. Jarvis, who had strong personal relationships with a number of African-American performers in Los Angeles, including Nat King Cole, refused to meet that demand, and ABC backed out.

Fittingly, rock music made its purest TV breakthrough in Memphis. According to Robert Gordon, Dewey Phillips had created a music scene even before he became a disc-jockey.

Working in the music department of W.T. Grant, a downtown five-and-dime, Phillips would play records, “howling over the intercom and causing a ruckus,” as he put it. Legend has it that he broke into radio in 1950 by taking over as host of “Red, Hot & Blue,” a nighttime show on WHBQ-AM, after setting a fire and commandeering the microphone as the regular DJ ran for help. Once at the mike, Phillips spun a free-form mix of blues, country, gospel, R&B, and western swing — the genres that coalesced to create rock ‘n roll — that caused a sensation in Memphis. By 1956, in addition to the nine-to-midnight slot, he launched an afternoon show, *Phillips’ Pop Shop*, which was

simulcast by WHBQ-AM and WHBQ-TV.

With his sidekick, Harry Fritzius, who never spoke but

pantomimed his way through comedy skits, the show combined elements evocative of Ernie Kovacs’ absurdist approach to video humor with cutting-edge rock music.

Part of the success of *Pop Shop* was its pioneering use of the time slot. The late afternoon hours between the soap operas and prime time usually lacked a network feed and constituted a weak part of the day in terms of viewership and revenue. Phillips’ infectious enthusiasm had kids running home from school to hear the latest sounds and see his crazy stunts. Like the music itself, Phillips excited the audience by always seeming to be on the verge of losing control. With *Pop Shop*, WHBQ showed what could be done with late afternoon time to build audience and attract advertisers. Stations around the country took notice. Front-office

fears of anti-rock ‘n roll backlash were eclipsed by the promise of a new revenue stream, and TV producers were suddenly scouring local radio stations for photogenic disc jockeys to throw in front of the camera. With no established models to follow, each show developed unique features reflecting the idiosyncrasies of locale and host. Cities across the country sprouted rock shows, though none ever quite embodied the anarchist spirit of Dewey Phillips’ *Pop Shop*. Some notable series included *The Milt Grant Show* in Washington, D.C.; Robin Seymour and Bill Davies’ *Dance Party* in Detroit; Clark Race’s *Dance Party* in Pittsburgh, and *The Clay Cole Show* in New York City.

Throughout his career, Freed was dogged by detractors who saw him as a catalyst for juvenile delinquency.

The most influential radio-DJ-turned-TV-host was Alan Freed. Freed got his start in Cleveland in 1951 when record store owner Leo Mintz convinced him to do a radio show on WJW-TV. Calling his program *Rock and Roll Party*, Freed is often credited with coining the term by which the music has been known ever since. Not satisfied to remain a faceless voice behind the microphone, Freed took a huge gamble and booked a live show, “Moondog Coronation Ball,” into the 10,000-seat Cleveland Arena. When more than 25,000 kids showed up, police shut down the event. The scene scared municipal officials, but confirmed to Freed that he had caught a new cultural movement by the tail. Throughout his career, Freed was dogged by detractors who saw him as a catalyst for juvenile delinquency.

In 1954 Freed moved *Rock and Roll Party* to WNJR, Newark, an R&B station that put him in the New York City market. He was soon snapped up by WINS in Manhattan and then by WABC, which would emerge as the leading rock radio station in the nation's biggest market during the AM era. *Rock and Roll Party* became the hottest show on the air in the Northeast. Freed continued to host live shows — and they continued to cause controversy. One show defied an outright ban on live rock 'n roll in New Haven; another Freed show was the scene of a riot in Boston. Signing a deal with Paramount Pictures, Freed made the first Hollywood rock 'n roll feature film, "Don't Knock the Rock," which included performances by Little Richard, Bill Haley and the Comets, and The Treniers. He followed with two more films featuring top musical talent: "Rock, Rock, Rock" and "Rock Around the Clock." Having conquered the airwaves, the concert stage, and the big screen, Freed moved on to television in 1957, hosting *The Big Beat* on MetroMedia's WNEW-TV, New York, six times a week (weekdays after school and Saturday nights).

A hero to the rock audience and to rock musicians, Freed became a convenient scapegoat for the forces aligned against rock music. By the time *The Big Beat* premiered on television, he was beginning to compromise under pressure. The talent lineup on his first telecast included Connie Francis, the Everly Brothers, Ferlin Husky and the Billy Williams Quartet, a far cry from the raucous, rhythm-and-blues acts he presented on his early radio shows and onstage in Cleveland and Newark. He did, however, manage to introduce TV

audiences to such stars as Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Clyde McPhatter, Jerry Lee Lewis and Mickey and Sylvia.

Perhaps the most memorable moment of *The Big Beat* series took place on November 26, 1959, when two police detectives showed up at the studio to serve Freed with a subpoena. He was accused of accepting money in return for playing records. Within days the word "payola" had entered the lexicon. WABC radio dropped Freed like a hot potato. *The Big Beat* continued on television for a while, but when Frankie Lymon danced on camera with a white woman, ABC seized the moment to drop the show, bringing Freed's television career to an abrupt end. He returned to radio with airtime at Westinghouse's KDAY in Los Angeles and then WQAM in Miami, but only briefly. Alan Freed died eight years later, at age 43, of causes related to drinking.

A lesser-known name in local TV rock history is Bob Horn. A Philadelphia DJ, Horn had a radio show known as *Bandstand*, which he brought to WFIL-TV in 1952. The show attracted a loyal following of teenagers from three nearby high schools who came each day to dance at the studio. As the TV show gained popularity and took up more of Horn's time, Dick Clark, then an unknown, took over the *Bandstand* radio show. When Horn was arrested in 1956 for driving under the influence (just as WFIL was waging a PSA campaign against drunk driving!), Clark was brought over to the TV side with instructions to reassure jittery sponsors that rock 'n' roll was just good clean fun. Within a year, Clark made a deal with ABC president Leonard Goldenson to take the show national;

American Bandstand premiered in October, 1957. Local competition folded in many markets, but Baltimore and Memphis, where Buddy Deane and Dewey Phillips, respectively, resisted. Viewers in those markets found their homegrown shows too cool to mess with.

When rock music burst onto the scene in the 1950's, television — like much of the country — was caught between two impulses. One was to

put a lid on it; the other, to dance to it. The broadcast television networks, in their shared goal “not to offend,” were overly cautious and fell decades behind popular taste in their presentation of music. But for a short time during the early years of television, local stations opened their studios to a music whose revolutionary beat advanced the cause of civil rights and other social movements in America.

Gary Kenton was an editor at *Fusion*, one of the first magazines devoted to rock music and youth culture, during the 1970s. His writing has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *Rolling Stone*, *Utne Reader* and other publications. He is currently working on a book about rock 'n' roll on television and teaching at the Anderson School in Staatsburg, NY.

The Big Chase

True-life made-for-TV movies start with the race for rights. | **By Philippe Perebinosoff**

In the 1980 and 90s, when I was a television movie executive at ABC, the number of chases for the rights to stories based on real-life events was at an all-time high. The huge success of “The Burning Bed” and “Fatal Vision,” both 1984 true-crime TV movies based on books about sensational cases, upped the ante on the genre. On my desk was a list of the true stories with the names of the producers who had queried us about the particular properties. Keeping the list current and making sure that everyone was kept informed — especially about the amount of money ABC was offering to help secure the rights — was an all-consuming task. Hurried meetings were typical. A lot of people needed to be in the loop, including the business-affairs department, programming heads, other executives who were being pitched the same hot stories and producers eager for any bit of information that might give them an edge in their negotiations.

Oftentimes, ABC would go into development with the first person who secured the rights we wanted. If that turned out to be an untested producer, we would “marry” the neophyte with a veteran producer with an established record. At this juncture, the jockeying began to determine *who* became the producer that provided the necessary “comfort level” for the network and *who*

would ultimately be in charge of the project. Would it be the producer who got the rights or the producer who was attached to make sure the story would be properly developed and produced?

My involvement with the breathless chase for story rights — and resulting bidding wars — reached its zenith with the Amy Fisher saga. On an August morning in 1992, a rebellious 16-year old, who was having an affair with a thirty-something auto mechanic named Joey Buttafuoco, shot her lover’s wife in the head. Within six months of the deed, the Big Three broadcast networks had all aired made-for-TV movies about the shocking crime.

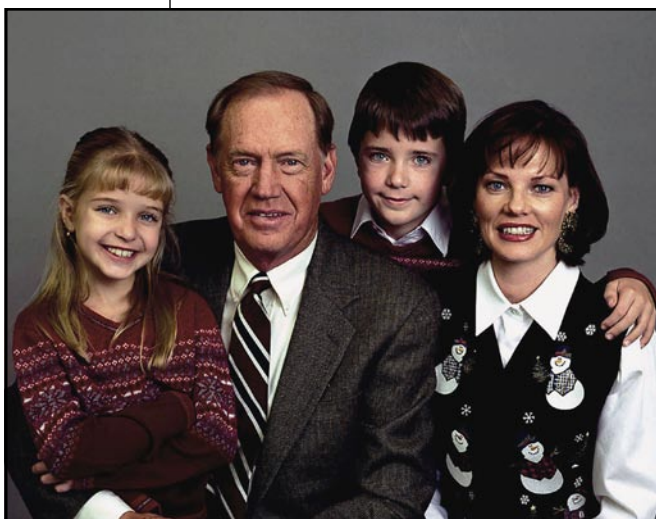
The NBC movie, “Amy Fisher: My Story,” was told from the defendant’s perspective (she sold her rights for a reported \$250,000 to raise bail). The CBS version, “Casualties of Love: The Long Island Lolita Story,” presented Buttafuoco’s viewpoint. Our movie at ABC, “The Amy Fisher Story” starring Drew Barrymore, was drawn from documents in the public domain and the *New York Post* articles of Amy Pagnozzi, who was retained as a technical consultant. The ABC and CBS movies actually aired opposite one another on January 3, 1993, a week after the NBC version. All three got impressive ratings, in a sense justifying one of the hottest chases in television

movie history.

Several years later, I'm in the more reflective role of a college professor, and find it fascinating to analyze industry trends, examine programming decisions and evaluate creative ideas that will generate excitement with producers, network executives and the elusive, hard-to-read viewing audience. "Ripped from the Headlines" movies are a staple of American television, so it's worth considering what makes a story worth chasing.

The conventional wisdom has been that having the rights to a *People* magazine cover story gives a producer a leg up in terms of generating network interest because of the built-in recognition factor. Promoting a movie like "Willing to Kill: The Texas Cheerleader Story" (1992), for instance, was made considerably easier because *People* — along with *Hard Copy* and *The National Enquirer* — had already introduced millions of potential viewers to the storyline of a desperate mother who conspired to murder the mother of her daughter's chief rival.

The tabloids are tops as an indicator of what stories capture and hold the public interest, but good stories have also been mined from more respectable and traditional news sources. *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, *60 Minutes*, *Dateline* and *Texas Quarterly* all carried pieces that put a producer on the right track. In a marketplace that values the quality of "edginess," *Reader's Digest* seems like an unlikely source. But one of the best



(l-r) Dyanne Landoli as JonBenet Ramsey, Ronnie Clark as her father, Tyler Sharp as her brother and Marg Helgenberger as her mother in "Perfect Murder, Perfect Town," the made-for-TV movie about the murder of JonBenet Ramsey.

television movies ever made, "Who Will Love My Children?," starring Ann-Margret, sprang from that wholesome publication.

Regardless of the specific source, though, what are the ingredients in a story that create a chase? Some of the most experienced players in the true-life genre took the time to talk with me about their experiences.

For Marc Lorber, a producer and international production consultant, a story that addresses the human condition in a unique way can develop into a sought-after property. He was co-producer of the 1994 *Movie of the Week* "Moment of Truth: Cradle of Conspiracy" that was inspired by the true story of a teenage girl whose boyfriend secretly plans to make her pregnant to sell the baby to eager adoptive parents. Lorber feels that hot stories can be "uplifting and aspirational," as "Cradle of Conspiracy" turns out, but he also feels that part of what fuels the chase is

a story that reveals a uniquely insane or criminal mind. The likes of the angel-faced serial killer Ted Bundy or the Boy Scout leader next door who turns out to be the wretchedly depraved “Bind-Torture-Kill” pervert will always be in the crosshairs of programmers.

Ken Kaufman, who produced eleven *In the Line of Duty* telefilms, including “Ambush at Waco,” seeks stories that have complex bad guys with unique attributes, such as a political or social obsession. An unusual relationship with a family member, for example, a twin, always piques his interest. Kaufman also looks for cops who have special characteristics that could be brought to life to distinguish them from “run-of-the-mill good guys.”

Docudramas, he believes, aren’t so much about accuracy, but credibility. As Kaufman told *TV Guide*: “Omission, compression — those are things we have to use in order to tell a story. There are composite characters whose essence is truth.”

Once a story with unique elements is discovered, what’s next? For many, deciding whether or not to pursue a given story comes down to one basic question: Is there a buyer? Judith A. Polone, who has produced over 50 movies for television, says there is no point in chasing a story that doesn’t have a buyer. To do this, she commits to doing her homework by being in regular contact with her buyers to know exactly what they’re looking for.

Polone, now president of movies and miniseries at Lions Gate Television, refers to the process of vying for rights to a good story as a “beauty contest.” Several suitors line up to gain favor with the individuals who are essential to a given project. Polone has won her

fair share of competitions, including convincing Nigel Hamilton, the author of *JFK: Reckless Youth*, to join with her and forsake his many other suitors hoping to make a TV movie of his work. The secret to winning such beauty contests, she says, “is being fully prepared and coming up with a specific approach that will set you apart from the other producers competing for the project.”

Helen Vernio, Executive Vice President, Sony Pictures Television, has done numerous true-crime stories, notably “The Perfect Husband: The Lacy Peterson Story,” which went into development at USA network *before* a verdict had been reached in the murder trial of Scott Peterson. She has an impressive list of what she calls “guilty as charged” films: “Murder in Greenwich,” based on the book by Mark Fuhman about the murder of Martha Moxley; “Honor Thy Father and Mother: The True Story of the Menendez Murders,” about two sons who killed their affluent parents; and “In a Child’s Name,” based on the book by Peter Maass, about a woman’s fight to have her sister’s husband found guilty of murder. Playfully citing her track record, Vernio says it seems likely that if she selects to make a movie about a crime, the person accused of the crime will be convicted. She adds, with a smile, that if she had chosen to make movies about O.J. Simpson and Michael Jackson, *they* would have been found guilty!

Lawrence Schiller also knows a good story when he sees one, but he looks behind the headlines for multiple layers of drama. He prefers stories that are “flushed through the written word” by means of a book or major magazine

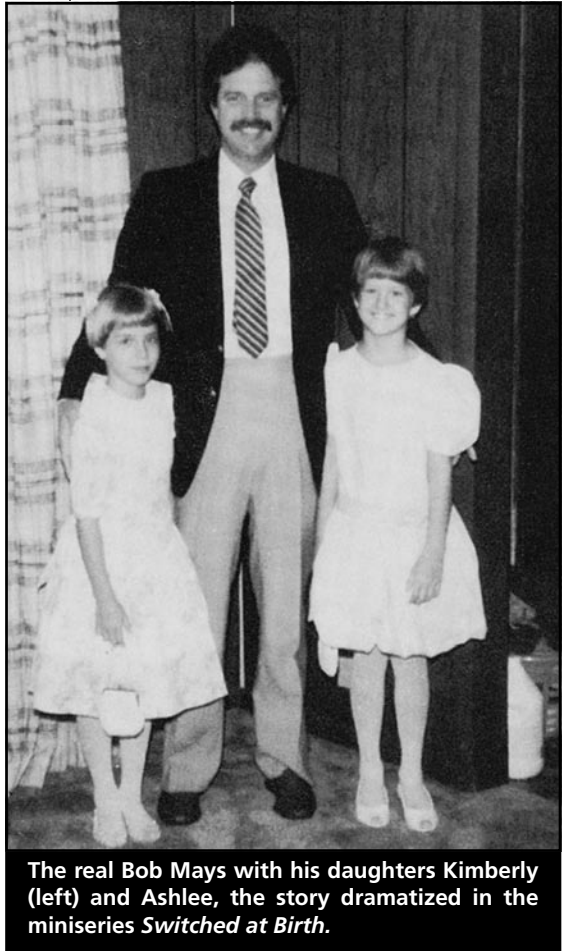
piece. One of his earliest projects, “Executioner’s Song” (1982), highlights that wisdom. The Emmy Award-winning TV movie was based on Norman Mailer’s Pulitzer Prize-winning book depicting the events surrounding the execution of Gary Gilmore.

Schiller used his own best-selling book, *Perfect Murder, Perfect Town* about the Christmas-night murder of six-year-old JonBenet Ramsey and the 18-month investigation as the basis of his 2003 TV movie. He believes it’s essential to secure the rights of some of the principal players when producing a true story in order to achieve dramatic perspective.

Other producers, such as Ilene Berg, feel comfortable working without rights if an extensive public record exists. Her telefilm, “Baby M” (1988), about a surrogate mother’s custody battle that riveted public attention, was praised by supporters of both camps as an accurate representation of a controversial case.

In my own experience at ABC, I can recall reviewing scripts in which the power of the story was obliterated by elevating the significance of the individual whose rights had been secured. The glorification of a particular detective, for instance, can easily tilt the tale in the wrong direction. But, for the most part, networks want the rights secured — and going after them can be a complicated process.

Switched at Birth (1991), one of television’s most successful miniseries, reveals how intricate and contentious chasing the rights for true stories can



The real Bob Mays with his daughters Kimberly (left) and Ashlee, the story dramatized in the miniseries *Switched at Birth*.

be. The story involved a custody battle of epic proportions that, according to producer and writer, Michael O’Hara, played into everyone’s worst nightmare. Briefly, the daughter of Regina and Ernest Twigg died at age 10, and through tests, it is discovered that she could not be the Twiggs’ natural daughter. In fact, their biological daughter, Kimberly had been “switched at birth.” The Twiggs wanted Kimberly to be turned over to them, and a custody battle began between the Twiggs and Bob Mays, the man who up to this point had believed that Kimberly was *his* daughter (Mays’ wife at the time of the birth had since died.)

The battle for the television rights was fierce. Citing the story's universality and emotional appeal, all the broadcast networks wanted to "get" the story. The chase began for O'Hara when he received a call from a journalist in Florida, where the true story took place. Was O'Hara interested? O'Hara said he was.

The journalist had contacted Mays, who had many suitors seeking to get his cooperation. O'Hara flew to Florida to meet with the father. O'Hara was one of many meeting with him in this particular "beauty contest," but O'Hara was able to convince Mays to work with him instead of another producer who, O'Hara warned, might put a writer on the project whom Mays didn't like.

It was a full-day meeting with O'Hara steadily advancing his case. To bolster his cause, he said he would write the script himself. O'Hara had sent Mays a copy of the telemovie he had written, "Those She Left Behind." Mays liked the script, and O'Hara won the contest. Mays' rights went for \$250,000, at the time, 1990, the highest price every paid for a set of rights.

But what about the Twiggs? O'Hara made a strategic decision not to seek their rights, but NBC wanted both sets of rights. Another production company had the rights to the Twiggs and a "shotgun marriage" between them was arranged in order to beat out CBS for the story. Word was that CBS would go forward with the project with only the rights to the Twiggs.

With the hastily created union in place, O'Hara arranged a lengthy meeting with the Twiggs to convince them that he was not Mays' guy and that he would be fair and balanced in the telling of the story, and would avoid

taking an advocacy position.

Was CBS bluffing about doing the project with only the Twiggs? It's hard to say, because in chases, misinformation is often part of the game plan. Placing a story in the trades that a network or producer is going ahead with a project is often a way to get the competition to "blink" or back off even before anything concrete has been set. Networks feel it's important to get their version of a hot story on the air first, thus creating intense competition.

Getting on the air first is not always a sure indicator of high ratings, however, no matter how many executives believe that their jobs depend upon it. ABC aired its Charles and Diana movie first during the 1981-82 season, but the subsequent CBS movie received significantly higher ratings. No matter that rushing a story on the air to beat the competition might mean less time for adequate promotion, networks insist on getting there first.

The trades themselves seemingly encourage the "get there first" approach. In 2005, hoping perhaps to ride the religious coattails that made Mel Gibson's "The Passion of Christ" a resounding international success, ABC and CBS both had telefilms in production about Pope John Paul II. *Daily Variety's* July 13th headline proclaimed, "Hallmark Trumps B'casters with John Paul Bio" in an article that almost gleefully announced that the Hallmark Channel was getting its story on the air ahead of the big guys, a real David and Goliath story. Thus the press, as well as the networks, seeks to generate excitement with chases. Bored executives can easily get the competitive juices flowing wanting to win the race first and the press is happy

because it gets a media-worthy story *about* a chase.

How should the chase game be played? Must networks and producers play fair? Should a city-slicker dress in overalls to be seen as “one of the guys,” as one dapper producer did during the beauty contest for the rights to the story of the rescued coal miners in Pennsylvania in 2002? When the stakes are so high, anything’s worth a try.

Can a network executive steer a project to a favored producer or studio? You bet. Can an agency that controls key rights exclude those players who aren’t represented by that agency? Certainly. In order to spark interest and get competitive juices flowing, can a producer tell a nervous network executive that another network is putting up money to land a project when that isn’t the case? Risky if caught in the lie, because executives at competing networks keep close tabs

on one another and are often “best friends,” but there are times when being “aggressive” (another term for lying?) reaps significant rewards.

As the market for broadcast television movies decreases and as cable outlets pay lower and lower license fees, chases, though perhaps not as numerous as before, become increasingly intense. With round-the-clock news and *Law & Order* clones chewing through today’s headlines, it becomes more difficult to find stories that have not been over-exposed, stories that still have revelations that the public will want to watch. There will, however, always be stories that capture the interest of the public, no matter how many news broadcasts have been done, and it becomes the daunting challenge of producers and executives to determine which of those hot stories have the necessary elements to warrant an all-out chase.

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Saving Our Legacy: Archiving Television at the Crossroads

A professional archivist shows how TV can preserve its heritage for the future. | **By Lisa R. Carter**

In his article “Beyond the Fleeting Image” (*Television Quarterly*, Spring/Summer 2004), Rich Newberg made a passionate case for the value of historic television footage, and outlined the current state of television preservation. The picture he presented was of a critical situation; the rich history of local television—the story of our communities in motion—is imperiled due to obsolete media and a lack of searchable descriptive catalogues. The urgency of doing something to save what footage can be found has been instigated by celebrations of anniversaries, viewer interest and the hope of repurposing content for delivery over the Internet. In spite of this urgency, television stations often find themselves frozen at the crossroads, without the resources or expertise to take the action needed to preserve past programming and ensure its longevity for use in the future.

Newberg submitted some examples of efforts towards preservation, presenting the experience of WIVB-TV as a specific case study. He also described a resource that is meant to help direct preservation efforts at local television stations, the Association of Moving Image Archivist’s (AMIA) *Local Television: A Guidebook for Saving Our Heritage*. Newberg’s overview indicates a growing interest in, and promulgation of, resources for preserving local television materials. This follow-up reviews the development of this interest and resources, lists additional television archiving projects, and outlines some initial steps for stations who seek a place to begin.

The best place to start an investigation into the state of and reasons for television preservation is the Library of Congress’s *Television and Video Preservation 1997: A Report on the Current State of American Television*

and Video Preservation. This study is useful to broadcasters because it details why the television heritage is worth preserving, using concrete testimony from those inside and outside the industry, such as studio and network representatives, historians, educators and archivists. The report is a touchstone for an informed discussion of the issues, and a resource for quotes and facts that can support funding proposals to granting agencies, community donors and corporate home offices.

While the Library of Congress was working on their 1997 study, Steven Davidson and Gregory Lukow were putting together a book called

The Administration of Television Newsfilm and Videotape Collections: A Curatorial Manual. Funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), this publication brings together essays, guidelines and examples that a station can use as an instruction manual as they set up an archival program.

Following this raised interest, AMIA prioritized and developed strategies for implementing the numerous recommendations in *Television and Video Preservation 1997*. By initiating several projects, AMIA provided tools that can be used by television stations as they take steps to preserve their heritage.

AMIA's Local Television Task Force (LTV) developed a grant project that was funded by the NHPRC to join with NATAS in discussing issues and making recommendations to promote preservation of local television. Together, NATAS and AMIA created a

database describing the local television holdings of public archives and stations, held summits to determine how the archival community could best help television stations and developed case studies of example archival projects at archives and television stations. These efforts culminated in the publication of *Local Television: A Guidebook for Saving Our Heritage*.

This guidebook outlines the steps a station should take if it wants to ensure the longevity of its assets. Resources for information about archiving, cataloging and storage are listed. Finally, the case studies included at the end of the *Guidebook* document how some stations

have approached the archives dilemma. Partnerships between KSTP-TV and the Minnesota Historical Society, Maine television stations and Northeast Historic Film and Pennsylvania Cable Network (PCN) and the Cable Center show how collaboration can benefit asset longevity and public access. In addition, the WGBH and Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN) case studies demonstrate how some stations are managing these efforts on their own.

Among other AMIA initiatives that might prove useful to television stations as they build an archival program are Moving Image Collections (MIC), the Preservation Fact Sheets and the activities of the Digital Initiatives Committee. MIC is building a union catalog of moving image footage available from participating archives and media producers. Through MIC's archival directory, archives in a station's region can be located. Finally MIC

The television community was rediscovering the value of its own history.

provides information about moving image preservation and metadata generation. Local television stations can either use MIC as an information resource or can participate in MIC to make their footage searchable to the general public. AMIA's Preservation Fact Sheets detail information about storage, handling and reformatting standards for moving image materials. AMIA's Digital Initiatives Committee is currently undertaking a study about the state of Digital Asset Management in the moving image community.

During the development of these tools, the moving image archives community acknowledged a need for a granting agency that would support preservation efforts across the country. By 2003, a few public and private sector individuals and institutions came together to establish the National Television and Video Preservation Foundation (NTVPF). The NTVPF "is an independent, non-profit organization created to fulfill a long-standing need by raising private funds and providing grants to support preservation and access projects at institutions with television and video collections throughout the United States". At this time, the NTVPF acquires donated services from a variety of labs and storage facilities and matches these sponsors to non-profit institutions who need help preserving their television materials.

While the basics (cataloging, storage and reformatting) of television archives work were being documented and promoted, the television community was rediscovering the value of its own history. In addition to celebrating anniversaries, stations faced large

numbers of tapes they were increasingly unable to store. Their viewers were beginning to call, inquiring about their own history captured on tape. Calls from cable channels and the lure of the internet as a delivery mechanism beckoned with new repurposing opportunities. And then the FCC mandated that television stations would need to begin broadcasting digitally by 2006.

While the major networks (NBC, CNN, etc) have employed proprietary systems for dealing with their archives and digital assets, local television continues to struggle to find appropriate and affordable solutions. Public television stations, given their educational mandates, have started to explore solutions to gaining control of their archives and migrating their assets into digital learning objects. A variety of projects have begun to "do something". A quick and non-comprehensive review of some of these initiatives illustrates a growing interest in tackling the archival challenge.

Research and support are building nationally for archival and digitizing activities.

- WTIU at Indiana University recently received an National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Preservation Assistance grant to bring in a consultant to do a preservation survey that will better inform their archival efforts.
- Kentucky Educational Television (KET) received grant funding to digitize its aired program archives. As a result of this project, KET began to address the role of digitization in video preservation, metadata generation, management of archival assets and strategies for saving the rest of their legacy materials.

- New Jersey Public Television (NJN) has begun a project to digitize selected heavily used segments from their archives.

- Production managers at Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) have been documenting information about their programs and archiving that metadata as productions wrap up. This effort will provide the basis for the digital asset management (DAM) system they will soon be implementing.

- Georgia Public Broadcasting (GPB) has also been building a DAM infrastructure to manage and distribute media more effectively, which will include digitizing their archive. They are also hosting this year's SURA/VIDe Conference, a venue for discussing the management and dissemination of digital video.

- Iowa Public Television (IPTV) holds a Digital Television Symposium every year that explores the latest information on digital television, including presentations on metadata, archiving and DAM.

- Wisconsin Public Television (WPT) hosts a website that presents their research on the issues involved in DAM, including information from their Evolving the Links project, a list of readings, presentations, web sites and definitions that explore issues relating to archiving and disseminating television assets.

- Detroit Public Television (DPTV) dug into their archives to work with Michigan State University's (MSU) MATRIX project to digitize and provide access to American Black Journal online. In addition to the NEH grant MATRIX received to undertake this project, DPTV received a grant from the NTVPF to transfer programs from this series that are still on 2 inch Quad tapes.

Research and support are building nationally for archival and digitizing activities. Vanderbilt University's

Television News Archive, which is the largest, most comprehensive collection of national broadcast news available to the general public, received grants from the National Science Foundation, the NEH, America Research Libraries and local foundations to investigate technologies for digitizing television and to implement the digitizing of their archive.

Preserving content and archiving for retrieval are critical to the future of media delivery in the digital world.

WGBH, which has long been a leader in investigating DAM issues, has teamed up with New York University (NYU), WNET Thirteen and PBS to undertake *Preserving Digital Public Television*, a National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIPP) funded project. This endeavor will advance national standards and provide a model for preserving digital programming. The templates and conclusions resulting from this project will be useful for all television archiving initiatives.

This year, the Corporation of Public Broadcasting (CPB) will release the first metadata standard designed specifically for television materials, called PB Core. This metadata dictionary offers a standard way of describing television materials so that content can be more easily retrieved, shared and repurposed. PB Core is also designed for use as a guide for the development of an archival or asset management process at individual stations.

These model projects and standard-setting initiatives provide the framework for saving our heritage

as it has been captured by television. They also anticipate the preservation and management of future television product.

But where should the individual television station begin?

1. Define the situation. How much legacy material exists, where is it and what kind of catalogs, indexes or other information survives to describe the asset? Who is in charge of the old tapes and how are they used? What kind of budget is available for archiving and what does the station hope to achieve?

2. Put someone in charge of the effort. WGBH, WNET, WPT, UNC-TV, WITU, KET, GPB, and even PBS are among those who have designated this work as someone's primary concern, sometimes establishing a full-time archivist or media asset management position.

3. Gather resources. Stations can utilize the publications and websites listed in this article to determine next steps and identify best practices already being employed by others.

4. Implement a plan. Next steps will be identified by a station's goals, focused through a review of the available resources and carried out by someone who can worry about these issues full time. The steps towards archiving are further detailed in the AMIA LTV Guidebook.

If these steps seem daunting, a station might consider partnering with an entity that can bring some resources to the effort, such as a library or an archive. As the case studies in the AMIA LTV *Guidebook* demonstrate, this sort of solution can effectively address preservation needs and public access. However, a transfer or sharing of rights ownership should be considered in such a partnership, since an archival institution will have to spend public dollars to save a television collection.

Since 1997, advances have been made in research, collaborations and technologies that can further the preservation of and access to the television heritage. What remains is action. Saving our visual heritage will require a change in how television stations prioritize managing their assets as well as a sharing of resources. Collaborations with non-traditional partners such as libraries, archives and museums will open up new funding opportunities. Innovative, exploratory efforts need to be documented and shared with others who seek similar solutions.

Preserving content and archiving for retrieval are critical to the future of media delivery in the digital world. Let's set out from the crossroads and uncover our past with an eye toward our future.

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Cleavage Control!

How did fifties TV deal with bra and girdle advertising? Verrry carefully! | **By Bob Pondillo**

If you think Janet Jackson's 2004 Super Bowl breast-baring episode caused a national scandal, you haven't heard the fascinating story of how postwar TV advertising dealt with "problems" of female cleavage. From the very get-go, one of commercial TV's biggest concerns—and public relations nightmares—was how it would display certain female pulchritude on the small screen.

One key reason for its anxiety was problematic: Just as American television made its commercial debut in the late 1940s, so did the return of clothing that over-emphasized a woman's bust.

The era was, indeed, the age of "mammary madness": a time of cone-shaped brassieres—dubbed "torpedo" or "bullet bras"—that caused each breast to appear perpendicular and pointy like the head of a missile. Evangelist Billy Graham remarked that citizens of the period had become "absorbed and obsessed with sex, especially the female bosom."

In 1948, NBC-TV refused to accept advertisements for girdles and brassieres. Chief network censor Stockton Helffrich considered corsets and bras "not a particularly timely [ad] classification for the new medium."

NBC-TV was not hostile to these products *per se*, just concerned about audience reaction to such marketing on commercial television and the potential public relations problems such messages could pose to the nascent industry. These products stirred concerns because of their association with human reproduction and bodily functions, areas of abiding taboo, never

In 1948, NBC-TV refused to accept advertisements for girdles and brassieres.

to be spoken of in mixed company or in front of children. For example, when

asked what commercial content was disconcerting on television, a survey respondent remarked, "bras and girdle [ads that] talked about the lift and separation," concluding, "That's embarrassing when there's teen-age boys around...it starts the imagination."

Nonetheless, one of Helffrich's earlier memos made clear that he saw a possible future for bra and girdle promotion, and explained "a classification of this type can be better absorbed in the framework of a come-of-age television schedule." That sense of uncertainty, of not knowing what kind of advertising the television viewer would bear, was a central concern as the industry was inventing itself. Based upon their experience with radio advertising, early television practitioners knew if

they first limited controversial ads to certain parts of the day, such a scheme would gradually spur general audience acceptance. Helffrich's mention of a come-of-age schedule at least suggests that possibility. And, true to form, six months later, in late January 1949, NBC television had already reconsidered dropping its ban on advertising bras and girdles, but only on local broadcasts and in specific time periods. Helffrich wrote, "Possible [commercial] treatments...[may] be acceptable and we have indicated with certain reservations a willingness to examine suggested presentations."

By November 1949, NBC-TV censors took a chance on a girdle commercial deemed "in pretty good taste." It "featur[ed] a demonstration of the girdle on a life-like dummy," explained Helffrich, "followed by a dissolve...to a live model attractively outfitted in a negligee bearing a marked similarity facially and by stance to the dummy seen earlier." Still, there was some tampering by the censors. Helffrich, for instance, insisted the girdle had to cover the dummy's thighs. If there was even the hint of a "crotch shot," as he put it, tulle—fine silk netting used in veils and scarves—had to be used to mask the "offense" of exposing a female "thigh between the bottom of the girdle and top of the hosiery." Helffrich's final caveat had the ad restricted to daytime broadcast "and on a woman's participation show basis only."

By early February 1950, there was speculation that Maiden Form Brassiere would soon be allowed to advertise on an NBC-TV Saturday night program.

Chief rival CBS-TV was the first to accept a bra commercial—showing it three days a week on its afternoon *Vanity Fair* fashion broadcast—it was therefore assumed evening ads for women's undergarments could not be far behind. The controversial CBS-TV afternoon bra commercial was uninspired and straightforward: a female spokesperson sat before cameras holding samples of the company's brassieres while exhorting their virtues. "The first [bra]," wrote Helffrich, "was a flesh colored number...[the spokesperson's] only particularly graphic remarks [were]...Maiden Form 'supports from below'...[with] the accent on 'uplift.'" Next came a strapless black bra dubbed the "Hold Tight," that again referred to the undergarment's support and comfort. Helffrich stated the product was "perfectly in line for a women's weekday daytime show...[but still] undesirable [for] nighttime network programming," and NBC-TV ad sales agreed, as did head of NBC television programming, Sylvester "Pat" Weaver. So, while there was no specific network code forbidding such sponsorship, Helffrich's rule-of-thumb precedent restricted such advertising to before 4:30 p.m. or earlier. "Placement at any other times would be poor programming," he declared.

Faye Emerson's program was not the problem. Her glamorous gowns, with their dramatic plunging necklines, were.

But what if a bra manufacturer wanted to advertise on a specific show at a later time? Lilyette Brassieres' desire to display its foundation garment line only on Faye Emerson's nighttime NBC-TV program asked just such a question.

By May 1950, Emerson's new show—*Fifteen with Faye*—seen Saturdays from 10:30-10:45 p.m., had only been on the network for about a month, but her earlier CBS-TV shows and many other television guest appearances had already caused considerable controversy with certain viewers and critics.

But Emerson's program—a breezy celebrity chat show on trends in fashion, theatre, and New York café society in general—was not the problem; her glamorous gowns were. On television Emerson always wore revealing designer frocks with dramatic plunging necklines, which became her trademark. As the new visual medium took its first steps, Emerson's décolletage became the subject of popular and industry newspaper coverage, sparked photo layouts in *Life* and other publications, and inspired comedians' jokes—one wag quipping "Emerson put the 'V' in TV." All the more reason Lilyette wanted to associate itself with Emerson's poitrine, intending to advertise its fetchingly named Cue-T-Bra. Lilyette's ad copy stressed its brassiere's "ingenious... self-adjusting straps [that] lift each bust individually [for]...contour separation." Despite sales-department and sponsor pressure, the NBC-TV censorship department again turned away the nighttime brassiere business for daytime television placement. In this case, Helffrich appeared more concerned about local press reaction than home viewer anger. "It would be hard to conceive of [bra] claims of this type," Helffrich explained, "on a show like Faye Emerson's getting by without a tweaking from [New York newspaper television critics] Gould, Crosby, et al."

The exhibition of brassieres on live models was initially out of the



Dagmar (top photo) decorated NBC's *Broadway Open House* in 1950.

Marilyn Monroe (above) was a legend.

question on television, so dummies were used, but *Sponsor* reported CBS-TV considered changing its display standards to real women. “A tasty idea,” remarked Helffrich, “and I guess it remains to be seen whether or not it

is actually done.” Whatever would happen, one thing was clear: NBC-TV would not be a trailblazer in this area. As it turned out, live models *were* used by the upstart ABC-TV network. Moreover, Helffrich noted, ABC permitted the ad to be broadcast during “family viewing” time—considered until 9:30 p.m., Eastern Time, 8:30 p.m., Central Time, and 9 p.m. elsewhere. On Friday evening, October 20, 1950, the HI/low Witchery and Disguise Bra was displayed on a live model to network audiences. Helffrich wrote, “I haven’t caught this particular pioneering effort but called my counterpart at ABC, Grace Johnson, to get her side of the story. She insists the plug was handled in good taste [and] says they have had only one adverse letter...” Nonetheless, the *New York World Telegram* was critical of the “event” as was John Crosby, TV critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, who wrote that using a live model “accentuates the—uh—positive, if I make myself clear, and I’m afraid that I do.” On balance, the commercial was praised by entertainment industry publications *Variety*, *Radio Daily*, and *Cue*. Helffrich, again toeing the conservative company line, noted, “NBC...is taking a wait and see attitude.”

Sensitivity to bra advertising persisted throughout the 1950s. In mid-November 1957, NBC-TV preempted the popular *Perry Como*

Show for a special, *Holiday in Las Vegas*, sponsored by Exquisite Form Bra. In what was described only as “a situation” having occurred, a puzzled Helffrich wrote, “There have been enough phone calls and letters on [this]...broadcast to

Advertising America’s cultural obsession with the female bosom on the ubiquitous new medium of television made sexual propriety an incendiary social issue that held economic and political consequences for the networks.

suggest *something*. But what?...Parallels and precedents notwithstanding, polite phrasing and poetic persuasion aside, [the brassiere ads] *bothered* certain viewers...[w]omen more than men, in mail I personally have seen.” The chief censor next ticked down a list of potential reasons for the audience revulsion: the Las Vegas locale perhaps; maybe because full-bosomed actress Jayne Mansfield was featured in the show despite, Helffrich noted, the “careful avoidance of the contiguity of the [bra] commercials themselves and program material.” Perchance, he mused, it was the “cumulative feelings brought to the program by certain viewers...I truly do not know,” Helffrich admitted, concluding, “nor do some very mature colleagues working with me. I do know that I...am concerned over such critical reaction...which articulates itself around words like ‘indecent’ and ‘embarrassing’ in the family viewing circle.” And it was puzzling, indeed.

Newspapers and magazines of the era continually ran large display ads for all manner of brassieres and girdles, but the women featured wearing them were

illustrations and not photographs. If a newspaper photo of a bra-clad female was too close to the real thing, the use of a live, moving brassiere model on television would be considered a near obscenity for many, or at the very least, a deeply offensive breach of taste. It is important to recall that gazing upon the female breast in this era was a taboo of enduring power, one wrapped in sex, lust, guilt, shame, and all the baser emotions to which “decent, God-fearing” people should not be tempted or exposed.

Bra ad complaints persisted into at least the early-to-mid 1960s, prompting a frustrated Helffrich in his final NBC censorship report to ask: “Is it or is it not ‘poor taste in advertising’ to advertise a brassiere on television?” He quoted a *Printers’ Ink* column that proclaimed horror over an Exquisite Form Bra commercial’s “close-up of [a] bosom that filled the entire screen and went into clinical details about a gadget in front put there to adjust the fit.” Helffrich explained what was actually presented was a special effect shot of the garment itself “as if filled out by the anatomical matter it was designed to fit,” not a close-up of a breast itself. In a direct and pointed defense, Helffrich wrote:

The exploration of how and how not to advertise brassieres...[is a discussion that] examines “good taste” as a euphemism for evasion....“Personal undergarments” advertising, invariably relates itself to alleged damage to children, presumes a direct contribution to delinquency, and so on. If the handling is provocative, cheap, or essentially dishonest in its appeal: agreed. Otherwise, nonsense; arrant, head-in-the-sand, silly nonsense...Avoidance of television commercials concerning brassieres in effect would be avoidance of

reflection in television of a major cultural preoccupation: the bosom fetish. Better a passing reference to the fact that those “personal undergarments” are designed to fit than television pretence denying their existence.

Here Helffrich speaks to the essence of the matter: a brassiere was not merely a functional piece of female under-clothing, it was an erotic symbol, part and parcel of a culturally constructed, evangelically grown American breast fetish. Therefore, bra ads hyper-focused the on-going cultural obsession with the female bosom. Advertising such an obsession on the ubiquitous new medium of television made sexual propriety an incendiary social issue that held economic and political consequences for the networks. After all, television in general (and brassiere commercials specifically) provided countless outlets for “inappropriate” gazing at the female breast. At mid-century, bra ads were regarded as yet another repudiation of a “system of sexual controls” that historian Beth Bailey says, “few were willing [or] able to publicly reject...” It seems not much has changed in fifty years.

Clearly, to show or not to show the female chest on TV still vexes the broadcast industry—as the passionate reaction to Janet Jackson’s Super Bowl breast flash strongly attests. But when one considers the backstory of “cleavage control” on early television, the Jackson incident appears to be just the latest iteration of America’s unabashed, ongoing cultural fixation with the womanly bosom.

Bob Pondillo, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of media and culture at Middle Tennessee State University.

An Opposing View...

The Cosby Show did not validate the belief in the American dream. | **By Richard G. Carter**

Bill Cosby and I are contemporaries in age, race and political persuasion — and even share a demonstrated love for vintage movies. I love Cosby as a creative artist. I loved his stand-up comedy. I loved him in movies such as 1974's "Uptown Saturday Night." I loved him in television's hokey *I Spy* in the 1960s. I even loved his Jello commercials.

In my weekly column in the New York *Amsterdam News* — the nation's largest black newspaper — I was pleased to defend his controversial comments at the 50th anniversary of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in May 2004. I supported his subsequent, headline-making thoughts on the black family and I wrote objectively about his highly publicized sexual misconduct allegations in early 2005.

All that said, it is fair to say that I am now — and always have been — pro-Bill Cosby, which is important for readers to understand. I respect his integrity and his philanthropy with black colleges. But this isn't about that. Not by a long shot.

This is about *The Cosby Show*, which appeared on NBC for eight years in the

1980s and '90s. And it's about what I consider misleading comments about the program by Mary Ann Watson in her cover story in the Spring/Summer 2005 issue of *Television Quarterly*.

Frankly speaking, I was never a fan of *The Cosby Show*, which, I feel, did not accurately portray black life in America. As a black man who has been around the block a few times, I feel the program painted a false, even rosy picture of how most of us live — especially in the minds of many solace-seeking, guilt-ridden whites. And, as usual, I put my money where my mouth is.

I stated my reasons in a *Television Quarterly* cover story of my own in 1988. I characterized the show as "TV's black comfort zone for whites." I also took down the show that same year, during my days as an Op-Ed Page columnist with the *New York Daily News* — buttressed by street interviews of black and white viewers. And I heavily criticized the show's unrealities in a freelance piece for the Bergen (N.J.) *Record* and as a staff columnist with *The Milwaukee Journal*.

Here are three of the many negative opinions I gleaned on the streets of New York City for my *Daily News* column

during the heyday of *The Cosby Show* in January 1988:

Black woman: “Why kid ourselves? Cosby’s TV thing has always been out of touch with the black experience. I don’t live like that. No one I know lives like that except for a few white friends. I mean, they never talk about black problems on *The Cosby Show*.”

Black man: “Bill Cosby is God’s gift to the white man in these troubled times. Whites know if they watch his program, ain’t nobody gonna demand nothing from them.”

White man: “I love escapist TV like that lightweight show of his.”

In the years since, very few of my black friends, acquaintances and professional colleagues have had much positive to say about *The Cosby Show*. Like me, most feel other black programs on network TV such as *Sanford and Son*, *The Jeffersons* and *Good Times* were much closer to what it was all about. Not only that, they are considered more realistic, more entertaining — and far more humorous.

Although everyone knows time plays tricks on our memories, it amazes me that anyone — especially black people or right-thinking whites — can still believe in the sanctity of *The Cosby Show*. Thus, I was disappointed to read Ms. Watson’s thoughts about the program in her piece on the new Black Family Channel. Here’s how she began it:

“Twenty years ago, American families of all races looked forward to watching *The Cosby Show* together each week. Much of its appeal, beside the laughs, was that it validated the belief in the American Dream. Claire and Cliff Huxtable, a lawyer and a doctor, were happily upper-middle class and they

got there the old-fashioned way — hard work and higher education. Their five kids never heard the end of it and were never allowed to take the easy way out. That was the key to the comedy throughout the series’ eight-year run.”

I had to read this three times to digest it. And I still couldn’t believe what I was reading. I thought America long ago had outgrown the peaches-and-cream approach to black life that oozed from *The Cosby Show*. But here it was again. And I found myself saying aloud to myself, “You’ve got to be kidding, Ms. Watson.”

My reasons coincide with those of many others with whom I have spoken, and continue to speak, over the years. And they are easy for middle-class, mainstream, hard-working, authentic, average black people to understand. The program was out of touch.

First and foremost, it was elitist. And it would not be a stretch to perceive the Huxtables as rich rather than upper-middle class. In the context of today’s news, it reminds me of public views of a handful of Black Republicans — a species I cannot abide. They can’t see the forest for the trees. You could watch the show week-in and week-out and, except for their skin color, never get the idea that you were watching black people.

In short, *The Cosby Show* was *Ozzie and Harriet* in white face. In many ways, it was a stylish, modern minstrel show out to reassure white America that blacks were no longer a threat to them. And I can clearly recall a 1987 newspaper column by the conservative William F. Buckley Jr. in which he said *The Cosby Show* proves that racial

discrimination is not increasing in America. “A nation simply does not idolize members of a race that nation despises,” Buckley blubbered. Ugh!

Perhaps more to the point, *The Cosby Show* was not black enough. I don’t care how many African artifacts they had on display. Black on the outside doesn’t mean black on the inside — something white America had no interest hearing about. Clearly missing was a middle-class view of black life. To many of us, the day-to-day activities of upper-middle class blacks — or even rich blacks — is a turn-off.

Back in the 1970s — at the height of the movies’ kick-ass Blaxploitation era which I loved — an oft-heard question in films such as “Cotton Comes to Harlem” was: “Is that black enough for you?” Clearly, the answer is easy when discussing *The Cosby Show*. It’s a resounding “no.” Here’s why:

White viewers saw Cosby as a non-threatening, lovable, colorless pitchman for Jello. To appease them, the program rarely delved into gut-level issues of concern to everyday blacks. Discussion of anti-black job discrimination, drug abuse, black teenage pregnancy, interracial dating and marriage, one-parent families, growing anti-white attitudes, the Nation of Islam and the Minister Louis Farrakhan, the Million Man March and countless other issues important to many of us, were nowhere to be found.

While it is fine to portray a successful, two-parent black family, it is wholly misleading to portray it as perfect — as was the case on *The Cosby Show*. There was the perfect doctor father and the perfect lawyer mother and perfect teen-

age children who love school, almost always were successful and free of real conflict. With their parents, siblings, teachers or friends.

But perfect just ain’t the way it is in real life black America. Real life is real tough. In point of fact, this made-for-TV family was as phony as a \$3 bill.

Thus, I feel *The Cosby Show* actually may have been harmful to the image of the life and times of “regular” black folks in this country. By “regular,” I mean those who don’t put on airs, socialize with their less fortunate black brothers and sisters and care what happens to them — something sorely missing among the characters on the program.

This is not to say *The Cosby Show* was not well-acted in keeping with its Pollyanna intent. Indeed, all of the performers — Cosby, Phylicia Rashad, Malcolm Jamal-Warner, Lisa Bonet, et al., were fine in what they did. It’s simply that what they did rang so very, very hollow. It was not the real world for the majority of the nation’s black citizens.

What’s sad is that the great Bill Cosby had a great forum from which to be great. Unfortunately, his plain-vanilla show was not — at least not from a black perspective. But it played great with millions of whites, who were happy to see happy, financially secure blacks who never rocked the racial boat. It made them happy and they loved it!

I find myself much more in tune with Cosby’s public persona in the years since *The Cosby Show* departed the prime time, network schedule. Of course, this brought him into mortal combat with many in the nation’s black community. Some characterize his outspoken stance regarding the black family and black youth today as I characterized his

highly rated TV show: “Elitist.”

One is black scholar Michael Eric Dyson, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania and author of “Is Bill Cosby Right? Or Has The Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind?” Said Dyson, in the wake of Cosby’s highly publicized criticisms of the black family in May 2004: “He’s ill-informed. I’m not mad at him, but he needs some empirical data so that he knows what he’s talking about...”

In 2005, Dyson took Cosby to task on several occasions on cable-TV talk shows, and last summer publicly dissed him at the prestigious Harlem Book Fair on C-SPAN. For my part, however, I think Cosby is correct in this situation and wholeheartedly agree with him

Among his stinging remarks that grabbed headlines from coast-to-coast, Cosby said that unless the values of America’s poor blacks improve, there always will be too many poor blacks

among us. He said the black community is not properly dealing with illiteracy, crime and violence, and skewered the obscene lyrics of some rap music and the failure of young blacks to speak proper English while “standing on the corner.”

Bravo, I say. As a father of four and grandfather of six, I fail to see where he spoke anything but the truth. As a matter of fact, he probably didn’t go far enough. For example, how can anyone who rides New York City subways disagree? Every other word you hear from young, attention-seeking blacks is “nigger.” And I mean girls as well as boys.

Finally, while *The Cosby Show* definitely was not my cup of tea, the new Bill Cosby is. Like me — and unlike many others — Cosby puts his money where his mouth is. These days, you gotta love him. Go on with your bad self, Cos.

Richard G. Carter, a New York freelance writer, was a columnist and editorial writer with the *New York Daily News*. He has appeared on “Larry King Live” and “The Phil Donahue Show” and co-hosted “Showdown” on CNBC with the late Morton Downey Jr. He was Vice President-Public Affairs with Group W Cable and in 1986 received the Marquette University By-Line Award for distinguished achievement in journalism.

Dr. Watson replies:

Whether or not The Cosby Show offered an accurate depiction of black families in the 1980s — and whether it did more harm than good by leading white viewers to the conclusion that the societal playing field had been leveled — has been a spirited debate since the show’s debut. Richard Carter has been an especially insightful critic of the series. His arguments about the show being “out of touch” are absolutely sound and have contributed important context to the national conversation on race. My comment that The Cosby Show “validated the belief in the American Dream” was meant as a description of the show’s premise, not an embrace of its truth. That the significance of the series continues to have emotional resonance after two decades underscores the potency of TV’s “social scripts” — and the importance of a forum such as Television Quarterly to discuss them.

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Attack the Messenger: How Politicians Turn You Against the Media

By Craig Crawford

Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD
(179 pages, \$22.95)

By **Bernard S. Redmont**

Almost everybody in the media missed the real story when Dan Rather reluctantly resigned from the *CBS Evening News* on November 23, 2004.

Craig Crawford got it right. The story should not have been about an insufficiently verified document on which CBS based its report on the National Guard Service of President George W. Bush. The real story was the substance—that there was ample evidence and testimony to expose Bush's deficient service record and his failure to show up at required times.

As Crawford puts it, “The messenger had become the issue, and his message was lost.” The politicians supporting Bush skillfully diverted the issue and attacked the messenger. It was, Crawford wrote, “the day the politicians won the war against the media.”

This is one case bolstering the thesis of a thin but worthy book, *Attack the Messenger*.

The dodge had happened before. The elder George H.W. Bush had targeted Rather during a live TV broadcast with the anchor on Jan.

25, 1988, making the reporter the issue, instead of Bush's role in the Iran-Contra scandal.

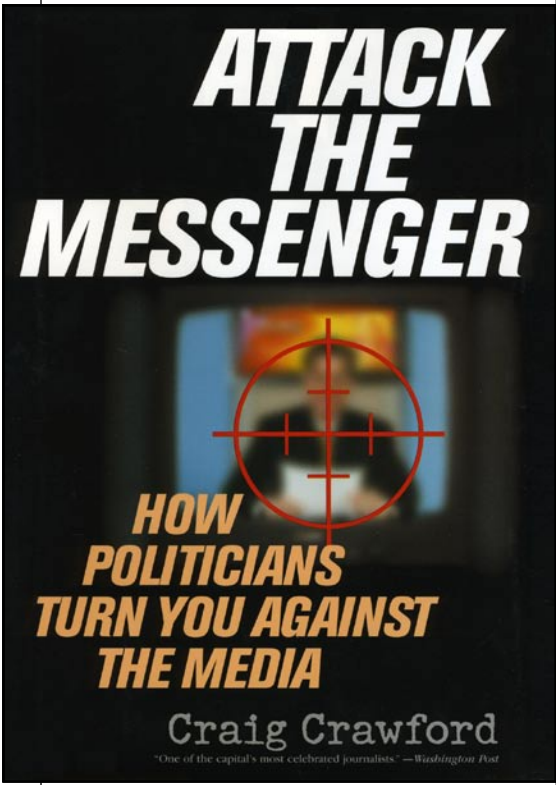
Bush Senior successfully attacked the messenger, by making a televised reference to Rather's angry walk off the anchor desk a year before. The Iran-Contra scandal was smothered.

This is an old artifice in philosophical argument, *ad hominem*, attacking a person with a passion and prejudice, instead of trying to use facts to refute his or her statement.

Crawford reminds us that the role of a journalist is “to stand in the shoes of average citizens who cannot get personal interviews with political leaders and ask the questions those leaders prefer not to answer.”

Demonizing the reporter

ATTACK THE MESSENGER



**HOW
POLITICIANS
TURN YOU AGAINST
THE MEDIA**

Craig Crawford

“One of the capital's most celebrated journalists.” —*Washington Post*

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undermines this vital role, thus subverting our democracy.

The device has worked so well that the media have been bullied and cowed. "Today," says Crawford, "reporters are less eager to stand up to power." Media bashing, he argues, has made many journalists into wimps.

A few hardy reporters like Helen Thomas, the dean of the White House press corps, asked tough questions in televised conferences. She was smacked down and exiled, ignored by Bush and his briefers, and banished from her front seat.

Journalistic bias is, of course, also a problem. "Plenty of reporting is biased, misinformed, and yes, just plain stupid," he says. But Crawford feels that "submissive reporting is the greater danger."

Too many in the news media shy away from aggressive questioning of politicians. "Television producers often worry that a news maker will not come on their shows again if they get too tough on them," says Crawford. Reporters sometimes worry that they will lose access to the halls of power if they speak truth to power.

CBS News executives mostly kept silent in 1988 after Bush Senior attacked Rather. It was worth noting that Bush launched his personal attack on Rather with the aid of a cue card held up by his campaign manager. The CBS camera did not show the cue card prompting.

Said Crawford: "Veteran news personnel in the room had never seen such a thing. It made Bush's outburst seem orchestrated. Had that been publicized, Rather might not have been so widely criticized as the villain in this

episode."

Crawford remarks that "Lying is an art form in Washington. The pros call it spin. A better word for spin is what we used to call it: propaganda." Republicans and Democrats alike have been guilty of this spinning.

Crawford is a Washington-based commentator and reporter, often a TV pundit. You've seen and heard him on CBS, NBC, CNBC, MSNBC and other TV and radio outlets. He's an attorney, though no longer practicing, and has run for office. So he's seen many side of the issue he tackles here.

Crawford writes eloquently on the odious spectacle of the shouters on cable, the CNN *Crossfire*-type yell fests.

He approvingly quotes ABC News President David Westin as a blunt critic of these shows, but he acknowledges that it works. It's wildly entertaining.

On CBS' *60 Minutes* in 2004, Jon Stewart, host of *The Daily Show* on Comedy Central, put it this way:

"What has become rewarded in political discourse is the extremity viewpoint. People like the conflict. Conflict, baby! It sells. *Crossfire!* *Hardball!* Shut up! You shut up!"

This said, we have some reservations about the book and its author. Crawford says he has not voted since 1987, when he became a journalist covering politics. Not necessarily something to be proud of. But his justification is that he wanted to be neutral.

He discloses that he had come to journalism after a few years of dabbling in Democratic politics. He reveals that the conservative Libertarian Party would be his political home today if he chose.

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His use of the term “politicians” is not precise. He really means primarily the conservative or right-wing politicians. At the same time, he is even-handed enough to criticize Democrats and Republicans, and he skewers journalists and officials alike.

Still, his thesis is a valid one, albeit often too simplistic. The book seems at times to be an expanded magazine article, for it tends to be padded and repetitious.

Crawford writes clearly for the most part, in simple, short sentences, and in clipped radio-television spoken style.

A couple of flaws: He uses the term “media” as if it were singular and monolithic. Media should be plural.

Another fault in an otherwise accurate work is Crawford’s panegyric to the national television networks as “still a solid source of real information.” He asserts that “with bureaus throughout the world, they can provide on-site reporting from nearly anywhere on the globe on a moment’s notice.”

One wonders where Crawford was when the networks demolished most of their overseas bureaus and began covering the world with “parachuted” reporters and packaged footage, and decided to go for “info-tainment.”

On the whole, however, *Attack the Messenger* rewards the reader with important insights.

There was a time, says Crawford, when the average person would watch a politician duck a question and immediately say, “He didn’t answer the question.” Today, people are more likely to say, “That’s a rude question.”

Crawford argues that the public must let journalists ask rude questions

again. It’s healthy, and it’s democracy at its best. He compares it to “Question Time” in the British Parliament—a vigorous exercise in democracy.

Politicians would not get away with avoiding tough questions if the public demanded more scrutiny, he says. It’s up to the voters to punish those who dodge the media or unfairly attack the messenger by not voting for them.

A frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly*, Bernard S. Redmont is Dean Emeritus of Boston University College of Communication, and served as a correspondent for CBS News and other media outlets. He is the author of *Risks Worth Taking: The Odyssey of a Foreign Correspondent*.

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Created By... Inside the Minds of TV's Top Show Creators

By Steven Priggé

Silman-James Press, Los Angeles
(215 pages, \$14.95 paperback)

By Keith Damron

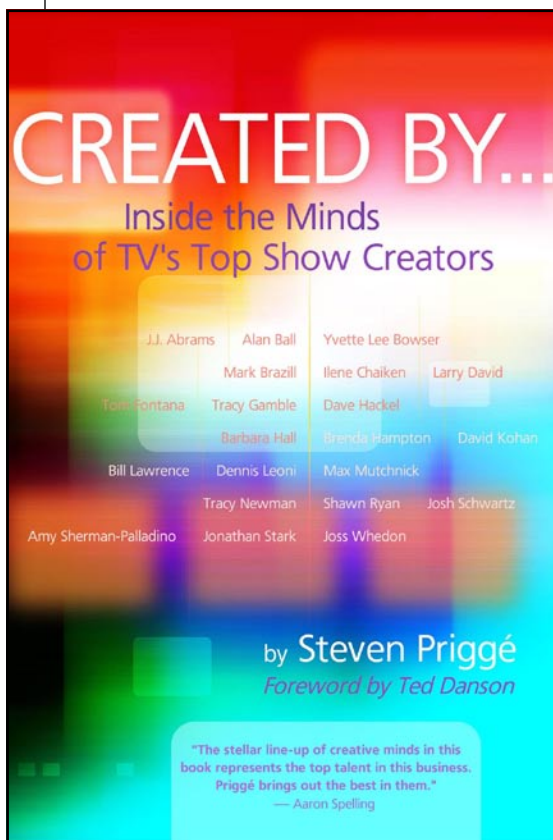
So, how did you break into the biz?

Show me an aspiring TV writer and I'll show you someone who has asked that question of a working Hollywood professional at least once in his or her budding career; and why not? To find our own way up the mountain, we often look to those who have blazed trails of their own and have reached the summit. Tales of success can do much to inspire legions of hard-working showbiz hopefuls who want nothing more than to have their shot at a career in a field where few flourish and many fall.

In *Created By...Inside The Minds of TV's Top Show Creators*, author Steven Priggé goes straight to the top of the mountain and asks this question — and many more — of twenty of the top show creators or showrunners of our time.

For the uninitiated, the term “showrunner” is the Hollywood parlance for the chief decision maker behind a television show. They are often the originators, and are almost always (networks notwithstanding) the final word on the creative

direction a series takes. Typically they carry the title of Executive Producer, though not all E.P.s are showrunners. They can best be analogized as the captain of the ship. Though rarely recognized by the casual viewer, some show creators have in years past, become household names and major contributors to popular American culture. Recognizable television giants like Norman Lear (*All in the Family*), Aaron Spelling (*Beverly Hills 90210*), and Garry Marshall (*Happy Days*) come to mind. Still others enjoy a more niche-like, almost cultish recognition like Joss Whedon (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; *Angel*; *Firefly*) a contemporary show creator featured in the book.



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In all cases these *auteurs* of television started as writers on other shows, learned their craft, and rose through the ranks to a pinnacle position in the TV writer/producer hierarchy. *Created By...* is our opportunity to meet them and to learn how they made it to the Hollywood big time.

After a foreword by Ten Danson and an introduction by Priggé, biographies of the twenty featured creators are presented along with a list of their writing credits and a photo. If you are a credit-reader (like this reviewer) it was nice to attach faces to such notable show creators as J.J. Abrams (*Lost*; *Alias*; *Felicity*), Brenda Hampton (*Seventh Heaven*) and Tom Fontana (*Oz*; *The Jury*). Their lists of credits (in most cases other hit shows) alone establishes an irreproachable track record and cements the notion that they didn't get to where they are through some accident of nature.

The rest of *Created By...* is a series of responses, reflections, and ruminations from the showrunners themselves on their careers, personal experiences, and perspectives on the Hollywood television-writing scene. The book is divided into major sections that serve as headings for a series of related subtopics that follow. For instance, "Beginnings" (chapter 1) focuses on such topics as "Early TV Influences," "Motivation from Family," and "Education." Each subtopic features six to nine of the creators' responses and reflections on the issue ranging from a paragraph to a page in length. Subsequent sections deal with "Breaking In", "Creating Your Own Show", and "Shooting the Pilot."

While the early chapters serve

to provide, for the most part, some historical context for the careers of these showrunners, the latter sections do offer some helpful information and advice for the hopeful TV scribe. In the final chapter, "So You Want to Write for My Show?," these television creators address what they look for in a writer and what spec scripts serve as the best writing samples. Yvette Lee Browser (*Half and Half*) looks for original material, one-act plays or short stories. Brenda Hampton and most other producers agree; they typically don't look at material written for their own show. In most cases, it puts the reader/producer in a vulnerable position of legal action in the event that they were working on an idea similar to the one in the sample.

Created By... is clearly written for the writer/student who has had some background in the television writing process. There is no primer that acquaints the reader with language and practices of the typical writing staffer. Assumptions are made that the reader understands terms like "spec" and "pitch." That is not necessarily a bad thing; it just speaks to a narrower readership.

And make no mistake, these aren't tales of intense drama. None of the twenty creators in question were relegated to a life sleeping in a cardboard box, close to starvation when their big break came (although Larry David did suggest it was a near-possibility). Barbara Hall (*Joan of Arcadia*) "fell" into television through a novel she wrote which caught the attention of a TV agent, who subsequently landed Hall her first TV job. Mark Brazill (*That*

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70's Show) worked as a comic before he caught the eye of Dennis Miller, who asked Brazill to join him if he ever landed a show; which Miller did. Their stories are straightforward, casual, and even a little dry at times. In many cases interviewees make breaking into one of the most difficult to penetrate professions sound easy. But if you're a TV writing aspirant looking for a departure from the countless "how-to-write" books that are out there, or you're just looking to become acquainted with some of the biggest TV power players in Hollywood, this book is worth a read.

Keith Damron is an assistant professor of Electronic Media and Film Studies at Eastern Michigan University, where he teaches production and scriptwriting. He's also written professionally for episodic television in the sci-fi genre, including several scripts for the series *Sliders*, on which he also served as a staff writer.

Inventing Late Night: Steve Allen and the Original *Tonight Show*

By Ben Alba

Prometheus Books
(368 pages, \$26.00)

By Bernard Timberg

In *Inventing Late Night* by Ben Alba we now have the definitive fan history of the Steve Allen *Tonight* show – written for fans and also for those who never knew Allen directly. The strength of the book is in its rich anecdotal detail, drawn from 32 of Allen's associates and fellow performers. Its weakness is that the anecdotes are marshaled so relentlessly to prove that Steve Allen "invented" the late-night talk show that the argument becomes monochromatic along the way, tiring even, and causes the author to leave out things that might contradict his thesis or put Allen's contribution into a larger perspective.

Still, fans of TV talk, scholars and those just plain interested in early television should be grateful for this volume. Gathered for the first time in one place is a multifaceted appreciation of Allen's talents as one of the founders of TV talk in the wild and woolly days when crews gathered around inspired hosts like Steve Allen and Ernie Kovacs were willing to try anything. We are still learning a great deal more about this era, but before you can put a puzzle together you have to have all the pieces. Alba's book contributes to an understanding

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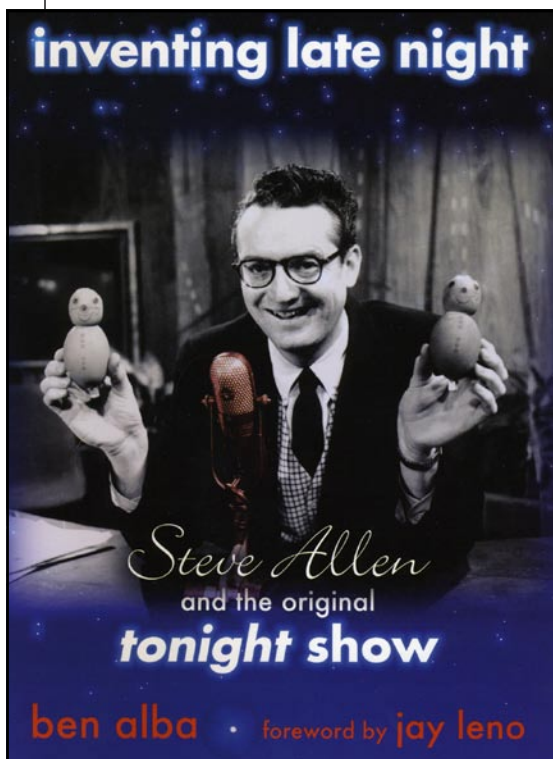
of one of the key pieces.

But Allen did not “invent” the late night talk show. What he did was put together the first commercially successful viable format for talk and variety in that time slot. The host and show that preceded him, Jerry Lester in *Broadway Open House*, were still tied too much to the proscenium arch and music-hall/vaudeville traditions. Allen’s training was in free-form radio. The late-show format he came up with — the opening monologue, the studio audience as welcoming chorus, the repartee of the host with the band leader, and that strange combination of private and public conversation that takes place between host and celebrity guests — is still with us today. He created what NBC Vice President Rick Ludwin called a “grammar” for this kind of show. But there was a strong show-business tradition preceding each of these elements, and each talk show host to follow adjusts the grammar and establishes, to extend the metaphor, his or her own unique “diction.”

There is much to learn from Alba’s book. I had always thought Jack Paar was the first “king” of late night. I took that straight from his own account (beware the show-biz autobiography!) Paar may have been quite sincere in his claim, but a single publicity shot in Alba’s book (it has two photographic sections, with 36 photographs in each) disputes this. An unidentified young lady, clad in one of those stunning 1950s evening gowns, is shown placing a crown on Allen’s head. The publicity shot is titled “TV’s first King of Late Night.” I

suspect, as with most show business traditions, the “royalty” tradition goes back further than Allen.

Some things had to stay the same but some things had to change, and Alba gives us many examples of Allen’s ability to go with the flow. He was interviewing Carl Sandburg one evening in December of 1954. Sandburg started running over “his allotted 10 minutes,” and Allen found himself “thanking the tireless poet repeatedly in polite but vain attempts to wrap up the interview.” Finally, adroitly and “without any hit of annoyance,” Allen interrupted one of Sandburg’s recitations from his Lincoln biography and told the audience, “twenty minutes or so ago we threw the schedule out the window.” He went on to spend an hour with Sandburg, practically the whole show. The poet



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remained benignly “oblivious to the mayhem” he was causing as guests were cancelled and plans frantically changed, and the evening flowed on. It turned out to be a remarkable success, the first of Allen’s single-guest theme shows and one that received glowing praise in the *New York Times*.

For all the great notes Allen struck on the air, both high and low, his original bits were not necessarily “original.” Before Allen there were Bob and Ray on the radio doing their own inspired man and woman on the street bits. Before Allen played with his bandleader (Skitch Henderson), his announcer (Gene Rayburn) and his singer ingenues (Eydie Gorme and Steve Lawrence), there was the repertory team of Jack Benny on the radio — with bandleader Phil Harris, boy singer Dennis Day, announcer Don Wilson, and a cast that was part real and part public persona created especially for its place in the Jack Benny family. And early daytime TV hosts like Arthur Godfrey and Garry Moore also developed repertory teams.

Alba’s interview with bandleader Skitch Henderson does show, in detail with salient quotes from Henderson, how a personality became a “persona” within such a show’s ensemble. Indeed, Henderson made his contributions to a second banana sidekick bandleader theme that reverberates in those who followed him: Doc Severinsen, who was literally passed the baton by Henderson in 1967, Paul Shaffer, Branford Marsalis, Max Weinberg and the Max Weinberg 7 on Conan O’Brien, Ellen De Generes’ twist on the theme with Afro-English DJ Tony Okungbowa, and many others.

There is rarely anything truly new under the sun in show business, and television talk shows in particular are works of “bricolage,” to use Levi Strauss’s term. They are put together out of bits and pieces of whatever is happening on the political, cultural and show business landscape, and welded to the host’s own strong personal vision by a team of skilled writers, producers, performers, shapers of sound and visual image and business managers.

The relentless effort to prove Steve Allen’s “invention” of the late-night TV talk show also makes for some strange omissions. For example, Alba records a particular piece of bravura camera work and direction by Dwight Hemion, when, inspired by the image of Fred Astaire defying gravity in his 1951 film classic “Royal Wedding,” Hemion had the TV camera defy gravity with upside-down and sideways effect for singers Andy Williams and Pat Marshall, ending with a “whirlwind” camera effect reminiscent of the tornado scene in *The Wizard of Oz* and the figure of Steve Allen himself, “perching sideways on a wall” and “nonchalantly ‘pouring’ a bottle of Knickerbocker Beer into a glass-sideways.” The studio audience “oohed and aahed” at this clever stunt, Alba reports, not seeming to think about or acknowledge Ernie Kovacs’ perfection of similar shots and stunts on his television shows in Philadelphia as well as the *Tonight* show itself. It is impossible to think that the non-sequitur blackout comedy sketches Allen did (which his crew called “crazy shots”) owed nothing to Kovacs, who had these kinds of bits well established by the time he performed two days of

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the week on the Tonight show while Allen covered the other three.

Alba's interviews are especially good in showing how each member of the Steve Allen team — the writers, the singers, the comedy performers and the director — worked to shape the show around the host. Fifty years later their accounts take on a nostalgic haze, but they have interesting things to say about the show, about how they viewed their own contributions, and about the television auteur who made it all possible.

Allen is portrayed in the book not only as a genius, and a man of great principle, but as something of a saint. He battles network executives when they try to interfere. He takes on the network "suits" on issues of McCarthyism and anti-Semitism, is a pioneer in integrating African American performers on late night, and even, at one point, defies the Mob in his determination to expose corruption in labor unions.

As important and as rich in detail as Alba's book is, it ultimately does not do justice to Steve Allen's contributions to television history. We need a book that spotlights the rich radio, music-hall, film and vaudeville traditions that fueled Allen's inventions and those of others in the early days of television. That book remains to be written.

Bernard Timberg is a radio, television and film producer, media consultant and writer living in Charlotte, North Carolina. His most recent book, *Television Talk: A History of the TV Talk Show* (University of Texas Press, 2003), was awarded the 40th Annual CHOICE award for the "best of the best" in academic publishing by the American Library Association.

Tele-visionaries: The People Behind the Invention of Television

By Richard C. Webb

Wiley-IEEE Press, New York
(170 pages, \$49.95)

By Don Godfrey

This new history is exactly what the author says it is, "I am just telling you what I saw." Webb makes no claim to being a historian, in fact he provides the reader with a declarative disclaimer: "Do not think of me as a historian chronicling all of this through, because I am simply one of the engineers who was 'there' at the time it was all happening." By "there" Webb means, he worked for RCA from 1939 to 1954, first as a Purdue University Research Fellow and later as a staff research engineer. While not claiming to be a historian, he does take a critical shot at the eight historians in his reference list, noting his feeling that these "real TV historians...[were] so uniformly caught up in the romance of the very earliest technology..." Webb believes they lead the reader away from the more important scientific discoveries. This is a statement, with which such technological historians as Albert Abramson, with his several volumes of television's scientific discoveries, would surely disagree.

Tele-visionaries is arranged into 19 short chapters, each relatively self-contained. After a text of 150-pages,

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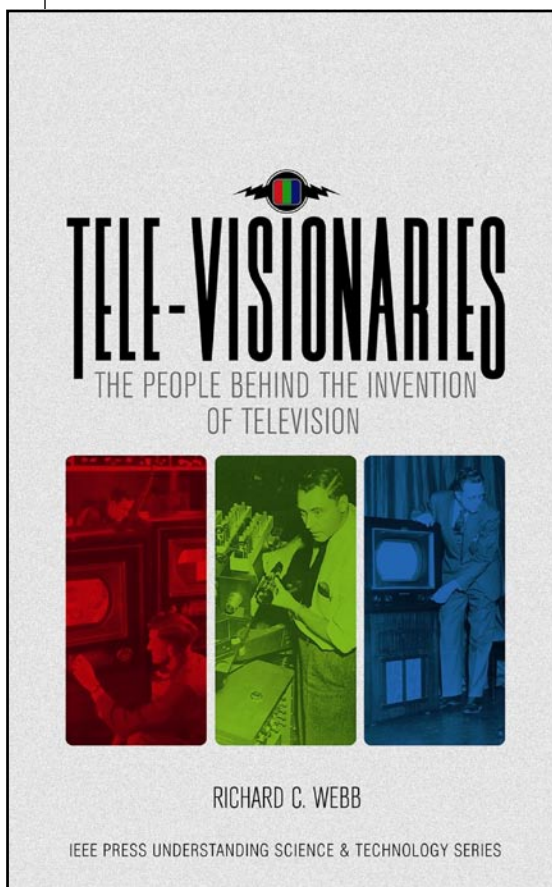
an Appendix offers a reproduction of a confidential 1933 RCA report on the development of the Iconoscope tube. Only eight references make up the entire bibliography, though the manuscript is wonderfully illustrated with RCA photos.

The first two chapters provide an broad overview of the medium which, as Webb correctly states, “was simply too large an enterprise to have been the sole work on one gifted individual or even an inspired group.” He notes the honors bestowed on two individuals, Vladimir Zworykin and Philo Farnsworth, but then challenges the reader “you decide for yourself!” Unfortunately, Webb provides no documentation with which the reader can base such a decision.

His review of the vacuum-tube era begins with “Edison as the virtual king of everything electric...” and describes those inventors working on various vacuum tubes. The “Fleming valve,” made Edison’s experiments more efficient. Lee de Forrest’s Audion tube is described as an “invention that would change the world.” Edwin Armstrong emerges as such a strong contributor. “He programmed fine classical music all day long, quiet, no static, I loved to listen to his station from Princeton.”

Two chapters focus on Zworykin and Farnsworth, but both are disappointing. While these two individuals have both been widely honored for their significant contributions, they are poorly detailed here. Three of the four

pages on Zworykin center on his early years and arrival in the United States. Only on the final page does Webb even mention Zworykin’s objectives with the cathode-ray tube and the electronic camera tube. Though he cites Zworykin’s 1923 patent, there is no discussion of the controversy surrounding it. Webb seems to simply dismiss Farnsworth’s role. In the three pages that comprise this “chapter.” Webb declares Farnsworth’s contributions as “ill-fated.” Clearly his own RCA orientation overshadows his history and the chapter is full of small errors (such as Rigby “Utah,” rather than Idaho. The “Salt Lake City businessmen, George Everson,”



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was actually a California Community Chest organizer working the Salt Lake City fund-raising drive when he met Farnsworth.

A chapter titled “The Foremost Problem of Television” describes light sensitivity as the main challenge to the development of the television camera. It traces Zworykin’s Iconoscope as the “lone survivor” and fails to mention Farnsworth’s Image Dissector.

A chapter on Sarnoff’s role with broadcasting digresses from television technology to provide historical context for that technology during the 1920s and 1930s. Another on the RCA Laboratories Division focuses primarily on the development, organization and management under Elmer W. Engstrom. A discussion of the evolution of the sensitive camera tubes (Iconoscope, Image Orthicon and Vidicon) was largely written by Paul Weimer, also an engineer at the RCA Laboratories.

Chapters introducing color technology spotlight only the RCA lineage, with no discussion of the competing CBS semi-mechanical color challenge. Al Schroeder is credited as “the father of the shadow mask color kinescope, which is probably the most important single development in color television history.”

A discussion of the transmission of color pictures introduces those working on transmission—from Claude Shannon at Bell Laboratories and Norbert Wiener of MIT (whose theories set the foundations) to such RCA people as William Houghton, Ed Goldberg and Al Bedford

A review of the FCC’s color TV hearings of 1949/1950 offers a glimpse

of the competition between RCA, CBS and the newly organized DuMont Company. The final two chapters offer an interesting introspective from Webb’s point of view as an insider. He makes several comments that are sure to spur debate: “Marketing . . . was not Sarnoff’s strong point” and “the real downfall of RCA began . . . when Sarnoff’s son Robert took charge.” He also touches on a few of the digital developments in RCA well before the computer era.

In summary, Webb’s book is less about technology and more a brief synopsis of the people at RCA who worked in the technology as it evolved through the years. The story is told from the perspective of the author’s own limited experience. He describes it as “something of a miracle that a TV system like ours, conceived and executed in the vacuum tube and slide rule era would turn out to be flexible enough to grow without interruption and withstand the enormous modifications necessary in bringing about today’s colorful system, which has already served us for half a century.”

Tele-visionaries is a personal perspective provided from one RCA employee—his recollection of the events and people involved in the technological development of television. Its value lies in its eyewitness recollections. It is limited in its scope as it is not a documented history, and illustrates only the RCA perspective. It misses much of the work being conducted by others outside of RCA—and seems to ignore much excellent recent historical research. Particularly notable among the missing factors was any discussion of the 1934 demonstration conducted

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by Farnsworth at the Benjamin Franklin Institute in Philadelphia or the overall effort of Farnsworth, Philco, CBS, DuMont and the labs of J.V.L. Hogan, all of which were active in television's technological development. Those interested in TV history should look elsewhere for the full story — in the works, for example, of Albert Abramson and Russell W. Burns, both of whom have extensively documented this phenomenon, placing RCA's contribution in a broader context.

Donald G. Godfrey, Ph.D., is a professor at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communications, Arizona State University. He is currently working on the biography of C. Francis Jenkins, a now-forgotten 1920s pioneer of mechanical television.

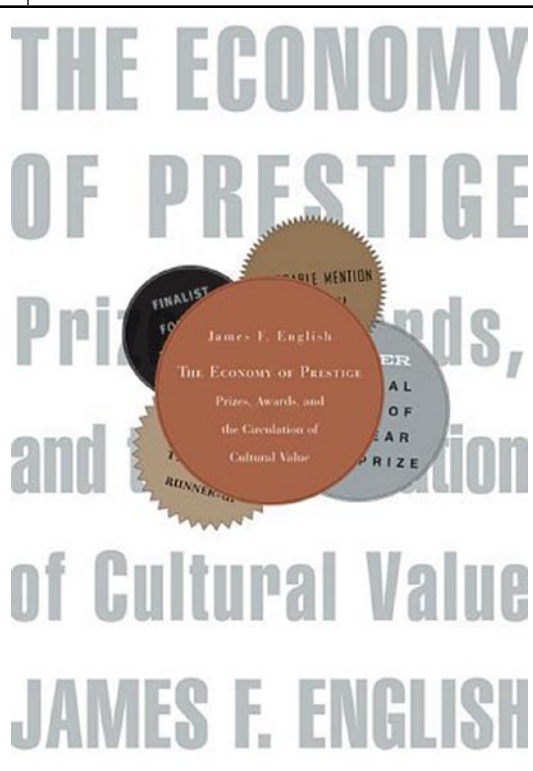
The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value

By James F. English

Harvard University Press
(409 pages, \$29.95)

By **Kenneth Harwood**

Here is a tour of many prizes and awards for arts and letters. General readers should find much on celebrity, professionals should be rewarded with a clearer view of the life cycles of awards, and scholars should



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discover a reference book to keep next to Tom O'Neill's *The Emmys*.

The introduction points to definition of cultural capital as seen by the late sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu. Four main parts of the book detail the games of prestige in various fields of cultural work, with main attention to literary awards.

Part one is a survey of awards. Major topics are growth in the number of awards, history of prize giving, and entertainment values of ceremonies. Second is a description of the awards industry, including costs of awards, judges and judging, trophies and their markets. The third part is on giving and getting awards, criticism of prizes, and some techniques of accepting and rejecting prizes. Fourth are international aspects of awards, documenting the recent rise in number of international awards, prizes in developing countries, and prizes in international politics.

Appendices are on the rise of cultural prizes in the twentieth century, monetary returns to prize works, and the many prizes and awards won by six frequent winners, including Michael Jackson and Steven Spielberg. Endnotes contain supporting details with citations in place of a bibliography. The index is a gift to researchers.

Features such as analysis of the Booker Prize for literature and one main part of the book on international matters should satisfy a large item in Horace's check list for good writing. The work appeals to audiences in more than one country.

Those who look for much on NATAS or ATAS might look in vain.

James F. English is Professor of

English and Chair of the Department of English in the University of Pennsylvania. His awards include the Rice-Whicher Prize for Senior Thesis, Amherst College, 1980; Doctoral Fellowship, Stanford University, 1981-1985; and Research Grant, Research Foundation, University of Pennsylvania 1989, 1994, and 1999. He co-edited an online journal of Johns Hopkins University, *Postmodern Culture*, from 1999 to 2004. His teaching includes a seminar on film and ethnography.

Founding dean of the School of Communication and Theater at Temple University and founding director of the School of Communication at the University of Houston, Kenneth Harwood is a retired broadcaster who serves as an adjunct professor of communication at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

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A Face in the Crowd

(DVD, Warner Video, 2005)

Added material includes critical commentary on the director and film; original theatrical preview trailers and subtitles in English, French and Spanish.

First theatrical release: *A Face in the Crowd* directed by Elia Kazan (Warner Bros., 1957).

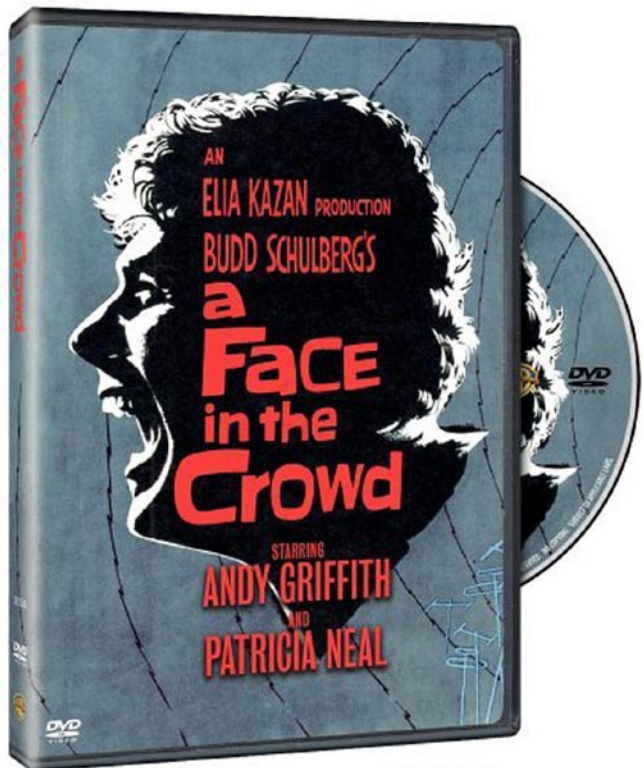
(126 minutes, \$19.95)

By David Marc

Anyone with even a passing interest in the effect that television has had on American electoral politics during the last half century ought to have strong opinions, pro or con, about director Elia Kazan's *A Face in the Crowd* (1957). In truth, the screen adaptation of Budd Schulberg's story about the rise and fall of a telegenic small-town conman is hardly known to anybody. Some of the factors contributing to its obscurity are familiar. The film is shot in black-and-white; its monaural soundtrack is unremixed; and the editing is unmercifully optimistic in its assumptions about viewer attention span. There is nary a wrecked car

or pool of blood to gawk at during the entire two hours. As if these deficiencies in the techno-slickness department are not enough, *A Face in the Crowd* bears the mark of Kazan, whose pointedly liberal politics are anathema to the intellectual Right, and whose friendly testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee long ago scared off what is left in the political spectrum.

In spite of it all, this cautionary tale of democracy in the age of television, now available in DVD from Warner Brothers, seems more prescient than ever, and the virtuoso performances of its unlikely love triangle—Andy Griffith, Patricia Neal and Walter Matthau—remain compelling. Even



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if the film did not predict the thorough integration of mass-market corporate star-making and politics—and it does that with astonishing accuracy—*A Face in the Crowd* could stand as a period piece in the history of broadcasting, capturing the twilight of mom-and-pop radio during the post-war television boom.

Neal plays Marcia Jeffries, an idealistic Sarah Lawrence graduate working at her uncle's 500-watt station in Pickett, Arkansas. No 1950s "career girl," she is determined to something meaningful with her life and, in between hawking spots to the local feed stores, she produces a man-on-the-street interview show, a radio forerunner of reality TV. One hot July 4th, she goes into the county lock-up to cast about the drunk tank for a gritty "common man" to perk up the show. She quite literally awakens the beast when, microphone-in-hand, she trips over Lonesome Rhodes (Griffith), a smooth-talking, guitar-playing drifter who doesn't mind speaking the truth, if he senses some advantage in it. Marcia suspects that Lonesome's down-home charm might be put to better use than chatting up ladies for drinking money, and she offers him the daily mid-morning spot on her radio schedule. In for a penny; in for a pound. When he hears there's a salary in it, he says, "I'll talk on your radio for you."

Kazan's understanding of "The Media" (a term coined by Marshall McLuhan a few years later) shapes the film's narrative trajectory. We see Marcia shlepp Lonesome up the pyramid of media success that 21st-Century college communications

majors dream about: from small-town radio in Pickett to regional television in Memphis to a Madison Avenue agency and a spokesperson deal with an over-the-counter pep-pill company, landing Lonesome his own network prime-time slot. Among the film's memorable scenes is Marcia's presentation of her unschooled backwoods communicator to a reluctant group of Ivy League agency boys. Imagine if Rod Serling had written an episode of *The Beverly Hillbillies* as a script for *Playhouse 90*. To illustrate Lonesome's fifteen minutes of fame (a phrase not yet coined by Warhol), Kazan abruptly abandons the film's naturalistic style for an hysterical montage of television styles, complete with animated sequences and segments best described as music videos.

If D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) is the first Hollywood film to openly attack the policies of the Republican Party, *A Face in the Crowd* is the second, and it does so much more frankly. General Haynesworth (played by Percy Waram), head of Vitajex (the pep-pill company) is a G.O.P. bigwig who is as hip to the emerging media environment as he is contemptuous of the New Deal socialists who are destroying the economic and moral fiber of his America. Having just lived through 20 years of FDR and Truman, he says, "My analysis of history tells me that the mass has always needed a strong hand to guide it. With television, we have the most powerful tool yet devised to influence public opinion." Not visionary enough to back an actual performer for the presidency, the General instead asks Lonesome to coach his hand-picked candidate for the

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Republican presidential nomination, Senator Worthington Fuller (Marshall Neilan), in the ways of television. "Isn't Fuller the one they call, 'last of the old-line isolationists?'" asks Marcia, with some alarm. "Oh I suspect so—in those leftwing New York City newspapers," says the General. The coaching scene contains a trenchant confrontation between old-line political conservatives, concerned with ethics and personal honor, and neo-conservatives who are convinced that the future of political success is tied to media savvy. After watching a film of Fuller making a stump speech, Lonesome tells him, "What we got to get you is a whole new personality!" When the senator agrees, a stalwart Republican newspaper editor who is a long-time Fuller supporter, walks out.

The film's love story suffers from a case of too little, too late. Kazan probably included it to reassure his backers. The triangle only becomes a functional part of the narrative during the last quarter of the film. While in Memphis, Marcia takes on a writer for Lonesome, Mel Miller (Matthau), a pasty-faced bespectacled Vanderbilt graduate, who advances to New York as part of the team. He is the obvious rational choice for Marcia, sharing her idealism and her belief that, as E.B. White put it in a 1948 *New Yorker* article, "television... will be the test of democracy." Like the public, however, Marcia is utterly seduced by Lonesome, even though it has become obvious to her that love is not among his capacities. A first Mrs. Lonesome Rhodes shows up with no memory of a divorce. After that is settled, Lonesome promises to marry

Marcia, but instead ties the knot with a high-school cheerleader (Lee Remick in her screen debut) during a personal appearance in Texas. Angered, hurt, and yet in some ways relieved, Marcia is compensated by Lonesome's agreement to make her CEO of Lonesome Rhodes Inc.

It takes an attack on Social Security to get Marcia to destroy the Frankenstein she has created. The balding Sen. Fuller, now known as "Curly" to Lonesome and a group of friends ordered from central casting, appears as a guest on Lonesome's show to launch his new personality. The two talk politics while looking at footage of their recent duck-hunting trip. When Lonesome inquires as to the senator's views on Social Security, Curly replies, "Daniel Boone didn't need Social Security, did he?" Enough said; the camel's back is broken. During the credits crawl, with mikes down and music up, Lonesome, whose bad case of hubris is growing worse, expounds on his ability to control the ignorant public. With Patricia Neal's darkly maniacal expression plastered on her face, Marcia bursts into the control room and turns on Lonesome's mike. Two hefty sound technicians cannot unloose her grip. Lonesome (big smile, full-face close-up) comes up over the music "...this whole country's just like my flock of sheep! Hillbillies! Hausfraus! Everybody that's got to jump when someone else blows a whistle! They're all mine! Good night—you bunch of stupid idiots." Gen. Haynesworth calls the network to invoke the morals clause in Lonesome's contract before the employee is out of the building.

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Marcia and Mel rush to Lonesome's apartment for the final confrontation. On the second floor of his duplex penthouse, posed like Mussolini on the balcony, Lonesome is addressing an army of uniformed butlers while his old road pal, Beanie (played by Grand Ole Opry star Rod Brasfield), greets each nonsensical assertion with a louder response from an applause machine. Satisfied that democracy and the social safety net (for Kazan, they are indistinguishable) have survived this latest threat, Marcia and Mel grab a taxi and ride off into the night, a giant flashing Coca-Cola sign lighting the way.

David Marc is a writer and editor who teaches at Syracuse University. He is the co-author, with Robert J. Thompson, of *Television in the Antenna Age: A Concise History* (Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

Scenes from a Marriage

By Ingmar Bergman
The Criterion Collection #229
Three Discs, \$49.95

Fanny and Alexander

By Ingmar Bergman
The Criterion Collection #261
Special Edition Five Discs, \$59.95

By Ron Simon

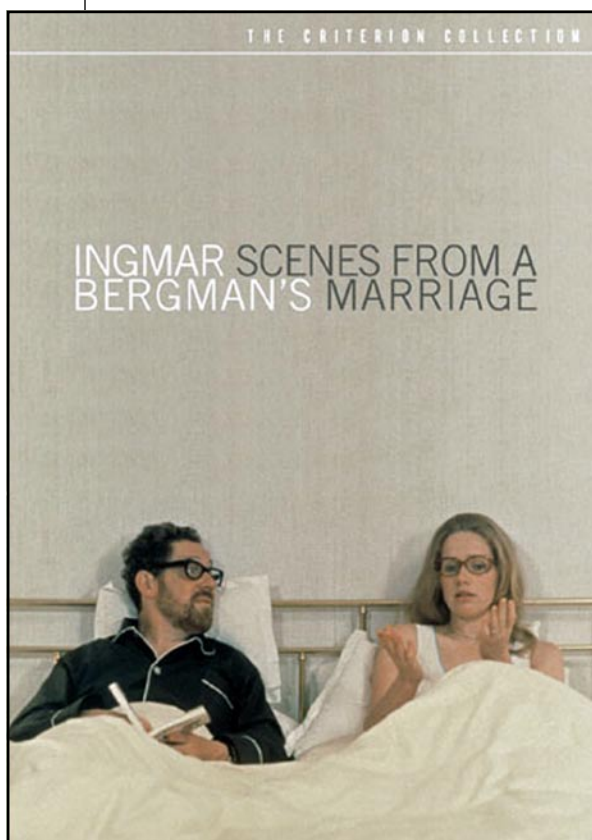
The explosion of DVD sales offers not only a second look at movies and television shows that we know but also a first look at artistic works we thought we knew. Many projects, especially international ones, straddle both the film and television worlds, with different incarnations for each, and it has been difficult for an American audience to make informed judgments single works with multiple personalities. No better illustration is the work of Ingmar Bergman. The Swedish director freely journeys from theater to film to television, imprinting his unique artistic signature on each art form. But two of his major statements, *Scenes from a Marriage* and *Fanny and Alexander*, which were seen in America as feature films, were originally made for Swedish television as mini-series. There have been few opportunities for American fans of Bergman to experience these masterworks as both a film and television, until now. Criterion has been committed to releasing DVDs of the highest quality and, with these two box sets, has produced the ultimate treasure, revealing the vision and mastery of Bergman in both media.

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Bergman used television to redefine himself as an artist and a mass communicator. In the early seventies he was having trouble raising money for feature films. Surprisingly, his movies did not attract a large and loyal following in his native Sweden, unlike the lines that greeted his latest project in New York or Paris. Using 16mm. equipment and a small crew, Bergman conceived *Scenes from a Marriage* as a six-part investigation into the pains and pleasures of contemporary relationships. With searing close-ups, he chronicled the emotional upheavals of two successful professionals, Marianne (Liv Ullmann) and Johan (Erland Josephson), whose ostensibly perfect marriage crumbles into bitterness and divorce. Their love disintegrates when Johan leaves his wife for another woman, and Bergman examines how their wounds eventually heal after many years of doubt and new entanglements. When the series was broadcast to Scandinavian audiences over a six-week period in 1973, *Scenes* resonated with a middle-class audience, many embracing Bergman for the first time. Comparing themselves to the characters on screen that seemed so real, Swedish couples reassessed their own emotional involvements after each hour episode aired; divorce rates in Denmark actually rose as Bergman's unremitting examination of marital unhappiness cut to the bone. The Swedish director previously known for such intellectual works as *The Seventh Seal* and

Persona had now achieved a mainstream popularity without sacrificing his art.

Bergman was persuaded to re-cut *Scenes from a Marriage* into a feature film for the rest of the world, discarding almost half of the original content. The National Society of Film Critics in America recognized *Scenes* as the Best Film of 1974. Several years later, PBS tried to present the television version, but made a major mistake: by dubbing the actor's voices into English, the production sounded artificial, thereby distancing audience identification, exactly the opposite of what the director intended. The Criterion Collection presents both versions subtitled in English with an improved translation, digitally



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transferred with restored picture and sound. For aficionados who only know the movie incarnation, the television original is a revelation. The film played as a series of stark dramatic confrontations; the television series gives the characters more depth, with longer uninterrupted scenes that approach the negotiations and arguments of real life. We see in the first episode the couple debate Marianne's pregnancy, resulting in an abortion. This plot line, missing from the movie, adds a layer of emotional texture that colors every subsequent encounter between the straying husband and his struggling wife. In fact, *Scenes* feels like a soap opera, but one of great depth and clarity; Bergman transmutes the lowly genre into his personal arena of anguish and redemption.

After several years in exile over a tax dispute, Bergman returned to Sweden in the early eighties to conceive his most elaborate and autobiographical production, *Fanny and Alexander*. Formatted as a four-part television series, *Fanny and Alexander* was not the typical Bergman chamber drama; this project featured 60 speaking parts, supplemented by 1,200 extras, and was shot over six months. Bergman journeyed back to the provincial town of his childhood at the turn of the 20th century where the lives of two siblings, the names of the title, are transformed when their father, an actor/manager of an exuberant theater company, dies suddenly during a rehearsal of *Hamlet*. Their mother then remarries a strict and forbidding

parson, who sucks the gaiety out of the family home. The boy Alexander, perhaps the young Bergman himself, retreats into his imagination to gain control of his diminished environment. With a rich canvas Bergman conveyed the emotional state of the family through a striking mise-en-scene; for him the film is "a huge tapestry filled with masses of color and people, homes and forests, mysterious haunts of caves and grottoes, secrets and night skies."

Just like *Scenes from a Marriage*, the international audience experienced *Fanny and Alexander* as a feature film in 1983, drastically cut from the original TV length of more than five hours. The Criterion special box set preserves



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both the television and film versions on three DVDs, accompanied by two discs of supporting material. Bergman's preferred version is the television series, which he says is "the sum total of my life as a filmmaker." The high-definition transfer emphasizes the hues and tones of Bergman's palette that make the TV version such a visual poem. The first episode is an old-fashioned Christmas celebration of an extended theatrical family. Diluted in the film version, this holiday pageantry is conveyed with festive color and sound, which speaks to the joyous possibilities of happiness and kinship. But the philosophical Bergman knows that life is not all brightness, and the film take a dramatic turn midway. How much darker, almost prison-like, the last two episodes become (much more unsettling than the film) when the new Calvinistic father takes charge, the perfect metaphor for Bergman's view of adolescence: "the prerogative of childhood is to move unhindered between magic and oatmeal porridge, between boundless terror and explosive joy." Watching the complete *Fanny and Alexander*, the viewer is swept away with high-spirited comedy and then confronted by the harrowing tragedy. The yin and yang of Bergman.

Both sets are loaded with a wealth of extras that help put the respective films into a historical and cultural context. *Scenes from a Marriage* features a 1986 interview with Bergman about the effect of the miniseries on his career as well as contemporary musings by actors Ullmann and Josephson on bringing such a demanding script to life. *Fanny and Alexander* is a virtual smorgasbord of illuminating goodies. The most revealing

is a 90-minute documentary, directed by Bergman himself, which shows the visionary artist at work. We see Bergman directing on the streets of Uppsala, where he walked as a child; gaily orchestrating a pillow fight among the young actors, so atypical of our stern image of him; and debating the process of shot composition with his master cinematographer Sven Nykvist. We also learn about Bergman's working methods with actors in another documentary as well as in the expert audio commentary by film scholar Peter Cowie. Every element of *Fanny and Alexander* has a meaning, and these extras help to unlock the mysteries.

It is astonishing that such a master of the theater and film understood the rhythms of television so well. These exemplary DVD sets allow an American Bergmanophile to appreciate the director on an entirely new level. Instead of an intense two-hour cinematic viewing, these individual episodes must be seen and savored, with time for reflection between each part, just the way television should be. Bergman certainly recognized the power of the medium because most of his work over the past twenty years has been for television. In fact, his most recent production, *Saraband*, explored what happened when the Marianne of *Scenes from a Marriage* decided to renew an acquaintance with her ex-husband Johan. For Bergman, the medium and his message have become one.

Ron Simon has organized several Ingmar Bergman retrospectives at The Museum of Television & Radio in New York, where he serves as curator of television and radio.

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Good Night, and Good Luck

(Warner Independent Pictures, 2005)

By Greg Vitiello

George Clooney's "Good Night, and Good Luck" is an elegant, riveting film that succeeds on at least three levels: as a moral tale pitting investigative journalist Edward R. Murrow against Red-baiting Senator Joseph McCarthy; as an insider's view of the workings of television news broadcasting, specifically as practiced by Murrow and his colleagues at CBS's *See It Now* in the early 1950s; and as a cautionary study of the free press' vulnerability in the face of political manipulation, then and now.

By shooting the film in black and white, Clooney's team captures the period aura of New York — from its smoky jazz clubs to its often grainy television images. It also enables the filmmakers to move seamlessly from new footage to archival material — most impressively when David Strathairn as Murrow delivers one of his eloquent introductions, before cutting to a news clip of McCarthy inveighing against the reporter. Through this technique, the filmmakers achieve a casting coup by having McCarthy and his attorney Roy Cohn play themselves.

The device of intercutting new and vintage footage adds to the

movie's compactness. "Good Night, and Good Luck" is a sparsely told film that uses Murrow's famous 1958 speech at the annual meeting of the Radio-Television News Directors Association as its framing device. Cutting away from that speech, the film flashes back to 1953 and moves quickly into the control rooms and offices where Murrow, executive producer Fred Friendly (played by Clooney himself) and their "See It Now" team work. Virtually all of "Good Night, and Good Luck" occurs in these tight settings, as Murrow and Friendly act on their decision to take on Joseph McCarthy and his demagogic methods. In this and subsequent tense moments, they



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have the full support of their reporting team, led by Joe and Shirley Wershba (effectively played by Robert Downey Jr. and Patricia Clarkson).

Readers of this publication will be familiar with the film's major events, which surround three actual broadcasts in late 1953 and early 1954: "The Case Against Milo Radulovich, A0589839," "Report on Senator McCarthy," and McCarthy's ensuing rebuttal. The first involved a former Air Force meteorologist who was about to lose his commission as a lieutenant in the Reserves and be forced to resign from the Air Force because he had been declared a "security risk." His breach against security? Having close associations with "Communists or Communist sympathizers" — his father and sister. The second broadcast was a half-hour show devoted solely to McCarthy — in his own words — framed by Murrow's memorable introductory and closing remarks. Finally, in his half-hour rebuttal, McCarthy launched an ugly, rambling counterattack on Murrow as the Red Threat incarnate.

The three broadcasts are the central events of Clooney's film and yet, they don't define its substance. This is, after all, a feature film, not a documentary. The camera doesn't merely capture Murrow on air, but watches him as he agonizes over whether to go forward with the Radulovich and McCarthy broadcasts. A charismatic reporter who became legendary for his wartime reports from London's rooftops, Murrow is the rare journalist with enough stature to take on McCarthy when the obstreperous Senator is at his zenith. Even so, Murrow knows the

risk he is taking, for McCarthy's Red-baiting is capable of destroying careers and bringing down institutions. In fact, McCarthy throws down the gauntlet following the Radulovich broadcast when his chief investigator Don Surine tells *See It Now* reporter Joe Wershba that Murrow "was on the Soviet payroll in 1934." As assistant director of the Institute of International Education, Murrow had worked on an exchange program involving the University of Moscow and, Surine adds, "I'm not saying Murrow is a Commie himself. But he's one of those goddamn anti-anti-Communists, and they're just as dangerous. And let's face it. If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, then, goddamnit, it is a duck."

After hearing of Surine's words, Murrow hesitates briefly before deciding to engage McCarthy directly. In a career-defining performance, Straithairn recreates Murrow's intense, eloquent reporting style and the anxiety that lies beneath the surface. We see Straithairn, cigarette poised, eyes narrowing, face clenched in momentary indecision just before the camera focuses on him and he delivers his lines in an uncanny rendering of Murrow's timbre-filled voice. Straithairn gives perfect weight to those lines, such as when Murrow concludes the Radulovich broadcast by saying: "We believe that 'the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father,' even though that iniquity be proved; and in this case it was not."

Radulovich is vindicated when the Air Force retracts its accusations. McCarthy is exposed as an intemperate name-caller whose browbeating and allegations lack substance. And yet

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George Clooney (left) as Fred Friendly and as Edward R. Murrow in *Good Night, And Good Luck*.

Murrow and Friendly have little time to savor their victories, for they live in a climate of fear. This becomes most clear when Murrow and Friendly are upbraided by CBS Chairman William S. Paley (played with a subtle blend of charm and hauteur by Frank Langella). Paley, a wary supporter of *See It Now* until the McCarthy broadcast, has switched to a more cautious, advertiser-appealing course. In future, there will be more personality interviews, such as the one with Liberace excerpted in “Good Night, and Good Luck,” and far fewer investigative reports.

Paley’s loss of journalistic nerve is one of the moments when we are reminded that “Good Night, and Good Luck” is not a mere historical recounting. Clooney and his co-writer and producer Grant Heslov are drawing

inferences for any time when the press might compromise its reportorial duties for fear of retribution. The filmmakers present a more tragic case of the wages of fear in the person of Don Hollenbeck (played by Ray Wise), a news anchor who cracks under the strain of being baited by right-wing columnist Jack O’Brien. The son of a former television newscaster, Clooney is well acquainted with the danger of abridged press freedom. And yet he doesn’t overstate his case by dragging in parallels to the present moment. A couple of writers (including one for *The New York Times*) take the film to task for “making [its] points by indirection.” Would Arthur Miller be faulted for “indirection” in writing of the Salem witch trials when his oblique target in *The Crucible* was the same Senator McCarthy? Of course

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not. "Good Night, and Good Luck" succeeds partly because it doesn't strain to make connections to today. And yet the behavior of McCarthy and his cohorts is cautionary message enough.

On the evening I attended "Good Night, and Good Luck" at a theater on New York's Upper West Side, the audience burst into applause when Murrow read his final speech in "The Report on Senator McCarthy," which ends: "The actions of the junior senator from Wisconsin have caused alarm and dismay amongst our allies abroad and given considerable comfort to our enemies, and whose fault is that? Not really his. He didn't create this situation of fear; he merely exploited it, and rather successfully. Cassius was right: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars but in ourselves..."

After a short beat while he stares into the camera, Murrow delivers his classic broadcast coda: "Good Night, and Good Luck." And, we might add, "Good job."

A frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly*, Greg Vitiello is a New York-based writer and editor whose books include *Eisenstaedt: Germany, Spoleto Viva, Twenty Seasons of Masterpiece Theatre* and *Joyce Images*. From 1966 to 1972 he wrote for National Educational Television and the Children's Television Workshop.

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