TELEVISION QUARTERLY

VOLUME XXXV NUMBERS 3 & 4 • SPRING/SUMMER 2005

THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF TELEVISION ARTS AND SCIENCES

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Those who are associated with the planning of this Journal believe it is time for a penetrating, provocative and continuing examination of television as an art, a science, an industry, and a social force.

Accordingly, our purpose is to be both independent and critical. We hold that the function of this Journal is to generate currents of new ideas about television, and we will therefore try to assure publication of all material which stimulates thought and has editorial merit.

This Journal has only one aim —
to take a serious look at television.

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Mission statement from Volume I, Number 1 issue of *Television Quarterly*, February, 1962

With a Nod to Cosby, The Black Family Channel Steps Up to the Plate

Now available in 30 million homes, the 24-hour digital cable network is dedicated to making a difference.

By Mary Ann Watson

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.

Optimists believed the enormous success of the show would begin a new era in the history of black portrayals in popular entertainment. Super-optimists hoped the audience bonding with the Huxtables would lead to improved race relations in the United States. But by the time The *The Cosby Show* signed off in 1992, the splintering multi-channel marketplace and widening chasm between the rich and poor had altered the American social landscape.

Early in 21st century, *The Cosby Show* is regarded by many with nostalgia as a quaint example of "family friendly" prime-time entertainment as extinct as the dodo bird.

Dr. Cosby, though, has no intention of fading quietly into that pigeonhole of history. He's been on a controversial crusade since May 2004, when he was honored at a black-tie affair commemorating the 50th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and he stunned the audience.

Cosby lambasted low-income black parents for not "holding up their end" in the implied deal of the civil rights movement. In return for the sacrifices made by early activists, the succeeding generations would take advantage of every hard-fought opportunity. "People marched and were hit in the head with rocks to get an education," Cosby said. "And now we have these knuckleheads walking around. . . . I can't even talk the way these people talk: 'Why you ain't?' 'Where you is?' You can't be a doctor with that kind of crap coming out of your mouth!"

While some in the black community took umbrage at his harsh criticism, which they characterized as an attack, the consensus among African Americans was found in headlines such as "Cosby Speaks Painful Truth to Poor Blacks." *Detroit Free Press* columnist Rochelle Riley explained that some might blame the federal government or even slavery for their plight: "But as much as I believe America has not healed itself or millions of its residents from that horror, the memory of the American holocaust does not ban parents from teaching their children to read. It does not make you act out raunchy violent rap lyrics. It does not make you take out an AK47 and shoot a 6-year-old."

Robert Townsend understands the power of entertainment to either undermine or assist in good parenting. The filmmaker, actor, writer, TV producer, and stand-up comedian recalls his childhood in the 1960s: "My mother raised four kids on her own. My father wasn't there. I watched The

Robert Townsend

Andy Griffith Show and Opie's lessons were my lessons. I think he taught me well. He reinforced what mom was teaching me and what the church was teaching me."

Townsend also remembers watching reruns of *Amos n' Andy*, which provided fodder for his first big splash in show business in 1987-- *Hollywood Shuffle*, a satire about black actors forced into demeaning roles. Since then Townsend has enjoyed an exhilarating, multi-faceted career. Highlights include the inner-city fable *The Meteor Man*, which he wrote, directed and starred in with James Earl Jones, Bill Cosby, and Eddie Griffin. Another feature film, *The Five Heartbeats*, the story of a rhythm and blues male singing group, followed. Townsend's television success—both in front of and behind the cameras—was also stellar. Awards

poured in for projects ranging from made-for-TV movies such as *Livin' for Love: The Natalie Cole Story* and *10,000 Black Men Named George*, a period piece for Showtime about the Pullman porter strike, starring Andre Braugher and Charles Dutton. His sitcom *The Parent 'Hood* was a success for the WB network.

Townsend's latest gig came as a surprise to Hollywood observers. In spring 2004, he signed on as President and CEO of Production for the Black Family Channel, which was being developed by the Major Broadcasting Cable network (MBC). MBC got its start in 1999 when Willie Gary, an attorney from a hardscrabble background who became a multi-millionaire by suing huge corporations for underdog clients, formed a partnership with baseball great Cecil Fielder, four-time heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield, and Marlon Jackson of the legendary Jackson 5. The network delivered gospel music and religious programming to an urban audience.

When Robert Townsend was brought on board, the corporate name was changed from MBC to the Black Family Channel. "I wasn't recruited for the job," he said. "I went after it." The timing was right for Townsend, a father of four kids aged 5 to 15, to make a commitment to be part of the solution. "This has been a dream of mine to do something like this. It's been in my head for like 8 years, maybe even longer. Now, it's coming together."

And it couldn't come at a more crucial time. BET (Black Entertainment Television) was once a beacon of black-owned, black-originated programming. But in 2000, Viacom purchased BET for an estimated three billion dollars. As feared, not long after the sale, BET canceled most of its public affairs programming, including *BET Tonight with Ed Gordon*, *Lead Story* and *Teen Summit*. More music videos, vulgar and violent, took their place. Those who initially took pride in the network felt profound disappointment, even anger.

Now there is another choice in the marketplace-- BFC, the only minority-owned and operated 24-hour cable network. The mission of the Black Family Channel is to create a wholesome entertainment venue that can help viewers make thoughtful choices in life and reinforce good parenting and teaching. Citing the inspiration of Bill Cosby's career, candor, and philanthropy, Townsend began the task of building a slate of appealing programming imbued with a sense of responsibility. "We have an opportunity to show families what they don't normally see on cable or broadcast television; positive images, positive marketing, and positive people mirrored after them."

Eight new series debuted on Thanksgiving weekend 2004. Three are in the "BFC Kids TV" block on Saturday mornings. *The Thousand-Dollar Bee*, a game show that celebrates the mastery of spelling and grammar is pitched to fourth and fifth graders. Tragically often, minority youngsters who speak grammatically and strive for academic achievement are ridiculed by classmates for "acting white." A simple idea that might just plant seeds for changing attitudes.

Gory Stories is a mystery series for middle-schoolers that underscores the notion that it's always possible for the wayward to get back on the right track. *Lisa Knight & the Round Table* is a talk

show for young teenagers. "If some young kid is thinking about having sex and watches a *Round Table* discussion and hears 'Watch yourself, don't give in to peer pressure,'" says Townsend, "I've done my job."

The other new offerings are: *Barbershop Critics*, in which aspiring comics review movies, music, and pop culture; *Black College Talent Hour*, a showcase for students and alumni from historically black colleges; *Souled Out*, a critical look at the music industry and the messages steeped in rap music videos; *Spoken*, a poetry-jam featuring the best of language artists; and *Speaker's Box*, which gives viewers the chance to have their say on politics, entertainment, or whatever is on their minds. Securing the rights to classics such as the *Nat King Cole Show* and ambitious original dramas are also in the works to complement a programming schedule that delivers sports, news, family movies, and a daily worship service.

Cynics might be tempted to dismiss the Black Family Channel as a do-gooder network that's just whistling in the cemetery in the hope of resurrecting old-fashioned values. Those with a wider view, though, will recognize the potential of BFC to reach large and diverse audiences. The conventional wisdom that white viewers won't watch shows geared to black audiences is totally 20th century.

The disillusionment with the current state of television is cross-cultural and cross-racial. Smart, uplifting shows that parents and children can watch together—or that parents can allow children to watch on their own—are a scarce commodity. Although BFC's primary goal now is to become a

Souled Out

beneficial presence in African-American households, Townsend acknowledges the network's themes of betterment and empowerment are universal and that, perhaps, a name change might someday be considered. "Ultimately we want to be colorless. We want it to be the human channel—human emotions, comedy, drama. If you want something you can identify with, tune in."

There's a lot riding on the success of the Black Family Channel. Any effort that helps strengthen the social fabric of urban communities is in all our best interests. Earnest men who could have rested on their laurels and their checkbooks invested themselves in a project dear to their hearts and deep in their souls. Now it's time for advertisers, cable systems, and satellite services to step up to the plate and make it work.

Mary Ann Watson is on the faculty of Eastern Michigan University's program in Electronic Media and Film Studies. Much of her research and writing focuses on the connections between popular entertainment and race relations in the United States.

Saving Nat "King" Cole

A media historian suggests an intriguing reason NBC never gave up on Cole's doomed 1957 TV variety show. **By Bob Pondillo**

The unfolding of history might be compared to unfurling a length of fabric. Sometimes the material comes in whole bolts, other times it's a patchwork of holes with thin strands connecting to still more holes—sort of like your grandmother's doilies. It's within these holes that we often find history's most baffling mysteries, beguiling because there is little if any documentation that can confirm or deny a satisfying conclusion. Filling in the gaps requires historians to work much like detectives, reinterpreting existing eras for motives that could possibly explain what animated unusual behavior in historic actors. The following then, is an unabashed detective yarn, one of clues, gap filling and deductions set in New York City during the great Cold War of last century. Its central characters: a black man, a white man and a new technology—television. At stake: the way TV would be used to help a nation and a world "see" a different 1950s America.

My story begins at the end of World War II against the backdrop of extreme race hatred and division in the United States. Segregation was a contumacious institution in postwar America. Unyielding in the South in the late 1940s and 1950s, poll taxes, racial discrimination, and a half-century of "separate but equal" ideology haunted the era. Even in the North rabid strains of racism thrived from the 1930s to 1960s. Shameful discrimination by city zoning boards as well as by homeowners, real estate agents and lending institutions resulted in *de facto* residential apartheid. This discrimination produced segregated neighborhoods, schools, public recreational facilities and private shopping areas. Segregation in the "tolerant" Northwest was not much better. In some Spokane restaurants, "No Colored Patronage Solicited" notices were displayed and a racist suggestion posted at the Idaho border read: "Nigger, Read This Sign and Run." In virtually all regions of the nation after World War II white people could still call an adult black man "boy." This turbulent postwar period saw the lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till for whistling at a white woman and the rise of so-called Southern White Citizens Councils—the KKK in suits—to oppose *Brown v. Board of Education* and keep Jim Crow intact. It was the

decade that President Eisenhower sent federal troops with loaded rifles and unsheathed bayonets to Little Rock ensuring that nine black teens could walk to school without harm from seething white mobs. Commercial TV was introduced to America in these racially unstable times. Many saw television as both godsend and plague and it was still unclear if broadcasting images of black Americans into white middle-class homes would work to soften racial hatred or reproduce and strengthen it.

After the war, America also felt the stirrings of a determined black middle-class especially in Chicago, New York and other large urban centers.

Enrollment for African-American college students was up by 1000 percent and black unemployment fell to 4 percent. *Ebony* magazine crowed about the new purchasing power of African - Americans, noting black consumers outspent their white counterparts in most categories of durable goods. The dawn of the civil rights era was on the horizon as well. Yet despite the rising wind of social change, and the exception of a few acknowledged entertainers and sports figures, black stereotypes remained the order of the day in most popular mass entertainment. Although toned down considerably after the war, variations on the shiftless coon, termagant Mammy, and servile Uncle Tom were still the mainstays of the black TV persona.

Fear and race discrimination by sponsors could not be ignored.

Some, however, longed for commercial television to be different. A few imagined this new video medium could break the stranglehold of American segregation. By May 1950, *Variety*, offering perhaps the overstatement of the decade, carried a headline that read, "Negro Talent Coming into Own on TV Without Using Stereotypes: A Sure Sign That Television is Free of Racial Barriers." A month later *Ebony* echoed the theme, despite profound and lingering postwar dilemmas of cultural stereotyping and racial hatred. That same year Ed Sullivan remarked television helped "the Negro in his fight . . . to win the guarantees [of] his birthright [by taking the civil rights battle] into the living rooms of America's homes where public opinion is formed." Superficially that may have been the case, and to Sullivan's credit and the occasional consternation of anxious advertisers, he regularly featured African-American musicians, singers, dancers and comedians on his popular variety program. In fact, during television's experimental years—prior to the war and into the early postwar years—black performers *seemed* to make significant inroads toward eliminating the color barrier. Early television's insatiate need for programs and talent meant that African-American entertainers were regularly seen on local and network shows and had not yet been cast as stereotyped caricatures as they were on radio and in movies. Some historians say that TV's breezy attitude toward race before and immediately after the war was due in large part to early television's absence of significant audience and the accompanying social, political and economic pressures—not enough people were watching to incite controversy, especially in Southern markets. But television was being groomed primarily as an advertising medium in the U.S. And as millions of television sets invaded new suburban homes and more and more Americans consumed network TV, sponsorship, along with the many social restrictions it brought, increased. Fear and race discrimination by sponsors, abetted by the commercial broadcast business's need for operating revenue from ad sales, could not be ignored. While it's true there were many experimental "sustaining" (or sponsor-less) programs at that time, if such programs didn't eventually attract *some* advertiser interest, these shows would be coldly and unceremoniously dropped. In

the 1950s, three mutually inclusive criteria were needed for a commercial television show's success: it had to draw an audience, it had to attract sponsors, and it *had* to make money for the network—ideas that hold to this day. That formula was broken by one extraordinary program, *The Nat "King" Cole Show.*

Nat Cole compared his 1956 foray into commercial television to Jackie Robinson's breaking major league baseball's color line nine years earlier. "I was the pioneer, the test case . . ." Cole told *Ebony* magazine, "After a trailblazing year that shattered the old bugaboos about Negroes on TV . . . [the advertising agencies and sponsors] who dictate what Americans see and hear didn't want to play ball." The record shows Cole's statements, while poignant, are only partially correct. Although many consider him the undisputed premier black recording artist of his generation, Cole was not the first African-American entertainer to emcee his own network television variety show. That honor fell to former singing waiter and master showman Billy Daniels, who hosted his own 15-minute Sunday night network program on ABC-TV for 13 weeks in 1952. But Nat Cole's was the first TV show starring a highly visible, internationally-known African American performer whose program was heavily, one might even say obsessively, promoted by a major network.

Actually Nat Cole had two shows on NBC-TV; the second program, and the one most remembered, ran initially as a summer replacement, then moved to the fall line-up. But a previous, rather anemic 15-minute "sustaining" offering preceded that one. For eight months Cole's first quarter-hour show was broadcast Monday nights at 7:30, right after NBC-TV's nightly news. Cole's program generated little advertising interest, and despite the era's tense racial climate it's arguable that a single national sponsor did not emerge because Cole's initial ratings were simply not competitive. In 1956, Nielsen ranked the earlier *Nat "King" Cole Show* 116th in viewer popularity. The program averaged less than 20 percent of the viewing audience, and was even beaten by a documentary-travelogue on ABC-TV. Strangely, after its first dismal cycle, NBC-TV did not cancel the underperforming show. Instead it expanded Cole's program to a full 30-minute variety offering, increased its production budget, and experimented with it in prime time (10 p.m., Tuesday nights) over the summer of 1957. Many major performers of the era, among them Mel Torme, Peggy Lee, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald and Tony Bennett performed as guest stars on the show, being paid minimum fees (as a gesture of support to Cole) just to increase the viewing audience and entice sponsorship. NBC-TV continually lost more then $20,000 a week on the show, but the network persisted in keeping it on the air. Why? Because one man stood behind it: RCA President, General David Sarnoff.

Cole biographer Daniel Mark Epstein wrote that Sarnoff was so moved by Nat Cole and Harry Bellafonte's performance on one show that "the General called in his vice president in charge of advertising and said to him, 'I want that show to be sponsored or heads will roll.'" By summer's end *The*

Nat "King" Cole Show was the number one variety show in New York City. In Los Angeles it had landed in the top ten and pulled within three Trendex rating points of CBS-TV's *The $64,000 Dollar Question*, a show that ranked fourth among all programs of the 1956-57 season. Yet despite that success national sponsors could not be found for Cole's show. Undaunted, Sarnoff and his sales team next devised a "cooperative sponsorship" plan wherein NBC-TV sold heavily discounted ad time to local sponsors from coast-to-coast, patching together an ersatz eight-market network. Such was still not enough to meet the costs of production and make a profit. After a total of *64 weeks* on the air, with the network sustaining losses between $400,000 and $1-million, Sarnoff would still not cancel the show. Instead NBC-TV planned to move it to a less expensive, thus less commercially desirable, time slot. "They offered me a new time," Cole told the *New York Times*, "but I decided not to take it," later adding, "There won't be [television] shows starring Negroes for a while." How prescient that comment; it wasn't until 1966 that another Black performer, Sammy Davis, Jr., hosted a network TV musical variety show, and not until 1968 that an African-American woman starred in her own television sitcom, NBC-TV's *Julia*. In it singer Diahann Carroll played the title role of a widowed nurse in a show that boasted a black and white cast—the first integrated television show since Ethel Waters starred as the "colored maid" to a dysfunctional white family in the 1950 sitcom *Beulah*.

The literal bottom line was that Madison Avenue ad agencies and the sponsors they represented would simply not advertise on what they viewed as a "Negro show." For example, some claimed that Coca-Cola was "the drink of the Negro" and insisted Coke commercials be removed from "all white" television shows. Many other advertisers readily asserted that they couldn't afford to have the public associate theirs as "Negro products." Revlon was convinced African Americans could not sell its line of lipstick to white America. Pillsbury feared a drop in sales if they sponsored an integrated show. In fact, one executive was certain the public would consider Pillsbury's product, as he put it, "nigger flour." Moreover, postwar segregation and racial panic were systemic in America, especially in the South. *Variety* reported most Southern politicians rejected television programs showing blacks and whites "on a purely equal social status." Southern historian Pete Daniel explained the odd logic like this: whites feared integration because it "would allow black males and white females to share the same social space" thereby leading to "interracial orgies" and mongrelized children. Georgia Governor Herman Talmadge threatened a nationwide boycott of companies sponsoring "race mixing" programs so as "to clean up television before the situation becomes more offensive." An unidentified resident of East St. Louis wrote to NBC-TV complaining that he and his friends were "thoroughly disgusted" when they viewed "mixed programs in which whites and Negroes take part," further noting, "Whenever your sponsors . . . find it necessary to put whites and blacks on the same program, it is . . . time to . . . boycott the commercial lines represented by the sponsors." This irrational fear of race

mixing—that a predator black male would not hesitate to rape any and all "irresistible" white females he saw—was a cornerstone of Jim Crow. And defending a Caucasian women's honor against imagined sexual assault was frequently conflated with white masculine power, jingoistic patriotism, and the abiding horror of invisible, advancing communism, a ubiquitous fear in the culture at the time.

NBC-TV's internal memos, while not altogether mute on NBC-TV's Nat Cole experiment, do not frequently mention the show or the controversy swirling around it during 1956-57. There was, however, a letter from a Raleigh, North Carolina woman who insisted she be viewed "as a native Southern Segregationist, first, last, and always," but adamantly declared Cole should stay on the air. The matron cited newspaper reports that discussed the show's impending cancellation for lack of commercial sponsorship and snipped, "Were I owner of an industry, I'd be happy to sponsor him," concluding, "It isn't fair to whites nor Negroes in any section of the country to deprive them of the enjoyment Nat brings through TV." This "Segregationists-for-Cole" letter is a good example of how early television promoted a palpable tension in white America, a confusing ambivalence. How could whites adhere to their unspoken doctrine of national racial apartheid, and not at the same time deprive themselves the pleasure of this charming internationally admired black singer? But a dearth of sponsorship was not Cole's only problem in the South; there were local racist broadcasters, too. The Cole show was simply never telecast by several NBC-TV southern affiliates.

The reasons for the president of RCA behaving proactively toward the Nat "King" Cole Show are shrouded in mystery, but hints are out there.

Vastly more puzzling was the role General David Sarnoff played in the drama. The reasons for the president of RCA behaving proactively toward the *Nat "King" Cole Show* are shrouded in mystery, but hints are out there. For example, Cole's biographer suggested Sarnoff found Cole's considerable talent engaging and, so as not to deprive the American people of such brilliance, backed the show with his considerable power. Sarnoff had only occasionally insinuated himself in day-to-day programming decisions in the past, so any programming fight was inconsistent with the General's usual behavior. Sarnoff only really understood the business end of broadcasting, he rarely strayed to the creative side. The "special relationship" theory of Blacks and Jews—a notion fraught with controversy—has also been offered. According to this view, postwar liberal Jews sympathized with the plight and oppression of African-Americans because of their similar dispossessed histories, and so became close allies with blacks in their fight for civil rights. While it is true that Sarnoff experienced unmerciful anti-Semitism early in his life and literally fought his way out of New York City's ghetto tenements, the "special relationship" notion between him and Cole may be only indirectly

applicable if at all. Plainly, it wasn't in the network's best financial interest to back an African-American showman like Cole no matter how talented or how much Sarnoff sympathized with him or his people's plight. First and foremost Sarnoff was a flinty-nosed businessman, a lion of corporate America—his primary allegiance was to RCA's stockholders. Yet he plunged headlong into what manifestly can be described as a crusade to save the Cole show that went past the mere observance of NBC-TV's corporate policy of "integration without identification." Why? The answer may be found in the character of Sarnoff himself.

David Sarnoff began his career peddling newspapers on New York's tough Lower East Side. A poor Russian-Jewish immigrant, he couldn't speak a lick of English when he arrived in the U.S., steerage class, in 1900, and was later forced to drop out of school to support his family. Sarnoff befriended the legendary Guglielmo Marconi, became his personal messenger boy, and ruthlessly climbed the corporate ladder after American Marconi became the Radio Corporation of America. Sarnoff was there when wireless telegraphy became radio and "chain" broadcasting was the rage, and he frequently sat in awe at the White House watching FDR do fireside chats on NBC Red and NBC Blue. Sarnoff was a fighter, a visionary, an overbearing boss, and a much-hated competitor in the skyrocketing electronics business of the 1920s and 30s. He became energized when he smelled a challenge to his authority, his company, or his country, and *always* did what he had to do to win no matter the cost.

In early 1944, RCA President David Sarnoff was summoned by his nation to design a massive unified communication system, critical for success of arguably the single most important Allied offensive of World War II—the Normandy Invasion. Sarnoff worked closely with Supreme Commander General Dwight Eisenhower on the project, and was able to pick up the phone to chat with any of the highest-ranking military officials at the Pentagon or around the world. Sarnoff was commissioned a Brigadier General in the U.S. Army three weeks after the D-day victory—a triumph of which he and RCA were unquestionably an essential part. He was so proud of his military commission that until his death he insisted his top NBC managers and staff call him "General."

Four years after Normandy as the Cold War raged, the National Security Agency and the FBI asked Sarnoff and RCA (as well as Western Union and International Telephone and Telegraph) to participate in Operation Shamrock (OS), an illegal scheme to intercept messages sent to and from Russia and Eastern Europe. OS was not terminated until 1973, two years after Sarnoff's death. Sarnoff biographer Ken Bilby writes, "The degree of Sarnoff's personal involvement (in OS) was never established, but . . . his eagerness to employ RCA resources to thwart the nation's enemies was known throughout the company."

Like his close friend (and fellow megalomaniac) J. Edgar Hoover, Sarnoff was a superpatriot bent on protecting his cherished nation from foes seen or unseen, foreign or domestic. Sarnoff's stalwart past actions indicate he would do whatever it took and engage all necessary resources of RCA to defend his adopted homeland. Could it be

then, that saving Nat "King" Cole from cancellation was driven by Sarnoff's deep and unswerving sense of nation? Quite possibly, yes.

Salvaging Cole became a calculated risk, a political and business test of wills, a kind of John Foster Dulles-like brinksmanship with Madison Avenue. Sarnoff, after all, was a shrewd businessman, unaccustomed to losing money or recklessly putting his network at financial risk. But his actions in the Cole affair indicate otherwise. Unless there was some higher personal value or essential, intrinsic idea that Sarnoff placed above bottom-line network considerations, his actions appear out of character.

The General, an unabashed cold warrior, *had* to be acutely aware of how America's bigotry and segregation harmed the nation's image overseas. Historian Mary L. Dudziak pointed out that long-standing American racial hatred, segregation, and lynching were key Soviet postwar propaganda themes used against U.S. claims of Democracy's "moral superiority" over Communism. Domestic racism was hurting the U.S. in the court of world opinion, therefore another cultural discourse had to be put forward to refute Soviet assertions. Television could provide that oppositional dialogue, and make more credible the American government's claim of ongoing reform in social and civil rights. Saving Nat Cole's show from prejudiced business practices and racist Southern White Citizens Councils would make an excellent example of resistance to communist claims, and would have been just the kind of bare-knuckled fight Sarnoff welcomed.

In February 1957, the same month Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus called in his state's National Guard troops to prevent nine African-American students from attending Little Rock's Central High School, Nat Cole's show began it's fall run on NBC-TV. And, as the Little Rock incident became the "paradigmatic symbol of race in America" and the Soviet Union ratcheted-up its anti-U.S. rhetoric in Europe, Asia and Africa, *The Nat "King" Cole Show* defiantly sent an opposite message to America and the world. Sarnoff's sense of purpose was unwavering. Keeping the Cole show on the air may have been the General's answer to Red propaganda, a way to blunt Mother Russia's "lies," and even perhaps a way to change this nation's hard hearts.

Of course, all this is historicist conjecture. There is not a shred of specific evidence to suggest Sarnoff viewed the Cole show in this way. In fact one of the curators at the Sarnoff Library told me "it's best not to assume that [General Sarnoff] had his hand in [the Cole incident] beyond his blessing for other's anti-discriminatory stance." Okay, but it can't be denied that in the past Sarnoff had championed other sustaining "prestige" programming. It was, after all, David Sarnoff who single-handedly brought the Metropolitan Opera and the cachet of Maestro Arturo Toscanini to NBC television and radio. Neither were big revenue producers for those networks. Why is it beyond the pale to suggest he behaved with similar conviction for Cole's program?

While it's true that *Variety* and other trade publications in 1950 declared the "Negro audience is a 15-billion dollar market" (today it approaches $700-

billion) and one that should not be ignored, it's equally true that the Cole show was not kept on the air to attract and tap *that* market—indeed, his show lost the network money because of racist sponsors. It is possible then that Sarnoff's continued involvement in the Cole affair was not at all animated by profit, but by something else—like personal patriotism. David Sarnoff may have used his office to exploit the television network he controlled in order to diminish the Soviet charge of U.S. racism and provide a kinder, gentler image of race to U.S. television viewers. Remember, Sarnoff's imagined America was not racist. Brotherhood and equal opportunity is what the country and world saw on *The Nat "King" Cole Show* every week. Sarnoff might have been saying in effect, "Look, who we really are can be seen here, Tuesday nights at 7:30 on NBC-TV!"

But whatever prompted him—ambition, patriotism, pigheadedness—Sarnoff may have ached to make a difference in the postwar era as he had earlier at Normandy. Perhaps he just yearned to participate in something greater than himself again—a cause, an ideal. Sarnoff's determined saving of Nat "King" Cole's doomed TV show just might be the hidden, human story of such yearning.

We may never know for sure.

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"Time To Stand Up"—When PBS Buckles on War Documentary, *Frontline* Sings "Courage"

A hostile political climate and FCC ambiguity on indecency chill PBS when *Frontline* airs "A Company of Soldiers" **By Tom Mascaro**

It hurts when heroes stumble. As when Muhammad Ali speaks in that soft whisper instead of the booming braggadocio he made famous.

Last year, when CBS was rocked by mistakes in the Bush National Guard-documents story, the industry was stunned because CBS News had climbed through fire to earn its place at the pinnacle of public-service journalism. CBS virtually invented broadcast news. Its reporters had slogged their way through tough conditions, created new methods, and emerged as the genuine article. Like the Beatles or Rolling Stones, they were standard bearers.

Had the Guard-documents story been flubbed by one of the younger news teams—cast, like the Monkees, to sing news of a particular style or tone—there would have been barely a ripple in the broadcast community because of lower expectations. But it was CBS News that faltered. We expect champions to be better.

Last February, it was another hero's turn to be humbled—PBS.

During the Clinton era, when Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and others sought to de-fund the Public Broadcasting Service, they

quickly learned how their constituents cherished the noncommercial network. Television viewers, especially those who cannot afford wire feeds, depend on PBS for educational, cultural, news, and entertainment programming. It is the only broadcast network that routinely airs documentaries. *Frontline*, since 1983, has been the network's flagship and PBS is a hero to many for sustaining the investigative/documentary tradition through this series.

So when PBS announced it was going to censor a *Frontline* documentary, entitled "A Company of Soldiers," because it contained f-words uttered during combat in Iraq, there was a collective cry throughout the industry—"Say It Ain't So, PBS!"

"A Company of Soldiers" follows Dog Company of the 8th Calvary in South Baghdad. The 90-minute report was the product of an embedded team from October Films—Edward Jarvis was the producer, Tim Roberts the director. Filming began three days after the start of the Fallujah campaign last November.

During production, insurgents attacked Dog Company's sector. "They're a real tough group," Roberts said of the men and women known as the Misfits. "This is not an army hiding timidly behind their fortifications. They fight hard in the streets."

Proof is in the pictures of the Misfits responding to two massive car-bomb attacks. While returning to base, gunfire and rocket-propelled grenades rain on the unit. They return fire, but a civilian in a car is fatally wounded.

Next day the Company is ambushed again. Specialist Travis Babbitt is hit. He returns fire, killing several insurgents and saving the lives of fellow soldiers, before collapsing from fatal wounds. This is no warm-and-fuzzy beer promo recreated for a Super Bowl audience to show Americans cheering returning soldiers. This is the real deal, and it aches to watch.

With a camera rolling inside a patrolling vehicle, the viewer gains a haunting perspective on military duty in Baghdad. Dog Company is trying to keep a lid on the growing insurgency, never anticipated before the war. It is a dangerous mission placing brave men and women in the vicinity of roadside bombs and the sights of rebel fighters. An improvised explosive device (IED) injures another soldier. Fear and anger burst all restraints on politeness as soldiers say words unfit for the family dinner table but familiar as mashed potatoes. The viewer understands it is frightening and painful to be trapped in the confusion of a firefight. The blistering stream of words and images makes the point about the human cost, giving viewers a rare glimpse of the war's effect on sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, husbands and wives defending the flag.

The emotional toll is high. Big, tough, determined soldiers struggle to contain tears, then break as oversized lineman do at Hall of Fame ceremonies. Eventually, though, commitment and dedication overcome feelings, and the Americans soldier on.

Some scenes are uncomfortable to see, such as the Iraqi man dying in the back seat of a car, a dog being shot, and an American officer bullying a local Iraqi who seems to have been in a position to stem the insurgency. Still, the overall impression stirs appreciation and empathy for the soldiers of Dog Company. No mature

Members of the U.S. Army's 8th Cavalry Regiment in a Baghdad market.

adult would fault any one of them for speaking f-bombs when attacked with real bombs or expect producers to excise offending words from a horrific event videotaped as it happened.

Public Broadcasting officials were nervous, though, about possible repercussions through fines by the FCC or renewed conservative political pressure to curtail its funding. Even staff members at *Frontline* understand PBS is in a tough position given the existing political climate, which is the real story of "A Company of Soldiers."

Public outcries have made broadcasters leery of possible penalties for material that may or may not be deemed indecent by the FCC or power-hungry politicians. The triggering incidents are now familiar: the appearance of Janet Jackson's breast during half-time at Super Bowl XXXVIII, a tawdry promo for ABC's *Desperate Housewives* during *Monday Night Football* last November, and a decision by ABC affiliates to pre-empt *Saving Private Ryan* during the last Veterans Day observance (ostensibly fearing FCC fines for the raw combat language and images of dismembered soldiers).

In addition to reactions to these incidents, the highly charged political climate fueled by partisan ads and documentaries during the 2004 election, and a belief that a "values" initiative re-elected George W. Bush, have given broadcast programmers the jitters. At last January's convention of the National Association of Television Program Executives (NATPE), workshop after workshop debated how to program television when the FCC is threatening punishment for indecency

without defining what is indecent. Faced with a Private Ryan moment, in the words of some observers, "PBS copped out."

It happened like this: In late 2004, *Frontline* set out to make a film about the raw experience of U. S. soldiers serving in Iraq. Louis Wiley followed the progress of the production, as he does all Frontline documentaries. As executive editor, Wiley screens all program proposals and monitors the editorial team that researches new ideas. He enforces editorial standards and practices. Finally, he reviews the rough cut, fine cut, final cut, and is involved in the fine scriptwriting session of each Frontline documentary.

Wiley was pleased with early reports from the team in Iraq, but he was most concerned about the safety of the film crew. "You're putting people in harm's way," he said, "even though they've said they want to do it, and Tom Roberts is a very experienced producer, as is Edward Jarvis. But nonetheless you're paying attention to what's happening to them. Are they okay? They would send back emails and other communications indicating where the story was going in general terms, but our primary concern was their safety."

Wiley was unaware of any language problem until he saw an early cut in January. The bigger problem was time. "We had asked them to do an hour film," said Wiley. "We were just so moved by what we saw, though, that once you were in the experience you really needed to let it play out." *Frontline* had to ask PBS for 90 minutes of air.

Just as truncating the film to an hour would have lessened its impact, Wiley also knew bleeping the actual words spoken during combat would

Frontline Executive Editor, Louis Wiley

diminish the program's power. "We're showing war as it is happening," said Wiley, "and we felt editorially this was completely justified. It certainly in no way falls within the indecency rules."

At this stage there was no deviation from conventional *Frontline*–PBS protocol. Documentaries are routinely shown to PBS officials. For any program containing questionable language or images, *Frontline* produces two versions—an original and an edited or bleeped version, as they did for "A Company of Soldiers." In the past, the network would hard-feed the original version and provide a soft-feed of the edited program for station managers who felt the content inappropriate for local audiences.

As the saying goes, "That was then, this is now." "Now" meaning a hostile climate for the press and free speech in news, knee-jerk sensitivity to anything that might be deemed "indecent" regardless of context or veracity, and anything that shows the real human or national costs of President Bush's war in Iraq.

Frontline sent a review copy of "A Company of Soldiers" and asked the network to feed the intact program at their normal 9:00 p.m. slot, and also make available the bleeped version for stations that wanted it. "We were all aware of the precedent of Saving Private Ryan," said Wiley, which had already aired unedited on national broadcast television. "Our view was, if it's good enough for a movie, and the FCC had preliminarily said they weren't going to sustain complaints about it, it sure is good enough for a documentary. It was time to stand up."

On February 17, David Fanning, *Frontline*'s Executive Producer, Michael Sullivan, Executive Producer of Special Projects, and Wiley issued a joint statement to PBS station executives: "Several months ago, *Frontline* set out to make a film that would bring the real and raw experience of U. S. soldiers serving in Iraq into the homes of public television viewers. That program, 'A Company of Soldiers' will air on Tuesday, February 22."

The statement further explained the program was "about young men at war, often in combat and always in danger . . . the language of these soldiers is sprinkled with expletives, especially at their moments of greatest fear and stress." Most of the expletives were the f-word along with a few common scatological references. "[We] were judicious" in editing the program, the men wrote, but [we] "came to believe that some of that language was an integral part of our journalistic mission: to give viewers a realistic portrayal of our soldiers at war. We feel strongly that the language of war should not be sanitized and that there is nothing indecent about its use in this context."

PBS disagreed. Facing the distinct possibility of government repercussions, PBS opted to hard-feed the sanitized documentary. What is more, PBS required any station intending to air the original (with expletives), to formally request the program and agree to indemnify PBS against FCC fines. At that moment, the matter shifted from corporate policy to journalistic principle. Fanning, Sullivan, and Wiley recognized the encroachment on press freedom and the mission of *Frontline* and sent their letter:

"Our attorneys, including outside counsel, have advised us that the expletives in 'A Company of Soldiers' do not violate the FCC's indecency rule. They have concluded that the uses of the f-word and others in this film do not cross the FCC's guidance against 'gratuitous' use. They are not meant to 'titillate' or 'pander' to the audience. As you know, there is a 'safe harbor' after 10 p.m. for such language for those stations who [sic] regularly air the program at that hour."

To bolster their case, Fanning, Sullivan, and Wiley summarized the "Private Ryan" example and former FCC Chairman Michael Powell's decision to withhold action against ABC affiliates that aired the film, because it is an accurate portrayal of the Normandy invasion.

They continued: "*Frontline* believes this is the moment for public television to stand firm and broadcast 'A Company of Soldiers' intact, as it was intended. We believe what is at issue is not the particulars of this case, but the principle of editorial independence. Because overreaching by the FCC is at its heart a First Amendment issue, all programs are at risk, whether art, science, history,

Two cavalrymen in a discussion with a local Iraqi.

culture, or public affairs.

"We believe the risks of an adverse outcome are small and the principles we stand on are large. Editorial decisions should be free from influence by the government and should be made in accordance with the standards, practices, and mission of public broadcasting."

WBGU General Manager Patrick Fitzgerald had no doubt about whether he would run the original, unedited version. WBGU-TV is the PBS affiliate in Bowling Green, Ohio, just south of Toledo. At the very least Fitzgerald planned to run the original during the overnight (early morning) rerun time slot. Before deciding what to air in the normal 9:00 p.m. slot, though, Fitzgerald conferred with his staff. He took an early feed from PBS and asked producers and other employees to view it and report on the appropriateness of the language as presented. They concluded overwhelmingly the dialogue in the documentary was fitting and proper in the context of the combat scenes shown. There was no need to broadcast the sanitized version. Fitzgerald ran the original at the regular time at 9:00 p.m. and received no viewer complaints.

Fourteen other PBS stations found Frontline's argument sound and aired the unedited version at 9:00 p.m. in Albuquerque, Buffalo, Chicago, Flint, Mich., Houston, Iowa PTV, Kansas City, Portland, San Diego, Schenectady, Springfield, South Carolina (ETV), Toledo, and Frontline's home, WGBH in Boston. "My hat is off to them," said Wiley. "*Frontline* sent a letter of thanks to those stations."

Wiley is also aware of the financial jeopardy, though: "We wanted to make

a really strong point that this is the time to take a risk. I think maybe *Frontline* was asking too much, to be honest with you, and you can quote me on that. *Frontline* was pushing the envelope pretty far, so I understand why PBS said 'No.' But 15 stations chose to face that risk and I'm heartened by that. It was an important moment to raise the flag and make a point and they did so in the most direct way. Many stations were sympathetic to us and I think if you talk to PBS in editorial terms and not financial terms, they'd say 'we agree with you, our problems were not editorial.'

"But when the financial risk becomes an editorial risk, that's where you get the chilling effect. That's why I said this is a difficult problem and a serious moment. In financial terms, public television is relatively weaker in the panoply of broadcasters. So we have to respect the fears or concerns of station managers. I saw an email from one station manager who said, 'I'm with you, but I just can't afford to bet the farm.'"

Another 20 stations ran the unedited program at 10 p.m.: Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Erie, Fort Meyers, Harrisburg, Maryland PTV, Mt. Pleasant, Mich., New York, Orlando, Philadelphia, Rochester, San Francisco, Seattle, South Oregon PTV, Syracuse, Tampa, Tucson, Vermont PTV, and WETA in Washington, D. C. Comments from around the country posted on *Frontline*'s website (www.Frontline.org) reflect widespread praise of the program and what many viewers considered its "honest portrayal."

On the surface this case looks like a straight First Amendment question of free and protected speech, which it is. But not far below the surface, we begin to see the First Amendment showing signs of buckling under the weight of political power and policy and the ability of some to influence which ideas enter the marketplace and which do not. That is what makes Wiley and others nervous.

"Some producers and filmmakers," Wiley said, "would say, 'I don't want those nasty bleeps all over my program, let's make it unsay what was said.' I don't like that as a journalist who feels things ought to be what they are, not what you can do through a sly audio mix where you just hear a sound or a puff as the word goes by. And it's being done because of fear of government action. As far as I'm concerned you're right at the First Amendment doorstep here."

George Vradenburg, a Washington attorney and former general counsel to CBS, was unaware of the controversy involving "A Company of Soldiers" as it unfolded. He is no stranger to media litigation, though. Vradenburg helped defend CBS News against a very public lawsuit by U. S. Army General William Westmoreland in the mid-1980s.

Vradenburg says the legal advice a station would receive in this situation depends on the attorney's style. A self-confident attorney may conclude, given the FCC's policy and practice of focusing on the context of the broadcast—as a whole and in the use of particular words—the Commission likely would find that this is clearly not indecent. That attorney's advice: a producer or station could broadcast the program and be reasonably comfortable with the decision.

A more conservative attorney, though, might say, "I can't give you any assurance on this because the FCC's

An 8th Cavalry Regiment platoon.

decisions have been uncertain over the past year. They're subject to a lot of political pressure. As a consequence, if this is controversial, the FCC could be pressured to look into it because of how it depicts our troops. Who knows how the FCC is going to react to that pressure?"

That is what worries Lou Wiley: "If you lose, the FCC has a wide range of penalties they can impose. But any lawyer will advise you to check out the maximum. They don't have to impose the minimum. Can you tolerate the max?"

The thirteen objectionable words spoken in "A Company of Soldiers" could net a fine for each utterance, which, according to FCC spokesperson Janice Wise, is $32,500, up to a maximum $325,000.

The House, however, passed the Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act of 2005 (H. R. 310) earlier this year, which raises the penalty to $500,000 per violation. The Senate version of the bill (S. 193) would limit the fine to $325,000 for each violation or each day of a continuing violation to a maximum of $3 million. Wiley warns, "If that sails through the Senate and the President signs it, it won't just be chilling, it will be a glacier. You will freeze people in place with potential fines like that. They will instinctively say, 'if there's the least chance something is going to be controversial, forget it.'"

Wiley fears this climate will affect early editorial decisions and prevent programs like a previous *Frontline*—"American Porn," a frank report on the porn industry—from being broadcast. "I'm not sure we could do that today," he said. "I'm not sure we could even repeat that program. What more evidence do you want of a chilling effect?"

Vradenburg agrees, and sees his profession as an important line of defense: "Media is a contentious, litigious, and politically controversial business. Unless your lawyers are willing to look past what might be to what should be the result, and with some degree of confidence that they can persuade the court system to adopt that result, you're going to get timid calls.

"This is a timid call on the part of PBS. The additional problem for PBS, though, is that they are funded by government. So this is not just about indecency fines. The concern is whether somebody is going to be upset on the Hill and pull their funding. They're in a political environment dependent on political money and therefore subject to more political pressure. But you need some backbone in the business or else this is not a place you should be a lawyer."

CBS News journalist and commentator Andy Rooney, who reported for the *Stars & Stripes* during World War II, sees it this way: "So often vulgarities and obscenities are gratuitous and included in pieces just to attract attention. This is wrong. But if it's part of the natural flow of the story, it belongs in there. The exclusion or inclusion of that sort of thing is fitting if it's part of the artistic whole of the piece.

"I see so many things where those terms are used just to attract an audience. I find it really repulsive, and yet in a case like this—how can you do a war film without it? It's part of the whole ugly scene and if it's going to be real, you can't leave it out.

"Obviously, public television is nervous in its position with conservatives right now and it copped out. If you want to see it survive, maybe they had to do it. But it's too bad. I can understand their being nervous about it, but they should have said, 'well this is the way it should be as an artistic whole and this is the way we're going to put it out.' There is nothing that can be said that is too ugly or bad about war and it should be portrayed that way. If they aren't careful, it's going to make war look pleasant."

Lou Wiley agrees: "This is an important case. If you can't hear what soldiers say in war, what can you hear? Obviously as you go down that list of things that are appropriate or inappropriate, the burden is on you to exercise responsibility in the way they are presented. But our policy isn't an endorsement of gratuitous and pandering use of language for shock value and effect. That's not what *Frontline* does and we don't think that's responsible. We're saying everything is contextual and these are editorial decisions. If you make a mistake and go too far, you should pay a penalty, but not one imposed by the government. To the audience, the advertisers, the top executives at your institution, you should be accountable, but not to the government. That's my tune."

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The Fake Trial of Michael Jackson

An argument for permitting cameras in the courtroom.

By Gary Gumpert and Susan J. Drucker

No doubt the Michael Jackson molestation trial has caught the imagination of a world-wide public, but presiding Judge Rodney S. Melville has banned cameras from his courtroom. The interested public is limited to watching Michael Jackson and his familial and legal entourage navigate the maze of fans and press corps, the ritual of entering the courthouse itself and the familiar passage through the security guards and machines. In response to an apparent demand the television audience now has an option – it can watch *The Michael Jackson Trial, An E! News Presentation* each evening. E! Entertainment Television is a 24-hour cable television network that features celebrity gossip and entertainment news. Along with E!Online the service is available to more than 78 million cable and direct-satellite subscribers in the United States and is also broadcast on the E! International Network.

There is something about a trial that appeals to most of us – as long as we are not part of it. Perhaps it is the inherent built-in drama and the dire consequence of the decision that is so attracting. There is something about a trial of a celebrity that is even more enticing as we sit back and enjoy the potentially lurid testimony and anticipate the judgment. The press has traditionally served as the public's proxy, acting as its mediating agent, presenting the factual details to those unable to witness the trial at first-hand. The tales of famous trials are countless, but beyond the accounts of the printed page, the camera (still, film and television) and the microphone, have generally been barred from the courtroom. There have been notable exceptions – the trials of O.J. Simpson, Scott Peterson and Robert Blake to name a few—but for the most part the American Bar Association, through its Canons and Standards, have supported barring the electronic press. Shortly after the Lindbergh kidnapping trial in 1935, the ABA passed Canon 35 of the Association's Canons of Professional and Judicial Ethics recommending that cameras be banned from trials. Although Canon 35 did not have the weight of law, such ABA recommendations are often consulted by state legislatures, state bar associations and judges writing case opinions. Radio was similarly barred

Michael Jackson (above) outside of the courtroom, while Edward Moss (right) portrays Michael Jackson in the courtroom re-enactments for "The Michael Jackson Trial, An E! News Presentation"

by the ABA in 1941, and television cameras were added to the list in 1963. As television became a part of life in the United States in the 1950s and early 1960s, most states continued to prohibit any form of camera coverage in their courts. Judges, lawyers, and others soon became concerned, and in 1937, the ABA's House of Delegates adopted Judicial Canon 35, declaring that all photographic and broadcast coverage of courtroom proceedings should be prohibited. In 1952, the House of Delegates amended Canon 35 to proscribe television coverage as well. The Canon's proscription was reaffirmed in 1972 when the Code of Judicial Conduct replaced the Canons of Judicial Ethics and Canon 3A (7) superseded Canon 35. It read:

> A judge should prohibit broadcasting, televising, recording, or taking photographs in the courtroom and areas immediately adjacent thereto during sessions of court or recesses between sessions.

By 1981 the tide against television coverage in courtrooms began to shift as a result of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Chandler v. Florida*, in which Chief Justice Warren Burger wrote ". . .the Constitution does not prohibit a state from experimenting with the program authorized by revised Canon 3A(7)."

Canon 3A(7) of the Code of Judicial Conduct was amended to allow radio, television and photographic coverage at the *discretion* of the presiding judge. Today the ABA press standards serve as guidelines suggested or as a model for state bar associations. ABA Standard 8-3.8 no longer calls for a ban on cameras in courtrooms if consistent with the right to a fair trial and "subject to express conditions, limitations, and guidelines which allow such coverage in a manner that will be unobtrusive, will not distract or otherwise adversely affect witnesses or other trial participants, and will not otherwise interfere with the administration of justice."

With 47 states permitting some form of camera access to courtrooms, including at least 35 permitting cameras

in criminal trials—although most states place some limits on access—the consent of the trial judge is generally required. No constitutional right of access has been found to include the right to photograph or televise trials. Today, broadcast journalists have technically gained entry to most state courts, but judicial discretion remains a barrier and broadcast journalists still face closed doors to the Federal court system. In an age of media convergence, several state supreme courts regularly not only broadcast hearings but webcast via the Internet as well (e.g. Alaska, Florida, Indiana, Missouri, Vermont, Washington and Ohio).

In banning news cameras from the courtroom the judge relinquished more control than if he had permitted them in…

According to Court TV anchor Fred Graham, "On a case-by-case basis, there is a trend of judges in important cases, cases of great public interest, to say that for that very reason that they are not going to allow coverage." With an increasing number of trials televised, it is strange that those televised from within the courtroom are not necessarily those of greatest interest and notoriety. There is a further paradox that as venues for televised trials have grown, fewer judges see fit to grant permission, thereby excluding cameras in their courtrooms.

The audience attraction to trial atmosphere has long been recognized. The development of Court TV in 1999 was a response the public's fascination with the courtroom. Today's daytime programming includes *Judge Judy, Judge Joe Brown, Divorce Court, Judge Hatchett, Judge Greg Mathis, Curtis Court, Judge Mills Lane* and *Moral Court*—shows in which the misguided tribulations of the common folk are celebrated and attract a large mass audience, particularly through syndication. The distinction between the courtroom and the living room has been fairly clear – until recently. We recognize the difference between the actual public trial, the report trial (via the press), the televised trial, and the made for television courtroom show. One recognizes the difference, particularly, the increasing entertainment value in this progression of judicial attractions.

And now a newcomer has joined the group perhaps best characterized and described as a *"made for television trial show based upon the actual trial."*

The variation of a theme on a trial is operationally unique. At the end of each day a court reporter at the Jackson trial e-mails the transcript of that day's proceedings to the E! headquarters. A portion of that material is than developed into a script and produced and prepared for broadcast next day. *The Michael Jackson Trial, An E! News Presentation* (the wording of the title has obviously been chosen with great care) is aired at 7:30 p.m. EST and repeated at 9:00 p.m. The format is relatively simple—enactment and cross-fire-like commentary. The host of the program is James Curtis, a former district attorney. The commentators include Shawn Chapman Holley of the late Johnny Cochran's law firm in Los Angeles; Rikki Klieman, a *Court TV/Today Show* analyst; and Howard Weitzman, a trial attorney. Additional

expert commentators are used when needed. The primary focus of the *E! News Presentation* is the trial itself. The opening of the program is preceded with the following persuasive disclaimer: "The re-enactment and commentary in this program may contain frank talk of a sexual nature… Viewer discretion advised."

The program is produced in Studio A of the Wilshire Boulevard headquarters of E! The trial analysis frames the enactment in a carefully constructed courtroom set. The primary actors are the created doppelgangers of the real-life participants. Rigg Kennedy plays the role of defense attorney Thomas Mesereau, easily distinguished by a mane of white hair. Edward Moss (age 27), a long time professional Jackson impersonator plays the role of the defendant.

"It takes a mere 45 minutes for Edward Moss to morph from a little-known, Los Angeles-based actor into one of the world's most infamous performers," the *New York Times* reported recently. "He starts with a close shave. 'I grow a lot of facial hair,' Mr. Moss said with a sheepish, high-pitched giggle. He then moves on to his olive-colored complexion, which, with the help of MAC and La Femme makeup, is quickly made several shades lighter. Skin sufficiently whitened, he heads for his eyes. 'I make them lower and a little more almond-shaped,' he explained. 'I have to draw in the eyebrows a little arched, contour the nose and cheeks to make them thinner, add a cleft to my chin, then you add the wig and the costume and …'"

There is always something offsetting by impersonators; even the inanimate Madame Tussaud wax figures are somewhat disturbing. They are almost real, but not real. We look both for exactness of reproduction and for the flaw as well in the cloned figure. In the case of the enactment, the viewer is caught in that constant comparison of real and unreal, between the hard edged reality of the courtroom and its strange studio duplicate.

E! extends or pushes the envelope and recognizes that all trials have an entertainment function. Maybe E! is more honest in its approach then the others. From cable networks like CNN, MSNBC and Fox to network newscasts and magazine programs, broadcasters play to our shared prurient interests with coverage of trials, whether media coverage comes through a lens in the courtroom itself or through images assembled from outside the courtroom and given meaning through the play-by-play commentary of the newly celebrated class of legal commentators. These "news" and "talk" shows are media constructed trials, reconstructions of a sort that are not so apparent, they are not labeled as entertainment but appear in the guise of news.

The re-enacted trial, the fake trial, is framed as entertainment. The re-enactment is a reconstruction of the trial that the panelists then deconstruct with their legal expertise. The panel of commentators don't refer to actors, don't call attention to them as representations of the actual trial participants, but speak of the transcript which serves to legitimize the fake trial. The use of transcripts and the panel of legal experts support the perception that the medium of this re-enactment via actors is transparent – that is to say that the constructed event serves as a proxy for the actual courtroom event.

It fosters the illusion of transparency; the audience is watching the trial. Theoretically, the enactment is in the background. The real trial is in the foreground.

As E! News presents its trial each night one can almost hear the exclamation "Its show time!" Although the judge's ban on cameras was meant to avoid the media circus and the potential trivialization of the trial, the opposite effect has been achieved. In banning news cameras from the courtroom, the judge relinquished more control than if he had permitted them in, where his rules of coverage would have been binding. Media re-enactments need not adhere to judicially defined rules of coverage.

Lesson for judges: You can keep the television camera out of the courtroom, but you cannot keep it out of the trial. In the name of justice, and under controlled circumstances, perhaps it is time for a change.

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Ted Koppel Speaks Out

The back story of ABC's plan to replace him with David Letterman and other revelations.

By Morton Silverstein

There is one thing unmistakably clear about Ted Koppel: he does not suffer fools gladly.

On April 30, 2004, when *Nightline* announced that he was going to read the 721 names of those U.S. service men and women who had died in Iraq, despite Sinclair Broadcasting's pre-emption of the program that night on its eight ABC affiliates, Koppel and ABC News went forward, and closed with:

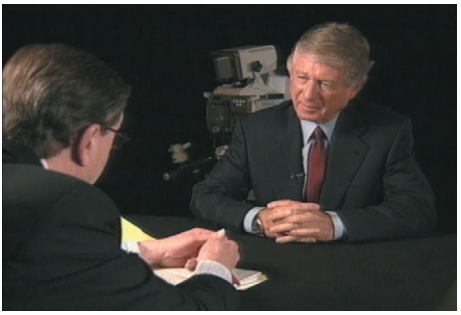
"The reading of those 721 names was neither intended to provoke opposition to the war, nor was it meant as an endorsement. Some of you doubt that. You are convinced that I am opposed to the war. I'm not, but that's beside the point. I am opposed to sustaining the illusion that war can be waged by the sacrifice of a few, without burdening the rest of us in any way. I oppose the notion that to be at war is to forfeit the right to question, criticize or debate our leaders' policies, or for that matter, the policies, of those who would like to become our leaders. *Nightline* will continue to do all of those things in the weeks and months to come."

Not that he needed backup, but Senator John McCain was among those who vigorously protested to Sinclair, declaring its action "unpatriotic. I hope it meets with the public opprobrium it most certainly deserves."

In 1999, when a Serb who had known of a massacre of Kosovo civilians two days earlier was interviewed about it by Koppel, he mumbled, muttered and otherwise fumbled for a response. Said Koppel, who had seen the grave, asked the translator to tell him: "Look, I know when I get a direct answer and I know when I get bullshit, And this is bullshit." *Nightline* aired that night with the epithet intact.

Koppel has just announced that he will be leaving ABC when his contract expires next December. In 2002,when I interviewed him in Washington, where he kept three impatient members of Congress waiting while he fulfilled the interview, he was locked into yet another imbroglio. This time, the enemy was within, summoning up Walt Kelly's Pogo character, who famously declared: "We have seen the enemy--and he is us."

ABC was seeking to replace *Nightline* with an entertainment show hosted by David Letterman. This is how our interview began.



Mort Silverstein: Back in March, 2002, devoted viewers of *Nightline* were concerned that after 22 years and thousands of broadcasts, they had seen the end of this distinguished ABC News series. Bill Carter, on *The New York Times* sounded the alarm, and the headline: "Koppel is the Odd Man Out as ABC Woos Letterman." It went on to say that ABC, trying to challenge NBC and CBS for the sizeable revenue of late night entertainment, made a strong bid to lure David Letterman, the CBS star, in a move that would displace Ted Koppel and *Nightline*. The story quoted an unnamed executive – they're always unnamed, aren't they?

Ted Koppel: When they have something like that to say, yes.

MS: I quote, "the relevancy of *Nightline* just is not there anymore." You responded a few days later in an op ed piece in the Times which many felt was remarkably constrained. Can you tell us now what was going on off camera between you and ABC News at that time, and the state of your own blood pressure? Being characterized as irrelevant is a phrase that doesn't appear in any book of encomiums that I know.

TK: Fortunately, I'm blessed with very low blood pressure. I mean, it's under control. And it didn't get out of control during that period either. And Bill Carter's story was exceptionally accurate in that the reasons that ABC had for doing that in the first place were purely economic. And I had no trouble with that. I had no illusions; as I said in that same op ed, I know I'm not working for a charitable organization. It's a business. I know why they had made a lot on *Nightline* over the past 22 years, and continue to make a reasonable amount of money on *Nightline*. They believed that they could make a great deal more by bringing David Letterman over to ABC. I understand that; I have no problem with that. But I said it was gratuitous for that still unnamed executive to say what he or she did. And that got my Irish up a little bit. So I felt that it was important that if the Letterman thing did not go through, and if *Nightline* was to stay on ABC, that very senior representatives of this organization publicly express what I hoped would be their real view about *Nightline*. Which they did. And we're back to status quo ante.

MS: Where do we stand right now? Is there a new commitment?

TK: Yes.

MS: Between you and ABC, which would satisfy you temporarily?

TK: It satisfies me. Look. I mean, one of the reasons that it was understandably difficult for them to give a public commitment of that kind is that as you well know, as someone who's spent a lot of your life in, in television, networks don't normally give commitments to television programs.

Indeed, they never give commitments to television programs. So ironically, we're in a better position now than we were in January or February of this year. As we discovered at the time, our, our life span could have been as brief as a few more weeks. Now we have a guarantee of significantly longer than that.

MS: How much longer?

TK: (laughing) None of your business.

MS: I'd like to take a long dissolve, to childhood years. Growing up in England during the 1940s, and to the time you were 13. Who was the young Ted Koppel? And who were your parents, friends, mentors? What kind of kid were you?

TK: Well, at age 13, or at least in the years leading up to 13, you tend not to have many mentors outside your own family. I had spent three years in an English boarding school, by the time we came over to the United States. My parents were German Jewish refugees, who had fled Hitler in the late '30s. I was born in England. My life really begins after I came to the United States. That's when I truly began to enjoy myself.

MS: In your book, "Off Camera Ted Koppel: Private Thoughts Made Public," you remembered fellow students in England sending you to Coventry, "a form of loneliness," you said, "that is both painful and conducive to introspection." What was that about?

TK: My parents were back in Germany at the time. My father was trying to reacquire some of the things that the Nazis had taken away from him, including a home and a factory. And they did not want me, for obvious reasons, to be going to school in Germany, and so I went to boarding school in England. And I made the mistake of coming back from one vacation with some little Shuco toy cars. And I was bragging about those cars. And pointing out that I thought they were infinitely superior to the English Dinky Cars.

Most Americans have much more than anybody else in any other country in the world.

This was only six years after the end of the Second World War. I think quite understandably my fellow students there didn't take too kindly to this kid coming back from Germany and saying that the Germans have got better cars than the Brits.

MS: What is Coventry?

TK: Coventry means nobody talks to you. I think I was in Coventry for about two weeks. When you're that age, two weeks is a long time, not to have anybody talk to you.

MS: And who determines when Coventry is over?

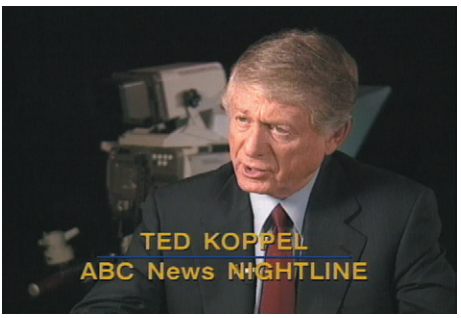
TK: Those who impose it. I mean, there's no point in trying to end it yourself. In fact, the more you try to end it, the longer it's going to last.

MS: At 13 in the Jewish faith, the customary phrase is that you've become a man. This is the year when you and your family come to the United States. Did you feel that you were at least on the path of what is known as manhood? Starting life in a new culture is a daunting task for anyone.

TK: This is, and has been for many, many years, an extraordinarily blessed country. Most Americans have much more than anybody else in any other country of the world. Even our lower middle class is wealthier, in many respects, than people who are considered to be quite well off in a lot of other countries. And some of that reaches the point of wretched excess. I remember my father giving me some money to buy the Sunday *Times.* I went to a local newsstand and the vendor gave it to me, and I said no, I only need one copy. And he said that is one copy. Well, as people in New York well know, and as people around the country may not appreciate, a *New York Times*, in New York, on a Sunday, probably weighs six or seven pounds. The advertising alone is several hundred pages. I had never seen a newspaper like that before.

MS: It'll give you tennis elbow.

TK: It sure will. I remember during the first week we were in the States, my mother coming in to find me sitting on the hotel bed. And in those days, they didn't have television in the rooms, but they did have radios. And I'd just been listening to the radio, and she found me, she found me crying on the bed, and she said what's the matter? And I said I can't, can't believe what kind of a country we've come to here. And she said what do you mean? And I had just heard an ad for Brioschi. And I still remember the jingle. It was "Eat too Much, Drink Too Much, try Brioschi, try Brioschi."



By then it would have been eight years after the end of the Second World War. We had rationing in England for some commodities until 1952. I remember sugar, for example, and candy were rationed until 1952. So I had just left a country where there was still a rationing. And had just come to a country where the only thing that people could think to do, if they had eaten too much or drunk too much, was to take some kind of a medicine for it. And I said, why don't they just eat less? Or drink less. Then they won't get upset stomachs. I mean, that seemed like a much simpler solution, and would have saved a lot of money all around. But I quickly adapted. I have early memories, although I can't, as I look back on it now, I can't have paid too much attention to it, but it clearly had an impact. I have early memories of my father listening to Edward R. Murrow on the BBC. As you know, he was over there for CBS Radio, but his broadcasts were considered to be of such propaganda value to the British people, who were going through a very, very bad time, obviously, that many of them were rebroadcast on the

BBC. And my father listened to these broadcasts avidly.

Koppel, while in London, as a pre-teenager, had decided to become a journalist. His influence, he told us, was listening to Edward R. Murrow on the BBC. We asked about first jobs in his years after college.

TK: I came out of Stanford in 1962, with a masters degree, and thought that *The New York Times* would just be tripping all over itself to want to hire me. And indeed they would. They were willing to hire me, as a copyboy. Which is what desk assistants were called in those days. And it would have been at $60 a week. It wasn't a lot of money, even back in 1962, but I was content to do that. And then I had a conversation with one of the editors, and I said, well, tell me, how long do you think it'll be before I can rise from being a copyboy to actually writing something? And he said, if you're very good, it'll be three years. I was just on the verge of getting married. And my wife was a New York City schoolteacher at that time. And I really didn't see how I was going make it on $60 a week with a family. So I took this job at WMCA, where they paid me the princely sum of $90 a week. And that was a good learning experience. There were some terrific reporters at that station. One of them, a fellow by the name of Danny Meenan, was probably about as good a, a police reporter as any around, and Danny took me under his wing, and the news director at the time was a fellow by the name of Ken Cornell. New Yorkers will probably have heard his daughter, Irene Cornell, on WCBS many, many times over the past 40 years.

I was quite content at WMCA. But then one day I was sent to cover a Neo-Nazi rally in Yorkville. I did a pretty good interview with the head Nazi. In which he, in his speech, had denounced the "domination" of President Kennedy's Cabinet by "all these Jews." And I said, which of the many Jews on President Kennedy's Cabinet did you have in mind? Did you have the Jew, Robert McNamara, in mind? Or was it Dean Rusk? Or were you thinking perhaps of his national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy?

Soon after that interview the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists called up management at WMCA and said if he had me on the air, he's got to be a member of AFTRA. And they came back to me and said you've got to join the union. And I said that's, that's fine, I'll be happy to do that. What do I have to do? Well, it was simple. I had to pay $350 initiation fee and I was a member. Now, that was a month's salary, before taxes. But I paid it. And then after, my new union came back and said, that's fine, but if you're going to have him on the air, you've got to pay him union scale. And that would have been, at the time, roughly a doubling, maybe more, of my salary. And WMCA said well, let's see: the option is, we have him on the air and we have to pay him a couple of hundred bucks. Or, we don't have him on the air and we don't have to pay him anything. So they took me off the air. So now I was an AFTRA member; I was out $350 and I couldn't get on the air. So that's when I started looking rather more seriously for a new job, and ultimately found this job with ABC.

MS: You sent out your bio, your resume...

TK: No. Actually one of the WMCA Good Guys, as they were then called, a DJ by the name of Jim Harriet, told me that had heard that ABC Radio was starting a new broadcast called *The Flair Reports.* And he said I think they're still looking for a couple of guys. Why don't you go over and audition? So I did. And I did rather well. I mean, they said, you sound good, we like your writing. The only problem is you're 23 years old. I mean, we can't possibly hire you as an ABC correspondent. And I said, well, this is radio. Nobody's going to know. Unless you introduce me every day by saying, and now here's 23-year-old Ted Koppel, why should they know? And they said no, we just can't.

But they did offer me a job as a news writer. At $175 a week. Which seemed like an awful lot of money. But I turned them down. And said that's not the job I applied for, and I think I'm qualified for that on-air job, and that's the job I want. And I went home – by then I was married and we had a baby on the way. And I said to my wife, I think I just blew it. I think I just blew a $175-dollar-a-week job. But she was very supportive, and said look, you did what you thought was the right thing. And three days later, the producer called up and said, alright, we've thought it over. Come on over. And that job paid $270 a week. Well, I've made bigger salaries in the years since then, but none ever seemed bigger than that one.

MS: You variously worked as an anchor or foreign and domestic correspondent and bureau chief; you were ABC News Hong Kong bureau chief, from 1971 covering stories from Vietnam to Australia. Vietnam: did you believe Vietnam to be a, a tragic, futile endeavor, as many did, and if so, if you did, when did you make this perception?

VIETNAM: I didn't think that was a war that could be won.

TK: Well, I went to Vietnam for the first time in January of 1967. I went for a year, and then I came back in late '67; spent '68 in the States covering Central and Latin America; covering civil rights stories in, in the South here; and then in '69 I was sent out to be bureau chief in Hong Kong.

I think that my perception of Vietnam was very much influenced by an interview that I did in 1964 with three colleagues: David Halberstam, who was then working for *The New York Times*; Neil Sheehan, who was then the UPI correspondent; and Malcolm Brown, who was the Associated Press correspondent. All of them covering Vietnam, and they were all back, and I did a one-hour radio documentary with the three of them on what was then still very much an evolving war in Vietnam. And much of what they told me then turned out to be absolutely true, and they had a much clearer vision, I think, of what was happening in Vietnam and what was going to happen. And I found, when I went to Vietnam myself in, in early '67, I found myself discovering many of the things that they had discovered a couple of years earlier. So from mid-'67 on, I had

very few illusions about Vietnam or that ultimately the United States would, would have to withdraw. I didn't think that was a war that could be won.

MS: How to regard the Sixties? That was a helluva time to be in television, to be a journalist.

TK: The interesting thing is, I missed a lot of the Sixties, because I was overseas. I was a war correspondent in those days. I was in the United States in 1968. And I covered Latin America; covered Central America; covered the civil rights story; and then was assigned in the summer of '68 to the Nixon campaign, which I covered through the election. And thought I was going to be, when he won, I thought I was going to become ABC's White House correspondent. And I was called in by the then-president, Bill Sheehan, who said look, you've done a terrific job, and I'm going to give it to straight: there's nothing wrong with your reporting. But you're 28 years old. And you look about 21. I just can't put you in the White House; you're just too young. You need some more seasoning. But I will give you the job as Southeast Asian bureau chief, if you're willing to go back out to Hong Kong.

My wife and kids had been living in Hong Kong when I was in Vietnam. And we were all very fond of Hong Kong, loved living out there. I was just beginning to feel, after a year in Vietnam, that I knew what it was about. So I was actually kind of eager to go back and, and resume covering that story. But I was there then for '69, '70, and part of '71. So I missed a lot of the turbulent Sixties.

MS: On November 4th, 1979, during Jimmy Carter's presidency, a group of armed men stormed the American Embassy in Tehran and took, I think it was 65 employees, hostage. Where were you on that Sunday?

TK: I was home. Got a call from the desk, and they said, look, a bunch of radical students have seized the U.S. Embassy, and we'd like you to come in. Do a story. And what few people remember now is that just a few months previous, a bunch of radical students had seized the embassy, or had tried to. And the then-ambassador had come out, talked to them, sent them home, and nothing had happened. It was Sunday, I didn't want to go in. And I said, I think this thing will be over before I get into the State Department, so why don't you just forget about it. And the guy on the desk said no, we really think, you know, there's nothin' much else going on today. We need you to come in and do that story.

Roone was sort of a guerilla fighter of network bureaucracy.

And as history was to prove, I was right. It didn't last long at all; just 444 days.

MS: Roone Arledge was then president of News, as well as Sports. He was beseeching the network to an open-ended late night time slot, a), and b), particularly a crisis which, as we [said], couldn't last for a couple of days or whatever.

TK: Sure. But, Roone wasn't the kind to "beseech." Roone was smarter

than that. He had actually wanted a one-hour newscast, at 6:30 in the evening. He wanted the 6:30 to 7:30 slot. And there was no way that the affiliates were going to give up that valuable 7 to 7:30 time slot, in which they could run syndicated programming and make a ton of money. But Roone was sort of a guerilla fighter of network bureaucracy. And he had it in mind that if he couldn't get that hour broadcast consecutively, then he would simply take half an hour in the early evening and try to get half an hour late at night. And for some months already, he had been setting this up in the news division, that whenever there was a major event that happened, he would seize that half hour, at 11:30 at night. And do a special. I remember we did a special when Elvis Presley died; we did a couple of specials when the Pope came to visit; there were any number of other stories. But what he was really looking for was a story with legs, a story that would last.

The hostages were taken on November 4th. It was probably four days later when Roone said, we're gonna do a, a late-night special on this. And we did a late night special on the 8th, and the 9th, and the 10th, and the 11th, and the 12th, and the 15th and the 20th and the 25th. And I remember one day getting on the phone with him and saying, Roone, you know, there is nothing happening today. We got nothing to say tonight. We shouldn't be doing this special tonight. He said, do it anyway. Tell me what an ayatollah is. Tell me what the difference is between a, a Shi'ite and a Sunni Muslim. I don't care what you do. Just put on a half hour.

And what he was really doing was he had seized that time period. And he wasn't going let it go again. And the hostage crisis went on and on and on, and ABC was losing a ton of money, because these were all specials. And they couldn't sell advertising on these specials. They had to declare their intention to do a regularly scheduled program before they could sell it. And that is how *Nightline* was born. In March of 1980.

MS: The first *Nightline* featured an exchange between the wife of one of the hostages and an Iranian diplomat.

TK: Yeah. Dorothea Morefield was the woman. Very elegant and smart and tough. And she took this guy apart. She was very rough with him.

MS: In his review of that first episode, Tom Shales, of the *Washington Post* called the show "cheaply theatrical. Mawkish and self-promotional. Neo-news. Non-news. Pseudo news. A sugar news substitute. News dressed up in a clown's suit and paraded in the center ring." How did you and your staff react to that kind of notice?

TK: Oh, I have learned over the years not to complain. Certainly to television critics. But I called Tom, and I said, I thought that was a cheap

shot. It didn't even give us a chance to get off the ground. I mean that's our first program of what we hope is gonna be a permanent series. And I think, in all fairness, you owe it to us to give it another look. And Tom, who actually is a very sensitive guy and a very decent guy, promised that he would do that. And I think about five or six months later, he came back with a rave review. It was one of the nicest reviews I've ever had. I didn't have any complaint about what he had to say; I was just concerned about the timing. You've got to give it at least a few nights.

MS: Shales's next review is nine months after that first review, he was now writing, "*Nightline* represents the most successful programming initiative in ABC News history. What makes *Nightline* click is Koppel's bullseye interviewing style: a verbal and rhetorical combination of Sugar Ray Leonard and Baryshnikov. The succession of jabs, rejoinders, and judicious to delicious interruptions. Koppel a cappella."

Television in America, **which appears on many public television stations (please check listings) is hosted by Steven Scheuer; Senior Writer/Producer: Morton Silverstein. For the Independent Production Fund: Alvin H. Perlmutter.**

Mayhem and Disaster in Studio 6B

A TV veteran describes his first day on his first TV job, as a production manager for the Milton Berle show: He flooded the set! **by Alvin Cooperman**

I was in a state of shock. My decision to leave the Shuberts was finally sinking in. Lee and J.J. Shubert were the only people I had ever worked for. Since I was 16 years old. I was treated like a son. The fact that I worked seven days a week and 10 to 14 hours a day didn't bother me. I loved the theater. I was married, and had a three-year-old daughter. In 1951, having worked for 12 years, a salary of $100 a week wasn't bad, but I felt trapped. Mr. Lee warned Rodgers and Hammerstein not to hire me. I "managed" the Booth Theater, but was not allowed to become a member of the manager's union and I needed to escape.

A friend, Edgar Rosenberg, told me I could get a job as a producer at NBC Television. He set up a meeting for me with Robert Sarnoff, and he hired me. I didn't expect it, but Sarnoff was impressed with my background in the theater.

When I told Mr. Lee he went berserk. I had never seen him like this before. In his high shrill voice he screamed at me, calling me a "God damn idiot." He insisted that I stay, and nobody ever said "no" to him. All I could think of was being free to pursue my goal of producing and writing. My aunt Gladys who worked in the accounting department for the Shuberts, and who brought me to the company, was furious. How could I do it? John Shubert, J.J's son, talked to me. Mr. J.J. for whom I started as an office boy, and then became his assistant talked to me. But I had made up my mind. Mr. Lee then had one of his lawyers meet with me. Milton Weinberger, told me that if I left I'd be a damn fool, since I was in Mr. Lee's will for $25,000.00 and that I was next in line to replace Elias Weinstock, head of the booking office.

I listened, but I left.

The following Monday as I headed to 30 Rockefeller Plaza to meet with Hugh Graham, head of production for the NBC television network, I felt like I

The author (left) with Milton Berle in 1951

had been kicked in the stomach. I didn't know a camera from a microphone. What if they fire me? I met Edgar on the sixth floor of the RCA Building and walked past the studios down the long hall to the end of it. On the left, there were the offices for the production managers. They were really cubicles. In a real office I met Hugh Graham. He was a big, affable Irishman, who was impressed that I had come into television from the theater. He didn't care that I didn't know a camera from a microphone.

NBC's number one rated show was *The Texaco Star Theater*, Tuesday night at 8:00 p.m. and starred the man who was known as Uncle Miltie, Milton Berle. It was televised live from Studio 6B down the hall from the production managers' offices, in front of an audience of about 200 people. Berle, his manager Irving Grey, his agents, the William Morris Company, and Mike Kirk and the other ad agency guys for Texaco from Kudner, ran the show. NBC wanted someone to centralize the control of the production and keep the show on budget. It had been an impossible task, and I didn't know what I was in for when Graham cheerfully announced to me that I was being assigned to this show.

Fear overtook me as they lead me to a cubicle that would be my office. Edgar promised to show me the ropes. They

walked me to Studio 6B to see where they laughingly said 'the mayhem' took place every Tuesday night. It was small and empty, and I could not imagine what I was in for.

That first day was a blur. When I took the subway home to Flushing, I began to think about what I had done. What would I say to my parents? What would I say to Evelyn, my wife?

When I got home, I was greeted by Evelyn, and my parents who had come over from Brooklyn to share in the good news. Our neighbors and best friends Fred and Ray Feldman and their same-age-as-Karen son Phillip were down at our apartment to join in the congrats. When I told them that I had been assigned to supervise the Milton Berle Show, everybody jumped for joy. My father, who always exaggerated my little successes, announced that I was the producer of the Berle Show. I couldn't dissuade him. The $200.00 a week thrilled my wife. My daughter Karen was awake, as she always seemed to be, joined in the celebration of she-knew-not-what. My sister called to congratulate me. My in-laws called to congratulate me.

Television was the thing. Tuesday night at eight o'clock was when all of the United States watched the *Texaco Star Theater*. If you had a television set it was Milton Berle's night to rule.

Their exhilaration did not melt the fear that consumed me. I was scheduled to meet Milton Berle on Sunday at the first rehearsal. I broke into a sweat as I realized that Sunday was two days before the actual live television program. How could it be done? One hour with a live orchestra and guest stars, and singing and dancing, and Uncle Miltie in his crazy makeup and costumes. How could it be done? My father told me not to worry, I'd be a great producer.

"But Pop," I mumbled. "I'm not the producer. I'm the production manager, and I don't know anything about television."

"You'll be a great producer!" he said, ignoring me. "You'll be great!"

My mother, who instinctively realized my father's tendency to exaggerate, chimed in, "Don't worry, son. Everything will turn out for the best."

After one week of orientation at NBC with the production manager's group I was about to meet the man.

On Sunday at ten of three in the afternoon I got out of the subway at 42nd Street and walked along Broadway to the building where the Nola Rehearsal Studios were. Second floor. Marked "Berle Rehearsal in Studio One." I walked up and taking a deep breath went in. There were a lot of people in the room, in small groups, talking to each other. No one came over to introduce themselves to me as I stood motionless, looking around to see if I could find Milton. He wasn't there.

I inched my way towards the closest person and extended my hand, "Hello, I'm Alvin Cooperman."

"Hi, I'm Ben Griefer." He said nicely. "I'm with William Morris. What do you do?"

"I'm the NBC production manager."

A woman standing with Ben Griefer chimed in, "Oh, am I glad to meet you. I'm Roz Berle, Milton's sister. I'm the costume supervisor and I have to talk to you about 'money.' We need more money this season for Milton's costumes. They'll be more outrageous, if that's possible." She turned to the third person in the group and said, "This is

Sal Anthony, he's the costume designer. Isn't that right, Sal?"

Everybody was waiting for Milton and his writers. The show was to open the new season on Tuesday night and this was Sunday at three-fifteen and there was no script yet. Bob MacKichan, the set designer tried to calm my obvious concern when he told me that he had done the show for the last three years, and it was always like this.

"You'll get used to it, Al." He said. "If you don't, you'll get a heart attack and die, just to get out of doing it." He laughed.

"Alvin." I corrected him.

A tall, elegant gentleman walked over to me, having been whispered my name by Roz, and introduced himself. He was Arthur Knorr, the director. He was famous before Berle, having staged the shows at Radio City Music Hall.

"When you get a chance, I'd like to talk to you about some problems we had last season in Studio 6B." He then said, "Get to know everyone first. Milton will be here momentarily with the script for Tuesday. Then we'll talk."

"Okay." I said softly.

With a little more confidence I walked further into the room, introducing myself. I saw Sid Stone talking to two of the Texaco men.

Then the door slammed open and Milton Berle, followed by two short, plump guys, and a taller fat guy, came quickly across the Nola studio floor. He was blowing cigar smoke as he moved to a large table against the wall. "Okay folks. Next season starts right now."

The two short guys turned out to be Buddy Arnold and Hal Collins, the two key writers. They were each carrying a pile of scripts, which they plopped on the table. Marco, the taller fat guy brought Milton a towel, which he threw around his neck. Along with the towel, Milton had a whistle on a chain around his neck. He wore a suede jacket. And the ever-present lit cigar in his mouth.

Milton puffed on his cigar. "I hope you're better than the idiot we had last season, kid."

Everybody in the room surged to the table, greeting Milton and grabbing a script. Ben Griefer looked back to me and motioned to come and get one. I did.

The silence in the room was broken with laughter as everyone read the script. I did too. How in the world are we going to get this on a stage by Tuesday? Not funny.

Finally Milton spoke.

"Who are you?" he asked, pointing to me.

"I'm Alvin Cooperman, the NBC production manager."

Milton puffed on his cigar, "I hope you're better than the idiot we had last season, kid."

I dissolved into the crowd of script-readers.

The next person he addressed was Ben. "Who can we get for the opening show, Ben? What stars, what acts?"

Ben replied immediately and firmly, "We've got The Beatrice Kraft Dancers. A wonderful act. That's set . . . if it's okay with you Milton?"

Milton blew a cigar smoke ring into the air and grinned, "They're okay, Ben. But let's talk about a singer or dancer with a name. We need a name. A big name. Who've you got?"

At this moment Bob McKichan tapped me on the shoulder, "I need to

talk to you. There's a slight problem in the script."

The whole script seemed to me to be a problem. A one hour show on the air next Tuesday!

Arthur Knorr was busy with Milton and Ben discussing casting, so Bob and I stepped outside the studio to talk.

Bob scratched his head, "We've got to look at the studio to find out how to handle the sketch. It's all about water."

You don't change Milton's sketch. If there's a change, Milton will make it.

I didn't know what he was talking about. I nodded.

"Let's tell Knorr we're going over to the studio now. I don't know how to design the shower stalls until we find out which side of the studio has the water outlets."

I nodded. I read the script and knew that the sketch was about Milton taking a shower and turning into a midget. I now learned that there was a production problem.

McKichan and I walked over to the RCA Building and took the elevator to the 6th floor. We entered the studio, which was empty. A couple of NBC pages were sitting in the audience section and left when they saw us. On the stage a lone electrician sat reading a newspaper.

"Hi Sam," Bob shouted. He then introduced me to Sam Adler, the studio's stagehand electrician.

Sam shouted back, "It's only Sunday. What're you doing here?"

We were now on the stage. Bob looked around. "I need to know where the water faucets are. We've got a water sketch."

"Water? You couldn't have water. There's no faucet." Sam pointed to the floor. "Master control's on five."

My first show. Why is this happening? With all my theatrical experience I couldn't think of a solution. I didn't even understand the problem.

Another person then appeared from the stage entrance.

"Sorry, Bob." He said. "I was late to Nola and they said you were here."

"Jack, this is Alvin Cooperman, the new production manager. Alvin, this is Jack Miller the *Texaco Star Theater* prop man."

He shook my hand.

"We've got a serious problem, Jack." Bob rubbed his chin. "There are no water facilities in the studio."

"Then how do we do the shower sketch?" Jack asked.

"What do you think, Alvin?" Bob asked.

"I don't know." I said softly.

Sam suggested we drop the sketch, to which McKichan roared with laughter. You don't change Milton's sketch. If there's a change, Milton will make it.

Jack Miller suddenly pumped his fist. "I've got it."

"Yeah?" Bob said.

"Here's what we do. Come with me." And as we left the studio, following Miller through the backstage entrance, he kept talking. "We get a hose and run it from the shower stalls that you design, Bob, out through the stage entrance. Down the hall past the pages' desk and Milton's dressing room. Take the hose past the elevator bank and around to the men's room." We followed Miller into the men's room. He continued, "We hook the hose up to the faucet, and voila! That's it."

"What's it?" I mumbled.

"Now you've got a hose hooked up to a faucet. The hose is also hooked up to the shower stalls. Got it?"

"How do we control the flow of water into the studio?" I asked.

"I stand in the hall outside the stage entrance. The stage manager, Sandy Wolin, is inside the studio at the stage entrance, looking out at me. I am controlling the flow of water. Sandy cues me according to the script. 'Water on,' and I let up on my grip of the hose. 'Water off', and I tighten my grip on the hose. Simple."

It sure sounded simple. McKichan reflected for a moment, "Good idea, Jack. That's what we'll do. You're responsible for getting a hose that will run from the men's room to the stage through the stage entrance."

"No problem." Jack said.

No problem. I was going with the flow, and I had no idea what was happening to the show or to me.

"I've got a whole show to design." Bob said. "I better get going." He left me standing with Jack Miller and Sam Adler. "I'll go over the designs and floor plans with you tomorrow morning in your office, Al, so you can approve them."

"Alvin." I said softly, as McKichan dashed out towards the elevators.

It was after seven on Sunday. I left Jack and Sam and walked to my cubicle down the hall. I reread the script and did a breakdown on a yellow pad. I looked at a sample budget. Cameramen? Audio? TD? I decided to go home. I'll have Edgar walk me through this tomorrow.

I arrived at my cubicle Monday morning about seven. Nobody was there.

Where the hell was Edgar Rosenberg? He got me into this mess. If he didn't plan to come in today why didn't he tell me? As I was excoriating Edgar in my mind, someone came into the cubicle and sat down at the next desk.

He was a wiry-looking man, and looked at least ten years older than me. He turned to me and introduced himself. He smoked. "I'm Ben Tomkins, you must be Alvin Cooperman. Hughie told me you were joining us. From the theater. I love the theater. Welcome."

"Nice to meet you, Ben." He blew smoke in my face. I coughed and he put his cigarette out in a large ashtray on his desk. "I need some help with this budget form."

He immediately pulled his chair over towards me, "What do you want to know?"

Everything. But I didn't say that. I said, "I need some help with cost estimates for the television technicians, which I have no experience with."

"Simple." He said, as he leaned to his desk, opened a drawer and pulled out a tech salary guide. "This will help you, Alvin, to begin with. Hughie should have given you a copy."

Hughie gave me nothing. Looking back I now realize that this was the earliest of days in the world of television, and everybody in it was struggling to get a handle on whatever area they were responsible for.

By the time I had figured out some of the estimates on the budget form, from what I knew was in the script and from guesswork about numbers of hours, Bob McKichan came rushing into my cubicle with an armful of floor plans and designs for the show.

He explained that he was going directly to the NBC carpenter shop on Tenth Avenue and 28th Street so that

the sets could be built and shipped to Studio 6B in the RCA Building tomorrow morning. He told me that the first set sent to the studio would be the sketch. That arrives at 5:00 a.m. so that Hank Frisch, the Lighting Director and his assistants could light it by 7:00 a.m. when Milton and his entourage arrived.

"What about the rest of show?" I asked.

"Everything else arrives whenever Milton finishes rehearsing the sketch. That usually is about noon. But don't worry about it. I've got it all under control. What I'm still concerned about is the hose from the men's room to the stage solution. I hope it works."

I thought, "This is my first show, it better work."

"Here's a set of drawings for you. I'll give you an estimate in a couple of hours. I'll call you from the shop." He dashed out. He popped back in. "Oh, and don't forget the miniature show opening. It's stored with Ken Jackson." He rushed out again. I couldn't blame him. This was Monday at about nine o'clock in the morning and tomorrow morning at this time Milton will be rehearsing the sketch. "Water on, water off," I thought. Will it work? It better, or its over for me.

I spent about an hour going over the floor plans and elevations so that I'd be able to understand the cost estimates that McKichan would call in. What I began to realize was that I was given no budget figure. It was about ten-thirty when I walked into Hugh Graham's office.

"How you doin', buddy?" Hughie greeted me.

"I've got some questions about the budget."

"Shoot." He said.

"What is it? The budget."

"You don't have to worry about the above-the-line. Berle and the agency is responsible for that. All you have to concern yourself with is the below-the-line. Give me your estimates for camera, audio, sets, lighting, stagehands, technicians etcetera, etcetera, and I'll give you the add-on charge for the studio. It's simple. Edgar can walk you through it. "

I responded quickly and angrily, "Edgar isn't in today, he worked on Saturday."

"Who told you that?"

"One of the secretaries."

"Bullshit. Edgar is supposed to be here, he's supposed to help you. Where the hell is he?"

"Phone call for you Alvin," Ben shoutedf.

It was McKichan with the estimates for sets and times for delivery to the RCA Building. I spent the rest of the day filling in estimate numbers on the printed budget form. Below-the-line only. New terminology. I wondered what the actual NBC budget figure, if any, was allotted to "above-the-line"? I wondered who approved the "above-the-line," which included cast, writers, director, AD's, stage managers, other "creative" disciplines, and Milton. Nobody, probably. Certainly "nobody" here at NBC, for fear of antagonizing their number one asset. I had the creeping feeling that was why they hired me. To control the above-the-line. Fat chance. I'm not going to last long here.

It was around five o'clock when I brought my estimates into Graham. He threw the papers into his in-box and said, "Come on, I'll buy you a drink at Hurley's."

"Don't you want to go over them?" I asked.

"What difference does it make? What you don't know is that NBC just made a thirty-year exclusive deal with Berle. You know what we're paying him?"

I knew from his expression that the amount would be unbelievable. "What?"

"The unbelievably huge sum of two-hundred thousand dollars a year!" He accented every word of the number.

"Wow."

He continued, "The show's on tomorrow and even if the estimates are high, we're going to pay them. When you get into it, you'll be able to catch this stuff on Sunday when you get the scripts."

"Yeah," I said. "And then what?"

He got up and put his jacket on. "Then YOU will talk to Milton and his gang of thieves." He laughed, "Come on, let's get a drink."

I shook my head. "I've got to go home and get some sleep. I have to be in the studio by five tomorrow morning."

"I forgot that." He laughed. "You'll get the hang of it."

He walked out ahead of me and left. I went to my desk and sat back. Ben was gone. I have to do this every week?

The following morning I went to my office down the hall from the studio to leave my briefcase there. On the way I ran into Ken Jackson, who was opening the door to the property room. He reminded me to have the miniature show opening picked up. It was about a quarter to five. Hank Frisch, whom I had met briefly on Sunday was already there. A coffee urn and a tray of Danish and bagels looked inviting. I asked if I could partake, and Hank said, "Go to it."

His electricians arrived by five, as did Sam Adler. At about five-o-five, the set for the sketch was brought in by the stage crew, who began to set it up for Hank and his guys to light.

The studio was a box-like stage, with a raked section of seats for about 200 in the studio audience. There was 40 feet between the audience and the stage, where three RCA cameras silently lay in wait. On the stage-left section of the space between the audience and the stage was the area where Alan Roth and his "orchestra" would play. Stage right had a large glass window as part of the stage wall, behind which was the audio booth. Stage left is where Sam and a couple of electricians sat and followed the lighting cues given by Hank from the video booth on the seventh floor behind the audience. The stage had a low ceiling that just accommodated the pipes for hanging the lights, which were reached by ladders. The back wall was used for the old-fashioned roll-drops. The "proscenium," such as it was, had two curtains that opened and closed from the left and the right by stagehands and pullcords.

I drank some coffee and nibbled on a bagel for what seemed like an eternity. I had seen shows being lit, so I paid little attention to it. What concerned me was the set for the sketch. The two shower stalls each had basins to catch the water from the showerheads. The basins were about 18 inches deep. I wondered if that was deep enough. The roll drop was put up – a painting of the back wall of a large bathroom. The painted flats to make up the other two sides of the bathroom were quickly

lashed into place. Then the rest of the set pieces and props were put in place. Sink, toilet, etcetera.

I heard a shrill whistle which made everyone straighten up and look to the studio doors. It was Uncle Miltie, in his suede jacket, towel and cigar, followed by Marco, his brother Jack and Hal Collins, the sketch writer.

"Wake up, everybody, the King is here." Milton said modestly, as he walked right into the set for the sketch.

I stood next to him as he carefully examined the set and its contents.

"Where's Bob McKichan?" He asked me.

"He's at the shop supervising the rest of the sets."

"What do you think?" He asked me.

"Looks like a bathroom to me."

"Amateur night, kid. Amateur night. But I suppose it's too late to do anything about it."

It sure was too late. For me. I'm a dead duck, and this guy is nuttier than a fruitcake. "What's wrong?" I dared to ask.

He looked at me as if I were nuttier than a fruitcake, and walked away to look at the shower stalls.

Jack Miller had come in with what seemed like miles of green hose. He was hooking them up to the shower heads. Milton stopped him. "You'll do that later, we're not going to rehearse using the water. What are you, an idiot?"

Miller took the one hose off and without responding just started to roll it up. I thought that not rehearsing the "water on," "water off" part of the sketch was a bad idea. How would we know whether it worked or not?

When the cast for the sketch arrived, Milton starting rehearsing. Arthur Knorr and the TD walked around with their scripts and plotted the camera shots. At about ten o'clock the cameramen and boom operator arrived. The lighting continue. Knorr and Bob "Moose" Daniels, the TD, went up the audience stairs to the video booth.

Bob McKichan arrived about then. "How'd the hose bit work, Alvin?"

"We never rehearse with props. When we go on the air we all pray."

"Milton won't rehearse with the water."

"Then how do we know it will work?" He turned to Sandy Wolin, the stage manager. "You've got to rehearse with the hose hooked up so we'll know whether it'll work or not."

Sandy shrugged and looked at Berle as if to say, "Talk to him."

Jack Miller came over and whispered to McKichan.

McKichan whispered to me, "You've got to tell Arthur Knorr that the water sketch must be rehearsed. He'll talk to Milton.

I bounded up the stairs to the control room and confronted Arthur with the problem.

"Alvin, my boy," Arthur said putting his hand on my shoulder. "You will learn that we fly by the seat of our video pants with Milton. We never rehearse with props. When we go on the air we all pray. The audience always thinks that what went wrong was planned that way. Milton is a clever chap. Don't worry yet. This is only the first show. "

Milton was always "on." Rehearsing for him was showing his guests and the dancers how much he knew about

everything. And he knew a lot about everything. He'd be especially lovey-dovey to the girls in the company. He wanted to be known as a "Casanova." He showed off to them all, and to his Mother Sandra, who sat pridefully in the second row of the empty audience section. She was always there during rehearsal, and during the show, and never said anything. Anything that I knew of. Occasionally during this first show Tuesday, Mike Kirk and Irving Grey would come in and look around and then walk out. Milton's girlfriend Ruth Cosgrove would would come in late in the afternoon and sit with Milton's Mother.

I tried to absorb everything as the day flew swiftly by. At seven-thirty in the evening, several NBC pages let the audience in from the seventh floor next to the control room while Milton was still rehearsing the musical second-act, which was written by Buddy Arnold.

It was about ten minutes before eight and the audience was already seated when the second act musical number finished rehearsing. Jack Miller and a couple of stagehands then helped hook up the hose and drag it out the stage door, down the hall, around past the elevator bank and into the men's room where the other end was hooked up.

Jack reported to me and to Sandy Wolin that the hose was ready to work and that he would control "water on," "water off." I double-checked this with Sandy, who was overwhelmed with cues. He said he thought it would work. I wasn't too sure now.

I was then asked to go into Milton's dressing room, which looked like a scene from a Marx Brothers film. It was jammed with everyone connected with the program. Milton was putting on lipstick and makeup while Sal Anthony and his sister helped him on with an outrageous Mardi Gras type of costume. Arthur Knorr told us calmly that the show was two minutes long. I nervously announced that it was now only three minutes to air. Milton said, putting the last touches of mascara on, "Cut the last dance number in the second act and we'll pick it up. Guaranteed."

Alan Roth said, "I got it." And pushed his way out to give the band members the note.

Sandy Wolin popped his head in. "Thirty seconds, folks."

Eveybody scampered. Arthur and the video crew flew upstairs past the audience. The audio group went into their booth on stage right. I didn't know where to go as Milton flew out of his dressing room onto the stage behind the curtain. Sal Anthony motioned for me to join him. We went on to the stage and joined some stagehands with our backs hugging the stage-right wall, in front of the glass window. When the curtain opened we'd be safely hidden there.

I was looking at the small monitor that Milton was looking at. *The Texaco Star Theater* music accompanied a cardboard box-like miniature theater curtain going up with the help of a stagehand, and the screen dissolving to the actual stage curtain, in front of which the four Texaco men sang "We are the men from Texaco. . . ."

I couldn't believe it. But then, they'd been doing it for several years. When they finished, Milton parted the curtains and let himself out onto what would be "the apron" in a theater. From behind the curtain we heard the audience screaming with laughter as Milton milked every line of his monologue.

Sandy was telling everyone that the sketch was next, following Sid Stone's Texaco pitch on the apron.

Milton finished his monologue and the applause of the audience came through the curtains. His sister Roz and Sal Anthony were ready to take off his monologue costume, and makeup, and to dress him for the sketch. Everything was happening so quickly I was mesmerized. None of this was rehearsed. Sandy was listening to Sid Stone and watching the monitor. He cued Milton and the midget actor, "Ten seconds." He then shouted down the back exit to Jack Miller who was standing there to be ready to follow the cues of 'water on', 'water off'.

I gulped as the musical intro to the sketch played, and the curtain opened. I saw the center camera's red light go on as Roz and Sal and I and the stagehands plastered ourselves against the stage right wall. The sketch was on. I was concentrating so hard on whether the water-on, water-off would work that I didn't hear any of the dialogue. Only the roar of the audience.

And I prayed that Jack Miller would follow the cues.

Then it came. Milton in one shower for a long time, and the laugh being Milton turning into a midget, who was in the other stall.

I strained to see Sandy standing near the backstage exit and giving hand-cues to Jack Miller. "Water on." The water came on. He then cued Jack Miller "water off," and the water went off. These cues occurred about six times, and to my total delight and surprise they worked on cue. When the sketch was over the curtains closed and Milton, as he always did following the sketch, went out on to the apron to the thunderous applause of the audience.

On the stage we all were horrified to see water pouring over the sides of the 18-inch basins that had held the water throughout the sketch, and onto the stage. I remembered Sam Adler's admonition about Master Control being on the floor below. Suppose we cut the Network off the air? I was helpless because the Beatrice Kraft Dancers were behind the curtain ready to be announced by Milton. Almost as one, we all grabbed newspapers and rags and backstage brooms and mops to try to wipe up the flooded stage.

The Kraft Dancers were a Siamese trio that slithered around as they danced, that was their style. So when the curtains opened they really slithered around, as we were all on camera in the background mopping up.

Arthur Knorr was right. The audience thought this was all part of Uncle Miltie's madness. The show was an enormous success.

When the show was over, we all met in Milton's dressing room.

Milton was furious. "How the fuck did we let the water spill all over the stage?" He screamed.

I knew I'd be fired, but Jack Miller confessed. " I dropped the hose when the sketch was over, Milton, and I guess we didn't figure on my having to run to the men's room to turn off the faucet."

Milton screamed at Bob McKichan. "How could you design such a disaster?"

He screamed at me. "This could be your last show, kid. You're from the theater. You should know how to work these props and effects." The blood rushed from my head. Last show?

He screamed at Arthur Knorr.

Knorr was cool. "Milton, I've always

told you that you must rehearse with props or special effects. Things like this will happen when you don't."

Milton then laughed knowingly, "As least the audience loved it."

Everybody went home. One by one they left. Milton and Ruth were almost the last to leave. That's when Jack Miller helped me mark the sets and props for the night crew. Red tags for stuff that was to be stored in Ken Jackson's bins. Green tags for those sets and props going back to the NBC shop, and yellow tags for props going back to vendors from whom we rented. We finished about eleven o'clock.

When I got home about twelve thirty, Evelyn had waited up for me and raved about the show. She told me that Ray and Fred and the Super who watched the show in our apartment loved it. Karen was running around. We were one of the few tenants in the building who had a television set. Evelyn wanted to know why I didn't get a screen credit. I said, "I work for NBC, not for the *Texaco Star Theater*." She didn't understand. I was just happy to still be employed.

Evelyn then asked me about the new job in television. "I've never seen you so tense as you've been this week."

"That's because I don't know what I'm doing, Evelyn."

"You only just started." She tried to help.

"I hope I didn't make a big mistake by jumping into television."

"You'll see. You'll see." She said.

My first week of the Milton Berle show was over and I had a lot to think about.

I had Wednesday off, but after sleeping like a drugged person till about noon, I went into the office. There was a message on my desk to see Hugh Graham.

I walked into Hugh's office not knowing what to expect. I was prepared to take a bullet through the heart.

"Good show, Coop," Graham greeted me. "Loved the water all over the stage bit. Funny, funny, funny. Fortunately master control on the fifth floor wasn't affected."

He then said, "Jack Miller was fired this morning. Milton's manager Irving Grey called. It could've been you, Alvin, but Milton likes the idea of having someone from the theater on the show. He'll burn your ass every week, but you and he will get along real good. It'll take time, but you did good."

I was a celebrity in the office because the water disaster was what everyone was talking about. After all, I came from the theater.

After his auspicious beginning with Milton Berle, Alvin Cooperman became an award-winning television and theatrical producer, writer and director. His awards include the Emmy, Christopher and Peabody. In the past half-century he has been president of Madison Square Garden Productions, vice-president of special programs for NBC-TV and executive director of the Shubert Organization.

I Knew Dan Rather When...

His first television director recalls Rather's Texas TV debut. **By John Baker**

I was disturbed by *The New Yorker* article on Dan Rather, just before he retired from anchoring the CBS *Evening News*. The writer obviously did his homework, interviewing a lot of people. Dan Rather would be proud.

My question is: Why are these negative nay-bobs of journalism suddenly appearing out of the CBS News closet? Now they come out after working with and around Dan Rather for 43 years.

The reason, I suggest, is a dash of envy, two pinches of jealousy, a smidgen of McCarthyism, two drops of "Get Dan" mixed with a splash of Deep Throatism. Dump all of this on a plate of Texas Field greens, and there you have it.

If there is any doubt that CBS News is a profit center, you had only to watch the end of Rather's final *Evening News* report last March 9th. After his good-bye to his colleagues and the American people, viewers see a shot from behind his anchor desk. A hundred or so people stand and applaud from the newsroom. We see the shot for three seconds. Then CBS cuts to a 10-second Wal-Mart commercial, after which they cut back to Dan standing at the anchor desk, taking congratulations from his colleagues for six more seconds. How rude it was for CBS to interrupt Dan's poignant last moments. As we say down in Texas, "Shame on you, CBS!"

Actually, I knew about Dan Rather before I met him. I replaced him as a play-by-play radio announcer at the Conroe Tigers football games, just north of Houston, in 1954. My first sports job, I was so excited. The downside was the radio station; it received hundreds of calls and letters, demanding to know what happened to Dan Rather. They wanted him back. Not exactly a confidence builder for me.

A few years later, I met Dan Rather. Who the hell was he, anyway? I kept following him around.

I was Dan Rather's first television director. Rather became news anchor at Channel 11 in 1959, fresh from KTRH radio, where he'd done news and sports. Channel 11's press release announced a new commitment to reporting on the many problems in Houston.

Dan came in with a cigar sticking out of his chiseled face, and a "do it now" positive attitude. He knew *nada* about TV. Through cigar smoke, he clipped wire stories onto notebook paper in the order they were to run. He'd bang a typewriter for a few rewrites

Dan Rather reporting from the field in Vietnam, 1966.

and local stories. With his system, we didn't have problems telling the news; we had problems getting video on the air properly. I had the copy leading to a film, but rolling it was an adventure. Dan never read the copy the way it was written. He always ad-libbed, adding words, deleting words. It made it hard for me to know when to roll the film.

Both Dan and I were getting really, really upset with our sloppy production. One day, before the show, he asked me, "How many seconds do you really need to roll the film?"

"Six seconds," I replied. "That's a firm six seconds."

He thought a minute, and then said, "Watch my hands. I'll be holding a pencil. When I start rolling the pencil, you roll the film."

"Gotcha," I said. We never missed another roll cue.

Channel 11 News began to catch on. Handsome Dan, with his cleft chin, was always chasing some kind of story. His tireless reporting made Channel 2, until then the news leader, uncomfortable. The local CBS affiliate, Channel 11 had never tried to compete with Channel 2 in news until Rather came along.

Dan and I would gather at Bob Levi's apartment after the ten- o'clock news and play sport board games, APBA football and baseball. Levi was a desk assistant and writer on the show. We'd sit on the floor in his living room and draw cards, roll dice and eat fried chicken. We had a grand time. We played with the enthusiasm of kids—28-year-old kids. Dan didn't like to lose very much.

Backseat Journalism

"See that dark cloud, that's Texas City," our teacher told us when we were on the playground back in 1947. I didn't

pay much attention. No one did. I was defending myself against Charlie Brantinni. We 12-year-old guys had stopped playing drop the handkerchief when someone brought boxing gloves to recess. We spent our time beating the crap out of each other. Spitting out blood in the schoolyard was a man kind of thing.

We were just kids. Texas City was at least 50 miles away. We didn't care if it blew up. Which is exactly what it did. First, one docked seagoing tanker, then another, and another…then all the tanks on shore exploded and burned. Hundreds of people died. The city, such as it was, was wiped out. Although World War II was over, many people believed the Nazis or the Japanese were attacking Texas. The war hadn't been over that long.

Twelve years later, Dan Rather believed we had another Texas City disaster in the making. A tanker was burning at a dock next to numerous onshore oil tanks.

We got the news at seven p.m. Channel 11's one cameraman had left hours ago. Eugene Wolfe wasn't paid much, but he got to use Channel 11's news car as a perk. Eugene hated his first name and insisted on going only by Wolfe. Dan tried desperately to raise Wolfe on the radio.

"Wolfe, come in! Come in, Wolfe! We've got a disaster going on. Pick up, goddammit!" Static was the only response.

All of us—Bob Levi, reporter Earl Lotridge and I—took turns trying to raise Wolfe on the radio. Dan puffed his cigar and paced the newsroom, soccer kicking trashcans.

"You know Channel 2 has a crew there," he fretted. "They even have film for the 10 o'clock news. What do we have? Hours-old AP wire copy! If the damn place blows up, we'll have to *hear* it to know what happened! We're going to get beaten on the biggest story since the last Texas City! Wolfe! Where are you?" Dan raged.

Sweat stains soaked Dan's shirt. His cigar had burned down to a stub of limp ash.

A little after eight p.m., following yet another plaintive call for Wolfe, the radio crackled.

"Wolfe here," he said.

"Wolfe! Where are you?" Dan screamed into the radio microphone.

An ominous pause.

"Uh, well, I'm in the back seat of the car, making out with my new girlfriend. What's up?"

"Texas City is blowing up, that's what's up," Dan hollered. "Get down there now!"

"Jesus, Dan, Louise and I are just getting to really know each other. Can't it wait an hour or so?"

"No! I need you now! Do you understand?" Another pause.

"Okay, Dan," Wolfe replied, weakly.

Fledgling Channel 11 kicked butt: the best coverage, a live eyewitness report and exclusive film the next day.

All of us knew it was too late to get film for that night's broadcast. The processing place we used was already closed. But Wolfe would get us something for the next day, and Channel 11 wouldn't be completely shut out.

We gathered everything we could

from the frantic phone calls to local police and fire officials and wrote it into Dan's Texas City lead. Channel 2 and Channel 13 showed film of reporters standing in front of police barricades earlier in the day. They had to shoot it early, so the film crews could get back to develop it. A glow in the sky told us where the unseen tanker was burning. Surface reporting, but at least they were there. Dan looked defeated. Dan wasn't used to being defeated. He would have sold his soul for videotape back then.

At the top of the 10-o'clock news, Dan reported all we knew about what was happening in Texas City. At 10:05, during a commercial, the special inside phone rang.

"This is Wolfe. I need to talk to Dan."

"Where are you?" I asked.

"I can't talk to you, you idiot! I need to talk to Dan. NOW!

I motioned to Dan. He picked up the phone's extension at the anchor desk, the commercial break still running. He signaled me, and when the commercial was over, Dan announced, "We have a report from our special correspondent at the scene of the tanker fire in Texas City."

We heard Wolfe's voice over the air. "Dan, I'm in a phone booth fifty yards from the burning tanker. Flames are licking out of portholes, the docks covered with firemen, and the heat from amidships is incredibly intense. Some of the crew have abandoned ship, jumping from the bow of the tanker into the harbor. Fire trucks and ambulances are trying to miss each other. The firemen are pouring water onto the ship. The Fire Chief says the fire is under control. He tells me this will not be a repeat of the last Texas City disaster. But you couldn't prove it by me. This phone booth is like an oven. Dan, I'm outta here."

Fledgling Channel 11 kicked butt: the best coverage, a live eyewitness report and exclusive film the next day.

Wolfe had used a fake FBI badge to get through the police barricade, despite the brightly painted Channel 11 news car he was driving. Louise lay on the floor between the seats. When Wolfe started to feel the heat from the burning tanker, he parked in the back of a warehouse and told Louise to sit behind the wheel and not to roll the windows down. He picked up a fireman's hat and walked into the fire lit arena.

At our request, a triumphant Wolfe brought Louise into the newsroom to meet everyone. She was especially pleased to meet Dan Rather.

"I'm just a waitress at Christy's Seafood," the awestruck young lady confided, "but I've always wanted to be on TV."

We all grinned back at her delighted smile, thinking, "Don't they all? Don't they all?"

Dan Rather's First Overseas Assignment

The powers that be at Channel 11 decided they needed to market Dan Rather further. President Eisenhower was going to the Far East, America's first President to do so. The idea was to send Dan on the press plane. He could do firsthand reporting on Ike's travels.

I could almost hear the debate in the conference room between the visionaries and the bottom liners. "Now,

look, this trip costs a lot of money. Dan not being on air for a couple of weeks might hurt our ratings."

The visionary counter would be, "Dan Rather is not just a local newsman; he can report global stories with the best of them."

The reality was that Channel 11 and Rather had to do something spectacular to unseat Channel 2's domination of the market.

Management's decision to send Dan to the Far East caused a few complications for me. Dan Rather left with a cameraman. He told me he'd file a report by overseas telephone for our 10-o'clock news every night. The problem was, we had Dan on audiotape, but the film he was shooting took two days to arrive. I asked the obvious question, "What video do you want to cover your audio?"

Dan grinned, "You're the TV guy; I'm the newsman. You figure it out."

The first night of Ike's trip was easy. Reporter Earl Lotridge, substituting for Rather as anchorman, talked to him on the phone live from Wake Island. The next day was more complicated. No live question-and-answer, just a four-minute audiotape about Ike's arrival in Manila. Dan's first film had come in. It showed the entourage leaving Andrews Air Force Base in Washington, D.C. two days before, and their arrival at Wake Island. The film was outdated and unusable.

Earl told me he'd be very uncomfortable listening to Dan's salient points and nodding for four minutes. I agreed. Bob McKay, our resident fixit guy, was standing in the hallway, drinking coffee, talking trash with a secretary.

"Get me a speaker," I interrupted.

"What kind?" He asked.

Bob's request for specifics took me back for a moment "The kind they have in classrooms—brown wood, a speaker in the middle. The kind principals use to tell students what not to do."

"Lamar High School is down the street," Bob said. "I'll find a way to relieve them of one."

That night at 10, Lotridge did a lead-in to Rather's report. The camera panned up and to the left, then zoomed toward a classroom speaker mounted on our gray news set wall. Underneath the speaker was a crudely stenciled sign telling us this was a Far East report. I rolled the audiotape when all I could see on camera was the speaker.

This crude technique worked because it had to. There was nothing else then, before satellites gave us instant live news. Lotridge thought I was a genius for keeping him off camera.

On the other hand, top management demanded to know why we didn't have film showing what Dan was talking about. I didn't have the heart to tell them they were idiots. At that point, I was looking for a good excuse to leave. I just didn't know where. Not many phone calls came from New York or any other exotic wonderful place… in fact none came at all.

I finally left Houston in the spring of 1961 and upgraded my career to the slums of Baltimore, Maryland. At my going-away bash, Dan Rather smiled and told me he'd see me soon in the big time. That fall he made history covering hurricane Carla as it struck Galveston, Texas. That was his kick-start at CBS. Everyone knows what happened since.

I find it interesting that Walter Cronkite graduated from San Jacinto High School in Houston and Dan

Rather graduated from Reagan High School in the same school district. These schools were fiercely competitive, both scholastically and on the football field. Despite their differences, Walter and Dan stood as the symbol of broadcast news for almost 45 years. I'm impressed that all that broadcasting talent came from Texas---but of course, I'm a Texan.

John Baker is writing a book titled "Forty Years on Broadcast Television Without Missing a Paycheck." His journey took him from Corinthian, Westinghouse and Metro Media to Post-Newsweek TV stations. He helped put CNN on the air and retired there as a vice-president. He now plays golf and drives a hybrid car.

Memories of the first Super Bowl on TV ...

When Green Bay played Kansas City in 1967, the great Jackie Gleason gleefully told millions of viewers what to expect. **By Richard G. Carter**

It's hard to believe last February's Super Bowl between the New England Patriots and Philadelphia Eagles was the 39th—each of which I anticipated with baited breath and watched with bleary eyes. It was a great match-up and the work of the Fox network crew of Joe Buck, Chris Collinsworth and Troy Aikman, was outstanding.

Yes, the Patriots hard-fought 24-21 victory in Jacksonville, Fla. provided plenty of TV pigskin thrills for even the casual fan. But for me, the highlight of the evening was Paul McCartney's stellar halftime show. Indeed, hearing the likes of "Hey, Jude" and "Live and Let Die"—complete with colorful pyrotechnics —brought nostalgic joy to millions.

The excitement of Super Bowl XXXIX notwithstanding, it's still easy for me to recall the very first "Super Sunday"—and the special circumstances surrounding it. For example, Jackie Gleason's confident, very gleeful prediction.

On January 14, 1967, Gleason ended his Saturday-night TV variety show on CBS in a surprising manner. In addition to acknowledging talented *Honeymooners* co-stars Audrey Meadows, Art Carney and Joyce Randolph, "The Great One" reminded his millions of viewers to tune into the very first Super Bowl the following afternoon, matching the Green Bay Packers and Kansas City Chiefs.

"It's gonna be murder!" he bellowed. Boy, was he right. The Packers clobbered the Chiefs 35-10, and Gleason fans like me who also were long-time Packer-backers, were delighted by his fearless declaration.

Of course, some may have felt Gleason simply was shilling for CBS which, for years, had televised the games of the established National Football League. And the NFL's powerful Packers were prohibitive favorites over the upstart Chiefs of the upstart American Football League—whose games were carried by NBC .

Interestingly, in the name of fairness and to maximize advertising revenue,

the first Super Bowl was telecast by both networks. This permitted advertisers to super-size their messages and viewers to choose, or alternate between, well-known announcers such as ex-players Pat Summerall and Frank Gifford on CBS, along with Curt Gowdy and Paul Christman on NBC, among others.

Indeed, Super Bowl I was a spectacle just waiting to happen. In my book, TV and pro football went hand-in-hand. Better yet, the tube was a great equalizer for folks like me from small towns and small states—permitting us to root on a level playing field with fast-talking city slickers with their pinched back suits. And as a Wisconsin native, I loved to bend the ears of friends about coach Vince Lombardi's Middle America powerhouse, which won NFL titles in 1961, '62 and '65.

But this was not always easy in some of the hostile environments my career took me. A good example was sports-happy Cleveland, where the baseball Indians had been eclipsed by the football Browns as king of the hill. I landed there in early 1966 to work for *The Plain Dealer,* Ohio's largest newspaper.

As the 1966 season progressed and the Packers piled up win after win, I was eager to watch the historic first Super Bowl with my two best *PD* buddies—Jerry Minnery, a red-hot Browns fan, and James Clark, a transplanted New Yorker. Jerry, who also was a fabulous cook, graciously invited us to his suburban Bay Village home to eat a gourmet meal and witness the festivities on his huge (for those days) 23-inch color TV. James, an irreverent Giants fan and self-proclaimed trencherman, was ecstatic.

As the afternoon wore on, I felt better and better—aided and abetted by Jerry's impeccable taste in food and drink, James' unparalleled ability as a teller of ribald stories and the way the game unfolded. More later about our first "Super Sunday" on TV. But first, here's a little history.

A ticket to the first Superbowl—note the price!—and the ring awarded to all of Vince Lombardi's victorious Green Bay Packers

In June 1966, the NFL and AFL had called a halt to six years of bitter hostility and fierce competition for players to merge into the National Football League we know today. A key ingredient was a post-season game between the two leagues—whose teams did not meet during the regular season—to determine the true champion of pro football. Thus was born the Super Bowl, initially called the AFL-NFL World Championship Game.

Of course, we NFL fans were sure the older league was superior to what Lombardi

called a "Mickey Mouse league with Mickey Mouse teams." But while the NFL tried to ignore the AFL, more and more big-name college stars, such as Alabama's Joe Namath, opted for the new league. Namath, later to become the fabled "Broadway Joe," signed a big contract with the New York Jets and the AFL gloated.

Pro football's initial interleague extravaganza was viewed by 70 million and a 30-second ad cost just $42,000.

Finally, NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle, who previously worked for the Los Angeles Rams, managed to persuade owners of teams in both leagues that a merger was essential to the financial survival of what had become known as "Big Game America." Rozelle's idea included producing an event that would surpass baseball's World Series, which pitted the champions of the National and American Leagues. And this eventually came to pass.

Since 1995, the Super Bowl has been the highest-rated TV event of the year — reaching a worldwide audience of some 800-million, and this year commanded an astounding $2.4 million for a 30-second commercial. The game now is played at night in the Eastern Time zone and in 2004 was seen nationally by 90-million on CBS. The game always is an advance sellout and tickets cost an arm and a leg. Each player on the wining team receives $63,000, and the losers $35,000.

But things were a lot different for Super Bowl I on Jan. 15, 1967, in the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. Although the Rams routinely attracted close to 100,000 fans—and despite a 75-mile TV blackout and top ticket price of only $13—more than 30,000 seats were empty as a mere 63,000 showed up for the 1 p.m. Pacific Time start. Nationally, pro football's initial interleague extravaganza was viewed by 70 million and a 30-second ad cost just $42,000. Each winning player got $15,000, which, in those days, exceeded what many earned for an entire season. Each loser got $7,500.

First dubbed "Super Bowl" by columnist Edwin Pope, of the *Miami Herald*, a sparse, albeit celebrity-studded crowd—including CBS's Walter Cronkite—was treated to a smashing, pre-kickoff performance by all-black Grambling College marching band, a pair of "rocket men" soaring overhead in spacesuits and release of thousands of white pigeons.

The game itself more than lived up to expectations, as Jerry, James and I loudly whooped it up between courses of his delectable Beef Wellington gleefully washed down with a variety of fine, imported wines. Luckily, Jerry had prevailed upon his lovely wife, Ruth, to take their two kids to the zoo and a movie—leaving us to yell our lungs out.

The favored Packers, with a 12-2 record, and the 11-2-1 Chief—coached by feisty Hank Stram—came out strong. After a surprisingly close first half with Green Bay up 14-10, fans in the stands and the national TV audience were treated to G-rated entertainment provided by jazz trumpet man Al Hirt, and two marching bands. Jerry, James and I thought it was great. To be sure, those were the days before risqué commercials and Janet Jackson's

breast-baring "wardrobe malfunction" would garner more publicity than the game itself, as it did at the infamous intermission show of the 2004 Super Bowl.

Green Bay blew the big game open in the second half and won going away. This was just what the doctor ordered for millions of NFL supporters and old-line owners such as the Giants' Wellington Mara, the Pittsburgh Steelers' Art Rooney and Chicago Bears' George Halas, who'd privately pressured Lombardi to take no prisoners.

Looking back on his work that day, NBC's Gowdy said: "I've never been a rooting broadcaster. I went right down the middle on the game. But inside myself, I at least wanted the AFL to make a good appearance in the game. I just wanted the Chiefs to make it close. I didn't think they could beat the Packers."

My pals and I switched between the NBC and CBS telecasts, but favored Gowdy's call and spent most of the game with NBC. We cheered-on the Packers and really loved it when 34-year-old Max McGee—subbing for the injured Boyd Dowler—caught two touchdown passes among seven acrobatic grabs. It later was revealed that McGee was hung-over from a Saturday night of curfew-breaking carousing unknown to Lombardi.

The icing on our cake was the sight of mouthy Chiefs' cornerback Fred (The Hammer) Williamson, getting knocked out and carried off the field. The brash Williamson, who specialized in a vicious clothesline tackle of ball-carriers, was to become a movie actor and director in the 1970s and star in several popular "Blaxploitation" flicks. One of the best-known was "Hammer" (1972).

By the time the game ended about 6 p.m., and we finished Jerry's delicious strawberry pastry dessert, we'd had our fill of football, food and tomfoolery. But there was more to come. At a televised postgame news conference and award ceremony in a crowded locker room, Lombardi was pressed by reporters to comment on the quality of the team his Packers had thoroughly vanquished. After initially resisting, he finally said, "The Kansas City Chiefs team is a real tough football team. But it doesn't compare to the National Football League teams…"

"Damn right!" I bellowed, glorying in the moment, which was a culmination of one of the most satisfying days in my years of watching pro football on TV. Jerry and James agreed, but, predictably, many officials, coaches, players and fans of the AFL vigorously were still not convinced. Yet, in the years to come, the gleaming golden symbol awarded to the Super Bowl victor was aptly named The Lombardi Trophy for the legendary coach whose Packers also convincingly beat the Oakland Raiders to win Super Bowl II, in 1968.

The first Super Bowl will never be surpassed for high expectations and even higher drama.

Little did the three of us know that this would be the first of many TV Super Bowls we'd share—alternating between each of our homes for the next decade. Better yet, we were joined for the final four or five by our wives and children, which actually made the day more enjoyable, and equally chaotic.

After going our separate ways in the years since, I made a point of calling Jerry and James on Super Sunday to recall that historic first Super Bowl together in 1967. And I continued with Jerry following James' death in 1984.

These days, of course, food and drink Super Bowl parties have become one of the TV rites of the New Year—and it's even possible to spot someone actually watching the game. Check it out the next time you attend one. Of course, things would be different if we still had Vince Lombardi's Green Bay Packers to root for. They were the greatest.

Years later, this historic event may have best been described by columnist Mickey Herskowitz, of *The Houston Chronicle*, who said: "There'll never be another game, in any sport, to equal the tension and the chemistry of the first Super Bowl between the Green Bay Packers and the Kansas City Chiefs." I couldn't agree more. And along with millions of others, I'll never forget it.

To be sure, those who watched Super Bowl XXXIX on Feb. 6, 2005, witnessed a close, competitive contest in the sports spectacle to end all sports spectacles, just as Pete Rozelle envisioned. Pre-game and half-time entertainment was top-notch and, with a few exceptions, most of the expensive commercials were good—especially the Ford Mustang spot parodying the 1996 film "Fargo." And everything was enhanced for our enjoyment by gobs of modern technology. In a word, it was super. But to me, the very first Super Bowl, on Jan. 15, 1967, will never be surpassed for high expectations and even higher drama.

Richard G. Carter, a New York freelance writer, is a former columnist and editorial writer with the *New York Daily News*. A frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly*, he is a graduate of Marquette University and received the 1986 By-Line Award from its College of Journalism for distinguished achievement.

The News Scoop To End All News Scoops

How NBC Radio beat everybody else, including all of television, in the Iran-hostage-release story.

By Don Blair

To many in the news business, January 18, 1981 may linger in their minds as "a date that will live in infamy," but to a few of us who became intricately caught up in the events which unfolded so dramatically that day, it is a day of which we remain immensely proud.It is a feeling that was not shared by most executives at either the once-great NBC Radio Network or (especially) at NBC-TV's *Nightly News*.

The "Iran Hostage Story" was in its 442nd day and we all knew that a break was imminent. Jimmy Carter was about to leave the White House and Ronald Reagan was practically standing in the doorway. Frankly, we were all very tired of trying to find something new to say about a situation which did not seem to change much, week after week, month after month. Daily network features would begin with "The Iran Hostage Crisis. . . . Day number such and such. Tiresome.

It was a Sunday and I was on the desk to write and deliver six hourly five-minute newscasts when suddenly the open line from London boomed out—"New York . . . this is Kennedy. It's over . . . the hostages are coming home. Put me on!" The NBC Radio Network's London bureau chief was breathless, having just raced up four flights of stairs to the bureau's studio and office.

This was basically a one-source story and there's a time-honored rule in journalism: two sources on every story. If not, hold it until you DO find a second source.

Susan, an employee who Fred hired largely because she spoke Farsi, the Iranian language, had raced to find Fred outside their building to tell him some very dramatic news. Susan had fled Iran after the Shah had been overthrown but she still had friends back in Teheran. This allowed her to converse with a friend at Teheran radio, in his language,

and he told Susan that Pars, Iran's official news agency, quoting the head of the Iranian hostage negotiating team Behzad Nabavi, was reporting that agreement had been reached with the U.S. Government.

This was basically a one-source story and there's a time-honored rule in journalism—two sources on every story. If not . . . hold it until you DO find a second source. Fred was having his doubts but after receiving a Telex of the agreement (second source?) and hearing Susan say that the Prime Minister's interview was on tape and being held for release for several more hours, he decided it was valid enough to run with.

That is when he breathlessly called NBC Radio in New York, where our desk producer that day immediately invoked the two-source rule, at which point I stood up and told him, "That's the best bureau chief in the business up on that speaker. If he's wrong, then we're both out of work . . . . I'm putting him on the air." I marched into the studio (yes, he could have stopped me but he didn't—perhaps because of the tone of my voice), did a one-minute talk-up to alert the network and here is a verbatim of what followed:

Blair: This is an NBC News Hotline Report. This is Don Blair, NBC News. We take you now to NBC's Fred Kennedy in London.

Kennedy: This is exclusive! It's an answer (pause) to all our prayers. The prayers of a nation have been answered! The captivity of the 52 American hostages is ending, and freedom, freedom is absolutely just around the corner! We have been told in an exclusive interview with Pars News Agency, the official Iranian news agency, that has just spoken with the Prime Minister's advisor and the head of Iran's hostage negotiation team, Mr. Nabavi. He said the final reply from the U.S. government had been received a few minutes ago, and they have reached an agreement. Nabavi says there are some small disagreements, but they are not important. They are not important at all. He says that an agreement has been reached.

Blair: OK Fred. Don Blair in New York. Uh, where do we go from here? Who do we hear from next before we can nail this thing to the wall?

Kennedy: Well, from here it's simple. Freedom! From here, if we were going to look at the logistics, the scenario, this is going to be announced throughout the world very shortly, uh, officially. BY THE OTHER NETWORKS AND THE OTHER WIRE SERVICES. They will pick it up soon. Uh, from that point, the, uh, the hostages will be checked by the six Algerian doctors, which are in Teheran. From there they will be moved to Teheran airport and put on an Algerian aircraft, chartered aircraft, which is arriving in Teheran tonight, and then flown to Algiers. From that point, we understand, they will be turned over to the Americans, and the tricky financial and legal complications, which have gone on over the last week in Algiers, will be finally completed, and, uh, Iran will get its assets. They will be unfrozen, and America will get its 52 hostages back.

Blair: OK Fred, just one more thing to wind up quickly here. Again, who

is the source for this report that the agreement has been reached? Who is . . . . .

Kennedy: (interrupting) The source is Pars. Pars—the official news agency of Iran. They have just finished having an interview with the head of Iran's hostage negotiation team, Mr. Nabavi . . . .

Blair: (interrupting) OK, Fred . . . .

Kennedy: (continuing) Mr. Nabavi says we have an agreement. There are (pause) a few small technicalities, but they are, quote, "not important." What is important is, we have an agreement. It is settled. We are in agreement with Washington. Everything is all go for the 52 hostages to come home to friends and families. Don, it's sensational, tremendous news.

Blair: Thank you Fred, and I can understand why you're out of breath. Thanks very, very much for bringing us the news we've been waiting for, for 442 days. NBC's Fred Kennedy in London. An agreement has been reached. We now wait for the details on when and where the Americans will head for home. Thank you very, very much Fred Kennedy in London. This has been an NBC News Hotline report. (NBC chimes).

Since our newscasts could be heard throughout the halls of 30 Rockefeller Plaza (in all NBC offices there), *Nightly News* was getting no such report from correspondent Garrick Utley in London, and their execs in our building reportedly went ballistic. "Who the hell were we to go with such a report?" They were in essence saying—if they didn't know about it then it didn't happen.

Should the reader be wondering why I repeated myself a few times? Asking the same question of Fred Kennedy more than once? It was to deliberately lengthen what I instantly knew was an incredible scoop and that our network was leading the pack. I simply did not want it to be a 30-second flash and then end. We were collaborating on a big piece of history and I must have considered the reality that we both could have been doing our last broadcast so . . . let's make it a good one, let's make it last.

In the news business a one-hour lead is great — five hours is an eternity.

Fred Kennedy sweated out the next five hours waiting for "those other networks" to catch the story and go with it. When Teheran radio finally did broadcast their taped interview with Behzad Nabavi it was monitored by the Associated Press in nearby Cyprus and AP immediately posted a bulletin announcing the release, fully five hours after Kennedy's newsbreak. But even before that, the NBC Radio London bureau was being besieged by phone calls from every other news organization on earth. The BBC was going with NBC Radio News live . . . complete with the chimes. TV crews from all over London were camped outside our radio network offices watching and filming the frantic activity.

NBC Television's *Nightly News* was not shy about saying it had broken the story but it never specifically said it had been the radio network that actually

pulled it off. Just NBC News. Fred got a royal chewing out for his audacity but kept his job. As for myself, I was the guy who bent the golden rule but I don't recall anything in the way of a rebuke. I still feel, considering the source and his well-earned reputation, it was the right decision to make.

Months later, I called Walt Dibble, news director of WTIC, Hartford, one of our oldest and best affiliates. "What did he think of that Sunday in January?" I asked. "Your finest hour," Walt replied, "a perfect example of what radio news is all about." And he added, "Cassettes of you and Kennedy are on my desk right now and no WTIC time salesman or woman leaves the building without one." I couldn't have asked for a better endorsement and to this day I still have to smile when I recall Fred's sly comment during his "exclusive" that soon (he never thought it would turn out to be five hours) the story would be picked up by the OTHER networks and wire services. It was an irresistible comment. I probably would have done something similar had I been in his shoes. In the news business a one-hour lead is great—five hours is an eternity.

Don Blair is a veteran of 51 years in broadcasting: 25 years in network radio, of which 15 were with the NBC Radio Network. Previous affiliations include Mutual, WCBS NewsRadio 88 and the ABC Entertainment Radio Network. He has been retired since 1989 and is now writing, hosting and producing programs for cable TV.

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Revolution Televised:
Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power

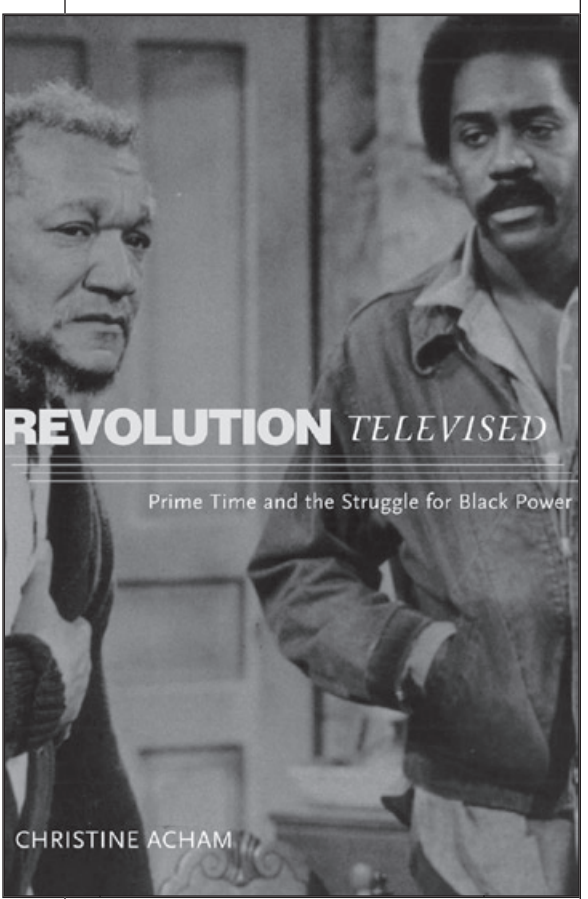
By Christine Acham

University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN
(248 pages, $24.95)

By Howard A. Myrick

Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power is a "must read" for all television programming executives and producers who are now (or ever expect to be) involved with African-American television talent or African-American subject matter—with equal relevance and treatment for both entertainment programming and serious news reporting. It is also essential reading for media critics and scholars who are wedded to the traditional negative v. positive images paradigm of analyzing programs with ethnic characters and racially oriented themes—in search of evidence that a given story or portrayal advances or retards the search for objectivity and progress in the representations of different ethnic groups in, notably, television programs and films.

Issuing an advisory to the reader of a new book may seem to be a strange opening. In this instance, though, it seems warranted. The advisory: do not be mislead by the title—especially, the subtitle, *Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power.* Why? It is really quite simple: This book is not only about the Black Power Movement of the 1960s. Although this historic period in the civil rights movement in America is accorded ample coverage, this book (and its greater value to media practitioners and analysts) is its contribution to a deeper understanding of the fact that (as Peter J. Boyer, a media critic for *The New York Times* during the period, stated) the civil rights struggle "…was a story that finally proved the value of TV news gathering as opposed to mere news dissemination." Seemingly, not wishing



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to confuse coincidence with causality, the author, Christine Acham—assistant professor in the African American studies program at the University of California, Davis—cites and appears to reject (with less vigor than this reviewer) the notion that "The whole process of changing television into a serious news medium happened to coincide with the civil rights movement" (as posited by CBS News reporter Robert Schake) – suggesting, instead, symbiosis (perhaps) but not coincidence.

One of the most engaging aspects of this book is it analysis of the dynamic impact of entertainment programming and the black actors who put a whole new face (no pun intended) on mainstream television programs. The author serves the reader exceedingly well in her identification and analysis of the various stratagems employed by such talented black actors and comedians as Redd Foxx, Flip Wilson, their supporting casts members and script writers, having their say, variously, in what the author refers to as "hidden transcripts" – getting past the mostly all-white gatekeepers at the networks. "Hidden transcripts," a term borrowed from the political anthropologists James C. Scott and Robin D.G. Kelley, who referred to the phenomenon of "oppressed groups challenging those in power by constructing 'hidden transcripts', a dissident political culture …emerging 'on stage' in spaces controlled by the powerful …always in disguised forms".

The failure of white programming executives and producers to understand the dynamics of race and the interrelationship of the mass media (especially television) accounts for not only the loss of missed opportunities to serve the public's best interest, but also the loss of revenue – notably from a segment of the population (African-Americans) possessing aggregated wealth exceeding that of the national economies of many countries in the world (a phenomenon not unlike the continuation of slavery, long after the expiration of its economic viability). It is also the reason that to this day the television industry has relegated black-oriented programs to such networks as Fox, UPN, WB and BET – suggesting that no lessons were learned from the cross-over power (and earned revenue record) of such programs as *Sanford and Son* (featuring the brilliant actor-comedian Redd Foxx), *The Flip Wilson Show,* the short-lived *Richard Pryor Show,* all artists to whom today's Chris Rock, Eddie Murphy and many black and white artists pay homage. What would today's television industry be like (and how much wealthier its executives) if these programs and their black artists had been allowed to achieve their full potential?

Lest the reader conclude that this book is only about the economics of the subject, it should be noted that the author concedes that was not the starting point for this scholarly effort; rather, it begins with "a review of the historical trajectory of African-American participation within mainstream American society …"and how "the mass media, especially television, have become significant tools in this transformation and have promoted different aspects of a black political agenda". This trajectory and transformation, of course, did not

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follow a straight and uninterrupted path. It ebbed and flowed with the vagaries of the times, the sentiments and sensibilities of the mostly white gate-keepers in the media.

There was a period in the 1960s and 1970s when it appeared that the television industry had made a commitment to the integration of its program schedules.

There was, for example, a period in the 1960s and 1970s when it appeared that the television industry had made a commitment to the integration of its program schedules. Such black-cast programs as the previously mentioned *Sanford and Son* and *The Flip Wilson Show* were prominent program offerings for both black and mainstream audiences. Then in the 1980s – except for the C*osby Show* and *Different World* – black-cast programs became scarce again. In the late 1980s and early 1990s black-cast programs reemerged – but in a mainly black-*targeted* "network ghetto" populated by fictionalized black people. The author of this book poses (and answers) the question: "What social, political and industrial factors brought about this shift from invisibility to hyperblackness in the late 1960s and 1970s?" A follow-on question: What accounts for today's programming decisions and what *should* today's decision-makers be doing?

The focus of this book is not limited to an investigation of entertainment programming: it also includes a very comprehensive and incisive probing into the realms of television news programming and documentaries – areas in which some strange differences are revealed. The acclaimed communications theorist George Gerbner has noted, for example, that in contemporary television a curious dichotomy in the representation of African-Americans is reflected: in fictionalized dramas and sitcoms African-Americans are depicted as more affluent and more socially integrated than they actually are in real-life America. In television news they are over-represented as criminals, drug dealers and engaged in various anti-social situations than is the case in reality. Are these chance phenomena?

Revolution Televised provides some unique insights into the role of television in those still not widely understood periods of American history referred to as the Civil Rights Era and the Black Power Movement (two very distinct facets of a larger sociopolitical phenomena – clearly delineated by, both, the adherents and the news media that reported on them). The Civil Rights and the Black Power phenomena did occur at just about the ten-year mark in network television news' maturation, at a time when the medium was still in the process of defining itself. Accordingly, if the news media did not cover these dramatic events, their powerful orators, charismatic leaders and large vociferous protest events, it would have been like insisting that the emperor was regally dressed when, in fact, he was naked. The Civil Rights and Black Power leaders knew it and so did the television news executives.

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Did the news media cover these events fairly and professionally? Sometimes they did and other times they committed egregious errors. As a graduate cinema student at the University of Southern California during the time of the 1965 Watts riot, I recall all too vividly a TV newsman reporting from a hovering helicopter (as the TV camera zoomed in for a close-up) "there goes a rioter now looting a clothing store!" – the "looter" actually was an off-duty black police officer who was the owner of the haberdashery from which he was trying to save his inventory from the approaching fires threatening to engulf Watts. Almost as if to corroborate my personal story, which might be regarded as merely anecdotal, *Revolution Televised,* recounts NBC's executive William Corrigan's comments about the problems encountered in covering the riots. Corrigan, who was dispatched to cover the riots, stated that news helicopters "sent out some frightful reports that were totally unverified." To this the author added: what was reported revealed much about the predilections of TV journalists and the cultural prisms through which they viewed and interpreted events.

Journalistic errors and exaggerations aside, the fact remains that television coverage of the "revolution" did keep the issue of race relations in America in the forefront of the national (and international) consciousness. The television networks covered the 1965 Martin Luther King-led march to Selma, Alabama, the signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the historic "I Have a Dream" speech by Dr. King at the Lincoln Memorial. It was television, too, that caused the nation's politicians and the American people to recognize the options posed by Malcolm X's "By Any Means Necessary" and Dr. Martin Luther King's "Non-violence" credos. The symbiotic relationship of the two different leaders and their approaches for achieving racial justice were amplified and made visible, in large measure, by television.

Apparently (and justifiably) not wishing the television to become too proud of itself, Christine Acham's *Revolution Televised* cites many examples of television's penchant for engaging in "recuperative" work, the creation of "nostalgic" (but incorrect) reconstructions of black Americans' and, concomitantly, the nation's racial past. We are reminded, too, that "The United States is constantly involved in a process of mediation with its history, and television has played a significant role in this negotiation and recuperation of our national memory."

Returning to the subject of the dual approaches the networks took to the *Civil Rights v. Black Power* facets of the larger race issue in America, the author reminds the reader that television news programs and especially TV documentaries were produced at a time when America was attempting to "contain rising black social and political movements." The networks were conflicted – probably as much by the dictates of networks' business and political concerns as by the reality that they and their reporters and producers were products of their whiteness. Briefly stated: "Black Power" was scarier than "Passive Resistance". In this connection, the reader is invited to review such

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notable televisions as the 1965 *CBS Reports:* "Watts: Riots or Revolt?" and Mike Wallace's five-part series *The Hate That Hate Produced.*

Public broadcasting did not escape the scrutiny of *Revolution Televised.* Indeed, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), my former employer, received more analysis than the allotted space here will permit recounting. Suffice it to state that, because public broadcasting is supported by tax dollars – to which African-Americans, too, contribute – there was ample criticism of the disparate treatment accorded programs dealing with civil rights issues. Complaints centered mainly around a conspicuous lack of financial support for such programs. Illustrative of this problem was the 1972 conflict, described as follows: "The Corporation for Public Broadcasting released the list of programs it intended to fund for the 1973-74 season. Conspicuously absent were the only two nationally televised black programs: *Soul,* a music-, poetry- and entertainment-driven program, and *Black Journal*," the latter concerned more with political and social issues affecting African-Americans. This instance, not having been the first such action taken by the public broadcasting system, elicited an outcry of protest which repeated a criticism stated in *Jet Magazine* by William Greaves, then the only black producer in American television, who stated that "*Black Journal*, the 'one oasis in a very large desert' [will be dried up this fall for lack of funding]." The reason, of course, was clearly not due to a lack of funding.

The readers of this book will, no doubt, find much that is disturbing, unsettling, and painful – some things we would all rather forget. Acham's *Revolution Televised*, however, deserves praise for being both elucidating and innovative. Moreover, who can find fault with an author who, for good reasons, dares challenge the continued perception of former FCC Chairman Newton Minow's characterization of television as a "vast wasteland"? The book is worth a reading, if only to discover the justification of the challenge to Newton Minow's law.

Howard A. Myrick, Ph.D., Professor of Broadcasting and Telecommunications at Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, former Director of Communications Research at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Director of the American Forces Radio and Television Service, currently serves, also, on the Pennsylvania Public Television Commission.

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Bad News:
The Decline of Reporting, the Business of News, And the Danger to Us All

By Tom Fenton

Regan Books, New York
(262 pages, 425.95)

Changing Channels:
The Civil Rights Case That Transformed Television

By Kay Mills

University Press of Mississippi, Jackson
(313 Pages, $30)

By Bernard S. Redmont

Veteran foreign correspondent Tom Fenton vainly tried to sell his network, CBS News, on an interview in late 1996 and 1997 with a then little known Islamic activist named Osama bin Laden. "Our bosses saw him as an obscure Arab of no interest to our viewers," he related.

A few months later, when he wrote another story about bin Laden, the masterminds complained, "too many foreign names," and killed it also.

Fenton had another staggering experience with the home office: In 1978, CBS refused to air his story that the Shah of Iran was in trouble. The New York producers killed it. Less than three months later, the Shah fled in disgrace.

When Fenton reported Saddam Hussein's 1988 poison gas attacks on northern Iraq, the *Evening News* producers made him delete all mention of the Kurds, despite his insistence that this was what it was all about. The producers said, "too confusing . . . no one knows who the Kurds are."

These sad but true stories provide an anecdotal counterpoint to a hard-hitting recitation of what's wrong with broadcast news—and how to fix it.

Fenton labored with distinction in the CBS News vineyard for 34 years. He was one of the ablest and most experienced flagbearers of what used to be called the Tiffany of broadcasting. (Disclosure: Tom is a former colleague of mine at CBS News. He moved from Paris to London as European correspondent when I moved from Moscow to Paris.)

In *Bad News* (what a great title!), he has written not merely a reporter's memoir such as many of us compose near the end of the trail. Tom has produced a devastating indictment of network news, and he explains how and why it has fallen so low.

His former colleague Andy Rooney summed it up to him: "Money has taken over news. It was always a factor but never what it is now."

To bolster his case, Fenton also gives us trenchant interviews with Tom Brokaw, Dan Rather, Peter Jennings, Don Heweitt and Walter Cronkite—who incidentally admits he doesn't watch the *CBS Evening News* any more. Cronkite commented to Fenton: "There's nothing there but crime and sob sister material. It's scandal sheet

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stuff for the most part."

For Fenton, who retired in December 2004, the industry leadership was incompetent, ignorant, lazy, biased and uninterested in the public good. In his account, serious journalists feel the news has been trivialized, dumbed down and severely cut back. This applies not just to CBS but its competitors as well.

"Corporate greed and indifference have all but killed the kind of newsgathering ethos that produces results…We need more and better news. Our lives depend on it."

In wielding the economy hatchet, the networks closed most of their bureaus abroad. Americans need more than ever intelligent understanding of international news and its impact on them. Fenton—and many of his colleagues—believe their trust, and the public's trust, has been betrayed. In the process, they charge, our democracy has been endangered. It's no surprise that network ratings have declined.

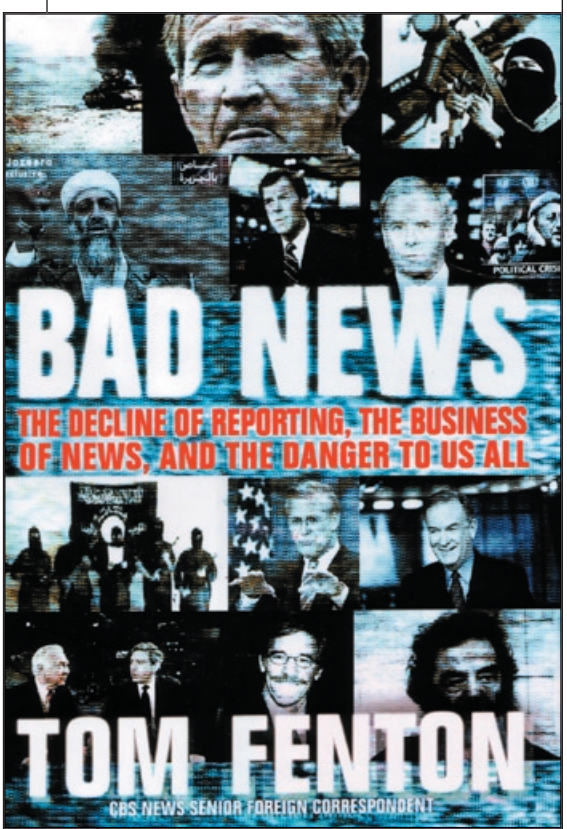
Fenton declares that "mega-corporations that have taken over the major American television news companies squeezed the life out of foreign news reporting."

Fenton's chapter-and-verse assault on the "corporate bean counters," the "bottom-lining bottom-feeders" and the "pandering to ratings" will not endear him to his former chieftains, but by his reckoning they earned it.

Tom says he writes not to knock his profession, or to denigrate CBS News, but because "we can—and we must—do a lot better." In his view, "corporate greed and indifference have all but killed the kind of newsgathering ethos that produces results."

For Fenton, politicians and government share the guilt, and the news media do a poor job of unscrambling their slanted "spin." The Bush White House, he declares, has perfected the art of manipulation. He warns journalists, "Do not be intimidated by censorship disguised as patriotism" and "make sure government does not abuse its power at home."

Even his London bureau doesn't



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do much reporting any more. It's a "packaging" operation, wrapping up reports and pictures shot by others—the news media's version of outsourcing.

Fenton's charge that the world outside the U.S. is better informed than the American public may stagger some readers. But it's no surprise to journalists who spend any time abroad and get their international news from a wide variety of sources including the BBC or European and Asian newspapers and broadcasters.

Fenton offers a long list of important stories that could be covered by television news, but aren't. He asks "what do we even know about America's interests abroad?" He wonders what we know about how the U.S. government spends our money abroad. How many of us know that "the Pentagon currently owns or rents 702 bases in 130 countries around the world, plus a number of other bases that are part of NATO or other multilateral commitments?"

Fenton's credentials as a world news analyst are impeccable. He worked for the *Baltimore Sun* and was as naval officer before he moved to CBS to cover virtually every major story in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. He has won four Emmy awards and countless other honors.

In the quest for higher broadcast journalism standards, we may ask, what's to be done? This important book has some positive recommendations: Amplify the public's voice. Create a lobby or pressure group to monitor news quality and quantity. Prod the FCC to do its assigned task of preserving the public interest. Expand the evening news to an hour. Reopen foreign bureaus and staff them with a respectable number of correspondents. "With handheld DVD and laptop editing technology available, the costs need not be what they were in the past," Tom suggests.

Fenton concludes, "This is not just a book. This is the beginning of a campaign to galvanize America. We need more and better news. Our lives depend on it."

The ruling struck like a thunderbolt. The decision jolted the broadcasting industry and ultimately transformed the face of television. But few today remember the case, or the long legal battle over WLBT-TV, the dominant, high-powered NBC affiliate in Jackson, Mississippi.

This is the theme of *Changing Channels,* a fascinating work by Kay Mills.

Complaints about violations of the Fairness Doctrine on racial issues first surfaced at the Federal Communications Commission in 1955. It seems longer ago, and as if it were another country.

When the action reached a climax, it was the first time a U.S. federal appeals court had ever taken away a TV license, and the first time that a television station had lost its license over programming issues.

What's more, the court ruled for the first time that the public had a right to participate in FCC business. It was the right the public would exercise to seek equal employment opportunity rules, to try to improve children's television and to affect the outcome of other license renewal proceedings and sales of TV

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stations.

Nowadays, the FCC has virtually abdicated its regulatory watchdog role. The FCC does not like to police the way stations fulfill their public interest obligations.

In the 1950s, black faces were invisible in much of American television…Minorities had little or no access.

Citizens have lost much in the waves of deregulation that have inundated broadcasting over the years, Mills judges. They've also suffered from "the creation of communications megalopolies," as Mills puts it.

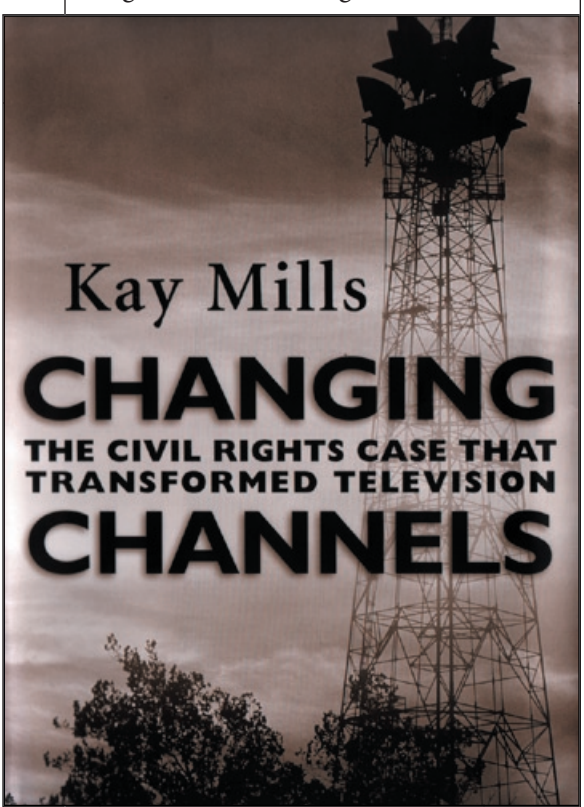
In the 1950s, black faces were invisible in much of American television, especially in the South. Racism was endemic. Minorities had little or no access. A program featuring Oprah Winfrey, born in Kosciusko, Mississippi, would not have been carried on any TV station in her native state. Network interviews with newsmakers like civil rights attorney Thurgood Marshall were not broadcast on many southern stations.

Local newscasts and commentaries presented civil rights activists as "outside agitators" bent on fomenting trouble in a local black community supposedly content with second-rate schools and second-rate citizenship.

TV in the South and indeed in most of the U.S. "was not giving a full and accurate portrayal of the world in which its viewers lived," as Mills reports.

One of the most powerful stations at the time was WLBT Channel 3 in Jackson. It was frankly racist in a market that was over 40 percent African American. Without fear of sanction, WLBT could pull the plug on a network interview with Marshall, who was later to become a Supreme Court Justice.

In the final analysis, it was not the FCC, the federal government agency charged with protecting the public interest, that seriously took up the issue. A small band of blacks and whites along with the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ defined local customs of segregation to work together to challenge the license of



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WLBT.

The challenge was led by memorable figures like the Rev. Everett Parker of the UCC and two black Mississippi activist, Aaron Henry (who later became the station's chairman of the board) and the Rev. R.T.T. Smith, a Baptist minister who had been denied the right to buy air time when he ran for Congress, the first black to do so since Reconstruction.

A federal appeals court panel headed by Warren Burger, before he became chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, ruled twice in favor of the challengers after the FCC regularly backed the station management. It took a 16-year legal struggle in which, as Mills notes, "all the money and all the power were arrayed on the station's side at first." Eventually, the license was awarded to an integrated group with majority black ownership. The group hired the first black TV stations manager in the South.

It was a dramatic time. The blood of Emmett Till and Medgar Evers had been spilled in Mississippi in the 1950s and 1960s. But WLBT would deliberately blot out any coverage of the civil-rights movement, while allowing the local White Citizens Council to get plenty of air time. Station management would preempt, or tamper with NBC's news and public-affairs programs. If African Americans were mentioned locally, they were subjected to prejudice or bigotry, and never referred to as "Mr." or "Mrs."

The TV universe has changed. By the beginning of the 21st century, the WLBT staff was about 40 percent minority. Jackson had a black mayor and a black police chief. The Mississippi House of Representatives was almost 30 percent black, and the State Senate almost 20 percent black.

WLBT's management also has changed over the years. No longer minority owned, WLBT is now run by a chain, the Liberty Corporation. Still, Liberty defines itself as an equal-opportunity employer.

TV is substantially deregulated. Affirmative-action programs, Mills declares, are "dormant if not dead." The Fairness Doctrine is not enforced. The public-interest movement is an idealistic dream.

Nevertheless, the WLBT case has had a lasting impact on the industry and the community.

Kay Mills tells this dramatic story with fairness, intelligence and historical perspective, expertly navigating the sometimes labyrinthine maneuvers and tedious details. She helps the reader through the narrative with a list of the cast of characters, a timeline calendar and reasonable notes.

Good journalists are also historians. Mills is well trained and disciplined enough to play both roles well. Once a United Press International broadcast news reporter, she also worked for the *Baltimore Evening Sun* and the *Los Angeles Times* before she went on to write several important books: *A Place in the News: From the Women's Pages to the Front Page; This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer; From Pocohontas to Power Suits: Everything You Need to Know About Women's History in America;* and *Something Better for My Children: The History and People of Head Start*.

Changing Channels will be valued by all who want to understand and

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remember the changes that shaped American broadcasting, the role of the FCC, and above all the impact of public opinion on social change.

It is an important book for all media professionals and for those who identify with the long struggle for civil and human rights.

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.*

A Public Betrayed:
An Inside Look at Japanese Media Atrocities and Their Warnings to the West

By Adam Gamble and
Taekesato Watanabe

Regency Publising, Inc., Washington, D.C.
(428 pages, $27.95)

By Bruce Dunning

One of the first things a newcomer to Japan is taught is to try understanding the difference between "tatemae" and "honne." Tatemae is the "image" of how things are supposed to be, the ideal, while "honne" is the "reality" of how things really are, the blunt truth.

This phenomenon can be as simple as the sweet and simple hypocrisy of telling a friend that he looks terrific, when in fact the person looks awful. And, say the authors of *A Public Betrayed*, it can be as vast and complicated as to distort the truth about the very essence of the Japanese government. In their view, there is a dangerous disconnect between the ideal of Japan as a modern, democratic nation and the actuality in which Japan is a nation that has undergone more than a half-century of virtual one-party rule and a nation that can brutally suppress dissent. In short, they say, the Japanese public has been betrayed by journalism as practiced in Japan.

The authors—Takesato Watanabe,

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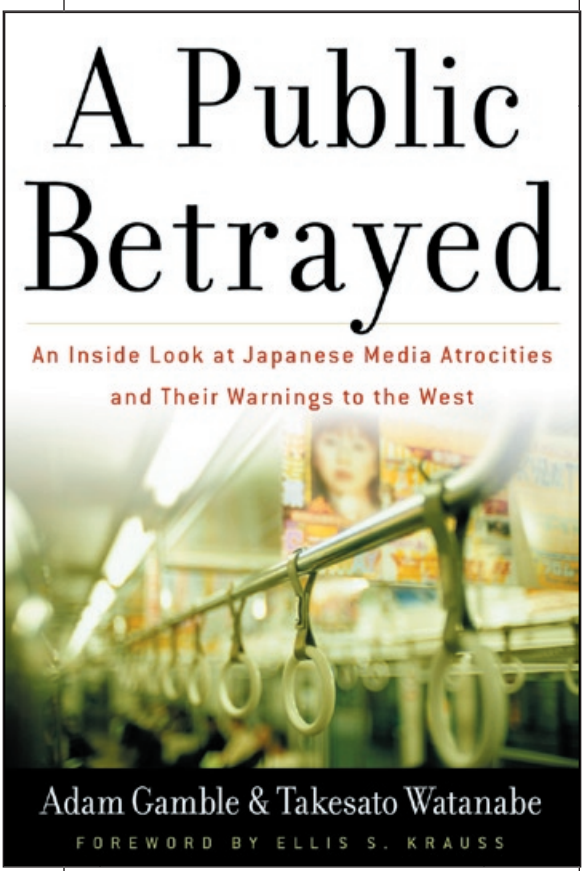
professor of media ethics at Kyoto's Doshisha University, and Adam Gamble, a Massachusetts-based writer and publisher—set out to show how Japanese journalism says all the right things about the public's right to know and about high ethical standards (tatemae) and actually practices a highly controlled, narrowly rigid form of journalism in which enterprise is punished, not rewarded, and the journalistic "pack" rules (honne).

Japan's journalism mainstream consists of the major national daily newspapers, the news agencies, and the national television networks. These organizations gather much of their news, especially political, financial, and economic developments, through institutions called "kisha clubs," kisha being the Japanese for "reporter." There are hundreds of these clubs throughout Japan, each maintaining a monopoly on news from government ministries, major financial institutions, the Imperial Household, sports teams and corporations.

Only reporters from the top mainstream organizations are admitted, and the organizations know that all news must be released through the kisha clubs. For many years, foreign correspondents were totally barred from the kisha clubs, though in the past 25 years or so, the barriers have eased somewhat. Still, it was not too long ago that CBS News, for whom I was working, was told by officers of the Tokyo High Court that they could give absolutely no information or cooperation on a case involving a foreigner because CBS was not a member of the kisha club.

The result of having news filtered through the mainstream news organizations is that the content winds up dull, bland, and non-controversial, boring and fact-oriented. The idea of enterprise reporting, or investigative reporting, is not part of the mainstream news traditions.

But outside this rigidly controlled hierarchy is another uniquely Japanese institution, the shukan-shi, or weekly magazines. These publications operate without access to official news sources. Their peculiar qualities are the object of the authors' study which is in part subtitled "An Inside Look at Japanese



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Media Atrocities."

There are about a dozen or so of these magazines, and generally they feature sensationalist articles on political, financial and social issues liberally flavored with salacious celebrity gossip. Most feature spreads or covers of pretty young women models. Some of the magazines definitely fall over into soft-core porn. Most are owned by major publishing houses which also produce serious literature or newspapers. Three of the major newspapers—*Asahi, Mainichi* and *Yomiuri*—each publishes a weekly magazine; though these magazines eschew porn, their covers are still likely to feature attractive young women.

But more than the racy content, these publications run articles that can well be called, in the authors' words, "atrocities." The best and lengthiest part of the book is devoted to studies of five such "atrocities," which are unfortunately all too representative of the irresponsible content of these magazines.

The first case study is particularly interesting in that it has an American parallel. In 1994, the Aum Shinrikyo cult decided to try out its success in producing sarin poison gas. In early 1995, the cult would carry out a terrorist raid by releasing sarin gas in the Tokyo subway system, with devastating results. The cult picked the city of Matsumoto for its trial run. Yoshiyuki Kono and his wife were the worst-affected victims; in fact, Mrs. Kono remains in a coma more than a decade afterward.

Police at first investigated Kono as the possible perpetrator of the gas attack, but fairly quickly dropped him as a suspect. Nonetheless, the Japanese news media continued to attack him as the probable guilty party. The weeklies ran the most negative and personally damaging coverage. Not until the attack in the Tokyo subway system nine months later did it become obvious that Kono was in no way guilty.

The case study then compares the Kono case to the case of Richard Jewell, the security guard at the Atlanta Olympics. Jewell first warned people about a suspicious bag found in a park near the Olympic site, but was later accused in the U.S. media of having planted the bag in order to be hailed as a hero for discovering the threat. He suffered a long period of media attacks before being exonerated. The interesting difference, the authors point out, is that Jewell was able sue several media organizations and win financial compensation. Kono received nothing.

Another case study focuses in the continuing rabid anti-Semitism in the Japanese weeklies. Exactly why Japanese are so virulently anti-Semitic is hard to understand, but as the authors show, attacks on Jews apparently boost sales and so are regular features of the weeklies. Holocaust deniers are always welcome in the more sensational magazines.

When foreign advertisers, including Volkswagen, complained about an article in one magazine that said the Holocaust and the death camps were fabrications, Bungeishunju, the prestigious publisher of the magazine, shut down the magazine and claimed that this was done to prevent "Jewish terrorists" from wreaking vengeance on Japanese people.

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Another case cited is the 1999 article about the take-over of a Japanese bank by the U.S. investment group, Ripplewood Holdings. The headline for the five-page article read:

"Finally unveiled: The Human Network of Jewish Capital that Devours Five Trillion Yen of Our Hard-earned Taxes."

One more case study dissects the case of the weeklies' two-year attack on the leader of a major Buddhist leader in which he was accused falsely of raping a woman. The weeklies dropped the campaign when it was proven false, but never reported that fact.

The final two case studies deal with Japan's unwillingness to confront the atrocities committed by Japanese military forces during World War II. In an eerie parallel to the Holocaust deniers, there is a steady diet of articles denying the Nanking Massacre of 1937. Despite reliable eye-witness accounts, there is a steady drumbeat of contention that any casualties that may have occurred were the normal result of battle, and that the Communist Chinese have exploited the "incident," as it is called in Japan, to get more money from the Japanese.

The final case study deals with the issue of the wartime "comfort women," an estimated 80,000 or more women from territories conquered by the Japanese who were forced into sexual slavery to serve the Japanese troops. The issue has gained international attention, but the Japanese weeklies continue to claim that the women were largely "volunteers" and paid well for their work.

The authors use these case studies to warn Americans that U.S. media seem to be heading in the Japanese direction, citing the growing tendency toward consolidating media ownership, the increasing sensationalism and "dumbing down" of news in America, and the unquestioning nationalism that has crept into U.S. media after September 11, 2001.

Frankly the comparison seems strained and not all that well backed up, but it does serve as a warning that U.S. news organizations may well be losing their edge.

Bruce Dunning recently retired from CBS News after 36 years, of which he spent 24 in Tokyo—as correspondent (1973-81) and Asia Bureau Chief (1989-2005). He is now living in the U.S.

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Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture

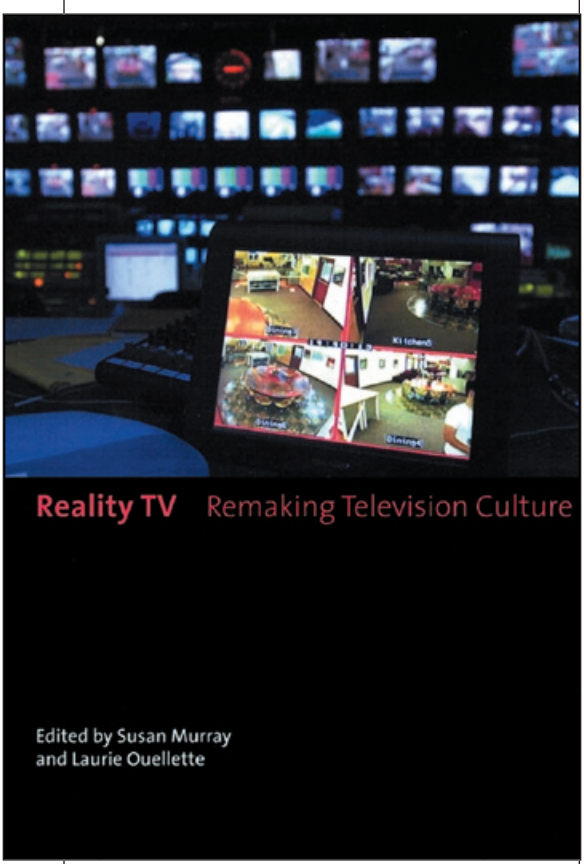
Susan Murray and
Laurie Ouellette (ed.)

New York University Press
(345 pages, $22.00)

By David Marc

During the 1950s, as American broadcasting was achieving national saturation for television, the critic Dwight Macdonald observed that a mass culture industry, like any enterprise requiring large-scale investment, must persist in a constant state of expansion in order to survive. In terms of technological formats, the television industry has consistently expanded and thrived. To illustrate this, one need only connect the dots (and add all the missing milestones): the replacement of tubes with solid-state wiring, color service, VCR, cable, surround-sound, DVD, flat-screen, HDL, plasma, etc.

Content, however, is another story. Dramatic forms adapted from radio, such as the sitcom and the detective series, emerged as the meat and potatoes of prime time, and television's appetite for fresh narrative grew increasingly voracious. Continuing expansion drove the industry beyond what new material its writers could produce, including what they could adapt from the high culture pantheon and folk culture traditions. As those resources were tapped out, television turned to other mass media for fodder, adapting stories from comic books and best-sellers as well as dated movies and old TV shows (making mergers with copyright holders increasingly attractive). Under such desperate conditions, the Hunchback of Notre Dame might show up on video as the singing, dancing, romantic lead of a feature-length Disney cartoon—and, with no permission from Victor Hugo required, he did. Here again, a list of prime-time milestones underscores the point: the demise of weekly anthology and comedy-variety sketch programming in the late 50s; the



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introduction of theatrical feature films in prime-time during the early 1960s; the migration of soap opera from daytime to prime time; the spectacular spiral of made-for-TV movie production; and so on.

But what happens when the industry's thirst for narrative becomes so voracious that it can no longer produce enough material to keep its own recycling bins filled? Phrased otherwise in several ways, this is the question taken on by editors Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette and more than a dozen contributors to this anthology of essays on Reality TV.

Rowing against current tides in academic products, the book offers readers some measure of historical context for understanding its subject matter. Reality TV's generic ancestry is acknowledged in essays concerning such prime-time series as Allen Funt's *Candid Camera* (CBS, 1960-67) and Craig Gilbert's *An American Family* (PBS, 1973). Anna McCarthy uncovers a buried history of serious academic interest in *Candid Camera*, although the show was packaged as nothing more than a novelty comedy series. While some intellectuals worried about *Candid Camera's* nonchalant invasions of personal privacy, it was hailed by others for bringing "sociological realism" to the homescreen. No less an authoritative figure than David Reisman, author of *The Lonely Crowd,* called Funt "the second most ingenious sociologist in America" (placing him just behind Paul Lazarsfeld). By contrast, as McCarthy points out, contemporary Reality TV is usually derided as "a cheap, endlessly recyclable and licensable programming format, a [by]product of the collapse of the three-network system and the rise of cable."

Looking at the collection as a whole, the treatment of pre-cable models for Reality TV is likely to be less than satisfying for readers interested in the genre's historical roots. *Real People* (NBC, 1975-79) gets only passing mention and other seminal works, including *People are Funny* (NBC, 1954-61), *That's Incredible!* (ABC, 1980-84), and *Divorce Court* (syn. 1957-69) fall beneath the radar. *American Idol* comes up for discussion in the book; *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts* does not.

A group of essays on the economic underpinnings of the Reality boom is more comprehensive. Ted Magder, chair of the Department of Culture and Communication at New York University, takes the reader beyond the well-known cost advantages of replacing salaried actors with amateurs willing to accept a leap through the looking glass as adequate compensation. Magder lays out a broader picture of the economics of the genre in comparisons of production costs between reality shows, scripted dramas, and other options. He demonstrates how, in particular, the success of CBS's *Survivor* in 2001-02 changed the business model for prime-time television, redefining a set of decades-long relationships between networks, sponsors, and production companies. Seeing this economic paradigm shift from another angle in his essay, Chad Raphael asserts that the 1988 writer's strike played a crucial role in the rise of the Reality shows by piquing network interest in dramas without scripts. Reality TV, Raphael

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contends, has since become "an integral part of network strategies to control labor unrest."

Jon Kraszewski's "Country Hicks and Urban Cliques: Mediating Race, Reality, and Liberalism on MTV's *The Real World*" is among the most thoughtful works of criticism in the collection. Attempting to show how cogent messages are delivered in *The Real World* by means other than conventionally scripted speeches, the author examines the construction of context by the producers through decisions on casting, setting, and visual and aural editing. Saving his most telling anecdote for the essay's conclusion, Kraszewski describes an incident that occurred when Mary-Ellis Bunim and Jonathan Murray, the show's producers, held an open casting call for *The Real World* on the campus of Indiana University in Bloomington: "One student, a huge fan of MTV, admitted wanting to try out, but not knowing what to say. Another student chimed in, 'Just say you're a racist from a small town in Indiana and you want to expand your mind. They'll pick you.' To which the first student responded, 'But I'm not a racist. I don't have a racist bone in my body.' The other student replied, 'That's okay. By the end of the show they'll portray you as a non-racist. They always do.'" *The Real World* and shows like it are perhaps not so much "unscripted dramas" as they are dramas without need of traditional scripts.

Survivor, the pivotal CBS hit, receives the most attention in the collection, including an essay by Kathleen LeBesco that examines how the series influenced the emergence of gays as stock characters in Reality vehicles. Other programs that come in for various types of focused critical treatment include *Big Brother, The Osbournes* and *Judge Judy.*

Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture is a highly readable book, largely free of academic diatribe and only rarely lapsing into jargon. The scope of the collection does not extend to influential marginalia at the genre's deep end, such as staged talk shows (*Jerry Springer* or *Jenny Jones*) or para-sports (professional wrestling or roller derby). This is probably a good thing, given the largeness of these targets for smug academic cheap shots. Also absent from the collection is comment on influence of Reality TV upon an older and intimately related genre, "the news." But no shame to the editors on that account; the topic requires a book of its own at the very least.

David Marc is a writer and editor living in Syracuse, New York. He recently saw publication of his fifth book, *Television in the Antenna Age*, co-written with Robert J. Thompson. Marc teaches courses at Syracuse University and Le Moyne College.

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Northwest	Scott LaPlante	Diane Bevins
Ohio Valley	Roy Flynn	Peggy Ashbrock
Pacific Southwest	Will Givens	Terry Williams
Rocky Mountain/Southwest	Donna Rossi	Patricia Emmert
San Francisco/Northern California	David Mills	Darryl Compton
Southeast	Evelyn Mims	Tomi Funderburk Lavinder
Suncoast	Robert Behrens	Karla MacDonald
Upper Midwest	Ken Stone	Teresa Vickery