TELEVISION QUARTERLY

VOLUME XIV NUMBER I

SPRING 1977

THE JOURNAL OF THE
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF
TELEVISION ARTS
AND SCIENCES

PRICE: $2.00

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THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF
TELEVISION ARTS AND SCIENCES

EDITORIAL BOARD

TELEVISION QUARTERLY

is published quarterly by The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, 291 So. La Cienega Blvd., Beverly Hills, Calif. 90211 (213) 659-0990.

Members of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences receive TELEVISION QUARTERLY as part of membership services. Inquiry regarding membership should be directed to the office of The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

BUSINESS ADVERTISING OFFICES: Television Quarterly, 291 So. La Cienega Blvd., Beverly Hills, Calif. 90211 (213) 659-0990. Advertising placement and other business arrangements should be made with the Beverly Hills office of The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

EDITORIAL OFFICE: Television Quarterly, NATAS, 291 So. La Cienega Blvd., Beverly Hills, Calif. 90211 (213) 659-0990.

The subscription rates for non-members, libraries and others is $7.50 a year and $2.00 a copy in the United States, $8.00 a year and $2.50 a copy in all other countries, postage paid. Special Student Subscription $5.00. Subscription orders should be sent to TELEVISION QUARTERLY, The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, 291 So. La Cienega Blvd., Beverly Hills 90211.

The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the contributing authors and do not necessarily represent those of The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences or the members of the Editorial Board of Television Quarterly.

Design and Printing:
Chapman Phototypesetting
1135 E. Truslow
Fullerton, California 92631

TELEVISION QUARTERLY

VOL. XIV NO. 1

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THE SIGN OF GOOD TELEVISION

"Star Trek" and The Bubble-gum Fallacy

By ROBERT JEWETT and JOHN S. LAWRENCE

In popdom's frantic realm, lasting popularity is always sought but seldom achieved. Pop fame can be as ephemeral as any fashion—in the top ten this week, off the charts next week, never to be heard or remembered again. One of the most enduring and mysterious masterpieces of current pop culture is *Star Trek*.

Seventy-nine episodes of *Star Trek* were produced by Gene Roddenberry between 1966 and 1968. They have since been replayed by local stations all over the country to viewers numbering in the millions. There is even a cartoon version of *Star Trek*, which plays to the kiddies on Saturday mornings. When NBC first thought of cancelling the program in 1967, they were inundated with protest mail that forced a renewal for one more year. In an unprecedented manner the series has evoked the spontaneous development of fan clubs and locally produced fan magazines dedicated to keeping the *Star Trek* vision alive.

When one discusses the appeal of *Star Trek* with its less dedicated viewers, the term "bubble gum" is frequently used.

The serious investigation of bubble gum has not advanced very far. But we can report the following. The term "bubble gum" is used to describe a type of teen rock music that is supposed to lack significance. It is music devoid of message, musical innovation, or any other sign of serious intent. Hence the response, "It's just bubble gum," implies that material such as *Star Trek* is pure diversion.

We would like to label this line of argument *the bubble-gum fallacy*. It paradoxically ascribes trivial and instrumental qualities to popular-culture materials possessing psychically resonant themes. It suggests that popular culture, while powerfully influential in benign areas of behavior, lacks the power to corrupt and destroy—an obvious contradiction. This stance discourages any investigation of the power of such materials to shape consciousness and thus indirectly influence behavior. Above all, the bubble-gum fallacy obscures the mythic qualities of popular-culture materials that render them attractive to the deeper levels of consciousness. Audiences can thereby be hooked on a program or comic strip without ever knowing or asking why. Perhaps a look at the world of *Star Trek*, with its thousands of dedicated fans, will offer some clues to this curious phenomenon.

Does *Star Trek* have a message? Are its concept of the universe, its scheme for the mission of the *Enterprise*, and its array of characters essentially trivial and meaningless? Does it have a message beyond the brilliantly entertaining presentation of space travel?

The United Starship *Enterprise* is on a five-year mission to explore the galaxy. She is one of twelve starship-class spaceships under orders of the United Federation of Planet Earth, with a crew of 430 men and women and a gross weight of 190,000 tons. Since her speed on space-warp drive far exceeds that of light, the *Enterprise* explores and carries out assignments, making only infrequent contact with Federation authorities. Given this format, the episodes permit the *Enterprise* to intervene on her own initiative in the affairs of other planets, playing the role of cosmic sheriff, problem-solver, and plenipotentiary.

The leader of this semi-autonomous space probe is Captain James T. Kirk, the youngest man ever to be assigned a starship command, and a brilliant, irresistibly attractive and hard-driving leader who pushes himself and his crew beyond human limits. He always leads the landing party on its perilous missions of unexplored planets but, like a true superhero, regularly escapes after risking battle with monsters or enemy spaceships.

Kirk's main cohort, Mr. Spock, is cut even more clearly from superhero material. He is half human and half Vulcan, which gives him ". . . extrakeen senses, prodigious strength, an eidetic memory, the capacity to perform lightning calculations, telepathy, imperturbability, immunity to certain diseases and dangers, vast knowledge—especially of science." As played by Leonard Nimoy, Spock is a strong, ascetic character of pure rationality, his emotions kept strictly under control by his Vulcan temperament. The emotional tension is hinted at by his slightly Satanic appearance, including pointed ears.

A Spock feature that has fascinated the female writers of the stories is *pon farr*, the periodic rutting season which renders all Vulcan minds powerless and threatens death if union with an appropriate partner is not achieved. Nimoy reported that the question of Spock's extraordinary sex appeal emerged ". . . almost any time I talked to somebody in the press. . . . I never give it a thought . . . to try to deal with the question of Mr. Spock as a sex symbol is silly." One wonders whether even television stars use a little bubble gum on occasion.

All the remarkable powers of Spock, Kirk, and his crew are required to deal with the adversaries of the good ship *Enterprise*. The *Star Trek* universe is populated by two vicious races of bad guys. The "Romulans" are similar to the Vulcans in ability and technological development but are ". . . highly militaristic, aggressive by nature, ruthless in warfare, and do not take captives." The "Klingons" are even worse, though less intelligent. David Gerrold's description is delightful: "Klingons are professional villains. They are nasty, vicious, brutal, and merciless. They don't bathe

regularly, they don't use deodorants or brush their teeth. . . . A Klingon is a good person to invite to a rape—or even a murder, provided it's your own. . . . Klingons build their battlecruisers without toilets . . . drop litter in the streets . . . pick their teeth in public. And those are their good points. . . ." Clearly such villains are ". . . more symbolic than individual," threatening the peace of the galaxy in a way that requires constant vigilance by the *Enterprise*.

* * *

To counter these threats and to cope with the weird, aggressive powers that seem to inhabit all earthlike planets of the universe, the *Enterprise* acts as galactic redeemer in episode after episode. As Gerrold explains, ". . . The *Enterprise* IS a cosmic 'Mary Worth,' meddling her way across the galaxy . . . to spread truth, justice, *and the American Way* to the far corners of the universe." The format of *Star Trek* accentuates this role by keeping Kirk and his ship out of communication with Earth. The captain becomes ". . . the sole arbiter of Federation law wherever he traveled . . . a law unto himself."

The story thus fits into the genre of the isolated zealous hero or nation, answerable only to a higher law and fighting for right whenever called to do so, a theme America has tried to act out in recent times. And like a sophisticated American, Captain Kirk does not allow himself to become "paranoid" about the enemies who are out to get him or the planets he must destroy in the fray. In a spirit worthy of Halberstam's "The Best and the Brightest," Kirk's ". . . enemy is an adversary to be met with strength and even destroyed, if necessary, but not necessarily a villain with whom no reconciliation is possible. Peace really is his [Kirk's] profession."

The moral vision of *Star Trek* thus partakes of the spirit and rhetoric of the *Pax Americana*. Its basic moral principle is zeal for the mission. This is in effect what authors Lichtenberg, Marshak, and Winston celebrate in their comprehensive fan book, *Star Trek Lives!* They affirm an admirable ". . . equality of moral stature" on the parts of Spock and Kirk. "Each of them is the rarest of all things among men: a man of unbroken integrity . . . each remains dedicated to striving, extravagantly willing to pay the price."

But when one measures this moral quality against standards forbidding deceit, adultery, and violence, the lack of restraint is striking. What we have here is moral zeal attached solely to the mission and to their own vision of what amounts to "the American Way." It is a zeal transcending both due process and the moral code of the Federation's "noninterference directive," which Kirk has sworn on pain of death to uphold. This directive is consistently broken in *Star Trek* episodes when "necessary" for the fulfillment of the mission. It is an effective format for reinstating in the realm of fantasy some of the American values that floundered in the sixties against ugly obstacles in Vietnam.

Dedication to the ideals would alone suffice, in fantasy if not in reality. Zeal for one's own value system justifies the intervention in someone else's. One episode that Gerrold claims is patterned after the *Pueblo* incident bears the message ". . . that the ends justify the means; because our ends are just, then no matter what means we choose, our means will be just too." Thus it is understandable that fans Lichtenberg, Marshak, and Winston would admire this kind of ". . . fierce dedication, each to his own philosophy and vision of life, and the integrity of character that supports that dedication."

The impact of this kind of uncompromising zeal on other cultures is worth noting. Gerrold writes that the cumulative message of *Star Trek* is that ". . . if a local culture is tested and found wanting in the eyes of a starship captain, he may make such changes as he feels necessary."

The correlations between the *Star Trek* format and recent tragedies in American history are troublesome and painful, especially for those who happen to enjoy the élan and imagination of this series. It would be foolish to blame programs like *Star Trek* for the debacle of Vietnam. What fascinates us is the connection between these correlations and the peculiar commitment a series like this evokes from its most dedicated fans. Richard Slotkin's concept of "National Mythology" provides an important clue. He shows how the historical experience of a nation provides metaphors and stories which assume mythic proportions in literature and art, so that the resultant myth exercises a reciprocal pressure on succeeding generations. It shapes the sense of reality and is itself reshaped by subsequent experience. Thus a national mythology may come to exercise the same unconscious appeal as the archetypal myths of which they are variants.

It is perhaps characteristic of our current mood, having experienced the collapse of *Star Trek*'s dynamic sense of mission, that its successor in the demoralized 1970s should be *Space 1999*. Its setting is *Moonbase Alpha*, which originally had the task of monitoring lunar storage sites for atomic wastes shuttled from Earth. When the garbage mysteriously explodes, the Moon is blasted out of its orbit and careens through space. So rather than playing the galactic sheriff role, the drifting base repeatedly suffers siege from fantastic, malevolent life forms. In "The Last Sunset" episode there is a critique of the kind of zealous internationalism that marked *Star Trek*, as a crew member goes berserk and raves dangerously about establishing a new urban civilization that could colonize the galaxy. But the mythical scheme of redemption through violence is retained as the madman is beaten into sensibility by "Sheriff" Koenig, *Alpha*'s commander. The saloon brawls of the cowboy Western are transposed to outer space as the antidote to galactic crusading.

Despite the discrepancies in their quality and sophistication, both *Space 1999* and *Star Trek* appear to be traditional reworkings of American ideol-

ogy. But as one might expect, there is a hitch to this burgeoning mythic theory of ours.

At the surface level *Star Trek* stories seem to defy interpretation as mythic material with powerful unconscious appeal. The entire series takes a singularly dim view of myths, not to speak of legends, fables, and their primitive religious accouterments. *Star Trek* celebrates the freeing of the human spirit from superstition and narrow-mindedness. It wears the cloak of empirical science. It purports to be a future chapter in what Joseph Campbell called "the wonder story of mankind's coming to maturity."

Campbell, the famous historian of world myths, argues that with the coming of the scientific age, mankind has been set free from myths. "The spell of the past, the bondage of tradition, was shattered with sure and mighty strokes. The dream-web of myth fell away; the mind opened to full waking consciousness; and modern man emerged from ancient ignorance, like a butterfly from its cocoon, or like the sun at dawn from the womb of mother night." Producer Gene Roddenberry would surely agree. The antimythic bias in *Star Trek* is clearly visible in the following episode.

"Who Mourns for Adonais?"

The U.S.S. *Enterprise* is approaching an unexplored M Class planet when an immense, masculine face appears on the scanner screen and stops the ship in midspace by a tremendous exertion of energy. Captain Kirk leads the exploration party of Spock, Chekov, McCoy, Scott, and the ravishingly beautiful archaeologist Carolyn Palamas. They find themselves in a Greek-like temple complex. A magnificent, muscular man whose face they had seen on the scanner rises to greet them with the words, "I am Apollo. . . . You are here to worship me as your fathers worshipped me before you."

When Kirk asks what he requires, he insists he is Apollo and demands "loyalty," "tribute," and "worship" in return for a "human life as simple and pleasureful as it was those thousands of years ago on our beautiful Earth so far away." Kirk replies, "We're not in the habit of bending our knees to everyone we meet with a bag of tricks." When they refuse obeisance, Apollo's wrath melts their phaser guns and injures Scott, who has attempted to protect Carolyn from amorous advances. She volunteers to go with Apollo and quickly falls in love with him.

Captain Kirk theorizes that an unknown race capable of space travel had come to ancient Greece with the ability ". . . to alter their shapes at will and command great energy." This theory is corroborated by Apollo's explanation to Carolyn:

"Your fathers turned away from us until we were only memories. A god cannot survive as a memory. We need awe, worship. We need love."

Carolyn replies, "You really consider yourself to be a god?"

He laughs, ". . . In a real sense we were gods. The power of life and death

was ours. When men turned from us, we could have struck down from Olympus and destroyed them. But we had no wish to destroy. So we came back to the stars again."

After making love to Carolyn, Apollo returns to the other members of the crew. The enraged Scott attacks him, only to be struck down with the blue-hot streak that lashed from Apollo's finger. This provokes Kirk to declare war on the god, and Kirk too is struck down. When Apollo disappears to recharge his power source, they decide to attack him in hopes of wearing him down. The *Enterprise* crew meanwhile prepares to fire phasers against Apollo's force field. When Carolyn appears again, Kirk tries to cope with her infatuation.

The lovely archaeologist relates Apollo's message, "He wants to guard . . . and provide for us the rest of our lives. He can do it."

Kirk reminds her, "You've got work to do."

"Work?" Carolyn replies.

Kirk insists, "He thrives on love, on worship. . . . We can't give him worship. None of us, especially you. . . . Reject him! You must!"

"I love him!"

"All our lives, here and on the ship, depend on you."

"No! Not on me."

"On you, Lieutenant. Accept him—and you condemn the crew of the *Enterprise* to slavery!"

She stares at him blankly.

Kirk pleads with her to remember ". . . what you are! A bit of flesh and blood afloat in illimitable space. The only thing that is truly yours is this small moment of time you share with the rest of humanity. . . . That's where our duty lies. . . . Do you understand me?"

Carolyn comes to her senses when she discovers Apollo will not accept her liberated intellectual interests. This time the god lashes out in fury at her. But the incandescing phaser beams from the *Enterprise* strike his power source just in time, reducing him to a "man-size being."

"I would have loved you as a father his children," Apollo says, in anguish. "Did I ask so much of you?"

Kirk's reply is gentle. "We have outgrown you," he says. "You asked for what we can no longer give."

Denied the worship so necessary for his being, Apollo's body begins to lose substance, and for the first time he admits the time of the gods "is gone. Take me home to the stars on the wind."

This episode bears a clear message that the era of myths is over, that retreating into slavery to the gods of the past would be terrible. Moreover, the episode suggests that the ancient myths can be scientifically explained by assuming that space travelers played the role of gods. This theme has enormous appeal, judging from the popularity of works such as *Chariots of the Gods*. The episode implies that meaning is purely of this world, any threshold to mysterious, transcendent reality firmly denied.

In contrast to the illusive message of myths and religions, the meaning of Carolyn Palamas' life is simply her "duty" to the only reality of which she can be sure, the "humanity" she shares. This conviction of Captain Kirk fits the spirit of the entire series. It is unthinkable that he or his crew, not to speak of the strictly scientific Spock, would give credence to myths for a moment.

Yet the story line of this and other episodes follows a mythic pattern. David Gerrold, one of the writers of *Star Trek* scripts, defined *Star Trek* as ". . . a set of fables—morality plays, entertainments, and diversions about contemporary man, but set against a science-fiction background. *The background is subordinate to the fable.*" This can be documented at those points in which dramatic coherence—that is, hewing to the mythic story line—caused scriptwriters to depart from the standards of scientific accuracy.

For instance, the attractive young crew of the *Enterprise* never ages despite journeys through the light-year distances of outer space. Members of the bridge crew are regularly shaken off their seats by enemy torpedoes despite the fact that shock waves would not carry past a spaceship's artificial-gravity field. The scientific liberties are taken for dramatic effect, creating ". . . action, adventure, fun, entertainment, and thought-provoking statements." These are actually mythical elements that appeal to an audience schooled in a particular mythical tradition.

When one compares the themes of the series with the content of classical myths, similarities are immediately apparent. Isolating such content from the genesis and function of myths, we mention three patterns visible in "Who Mourns for Adonais?" The first is *saga*, which features a protagonist journeying to unknown and dangerous regions, undergoing trials to test his strength and wit. In the classical monomyth delineated by Joseph Campbell, a journey is undertaken in response to the requirement for each human to move from childhood to maturity through "the crooked lanes of his own spiritual labyrinth." But in materials embodying the American monomyth, the saga of maturation tends to be replaced by the defense against malevolent attacks upon innocent communities.

Gene Roddenberry's original prospectus for *Star Trek*, featuring the format of "Wagon Train to the Stars," aims at saga. He planned the series to be ". . . built around characters who travel to other worlds and meet the jeopardy and adventure which become our stories." This correlates with the announcement at the beginning of *Star Trek* programs, that the mission of the *Enterprise* is ". . . to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before."

Thus in the saga of Apollo's planet, the *Enterprise* had to be mortally endangered by the gigantic face on the scanner, and it was essential for the protagonists Kirk and Spock to leave their command post and come face to face with the foe. It was obviously bad military and space-travel strategy, as many critics have pointed out. No sensible commander would

send himself and the key technical officers on a landing party like this. But it is essential to the saga format and this is characteristic of almost every episode.

* * *

The second mythic pattern visible in *Star Trek* is *sexual renunciation*. The protagonist in some mythical sagas must renounce previous sexual ties for the sake of his trials. He must avoid entanglements and temptations that inevitably arise from Sirens or Loreleis. Thus Lieutenant Palamas is tested in the episode with Apollo, her sexual liaison endangering the survival of the *Enterprise*. After she renounces her passion, the saga can get back on course. In the classical monomyth this theme plays a subsidiary role in the initiation or testing phase. The protagonist may encounter sexual temptation symbolizing ". . . that pushing, self-protective, malodorous, carnivorous, lecherous fever which is the very nature of the organic cell," as Campbell points out. Yet the "ultimate adventure" is the ". . . mystical marriage . . . of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess" of knowledge. In the current American embodiments of mythic renunciation there is a curious rejection of sexual union as a primary value.

In *Star Trek* each hero is locked into a renunciatory pattern closely related to the mission. On long expeditions in outer space, there is, for example, no intrinsic reason why the captain would not be accompanied by his wife and family. This was customary for the masters of some large sailing vessels in the era of extended voyages. But that would violate the mythic paradigm. So Roddenberry describes the renunciation pattern: "Long ago Captain Kirk consciously ruled out any possibility of any romantic interest while aboard the ship. It is an involvement he feels he simply could never risk. In a very real sense he is 'married' to his ship and his responsibilities as captain of her." In numerous episodes Kirk is in the situation Carolyn Palamas faced, forced to choose between an attractive sexual partner and his sense of duty to his mission. The authors of *Star Trek Lives!* report that female fans

> . . . vicariously thrill to Kirk's sexual exploits with gorgeous females of every size, shape and type—from the stunning lady lawyers, biologists and doctors who have loved him, to the vicious and breath-taking Elaan of Troyius, who ruled a planet but was willing to risk destroying her entire solar system for him. . . . Many see Kirk's love as having a tragic element. There is affection and warmth in his response, and evidently the capacity for deep love. But very often the situation is impossible. He loses not through his faults but through his virtues, because of the demanding life he has chosen.

They go on to describe the renunciation of sexual bonds for the sake of loyalty to the *Enterprise* and its crew. "Time and again, he had to make a choice between a woman and his ship—and his ship always won."

This renunciation of sexual love for the sake of loyalty to one's comrades goes far beyond the classical monomyth. It is seen perhaps most clearly

in the person of Spock. He is loyal to Kirk and his comrades at the expense of risking his life for them again and again, but he persistently resists the temptation of entanglements with the opposite sex. Nurse Christine Chapel, a beautiful, talented crew member who is hopelessly in love with Spock, receives the cold shoulder in story after story.

Here is a man ". . . capable of the prodigious outpouring of passion triggered by the irresistible *pon farr* and yet incapable of lasting emotional ties" with women. Sex is an autonomous force here, distinct from Spock's personality and capable of destroying his ability to reason. Since he cannot integrate it with his personality, it must be rigidly repressed until it overpowers him in the rutting season. Spock bears within his person the temptation threatening every saga with disaster—it must be fiercely renounced for the mission to succeed. Such a motif may not be true to life, and it is certainly improbable that there are sophisticated planets with *pon farr* rites derived from Puritan fantasies, but it is true to the mythic paradigm.

The third mythical pattern in *Star Trek* is *redemption*. In the classical monomyth the beautiful maiden must be redeemed from the clutches of the sea monster, the endangered city spared from its peril, and the protagonist redeemed by fateful interventions in the nick of time. The classical hero may experience supernatural aid as he crosses the threshold into the realm of initiatory adventure and then returns, and he may confront trials embodying the redemption of others. But his own redemption takes the form of gaining mature wisdom, achieving atonement with his father, enjoying union with the goddess, and returning home with benefits for his people.

The redemption scheme in materials like *Star Trek* has nothing to do with the maturation process. It fits rather the pattern of selfless crusading to redeem others. This form of selfless idealism has been elaborated most extensively by Ernest Tuveson in *Redeemer Nation*. As so frequently in American history, the *Enterprise* sense of high calling leads to violations of its "noninterference directive." If Kirk and his crew encounter an endangered planet, their sense of duty impels them to intervene. It may not be legal, or right, or even sensible, but the zealous imperative to redeem is all-pervasive. While Gerrold may have overstated in claiming that among the seventy-nine *Star Trek* episodes, ". . . there never was a script in which the *Enterprise*'s mission or goals were questioned," he has accurately described the series as a whole.

While the *Enterprise* regularly plays the mythic redeemer role, Mr. Spock embodies it in a particularly powerful way. His half Vulcan origin makes him a godlike figure, peculiarly capable of effecting redemption. Spock consults his computer with superhuman speed to devise the technique of saving galaxies and men from prodigious threats, leading the audience to view him with a kind of reverence that traditionally has been reserved for gods. Leonard Nimoy's interview, approvingly cited by the

authors of *Star Trek Lives!*, points toward audience yearnings for an omniscient redeemer. The viewer sees Spock as someone

> . . . who knows something about me that nobody else knows. Here's a person that *understands* me in a way that nobody else understands me. Here's a person that I'd like to be able to spend time with and talk to because *he would know what I mean when I tell him how I feel.* He would have insight that nobody else seems to have. . . .

In short, Spock is perceived as a god, which matches the requirements of the mythical pattern, namely that without a superhuman agency of some sort, there is no true redemption.

These mythical themes help us to focus sharply on a paradox evident in *Star Trek*. While its themes occasionally contest the mythical world view, its format and stories are thoroughly mythical. To use Joseph Campbell's terms, it is as if space-age man, having emerged from the "cocoon" of mythic ignorance, awoke to find himself still enmeshed "in the dream-web of myth." This paradox of *Star Trek* reveals a *myth of mythlessness.* Its implicit claim to be antimythical and purely scientific is itself a myth—that is, a set of unconsciously held, unexamined premises. The *Star Trek* format may be a new set of wineskins, but the mythic fermentation within is as old as Apollo.

One key to the acceptance of *Star Trek* seems to be its emphasis on technical exactitude in the details of production. Roddenberry called this the "Believability Factor" and felt that it would be crucial to the acceptance of the show. "Our audiences simply won't believe that this is the bridge of a starship," he stated, "unless the characters on it seem at least as coordinated and efficient as the blinking lights and instrumentation around them."

The effort paid off in the enthusiasm of audiences composed of scientists, technicians, even space-center personnel, in the inclusion of a *Star Trek* program in the Smithsonian archives, and in the display of an *Enterprise* model adjacent to *The Spirit of St. Louis*. Highly educated fans like Lichtenberg, Marshak, and Winston speak of "the atmosphere of believability in *Star Trek* . . . The ship lived. It flew. It went to real places."

Where other science-fiction shows tried to gloss over scientific inaccuracies, *Star Trek* fought to create a wholly believable technology and a real universe." *Star Trek Lives!* extends this confusion between fact and fantasy to a conflation of the actors and their roles. Kirk's nobility of character is reflected in Shatner's ". . . real life in the tireless dedication to his work. . . ." Leonard Nimoy's battles with directors to retain a valid characterization of Spock led fans to ask, "Does this sound like Spock? It does to us."

* * *

But at least one crucial caveat is called for here. While exactitude and gadgetry are parts of science, they do not constitute the degree of scientific objectivity capable of calling one's own myths into question. The essence

of the scientific outlook is a critical state of mind, which is willing to examine all dogmas, including those of science itself. Karl Popper, a major interpreter of science, has even argued that ". . . what we call 'science' is differentiated from the older myths, not by being something different from a myth, but by being accompanied by a second order tradition—that of critically discussing the myth."

This is conspicuously lacking in *Star Trek* because the mythical formulas so crucial to the plots are never called into question. Indeed, the myth of mythlessness ensures that they not even be acknowledged. Instead of a rigorously self-critical scientific outlook, *Star Trek* offers *pseudo-empiricism,* an empirical veneer of gadgetry, and crew talk applied to a mythical superstructure.

One of the most interesting elements of pseudo-empiricism in *Star Trek* is the "Idic" philosophy that Spock brings from Vulcan. It is a vague series of ideas, including repression of sexual energies into a rut cycle, concentrating on deriving personal profit from competition rather than being obsessed with winning, and placing one's energies in technological manipulations. But the authors of *Star Trek Lives!* are impressed by the fact that ". . . the optimism of the Idic is implicit in the fact that this philosophy is practiced, lived, *realized* by a planet-wide culture, the Vulcans, and it works!" Whoa! Works where? Realized by what planet-wide culture? On television or in reality? The writers go on: "The Vulcan nature is said to be more violently warlike than that of humans, but their world has enjoyed peace for hundreds of years. A large part of *Star Trek* fandom is energized by the belief that this Vulcan concept of peace is the only one which will help our world survive. . . ."

The language of this citation deserves close scrutiny. Under its pseudo-empirical cloak, *Star Trek* is presenting an alternative reality system so powerful and credible that a "belief" is "energized." And it is, of course, the "only one" capable of world redemption. This is the language not of science or technology, but of religion. The appropriation of this kind of belief system by individuals is described at great length by the authors of *Star Trek Lives!* They cite examples of individuals deriving a sense of courage and meaning from encountering this reality system.

"In *Star Trek*, the fan escapes not from reality but to reality—to a reality where failure is only a prelude to success, where strength, determination, and integrity can earn triumph just as Spock has won his battle by virtue of his strength." In other words, there is a reality in the *Star Trek* fantasy that transcends petty problems, and it thus provides a means of salvation. The television programs communicate this higher reality to the audience, evoking faith and courage. Such language, suitable for inclusion in William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, leads us to pop-religion.

Despite the bubble-gum fallacy and the myth of mythlessness, pop-culture artifacts like *Star Trek* are developing visions of life and destiny capable of evoking powerful loyalties in at least some audience members.

Pseudo-empiricism allows this to take place, convincing the audience that it is witnessing advanced science. As we confront the strange believability of such materials, there is need for a critical theory capable of cutting through the scientific veneer to the core, which unsuspectingly gives religious vitality to pop-culture artifacts. This veneer is growing denser and more difficult to penetrate.

When modern television was in its pilot stages in 1938, E. B. White wrote perceptively about the way the alternative reality in the picture box would someday threaten to displace the real world. "A door closing, heard over the air, a face contorted, seen in a panel of light, these will emerge as the real and the true. And when we bang the door of our own cell or look into another's face, the impression will be of mere artifice."

The technical wizardry of *Star Trek* has traveled impressively toward the fulfillment of White's prophetic statement. And more is yet to come as film companies seek new means of smothering sensory channels with an ever-increasing surfeit. We now have "Quintaphonic Sound" in the movie *Tommy*, which produces an acute sensation of being in the middle of the orchestra. There is "Sensurround" in movies like *Earthquake*, producing rumbling noises that evoke the sensation of earth tremors. "Totalvision" is reportedly coming soon, on a gigantic screen five times larger than Cinemascope, confronting the puny viewer with a terrifying, gargantuan image. The perfection of Huxley's "feelies" will nicely round out the repertoire of illusions.

It is appropriate to develop a *technomythic critical theory* that will sensitize audiences to mythic content and the techniques of presentation that lend them credibility. It would thereby provide critical armor against the powerful sensory assaults by which pop culture conveys its mythic images. It would draw pop artifacts into the evaluation process from which no area of culture should ever be exempt. This might correct the curious anomaly by which the ideas of pop culture remain virtually aloof from the critical process that has painfully engaged every other area in current society.

Robert Jewett is professor of religious studies at Morningside College, Sioux City, Iowa. He is the author of The Captain America Complex.

John Lawrence is professor of philosophy at Morningside College.

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Judith Crist, TV Guide

NBC is gratified with critical acclaim and audience response to "Jesus of Nazareth."

Balming Out in Gilead

By REUVEN FRANK

Now that everyone is going into the magazine business, it is time to say a few words about ours.

Weekend was born in a month of trouble, and all the portents were bad.

NBC had decided that the time had come to get its news division magazine out of prime time, where it had been well nourished but languished and died from sheer lack of parental affection.

It had been *First Tuesday*, two glamorous hours of prime time once a month, until the sellers and schedule makers moved it to Friday, and then back to Tuesday at an hour's length, then almost once a month on average, most months but not all, this day or that; a duty, a burden, a nuisance, changing its time as often as its name, so that if there was anyone out there who thirsted for this kind of program, he could not know where to look for it.

As journalism, it was not undistinguished. In its earliest days *First Tuesday* so aroused the public and official conscience about chemical and bacteriological warfare that it alone, *one* edition of *one* program, caused limiting legislation to happen. In its late days it dealt—before anyone else—with preventive medicine, with the problems of malpractice, and the related complications which burst on the public a year and a half later. And there were many firsts in between.

(When I say "first," I don't mean *first* first, historically speaking. I mean the first for a large, general audience, the first carefully thought out and journalistically executed report. I mean news people flying across the country, digging into files, showing as well as talking. I don't mean a few doctors and an interlocutor conversing early on a Sunday morning.

It is a safe guess that almost all issues come first to television on such programs because their need is something to talk about to fill the public uplift gap. They have the time, and time is all they have.)

So *First Tuesday*, which became *Chronolog* (because *First Friday* sounded ominous) and then *First Tuesday* again, and then *Special Edition*—and there may have been some I forgot—was ready for burial, needing only to be declared dead.

A sad little tale of deterioration and lovelessness, one that should be told because it reveals so much of the process by which those who manage time on the air grant pieces of it to their news departments, and what they expect.

It is not part of this story, except that in the Spring of 1974 the news department "magazine" was defunct, and the consensus—some of it joyous, some of it reluctant, was that there had to be some kind of magazine. At precisely that moment the FCC revised its prime-time access rule to allow networks to put into the 7-8 time slot on Saturdays, news programs, children's programs, and other balms in Gilead.

I was by that time slowly resuming the role of producer, which is my trade, after some seven years as an administrator. One program I had done with fair success, and the network was full of old friends who remembered. One such asked me to undertake 26 or 28 magazines a year at 7 on Saturday evenings. I accepted before he finished his sentence.

This may be as good a place as any to define a television magazine.

A magazine program includes more than one subject. It is expository in nature. That is all the definition you need, though critics like to speak of "mini-documentaries".

All other characteristics depend on the style and content and the people involved. They can work off the regular news flow, or behind it or beside it or ahead of it. They can think of themselves as something "between" the daily news programs and the hour-and-longer documentaries. Or they can postulate that if everything unnecessary, specious or tendentious were left out of most documentaries, you would have some interesting twelve-minute stories.

Magazine programs can, and ought to, differ from each other in almost every way, because they tend to be pretty good programs. If one show is interesting and thorough, there is no reason for doing another just like it.

In due course we had ourselves a magazine, *Weekend*, a budget, a broadcast time, and a frequency. That's all. The rest was up to us.

And there I was, a double retread, an old old-timer in the business, nostalgic for pictures that told stories, yearning for the excitement of working with narrative film. Here were all the challenges that compelled me to leave a pretty good newspaper job almost a quarter-century ago to try this new wonder, television.

Staffing. Always a problem. We sought people who hungered for movement and were suspicious of too much talk. Story-tellers, impelled by curiosity rather than mission. Technicians who enjoyed not only their work but their skill at it. Everybody to be picked from inside NBC, because I was always a company man.

Half the staff of our predecessor show was off with one of NBC News's prestige specials, a three-hour undertaking; the other half joined me. Included were a young producer out of the late Fred Freed's remarkable group. An old friend from *Nightly News* anxious to be able to finish a sentence. A young producer from the local staff whose work showed he knew why cameras were invented.

Anchorman. (The worst word in television.) A professional in both news

and television. Above all, a writer. This really was to be old-fashioned television. The last act in the process would be the writing of the script. That takes a skill that's virtually gone out of style. Our man had to write well, with occasional humor but constant wit, a proper respect for grammar, truth and the audience, and genuine, that is, organic personal style. He had to be the man he appeared to be.

It seemed obvious to me that the best such prospect was Lloyd Dobyns, who was then the correspondent in Paris, and with whom I had worked successfully on a program about Zurich and bankers and gold, all of which he made sound interesting, and which almost got us censured (after a day's full-dress debate) by the Swiss parliament.

I stood alone in thinking Dobyns the obvious choice, but that's another story. Nor is it a matter of "discovering" Dobyns, as though I were a casting director stopping in Schwab's drug store, and Lloyd, in a tight sweater, had brought me a lemon phosphate. I knew what I needed and "they" knew only what had worked elsewhere. As for "discovery", Lloyd had discovered himself a long time ago. I was merely smart enough to exploit the discovery.

I flew to Paris to talk Lloyd into doing it. He had no faith in the project. It would be fun to do, and therefore could not last. That's your quintessential Dobyns. He agreed to do the program, but not to move. For the first year he commuted between New York and Paris, briefly abandoning his wife, four children and Elysee-Palace-sized apartment. As long as the program lasted it would help pay the rent. Then I flew to London to line up a cameraman who might be useful. Then I got The Phone Call.

"Are you sitting down?"

"I am sitting down."

"The appeals court has thrown out the FCC's revision of the prime time access rule. . . ."

". . . meaning . . . ?"

". . . that you won't be on at 7 on Saturdays."

There was more. Some independent syndicators had petitioned the court to rule that the Commission had been arbitrary and capricious and had stifled local initiative by allowing this incursion. The petitioners were led by *Hee Haw* and the *Lawrence Welk Show*.

It's hard to panic in London. Hysteria won't do. Calm was restored and I proceeded with my business, confident that our project would, somehow, be salvaged. Of course it was. A long time before, while I was still an executive, I had suggested that we move our magazine to 11:30 P.M. on Saturday. The reasoning was simple. *60 Minutes* had moved from opposite *First Tuesday*—while they were locked in mortal combat, *Marcus Welby M.D.*, on ABC, became one of the great hits of all time—to 6 P.M. Sunday. It had done well.

If the moguls of television truly believe that the best journalism will do

poorly against even mediocre entertainment—and they do, they do—*60 Minutes* should disabuse them of the notion. It hasn't, so we moved into "fringe" time. And 11:30 Saturdays was the only fringe time left. My suggestion had not been considered seriously. But, years later, when the court struck down Saturday at 7, it rose to the surface. By the time I got back from Europe the project was ticking and the hour was set.

We had it all: Ninety minutes, once a month, Saturday at 11:30 P.M. Dobyns? "If you insist." I did.

Then the meetings began. What kind of program were we doing? A program without imperatives, with a style which has been often defined after the fact. But if you know Dobyns and your mind hears him talking, that's the style. People say irreverent. People say frivolous. (People are not universally kind.) People even say innovative. But we are nothing if not journalists of the old school—a very old school—who believe primarily in curiosity. Ourselves when young had made the decision to follow news for life because it had seemed to offer a more interesting existence than any reasonable alternative occupation. Above all, we were not out to change the world, to raise the masses to our own exalted levels, to parade our superiorities. (We are sufficiently secure in our superiorities not to need to.)

We took it as our primary obligation to be interesting. What interested us must necessarily interest at least a few others. At 11:30, if we were not interesting the audience would go to bed. But this rule preceded the change in time.

Format. Six commercial interruptions and two for station breaks. It seems like a lot but is, by special dispensation, less by a third than the normal for that period of broadcast time. Five pieces. Two must be, by anybody's criteria, serious journalism. Not solemn, serious. Not instructive, informative. But what most people write down or discuss, we took for granted: Decency, concern, a capacity for anger, these exist inside or they do not; they are not proper subjects for meetings.

But cool. Classy. Every sentence must parse.

A magazine. An interplay. When you have engaged the viewer one way, then you come up on his other side.

Every time you try to formulate a principle, it sounds like a bromide. Only people matter. All people are funny; all stories are sad. Television stories must move from here to there. Every program should have a piece which seems to imply that there is someone somewhere who wishes we hadn't done it. Process can be as interesting as result. *Things* are dull; we don't do pieces about things. Always alert for accident, we sensed that the unexpected often would make our story.

We also learned that no rule is absolute.

Some stories take a couple of weeks to prepare. Some take months. One took a year. A brilliant staff, plus the flexible magazine format, allows

Weekend producers to follow the story wherever it leads. You sit in an office in New York knowing what you are going to look for, not what you will find. Taking the cameras into the field with a completed script in your hand is a proper and responsible way to do programs, perhaps, but it is a dull way to live. We sought the spontaneous, we let life flow. We did not avert our eyes from injustice.

We heard about a school in Dallas where the children of Hare Krishna followers were being indoctrinated instead of taught, while living under sub-standard sanitary conditions. We showed the school in 1974. It is now closed.

Two young men were imprisoned for kidnap-robbery in North Carolina and the evidence we found indicated their innocence. We showed the story and they were pardoned.

We were ahead of almost everybody on the Reverend Moon, on the Korean C.I.A., on the treatment of the handicapped on commercial airplanes, on Israel as arms manufacturer, on the cocaine trail, on wife-beating as an ignored social problem. We were ahead of everybody, even local newspapers, on how much the poor taxpayers of Montreal would have to pay to be host to the Olympic Games.

In none of these film essays did we set out to be "first" or to crusade or to get legislatures to act. We saw interesting stories that seemed worth doing. For everyone that worked there was at least one other that turned out to be a dud.

We are not investigative reporters; we belong to no organizations of crusading journalists. We get no subventions from patrons of investigative reporting. Some stories we embark on turn out to be in need of investigating. It tells much about the tone of our times that I am impelled to cite investigative achievement as justifying the effort, rather than bragging about the stunning pictures we did on gospel music, the fascinating life style of the Middle Eastern wheeler-dealer Adnan Khashoggi, the terror of little boys at a military academy run by Marine DI's, the ludicrousness of a small-town beauty contest no one ever heard of, the ordinariness of a national convention of pet cemetery owners, and so on. The list is substantial.

Weekend has been pure television. If your picture tube blew out you would miss the point. Film stories do not translate well. My prejudice has given rise to this acid test, applicable no matter what the program format. Turn the picture to black and what do you miss? Does the audio deliver the essence?

On *Weekend* you will miss it all, including what you hate. We insist you watch. Or turn it off, which is every American's right.

The only thought we can't stand is just being there. That's the reason for the "verbals" which are the least liked part of the program. Those are those little two- or three-line jokes, or puns or political comments which

precede and follow commercials. They are not "graffiti", because they are carefully printed. I don't like "bumper stickers", because that's one of those chic mindless tags which pop sociology elevates and then forgets.

They take as much time as would be required to precede and follow each commercial with a card of the program's title, which is what documentaries do, or fade slowly from anchorman (that word again!) to black, and back again, the way news programs do. And they keep the viewer's eyes on the set.

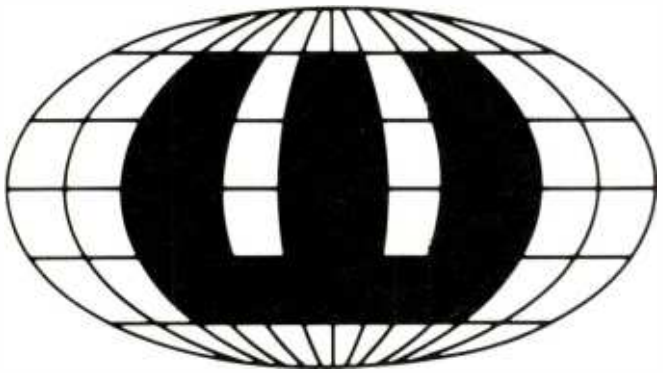
From the bosom of my family to the millions out there, nothing on the program arouses more hostility than the verbals. But they watch. I know they watch. I know because during most two-minute commercial breaks we insert a verbal in the middle. Two 30-second commercials before, and two after, and in between it says something like: "Agnostic Chinese: Yee Of Little Faith." Or "Johnny could read when his teacher could." Or "A penny saved is a penny."

People who are specific about those verbals they cannot abide seem to dislike most the ones in the middle of the commercial breaks. This, I submit, is absolute proof that they are watching; not merely that their sets are on, but that they are watching. It may seem strange to boast of making people watch television sets which are already turned on. *Weekend* has engendered a lot of boasts. We believe in it.

A journalist for more than 25 years, Reuven Frank was formerly President of NBC News. He's the man who paired Huntley and Brinkley, producing the first news show that swept the field in awards as well as ratings.

Mr. Frank is currently executive producer of the NBC show, WEEKEND.

A native of Montreal, Mr. Frank attended the University of Toronto and the School of Journalism, Columbia University.



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Off-Camera Intrigue In Mississippi

By LES BROWN

What is unusual about television station WLBT, Jackson, is not always apparent on the screen. Most hours of the day it is a fairly typical NBC affiliate carrying the standard commercial fare.

The hints of unorthodoxy are in the locally-originated programming. A black newsman, Walter Saddler, anchors the 6 P.M. newscast and a white woman, Marsha Halford, the 10 o'clock report. There is also a daily educational children's program in the mornings whose hostess is black and a weekly prime-time documentary on local issues which occasionally examines outmoded laws in the state.

These alone set WLBT apart from most television stations in the United States, but the real differences are behind the screen.

Since 1972, WLBT has been run by the only black general manager in American television, William H. Dilday Jr.

About 40 percent of the station's staff is black and more than one-third of the employees female. The station has no owner, and its profits—which are considerable—are given away chiefly to benefit black residents of the state.

Approximately half the money goes to Tugaloo College towards the creation of a department of communications, and the remainder is distributed to various educational television projects.

How long WLBT will operate in this manner is uncertain. The Federal Communications Commission must eventually award the license to a business concern. The agency has been weighing the relative merits of five applicants for the license ever since Lamar Life Insurance Company, in a landmark court decision in 1969, lost its right to broadcast on Channel 3 for conscientiously discriminating against blacks.

The contest for the license since then has taken bizarre twists and turns, and the involvement of citizens groups determined to see that blacks have fair representation in the new ownership has added to the confusion. The disposition of the license may still be years away.

Lamar lost the license, after 15 years of ownership, when the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ presented evidence, obtained from monitoring the station, that WLBT maintained racist policies in a city where blacks comprise 40 percent of the population.

During the civil rights struggle, the station had given voice only to the segregationist point of view and was known, on occasion, to post a "Sorry, lost our picture" slide when a black person appeared on a network broadcast. Some Jackson residents who recall those days say the deletion of blacks extended to ballplayers in baseball telecasts.

WLBT was one of only two commercial television stations in Jackson at the time, and because it was considered an important local resource the F.C.C. permitted the station to remain on the air on an interim basis in the custody of a newly-formed, nonprofit organization.

That caretaker organization, Communications Improvement Inc., with a biracial board of 18 prominent members of the community, recruited Mr. Dilday—a Bostonian with the physical proportions of a football player—as operating head.

In what was represented as a temporary position, Mr. Dilday has already had a longer run than most network presidents have in jobs that are purported to be permanent.

Mr. Dilday began with two handicaps: He had never lived in a southern city before—in fact had never previously traveled below Washington, D.C.—and he had had a scant three years of broadcasting experience as personnel director for WHDH-TV in Boston.

Necessarily, so soon after the civil rights turbulence of the 1960s, he was apprehensive of the personal risks he faced and unsure of his acceptance as a northern black in the city where Medgar W. Evers, the civil rights leader, had been slain in 1963 and where there was still an aftertaste of the two controversial trials of Byron de la Beckwith, who twice was cleared in the slaying.

But during the five years of Mr. Dilday's stewardship, WLBT has increased both its share of the audience and its annual profits over what they had been under the Lamar management.

WLBT's three daily newscasts—at noon, 6 P.M. and 10 P.M.—dominate their time periods, an achievement made easier, Mr. Dilday maintains, by the fact that the local newspapers are undistinguished.

The station's improved position, moreover, was accomplished despite added competition from a new UHF station, WAPT, which became the local ABC affiliate during Mr. Dilday's tenure, and despite NBC's decline in the national ratings.

"I never think of us as nonprofit," Mr. Dilday said in an interview. "I play by all the rules of commercial broadcasting, compete the way the others do—worrying about demographics, audience-flow and the rest—and send all the money I can to my board of directors."

Elizabeth Johnson, president of the caretaker group, has no quarrel with Mr. Dilday's aims. "The more money we get from WLBT, the more we have to give away," she said.

Mr. Dilday expects this year's revenues to approach $3.7 million and the profits to be around $500,000. The profits could be considerably higher,

he notes, but for the fact that WLBT must make payments of $30,000 a month to the former licensee, Lamar Life Insurance, for the use of its facilities, equipment and broadcast tower.

"They're making more money out of this now than they did when they held the license, and they have none of the worries," Mr. Dilday commented sardonically.

Mr. Dilday's success with the station has made the F.C.C.'s task in awarding the license considerably more difficult than it would have been if WLBT were struggling to remain profitable.

Usually, when television licenses are granted, the recipient has to build a station from scratch at great expense. In the case of WLBT, however, the new licensee in effect will be made a gift of a prosperous station, already prominent in the community, with a market value of around $18 million.

"Whoever gets the license becomes an instant millionaire," an F.C.C. official observed. "Giving this license away is like giving away a gushing oil well. It's a terribly difficult decision to make."

The commission came close to making a decision in 1973. After two years of holding comparative hearings on the five competing applicants for the license, an F.C.C. administrative law judge determined that it should go to an organization known as Dixie National Broadcasting Corp., which was 40 percent owned by Dixie National Life Insurance Company.

Three of the principals of Dixie National, Rubel L. Phillips, William D. Mounger and James Roland had been active in Republican politics in Mississippi. All are white. The three black shareholders in the corporation controlled less than 4 percent of the stock.

However, soon after the recommendation was made by the F.C.C., Mr. Phillips was indicted for his role in the $40 million Stirling Homex stock swindle, and last January was convicted of forging a signature to a Federal document in behalf of Stirling Homex.

Another leading applicant for the station was effectively disqualified when its principal figure, Charles Evers, a civil rights activist and brother of the late Medgar Evers, published his autobiography, "Evers."

In the ill-timed book, Mr. Evers described himself as having once engaged in a number of illegal activities, including pandering and bootlegging, and thus revealed himself as a probable tax-evader.

As the demerits mounted for the various applicants, it appeared for a time that the contender least promising in the beginning might win out. That was Lamar Life Insurance, the original owner, which had reapplied for the license with a reconstituted broadcast subsidiary that included black members of the community.

A few months ago, Lamar and one other applicant agreed to drop out, in return for reimbursement of their expenses, while members of the remaining three groups worked out a merger creating a single new applicant calling itself TV-3 Inc.

Whittling down the field of bidders to a single organization would seem

to smooth the way for an F.C.C. decision, but two influential citizens groups—the United Church of Christ in New York and the Community Coalition for Better Broadcasting in Jackson—have petitioned the F.C.C. to deny the merger.

Their opposition to TV-3 Inc. centers on William D. Mounger, its chairman and second largest stockholder, who they contend holds segregationist views. In their filings with the F.C.C., the citizens groups identify Mr. Mounger as a former officer of a segregated private school.

"We don't think the merger will provide the services we'd like to see delivered by the station," said Alex Waites, a member of the Community Coalition. "While basically we object to the backgrounds of some of the principals, we also find that blacks hold 31 percent of the stock. What we and the United Church of Christ want is 51 percent black ownership."

"We don't care how long this drags on," Mr. Waites said. "We wouldn't care if the station were left the way it is, run by a caretaker group."

Reuben Anderson, a black lawyer in Jackson who has specialized in civil rights cases and is a shareholder in the merged group as well as its general counsel, expressed annoyance with the citizens group opposition and despaired that "this thing could drag on to the year 2000."

"I don't think the United Church of Christ could ever be satisfied with any group of Mississippians that might be put together," he said. "But here we have an opportunity for blacks to control 31 percent of a profitable, successful broadcast operation."

"Some people think we're a bunch of Uncle Toms for going along with this thing. But we have to make a start somewhere, to participate in something more than a beauty shop," he said. "This is what the citizens groups ought to be encouraging rather than opposing."

"The issue is dividing a good black community here," he added.

Mr. Anderson said the expense of competing for a station license "makes it difficult for blacks to buy into this kind of operation and tends to favor the wealthy whites who can hang in." According to his estimates, his organization has spent close to $300,000 since 1969 to remain in the contest for the license and he personally has already invested $10,000.

He said the new organization, TV-3 Inc., has already made an offer to Mr. Dilday to remain as general manager, with assurances that nothing at the station would be changed unless he wished it to be.

"Everyone has great respect for Bill Dilday's abilities. He runs a tight ship and keeps everyone in line. He's hired the best people, and the whole staff respects him," Mr. Anderson said.

Mr. Dilday acknowledged receiving the offer but said he had not accepted it, since he feels obliged to remain neutral until the matter of ownership is settled.

Recently, his neutrality faced an uncomfortable test when B. B. McClendon Jr., one of the key stockholders in TV-3 Inc. was identified in the

Wednesday night "Probe" documentary as one of the real estate speculators (called "vultures" by some in the program) who buy up land from people unwittingly delinquent in their property taxes.

The broadcast noted that most of those who lose their land in this manner are the poor and the elderly, ignorant of the Mississippi laws. Frequently they are blacks.

The news department checked Mr. Dilday for permission to include Mr. McClendon in the report, recognizing that in naming him the station might appear to be interfering with the application for the license.

"This has nothing to do with the license," Mr. Dilday told the newsman. "If it is factual and pertinent to the story, we have to run it. Go ahead."

A truncated version of the foregoing article appeared in The New York Times.

Les Brown, television editor of The New York Times, is a graduate of Roosevelt University, Chicago. He is the author of "Television: The Business Behind the Box" and The New York Times Encyclopaedia of Television to be published next autumn by Quadrangle Books.

The preceding article is an expansion of a news story that appeared originally in The Times.

Owing to a typographical error, the publisher of Max Wilk's book, "The Golden Age of Television" was incorrectly stated in our last issue. The publisher is Delacorte Press. Television Quarterly regrets the error.

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The Adams Family: Metaphor of American Morality

By VIRGINIA KASSEL

John was a young man breathless to get his wife into bed on their wedding night—but so well brought up that he presented her with volumes of Pope and Shakespeare as a wedding gift before taking her into the bedroom.

. . . As a young Yankee lawyer, he defended the most unpopular Englishman in town—and agonized over whether he was doing it out of duty or ambition. As Minister to London, he was too poor to serve anything but a gift of turtle meat at his first diplomatic dinner. He went on to become President of the United States, leaving office after a single term because his principles were too strong for his politics. His son, another John was endlessly reproached by his wife—for not dancing with her at diplomatic balls, for driving their sons too hard, for marrying her out of a sense of duty when he really loved another.

One of those three sons flirted with a pretty girl, another became engaged to her, the third married her. The ex-fiance took to drink and washed overboard from a ship, an apparent suicide. Their father also became President and left office after a single term because his principles were too strong for his politics.

History or soap opera?

The correct answer is both.

—Anthony Astrachan, writing of
The Adams Chronicles in Harvard Magazine

Inheritance—good and bad—has always been a human concern. Moral and material legacies are a natural concern of any civilized people. "The sins of the fathers" have come to haunt less than their possessions. Fascination with transference of power, with the persistence of character traits is a staple of most cultures.

In politics—especially elective politics—the achievements of the past are litanies invoked to secure election. By repetition, noble words become meaningless and trite. The embarrassment at songs and oaths once held dear soon gives way to cynicism. The events of the last decade have led to this disbelief on one hand, and to a hunger, on the other hand, to know more of our history. It is important to know how we have come to feel about our country as we do.

Politics and political analysis in America have never been constant. Today's revisions will, themselves, one day be revised. In the process we shall glean new information from which new judgments will arise. Viewers may form a new concept of the American past after seeing 150 years pass in *The Adams Chronicles*.

From father to son to grandson to great-grandson for one hundred and fifty years, one name is forever in our history books, a steady light among those who have given shape to this nation. An Adams was there, a major presence, in the founding of these United States. John Adams and his son held the highest office in the land. Both were denied re-election. Each left words that are presently cited as moral guide posts in a troubled world.

The offices to which Adamses were elected, or appointed, include Chief Executive, Vice President, Congressman, Ambassador and Secretary of State. Their sons and grandsons became intellectual and financial leaders of the nation. But the America of John and John Quincy Adams has moved in a direction they never anticipated. Their standards, their high sense of duty, their elitism, did not suit the spirit of America after the Civil War.

Why did this unique, dynastic family disappear from the center stage of history? Stated broadly, the standards of the family and the standards of the nation were no longer one. The Adamses remained constant in their conduct and life style. But the country had lost its colonial innocence and its eighteenth century dedication.

Immigrants were arriving from eastern Europe, old settlers were moving West, pushing back the frontiers. Politics became a rougher, less idealistic calling. The Adamses did not campaign; they believed the office should seek them. A new populace and an expanding electorate found such New England principles too cold, too rigid.

In many ways, the Adams statesmen were ahead of their times; in others, they lagged behind. As Secretary of State, John Quincy drew the first treaty recognizing our Western boundaries might someday reach the Pacific. He may also be credited with the drafting of the Monroe Doctrine. But he presided over a nation already showing the strains of being half slave and half free. Like his father, he saw the need for a strong central government to supersede states' rights. He became the second President not to win re-election.

Finally freed of that "worm of ambition"—the chance of a second term

—John Quincy Adams achieved a popular acclaim and a freedom he had not known before. He was elected to the House of Representatives, from Plymouth district, Mass., where he led the anti-slavery forces.

By the third generation, the weight of the family history was becoming oppressive. Charles Francis, John Quincy's son, also held the Plymouth seat in the House. As American Minister to Great Britain during the Civil War, his charge was to prevent the English from recognizing the Confederacy.

A third Adams President was a logical selection. But only if the third possibility would seek office. He would not. The nomination went elsewhere. Charles Francis became the family historian, deciphering the endless letters and journals. Of his four sons, Henry achieved enduring fame as a writer. The Education of Henry Adams is required reading in most college history courses.

As *The Adams Chronicles* unfold, people will be watching the interaction between the public and the private lives of great men. They will see how history shapes private lives and how great men shape history. Had we created a fictional American family to set forth a comparable span of history, we could not have begun to offer the drama, the excitement—all with the powerful ring of truth—that we found in the documented history of the Adams family. Drama often pales next to the deeds of these real people caught up in politics at crucial moments in history.

In a fictional series, how many viewers would believe that men like John Adams and Thomas Jefferson would both die on the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence? Adams's last words were, "Jefferson still lives." In truth, Jefferson had died only hours earlier.

When we look back to make sense of history, we profit from our long perspective. The Adamses held no such perspective; they had only an uncertain future. When John left Abigail and their children on their farm in Braintree while he attended the Continental Congress (in 1774), he feared for their safety, knowing the British troops were closing in. These were their day-to-day concerns and we have tried to show them—doubt, fear, valor and all—in the television *Chronicles*.

The full perspective of the Adams's past contributions and the course of the future will come near the close of the series when Henry and Charles Francis II look back over the family—their philosophy, code of honor, concept of duty—and realize that obsolescence has set in. The Adams ethic was no longer relevant to a lusty, expanding nation entering the 20th century. Values had changed, the old order had vanished.

It is my hope that *The Adams Chronicles* will give us a deeper understanding of what goes into the decision-making process. Specific problems may have changed, but decisions demand the same weighing of evidence, the same honor and pragmatics. We have recently experienced crises of

leadership. Perhaps the series is more relevant now than it would have been in 1969. It is gratifying to recall that during the Watergate hearings, one of the most quoted individuals—about the national purpose and the relation of the people to their leaders—was John Adams.

The Adams saga opens many of the small, sealed drawers of history, but it is, ultimately, the family's humanity—the price they paid to serve their country—that touches us most tenderly.

Virginia Kassel, producer and creator of The Adams Chronicles was graduated from Bryn Mawr in 1954. She received her Master's degree in American literature from Brown University. After several years as a production assistant at WGBH in Boston, she joined WNET in New York. She spent six years preparing The Adams Chronicles under grants from various foundations.

Books Received and Noted

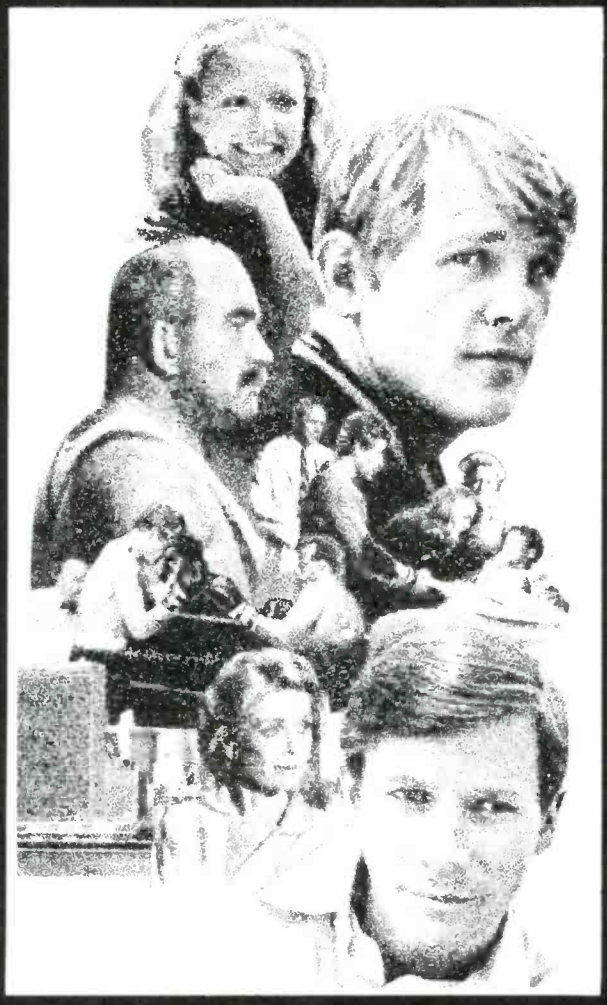
SARNOFF: An American Success by Carl Dreher. Published by Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Company, Inc. $12.50

BROADCASTING IN CANADA by E. S. Hallman with H. Hindley. Published by Routledge & Kegan Paul. $6.50

BROADCASTING IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA by Ronny Adhikarya. Published by Routledge & Kegan Paul. $6.50

AIR TIME by Ronald J. Seidle. Published by Holbrook Press, Inc., Boston.

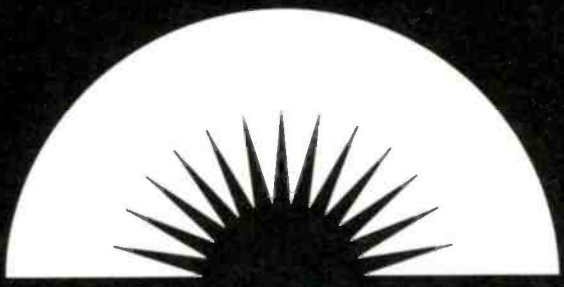
12 hours that shook the world of television.



Irwin Shaw's RICH MAN, POOR MAN Book 1

12 hours for local schedules, Fall 1977!
In one-hour, two-hour or 90-minute form!

MCA TV



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Updating Federal Regulation—At Last

By REP. LIONEL VAN DEERLIN

In 1934 Franklin Roosevelt was in the White House and television was in the laboratory. Satellites were *deus ex machina* devices known only to followers of Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers. Broadcasting was officially recognized that year by passage of The Communications Act of 1934.

Today lawyers usually refer to the law as "The Communications Act of 1934 *as amended*". It would be more accurate to say "as mended, patched, accommodated and tinkered with". Endlessly.

Is it any wonder that the Federal Communications Commission, that much belabored bureacracy, has difficulty making wise, impartial judgments about computer teleprocessing, cable TV, satellites or the role of the networks in politics?

For years there has been talk—but no action—about rewriting the Communications Act. Other nations, including Britain, Canada and Japan, have revamped their entire communications mechanism in recent years while we, the most communications-rich nation in the world, continue to lumber along with the regulatory equivalent of Jack Benny's 1924 Maxwell.

In part, the reason may be owing to bureaucratic inertia or, perhaps, a simple hostility to change.

At a time when the Japanese are on the verge of a national experiment with direct broadcast satellites, I note that the FCC in a recent press release dealing with earth station license for a NASA satellite, said: "It is also expected that the experimental program would be restricted in scope and number of participants so as to avoid the premature generation of widespread public demand for the service being provided." What the American people don't know can't help them—to vary a familiar adage.

The Lord made the world in six days, but that was before the emergence of the United States Congress, and I hardly expect that we'll have so easy a job with rewriting the Communications Act.

The process of drawing up new communications legislation will be cumbersome, complex, and prolonged. I have not promised that we will

pass a new Communications Act this session. I do promise that we will begin this session. A new Communications Act will be an arduous task requiring the best efforts of all of us.

To help us, I've had the subcommittee staff prepare a 1,000-page "options" paper to point out some of the directions we might take in embarking on this massive legislative rewrite.

I should emphasize that the ideas set forth by the staff at this point are just that: ideas, nothing more. Most of the proposals are provocative and others border on the revolutionary for an industry as traditionally disposed toward maintaining the established order as commercial broadcasting.

For an industry that is based on dazzling technology, many broadcasters have been strangely wary of anything that looks like change; recall the massive resistance to such technological newcomers as FM radio, UHF and color television and, more recently, cable TV. What are the broadcasters afraid of? Despite all the warnings and soundings of doom over the years, commercial radio and television interests today appear stronger than ever, certainly more prosperous.

Some of the staff options we'll be considering are:

Allotting radio and television stations by auction or lottery among applicants who meet minimum standards.

Establishing a trust fund from license fees or general revenues to aid those whose specialized communications equipment such as marine radios, is made unusable by changes in communications policy, like switching to a new frequency.

Regulating broadcasting like a public utility.

Controlling cable television as a common carrier by having one group own only the cable distribution station with programmers leasing channels from it.

Requiring the FCC to develop "privacy impact" statements, like environmental impact statements, for each new service licensed to use the communications spectrum.

Establishing full federal funding of public television and radio through an excise tax on television sets, a license fee for the use of a television set, a fee on commercial broadcasting or a tax check-off or converting the systems to entirely a viewer paid basis.

Giving the FCC more control over the CB radio frequency.

On the last point, the poor old FCC is struggling to keep abreast of CB license applications—there are currently some 20 million of these personal radios in use and the number is growing by leaps and bounds. Rather belatedly, the FCC has established a personal radio planning group consisting of an economist and three engineers, to study the problems of CB and consider its future role in the structure of telecommunications. Matters would be far simpler if the Communications Act were written in a way

to cover these emerging technologies. That is what our subcommittee hopes to accomplish.

As some readers of *Television Quarterly* may know, my own career was spent as a newsman for radio/television and newspapers prior to my first election to Congress in 1963. Therefore I feel a special affinity for the problems of broadcast newsmen both in gaining access to government information sources and also in achieving full parity with their brethren in the print media.

Existing communications law is far more a hindrance than help to the news professional on television and radio. The current strictures imposed through the "equal time" requirement and the "Fairness Doctrine" reflect the suspicions of an era when there were but few radio voices and none for television.

In hobbling broadcast newspersons we are also inhibiting and compromising our own right to know. A few examples serve to illustrate what I mean.

On various state ballots last November, voters found a grand total of 171 candidates for President. Among them were a health faddist pushing a bran diet in the cause of national regularity, a woman whose platform was to redecorate the White House, and a nominee of the National Nudist Party whose campaign was briefly interrupted by his arrest for "streaking."

None of these fringe candidates had even a mathematical chance of being elected. Yet if the law had been rigidly enforced, there could have been no Ford-Carter debates unless all 171 were included.

Nearer my home, a San Diego County supervisorial district attracted 20 primary election candidates. Television viewers saw only those who bought advertising time. No stations could have presented even a half-dozen of the principal candidates without parading all 20 before the cameras. Thus, the most useful means for helping citizens form public judgments was effectively denied them.

Frustrated broadcasters call it the "equal time" requirement. The law itself—Section 315 of the Communications Act of 1934—specifies "equal opportunity" for exposure of competing candidates and political viewpoints. Under 315, the FCC has ruled that equal opportunity means appearances of all candidates for a given office—or none. Such appearances must be of precisely balanced duration at comparable time of day. The commission further mandates broadcasters to deal with controversial issues, but also has weighted them down with the requirement that they seek out and air contrasting viewpoints.

Under the Constitution, there is no way government could impose a similar limitation on newspapers. I wonder if the time has not come to extend full First Amendment freedom to broadcasters as well.

Section 315 made good sense when enacted. The 1934 Act, written long before the television era—indeed, before development of even FM radio—

addressed itself to the problem of relatively scarce AM radio spectrum space. Government was licensing a limited number of applicants to provide programming on air waves which the law says belong to all the people. They were licensed for three-year periods in "the public interest, convenience and necessity." And because radio frequencies, unlike printing presses, were a limited commodity, it seemed prudent to impose specific rules for assuring their accessibility to varying economic, social and political viewpoints.

What has changed since 1934? Far from scarcity, we now have almost as many broadcasters as newspapers. There are more than 900 TV stations, more than 8,000 radio outlets—and we could allocate spectrum space for many more.

In many cities broadcast newsmen and women seem up against stiffer competition than their colleagues of the print media. San Diego, for example, has one metropolitan newspaper ownership but three commercial television stations which slug it out with locally originated news programs at virtually the same time of early evening. Granting differences in the scope and intensity of coverage provided by newspapers and TV, this situation can be likened to having three afternoon daily papers—a blessing no longer enjoyed anywhere in the U.S.

Along with the proliferation in the number of stations has come a parallel increase in the ranks of news professionals in broadcasting. A network-owned local station in Los Angeles, New York or Chicago employs as many as 200 in its news department. Each of the San Diego stations has a news staff of 35 to 40.

I see safety in numbers. The more outlets we have, the less chance that any legitimate point of view will be ignored or denied a forum. Yet broadcasters must still abide by the "Fairness Doctrine." It directs that anyone who has been criticized on the air shall have opportunity to respond. Or the chance to reply to an editorial with which he disagrees.

That sounds like a fine safeguard—and a necessary protection if we were at the mercy of a single broadcaster. But is it really needed? Or is it another intrusion by government on the right of radio and TV editors to determine what is newsworthy and to speak out on issues of the day?

In a democracy, no government agency can tell a newspaper what to print. Yet a responsible paper makes sure that every segment of the community it serves has access to its pages. Anyone with a bone to pick can write a letter to the editor—and papers often publish guest columns submitted by readers operating on all kinds of political and ideological wave lengths (including this congressman).

Similarly, the trend is more, not less public participation. Many stations have opened up to the extent of actually soliciting taped or filmed guest opinions from their audience, usually in the form of one-minute spots during which the guest commentator can discuss whatever he wishes, subject only to the laws on libel and obscenity.

As a part of any revision of the Communications Act we must consider reducing or eliminating controls which are no longer justified.

But federal intrusion in programming content—most especially on news and public events—should be a thing of the past. It is enough that the broadcaster's public stewardship can be evaluated at license renewal time. Let's keep government out of his day to day news judgments. These will be sustained, or they will be rejected, by the real beneficiaries of the First Amendment—the people. Just by a twist of the dial.

Rep. Lionel Van Deerlin (D.) is a native Californian who has represented the 42nd District of his state since 1962. He is a former newspaperman and broadcast journalist. He has worked for The Minneapolis Tribune, The Baltimore Evening Sun and Station KFSD in San Diego. He is Chairman of the Communications Subcommittee. His home is in San Diego.

Some of the they say about can't hear

They are said from faraway. . . Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, United States, Venezuela, and all Central America.
They like the television shows we send them.
In fact, last year TELEVISA exported 17,000 hours to be shown in the United States and South America. Probably, you would never guess that our biggest market is right here. . . in your own backyard. In 1974 we exported 9,000 hours to Spanish speaking stations, throughout the United States.
We are projecting Mexico's image to the world, either by tape or transmitting via Satellite.
For us that is more rewarding than hearing the nice things they say about us.
No matter how nice they might sound to us.

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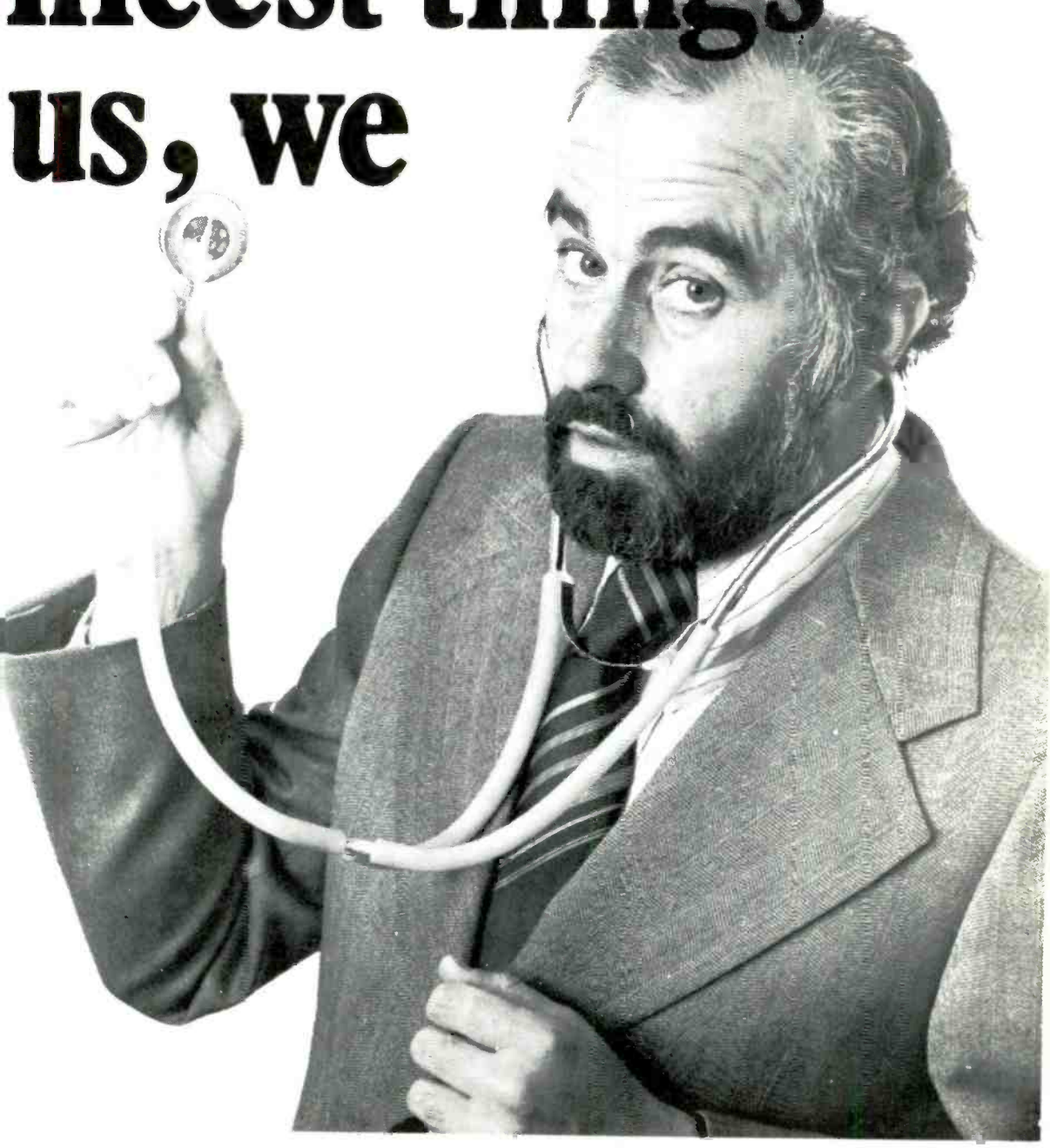

Point . . . Counterpoint

In 1966 I completed a fascinating NDEA (National Defense Education Act) graduate school project in which children in first grade were involved with puppets in the hope of improving the youngsters' oral capabilities. The main topic of "talk" chosen by the children as they made puppets "speak" was television programs. In particular, the puppets often "narrated" adventures from the then televised "Batman" program. In addition to increased verbal output, I noted that reluctant children, who were otherwise experiencing difficulties in reading and language arts, became eager learners when asked to read brief stories about "Batman" self-dictated to the teacher. The children paid unusually close attention to detail, listened more closely to other readers, read complex sentences, and attacked unknown and difficult words with great confidence. So interested did the children appear to be in the television-related reading materials developed, that those experiencing difficulty were happy to receive coaching from peers and teacher. In all, the children were willing to read stories whose vocabulary was drawn from oral dictation far more difficult than class texts.

—The New Season
By Rosemary Potter
Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co.

The role television has played in the national decline of reading and writing skills has not been precisely assessed—perhaps it never can be. But the nonverbal nature of the television experience, and the great involvement of children with television from their earliest years to the end of their school careers, makes a connection between television watching and inadequate writing skills seems inevitable . . .

"Perhaps the decline in reading and writing abilities of high school and college students today has occurred because certain basic verbal learnings usually acquired through reading have been neglected as a result of television watching."

"An awareness of television's potentially pathogenic influence on young children's way of thinking and behaving may lead parents to reconsider their acceptance of television as an inevitable part of their children's lives.

—The Plug-In Drug: Television, Children and the Family
By Marie Winn
(Viking Press)

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Media Medicine

By SHELDON LEWIS

Television coverage of health and medicine is booming—on the news, on TV specials, and on several regular health shows. And the viewing audience loves it. In response, the networks and local stations are assigning specialist reporters to medical beats—a few physicians have even stepped into the studio to get their messages across. *Medical Dimensions* talked with reporters, physicians, and network executives to find out from the inside about their approaches to and attitudes toward covering medicine.

A young pediatrician in a small New York State town was about to administer a smallpox injection to a year-old baby as part of a routine office visit in 1971. But the child's mother objected, questioning the necessity of the inoculation in view of a then-current controversy over whether they should be continued—particularly for infants under 18 months. The pediatrician firmly told the mother that he recommended smallpox vaccination for all infants. She was not persuaded, and he told her that the controversy was just a figment of someone's imagination. Surely, he argued, he would have heard about it if it were true, or if the Center for Disease Control had changed its recommendation. The mother assured her doctor that if he had not learned of the debate by the time of the child's next visit, she would allow the inoculation.

Next day, she mailed him a copy of a 1970 summary of proposed changes in the smallpox eradication program, clipped from *Medical World News*. By the day she returned to his office, *Time* magazine had picked up the story. The doctor handed the mother a copy of that piece and said simply, "This will explain why I no longer routinely recommend smallpox shots."

A leading gastroenterologist attached to a major teaching hospital was confronted by a long-time patient who worried about deep radiation treatments of the neck that she had received as a youngster. A piece on the CBS Evening News had indicated that patients who'd been so treated ran a higher risk of developing thyroid cancer. The doctor's response was candid: "You're telling me something I didn't know. I don't usually see the evening news. Are you sure you have it right?"

The impact of national television news programs is so great that such scenes are undoubtedly repeated in thousands of medical offices around the country. Though the public may distrust the news media to a certain extent, their growing concern for and interest in their own health and

welfare makes them tend to believe the news accounts they hear. After all, if the rest of the news is "true," why shouldn't it be true, for example, that a research team has discovered a way to transplant insulin-producing cells into diabetics?

Uncomfortable as it may be for a doctor to be confronted by a patient who seems aware of breakthroughs that haven't yet made it into the professional journals, chances are that the story the patient sees is correct. AMA media-watcher and public relations director Frank Campion gives the broadcast industry high marks for the accuracy of its medical coverage. Dr. Jay Dobkin, president of the Committee of Interns and Residents in New York, has viewed local coverage of medicine at close range and agrees with Campion. According to Dobkin, even independent local stations, which field only a few general assignment reporters, usually get the story straight.

But for the doctor—particularly the conscientious one trying to keep up in his own field—a patient who surprises him with the latest medical discovery or with news of an experimental treatment modality can be something of a threat. "I find it imperative to be absolutely candid with my patients," declares a young internist. "I can't possibly keep up in every aspect of medicine and still have time to practice. I just say I don't know about that. Then I make a few calls and get back to the patients and let them know what I've learned."

A few years ago, WNBC-TV's Frank Field, a pioneer in medical television reportage, did a film on the then comparatively new techniques of fiber-optic endoscopy, specifically colonoscopy. To this day, says a leading Manhattan endoscopist, just as he is about to launch into his explanation of what the procedure involves and what it allows him to determine, new patients will mention seeing Field's piece. When the colonoscopy story was first aired, however, it was not universally applauded. A senior radiologist with a national reputation got in touch with Frank Field and berated him for publicizing fiber-optic endoscopy. He argued that the procedure was unsafe, experimental, and could lead to "a perforated gut."

Today, though, fiber-optic endoscopy is an accepted diagnostic tool in the treatment of gastrointestinal disorders—and its ability to spare chronic patients repeated exposure to x-rays means its usage will probably continue to grow. The senior radiologist still isn't happy.

There are signs, however, that other physicians are more gracious about the phenomenon of increased television coverage of medicine. Shortly after Storm Field, a health and science specialist like his father Frank, but at local station, WABC-TV in New York, reported on orthroscopy, a diagnostic technique for joint diseases, he received several letters from physicians asking how they could learn more.

One physician even telephoned Field, thinking orthroscopy might be useful for one of his patients. Field was impressed by the responses to the

story—particularly by what he considers the doctors' courage in admitting their previous ignorance. "Doctors are not allowed not to know something," says Field.

The scenario of a patient confronting a doctor with tomorrow's journal headlines is a reality of medical practice to which doctors must adjust. On September 14, 1976, the six o'clock hour of the WNBC-TV local news included a medical spot on health and low tar cigarettes, and two medical features—one on a new breathalyzer as a diagnostic tool and one part of a series on mental retardation. Ten years ago, that much health news in one week, let alone in one hour, would have been unthinkable. "More attention is paid to medical news by the broadcast media than you had even three or four years ago," says the AMA's Frank Campion.

Certainly, though, you needn't be a TV addict to notice this change. Even an occasional viewer can see that almost every major city now offers some sort of medical news coverage.

Whoever is responsible, though, started a trend toward media medicine that has grown strong throughout the television industry—and shows no signs of fading.

"It's one of the hottest things going," says Charles Crawford, recently named health and science editor at WCBS-TV in New York. One of the few local newsmen in the country who cover health and science full time, Crawford is in a position to evaluate the success of health news. Most news, according to Crawford, particularly political news, has a negative ring. But medical news is generally good news, with its emphasis on new cures and breakthroughs. "Most of the health stories are upbeat," Crawford says, and have a "positive impact on the lives of our audiences."

Crawford wishes that more local stations had full-time health and science editors like himself. But nowadays even those that don't can cover medical news. Network-owned-and-operated stations do pool certain kinds of stories, and medical pieces are often among these.

In addition, some network-produced spots are syndicated among affiliates on a daily basis, and a slew of independent producers package short takes on health topics or medical news that are then sold in syndication to stations nationwide for inclusion in their local news programs. Crawford points out that health stories are especially suitable for syndication because, unlike political news, health news reports "could be as meaningful in Des Moines as in New York."

The fact that medical news *is* meaningful to the public hasn't been lost on the networks. In separate interviews, top executives of all three commercial networks indicated that they consider health news an important part of the total news package they offer. William Sheehan, vice president of ABC News, said the recent increase in this kind of coverage "stems from our recognition that [these stories] affect a lot of people in the way they live." [For several years, ABC has been the only network that has a full-time health and science editor/reporter.]

Richard C. Wald, Sheehan's counterpart at NBC, admits that he "has no personal deep interest in the subject. I'm not a frustrated doctor or anything." Nevertheless, under Wald's six-year stewardship, NBC has greatly expanded its attention to medicine, allied health areas, and medical consumer topics.

At CBS, however, according to deputy news director Sylvia Westerman, medical coverage is "intermittent at present." But she says the network plans to "beef up its coverage in that area . . . under a science reporting umbrella." Without a health and science specialist, COS cannot follow the broad, continuing stories in medicine or aggressively pursue the news of the latest breakthrough. Westerman candidly acknowledges that there are "advances in science and medicine that we don't know about until we read them somewhere else."

ABC's Sheehan argues that a network must have a specialist assigned to a medical beat in order to cover it properly. But just how much air time medical stories get—or if they get any—depends on what he calls the "ebb and flow" of the news in general.

And when medical events do become newsworthy, Sheehan warns, "you can't approach it on a commando basis." Not every medical story, for example, will be as perfectly suited for television as this summer's outbreak of Legionnaire's Disease was. For that, networks were able to detail reporters to cover the briefings, interview key medical personnel, profile the Center for Disease Control, attend victims' funerals, and talk with survivors. Generally, though, the typical television "commando approach" —swarming all over a breaking story with reporters on every aspect and film crews shooting lots of expensive footage—doesn't work well on medical stories. The controversy over the swine flu immunization program, for example, was simply not conducive to the standard approach of getting in, blanketing a story, and quickly moving on to the next news front.

Still, for the most part, the broadcast media rely on straight general assignment reporters to cover health. This means that the newsman may not understand the basic medical issues involved or be familiar with all the terms in his report. ABC's science editor Jules Bergman, who also covers medicine, is just the kind of specialist Sheehan feels is requisite. He dismisses much television coverage of medicine lightly. "In most cases," says Bergman, "people on the air don't know what they're talking about."

Are TV newsmen sufficiently qualified to present important medical information to the viewing public? "We assume our reporting staff to be competent enough to cover any area," says Sylvia Westerman. But doctors are frequently concerned that their patients receive medical news that is not only accurate, but *meaningful* as well. One West Coast physician expressed worry that TV may be devoting too much time to "health oddities and curiosities" rather than to "useful health segments."

In fact, network executives agree that medical coverage has a split per-

sonality, consisting of hard news—the cutting edge of medicine—and public health education. While a story on breast reconstruction following mastectomy is hard news, for example, a report on the techniques of breast self-examination would be considered educational.

Although the networks love to present health news because the public loves to get it, only NBC's Wald said he favored public health education, what he calls "news you can use." CBS's Westerman believes that health education's place is on public service announcements rather than on news programs. Education spots, she complains, would create a hard news broadcast full of little feature stories. Some such stories, though, do appear on the CBS Morning News, which generally carries more features. Nevertheless, she defends CBS Evening News spots that demonstrated the recently developed "Heimlich hug." "When it becomes a discovery, then it's a hard news story," says Westerman.

Considering the broadcast industry's preference for hard news, it's only natural that medicine is generally covered by experienced newsmen like Crawford and Bergman rather than by physicians. But reporters do, of course, use physicians as sources and on-camera interviews with experts are a regular fixture of medical news coverage.

Frank Campion of the AMA believes that some physicians could themselves excel as medical reporters. "You have to achieve a certain amount of communication," he says. "If a physician can do that, then you've got the ideal." Being able to refer to a reporter as "Doctor" may even boost the credibility of his report. A top NBC news executive, in fact, says that it probably does make some difference to the public that Frank Field, an optometrist, is referred to as "Doctor" on the air. Media consultant Magid points out that physicians may "lack the ability to articulate in lay language some of the things that the medical fraternity would like to communicate to the public. There is a tendency for some people in the profession to speak in medical language."

Both Bergman and Crawford feel strongly about leaving medical reporting to professional journalists. Bergman disapproves of "ophthalmologists and podiatrists pretending to be trained reporters." And Crawford says, "I'm very glad I'm not a doctor." Ever mindful of the viewing audience, Crawford explains the advantage of being a layman: "People treat you as if you know nothing. I will get a lay explanation rather than a technical one."

These two experts note that there are particular problems involved in reporting on so complex and specialized an area. Bergman spends a great deal of his time reading medical journals and talking with contacts at medical foundations to learn of the latest developments and check out the facts in his stories. "You do one or two stories a week if you're lucky," he says. And Crawford laments the fact that most health news spots are no longer than two-and-a-half minutes. "You can't tell as much as you'd like to," he says. At two-and-a-half minutes, though, a medical spot would

be one of the longest in a hour-long news show. Even the day's top story rarely gets as much as three minutes.

Much medical reporting centers around a breaking news story that has medical overtones. Pat Nixon's recent stroke, for example, found general assignment and health reporters interviewing specialists on the cause of and therapy for stroke. And in the case of a story like that, Crawford points out, the time between assignment and deadline is sometimes a limiting factor. Although the newsman might wish to confer with a large number of medical consultants, Crawford says, "he might have to live with just three or four views" because of deadline pressures. Usually, in fact, a medical report is built around an interview with only a single researcher or one research team.

Occasionally, a newsman will purposely tilt his story closer to public health education. In a recent spot on the reported dangers of mammography, for example, ABC's Bergman explained the difference between the new one-rad machines and the older, higher-rad machines. Bergman then urged women to have mammograms, but to ask their doctors about the level of radiation in the machines they were using.

Physicians who missed that report were undoubtedly surprised by the subsequent surge of interest in technical matters among past, present, and potential mammography candidates.

According to Bergman, "Mammography is the only way of lowering the death toll from breast cancer." But physicians who harbor their own doubts about its safety may have been upset by such a firm endorsement. Nevertheless, Bergman is proud of that report. "I took a strong editorial tack based on the known facts," he says. "We were praised for that. More and more in what we're doing, it is our responsibility to tell the viewer what he or she should do."

Refreshing as the strong advocacy approach to medical topics may be, the practice raises serious questions for both the broadcast and medical communities. Should newsmen really be giving medical advice to the public? Will advocacy reports eventually lead to their crossing professional lines and, in effect, running free medical schools for millions?

One way to avoid these problems, according to some, is to involve more actual physicians in the health education spots that are aired, still leaving hard news reporting to journalists.

One such on-the-air physician is Los Angeles gynecologist Dr. Arthur Ulene. Although Ulene appears regularly on the "Today" show, he refuses to think of himself as a medical reporter. "I'm practicing medicine on television," he says. "I don't cover medical events. I just don't do it." And Dr. Timothy Johnson of Boston, host of the half-hour show "House Call," believes that "there is too much news reporting about health." Since new medical theories continually rise and fall in the esteem of the medical community, Johnson favors more "interpretive medical reporting" that

attempts to "put into perspective what people are hearing about" and reflects "proven solid information."

Dr. Ulene claims he was prompted to go into television by a desire to reach a broader audience. Several years ago, Ulene discovered that nurse-practitioners he was training at the University of Southern California were not following basic self-help principles. In one class, only two of the 22 students were examining their own breasts each month, although all were clearly aware of the importance of that practice. Once they were taught, two of the students discovered malignancies. Dr. Ulene describes that experience as "the most important thing I had ever done in medicine." And since those 22 students were just a fraction of the total population, Ulene turned to television for a wider reach; first on KABC in Los Angeles, later on NBC.

Ulene's "California-style" approach to media medicine focuses on life-style rather than disease. He emphasizes self-help, "simple basic things people can do for themselves"—like how to care for their hair, recover from a heart attack, or lose weight sensibly. Ulene says he won't cover a subject unless he can "tell people something they can do afterwards." For that reason, although he feels that loneliness is an ailment suffered by millions, he hasn't planned to discuss it on the air.

Ulene's viewers have responded to his spots enthusiastically. He reports that 100,000 women have requested a brochure on the breast self-exam that he offered during a broadcast, and that a series on weight loss brought in three million brochure requests.

Ulene, however, is not the only health personality to be swamped by viewer requests for literature. Says Frank Field, "You only have to suggest that they can get a booklet and the mail starts coming in by the truckload." When NBC offered a diet brochure to complement Field's month-long weight loss effort, the supply was exhausted within a week. And instructions for the Heimlich hug proved so popular that Field had to ask people during a broadcast to stop sending in for them. Instead, he has repeated his demonstration several times with NBC anchormen and various guests.

Even when Ulene began appearing frequently on TV, he continued to treat private patients, a practice that one official at a major medical school questions as a possible ethical conflict. But AMA spokesman Campion says that the appearance on television of a physician in private practice doesn't automatically constitute a breach of medical ethics—"if the doctor's genuine motive is health education." Campion does stress, however, AMA guidelines prohibiting on-the-air solicitation of patients.

While Dr. Timothy Johnson is not in private practice, he is on staff at a Boston area hospital and is director of lay health information at Harvard Medical School. More experienced at discussing medical topics on television than most doctors—or reporters—Johnson began doing medical

features in 1966 in Albany, New York, where he worked in a hospital emergency room.

In Boston, on the ABC affiliate KCVB-TV, Johnson does three health segments a week for the news and a thrice-yearly hour-long special in addition to his popular "House Call" show. Telecast in midweek prime time, "House Call" attracts nearly 15 percent of the viewers for its time slot. Each week, the show focuses on a particular medical topic—arthritis, kidney stones, obesity and the like—and features a guest specialist from a Boston medical school.

First, Dr. Johnson "interrogates" his guest about the topic. Then, using such visual aids as slides, models, and x-ray films, they explain possible causes and cures of the disease-of-the-week. The format then switches to include questions phoned in by viewers at home.

A third media physician, Dr. Neil Solomon, is a kind of one-man health industry. A former Ohio State Golden Gloves boxing champ, the sharp-witted Dr. Solomon has a hectic public schedule that is a far cry from most doctors' lives. Solomon and his wife host a weekly half-hour show on WBAL-TV in Baltimore, "Prescription for Family Health." But he also interviews a health professional each week over WCAO radio, writes popular books on weight control, and turns out a syndicated newspaper medical advice column—all while holding down the job as secretary of health and mental hygiene for the state of Maryland.

In this capacity, Solomon oversees 15,000 employees, a $2 billion budget, eleven state commissioners, and all the health services in the state.

Dr. Solomon feels that his broadcasts perform a valuable public service. "It's wrong to keep the patient in the dark about anything," he says, adding that if people are educated about health, "they can make the best decisions" about their own health care. "Everyone can be an ancillary medic," says Solomon, "a paraprofessional." Solomon's broadcasts are done live, which makes for a good deal of unexpected humor, often from the outspoken host himself. And they bring up questions about "taboos" in television medical coverage.

A woman once phoned the TV studio to ask whether her husband's penchant for involving sauerkraut in their lovemaking indicated a psychological disturbance. In answer, Solomon simply wondered if the sauerkraut might not cause gas and diminish his pleasure. And during a radio discussion of impotence, Solomon's guest expert mentioned a surgical device that a man could wear to retain a permanent erection. Dr. Solomon quipped that it might cause problems with closing doors in crowded elevators. It is doubtful that a newsman without Solomon's medical credentials and political prestige would be permitted to continue on the air had he made that remark.

In fact, though Solomon's rather risque jests would have probably meant

the show's immediate cancellation a few years ago, a frank public discussion of impotence would have been equally unheard-of. In the recent past, in fact, one of Frank Field's spots was pulled off the air simply because it contained the word "urine." Frank Campion says, "I'm old enough to remember when mentioning of syphilis and gonorrhea was just not done. You didn't see it in the papers and you sure didn't hear it on radio."

Today, obviously, the situation has changed dramatically. Venereal disease has become just one more health topic in the parade of televised medical information.

"The willingness to deal openly and frankly with the subject is a product of the times," says ABC News Vice President Sheehan. And according to him, two subjects that have been greatly affected by changing times are cancer and death. Sheehan attributes greater frankness about breast cancer to the highly publicized mastectomies of Happy Rockefeller and Betty Ford. "The fact is that people just didn't talk about that until recently," Sylvia Westerman concurs. "But as soon as they began to, we began to report it."

Richard Wald of NBC contends that "no topics are considered taboo for television. The problem is how you treat it, not what you are talking about." Despite Wald's bold assertion, many newsmen and physicians can rattle off a list of medical scenes that audiences are not likely to see on the home screen any time soon—sigmoidiscopy or artificial insemination, for example, although these are extreme visual examples. Wald points out another consideration. "Sometimes it is a question of goriness," he says. "There are a lot of surgical procedures you can't show."

Just what those procedures are, though, seems to be constantly changing. New York local television news programs have shown a film of a vasectomy during the dinner hour—an occasion all the local health reporters remember well.

Frank Field and his NBC film crew have aired a live kidney transplant. Even the possibility that the patient might not survive didn't deter the network from running it. Fortunately, the patient pulled through and, as a result, the televised surgery produced 5,000 viewer requests for donor cards. On the other hand, a series of sex therapists scheduled to run on the evening news was mysteriously discontinued after only one segment was shown.

Not everyone in the broadcast industry agrees with Richard Wald about the suitability of all medical topics for news coverage. At Wald's own network, they remember, an exposed female breast was taboo on television until only a few months before Betty Ford's mastectomy. Even today, says one high NBC executive, "seeing masses of exposed flesh on the air somehow makes me nervous. I'm just not sure it is all that necessary to have those live pictures or that mini-cam on the scene in the burn ward after a plane crash."

It is an article of faith among journalists that a story should be personalized for the audience whenever possible. But video coverage of medicine is one area in which depersonalization seems highly preferable.

"I don't think you show an incision on the air. It causes people anguish," says Earl Ubell, former news director at WNBC-TV, now the network's special events producer. Ubell finds that showing a needle breaking the skin is equally disturbing. Ironically, though, Ubell believes that a complicated open heart surgery can be shown. But to be considered in good taste, he adds, the operation should be treated "in an abstract manner. If you show a chest open, the heart beating," Ubell says it is acceptable—"if you don't show the rest of the body.

"There are very few things I wouldn't show," Ubell concludes. One of those things would be sexual intercourse, but he adds, "I'm not against showing genitalia on the air—provided the rest of the body is not shown."

What does get cleared through to the air waves differs from station to station, depending on the personal standards of the decisionmakers. A story on the sex-change operation of Dr. Renee (Richard Raskind) Richards, points up a recent example.

"We're not going to put on graphically the actual pictures of the operational procedures involved in transforming a man into a woman," says Charles Crawford. "It's not necessary to be that visually definitive." But Earl Ubell claims he would show those pictures.

While television may be squeamish at times about highly graphic films of surgery, it has no qualms at all about digging into an aspect of medicine that the professional community has traditionally declined to discuss—the politics of health and research funding and medical priorities. The taxpayer's money is often involved in medical news and that puts medical policy on almost the same news footing as school lunch programs and the B-1 bomber controversy.

"You have to distinguish between strict medical and scientific informational reporting and what you would call the socio-economics of medicine," says Frank Campion. In recent years, while the AMA has given medical science reporting praise for accuracy and public service, it has formally objected to television specials like NBC's "What Price Health?" and CBS's "Don't Get Sick in America." Campion asserts that medical information was *not* the name of those games.

For the general assignment reporter, though, who is used to looking at the broad aspects of the story he's covering and then personalizing it for the viewer, the inequities of the health care delivery system are an inviting target. The paraplegic mother who can no longer get to the hospital conveniently because the neighborhood institution has closed evokes a reflex sympathy. The city ambulance system that appears to be part of an unholy alliance with outside parties is almost a straight story to a TV reporter. Industrial physicians who decline to comment on the incidence of cancer

at a plant that manufactures a known carcinogen raise obvious questions about the relationships of doctors to their employers—and to the larger society.

Stories where the covenant of silence within the medical profession is greatest are just the kind of stories that most intrigue the journalist covering medicine's social apsects: Who gets the best medical treatment and why? What impact has the prevalence of third-party payers—including Medicare and Medicaid—had on the quality of health among Americans? What has their impact been on inflation? Where is the waste and duplication in hospitals?

The disabled physician who continues to practice is rarely exposed by the medical community—usually, the media ask the questions. Why is there a proliferation of expensive and infrequently used equipment at several local hospitals when regional planning might suggest a different—and more economical—distribution of technology?

Richard Wald remembers vividly the response to a series of NBC reports questioning the efficacy of some cancer and heart research groups, and asking whether some of their studies weren't repetitive. The competition among researchers for funds was simplified so that patterns of parallel activity clearly emerged.

Not surprisingly, the medical community didn't like the pieces. But Wald defends the network decision to run them. "Some of the hospitals were upset we raised the question," he says, "but it is a perfectly reasonable area of public inquiry."

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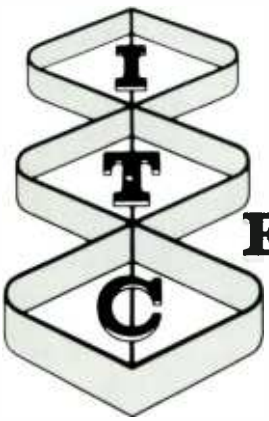

ENTERTAINMENT

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Making Violence Obsolete

By DAVID LEVY

Once upon a time, an idealist wrote: "It is the responsibility of television to bear constantly in mind that the audience is primarily a *home* audience, and consequently that television's relationship to the viewers is that between guest and host . . .

"Television and all who participate in it are jointly accountable to the American public for respect for the special needs of children, for community responsibility, for the advancement of education and culture, for the acceptability of the program materials chosen, for decency and decorum in production, and for propriety in advertising. This responsibility cannot be discharged by any given group of programs, but can be discharged only through the highest standards of respect for the American home, applied to *every moment* of *every program* presented by television."

Who wrote it? A member of the PTA? Of the AMA? A television critic?

No. It was written by a committee of TV broadcasters.

It was part of the preamble of the Television Code of the National Association of Broadcasters. A funny thing happened to that clause as the years passed from the 6th Edition of the Code, 1960, through the 19th Edition, 1976. It just disappeared.

In its place is a substitute commandment: "They (the broadcasters) are obligated to bring their positive responsibility for professionalism and reasoned judgment to bear upon all those involved in the development, production and selection of programs."

What happens to station violators of code injunctions whether the programs originate from the networks or from local sources?

Nothing.

Unless a member station is concerned about losing the modest privilege of showing the official seal of the Code at the end of the evening—in most cases, well after midnight.

Perhaps, as some have argued, the time may be at hand when the Code Authority, free of network participation, should be given meaningful power to enforce the Code; when Code representatives, alone, should make the judgement on what is, or what is not, an acceptable broadcast interpretation.

An ancient legal maxim states: "No man should be a judge in his own cause." Yet, the networks and their subscriber stations to the NAB Code

employ large staffs, each staff making its own interpretations of the standards set forth by the Code Authority.

The net result of this internal self policing of network programming has been a growing permissiveness which, to some, reduces the Code to an absurdity. Others are disturbed because they believe the relaxation of the Code provides an invitation to a host of interested parties of concerned citizens—all bent on changing some aspects of the present system—to attack the networks.

In the Bible it is said: "There ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." That little cloud has recently revealed its power and its voice through the 6,500,000 members of the PTA. It makes little sense for the networks and broadcasters to attack the PTA for criticizing program judgment, or to label the organization as a self-appointed censor, not when the very Code of the NAB proclaims that "All viewers should make their criticisms and positive suggestions about programming and advertising known to the broadcast licensee—" and further, "They (broadcasters) should affirmatively *seek out* responsible representatives of all parts of their communities so that they may structure a broad range of programs that will inform, enlighten the total audience."

In this case, of course, it has been the PTA that has, on its own initiative, injected itself into the issue of program quality—specifically, into curtailing violence.

In order to achieve their objectives, the PTA is setting up training courses at twelve centers across the country where members will be taught methods of monitoring programs and of reaching local stations. The new enterprise, set in motion by the PTA, will be undertaken at once, with a probationary period, from June, 1977 until January, 1978. Networks are urged to make changes consistent with PTA objectives. If their objectives are not reached there is an ominous threat of boycotts against advertisers supporting violent programs, and of challenges to holders of TV licenses.

Changes consistent with the avowed aims of the PTA have long been under consideration at the three networks. Robert T. Howard, President of the NBC Television Network, took the lead some time ago, when he announced that NBC, as a matter of basic policy, would begin to cut back the number of violent programs carried by NBC. ABC and CBS officials have similarly indicated that there will be fewer contemporary action-adventure programs on the air in the 1977–78 season. These actions, it should be noted, are the result of genuine concern over the proliferation of this genre, not anxiety over waning ratings.

There has been added anxiety over the criticism of TV violence by another voice—the advertiser.

When such giants as General Motors, McDonald's, Schlitz, Sears Roebuck, and Eastman Kodak express their dismay by withdrawing advertising support from programs deemed overly violent, even if there are other

advertisers ready to assume their place, network officials take note. As Archa Knowlton, director of media services for General Foods said in the *Wall Street Journal*, "A blood-and-guts environment is a terrible place to put a commercial for Jello".

Networks have not been indifferent to this growing concern over violence.

In a recent issue of "Television/Radio Age" it was reported that a study by CBS showed that "the three networks combined had 24% less violence in the '75–'76 season than in the previous one, with CBS alone having 35% less." It would be safe to assume that the '76–'77 season has seen a further diminution of violence.

Yet, the problem persists. The American Medical Association has just passed a resolution that states: "TV's massive daily diet of symbolic violence and crime is an environmental hazard" and further that its use should be declared "a risk factor threatening the health and welfare of young Americans."

The AMA's *Journal* recently published an article by Dr. Michael B. Rothenberg of the University of Washington, which asserts that the average American child will have witnessed some 18,000 murders on TV by the time he has finished high school. Nicholas Johnson, former member of the FCC, and now president of the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting, has mounted a highly publicized campaign based on body counts of violent acts, and on identifying those advertisers whose dollars support violent network programs.

It would seem that the time has come to moderate the rhetoric, cool the passions and end the "body count" on violence. The acrimony is now counter-productive.

We all know that there is violence. It's been there for years. It has been called television's cancer, and it has clearly taken some of the lustre from the medium's good name.

One can deplore the violence and still feel gratitude to the TV industry. All things considered, quality remains high. We can point to such programs as *60 Minutes, The Waltons, Roots, Eleanor and Franklin* and *Jesus of Nazareth* . . .

But this hard truth remains: no network official and no advertiser—except, perhaps, manufacturers of hand guns who get a free ride on TV every night—can defend the moral values in scenes of brutality, murder, mayhem and general savagery.

Finally, advertisers are crying, "Enough!"

Don Johnston, president of J. Walter Thompson Company, cited, recently, that one of the "most alarming" statistics of a survey conducted by his company indicated that 25 percent of the respondents "said they would approve of the government taking an active role in controlling TV violence."

Mr. Johnston expressed his sympathy for the networks "caught between an apparent appetite for violence in major parts of their audience and the protest against that violence." He added further that, "I am convinced on the basis of these figures and others that we all have something to worry about both as marketers and as corporate citizens."

Network officials have firm policies that prohibit the *excessive* use of violence on their programs, but the interpretation of what is or is not excessive varies. There is, however, near unanimity in most quarters about the central issue: there is simply too much violence on the air no matter how well justified individual violent actions may be in the development of a particular story.

* * *

The new schedules of the three networks, shortly to be announced as this article was being prepared, are expected to show a diminution in the number of contemporary action-adventure series. In the course of the 1977–1978 season it is likely, too, based upon the public statements of the network leadership, that more exacting ground rules will be in effect with respect to the incidents of violence within each episode.

Network prime time may, in fact, be witnessing the beginning of the end for network "crime time." Whether this is by accident or design—by network recognition of silent viewer action taken at the channel selector—the result may be significant.

A factor that exacerbates the violence problem is that action-adventure shows are a natural for late evening. The Family Hour, whatever its motives, was, regrettably, responsible for the concentration of contemporary action-adventure programs into the last two hours of prime time, thereby creating the heavy impact of "crime time."

Network scheduling decisions, which basically restrict the exhibition of contemporary action-adventure programs to the two hour period of 9:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m., bring about a pattern of block programming. This long established practice—wherein a successful type of program is almost inevitably followed by a similar program—a pattern that creates a flow of audience that has for its purpose the protection of the audience numbers acquired by a successful show, helps create the tonnage of crime drama. Since crime drama plays better in one hour form, two such programs scheduled back to back make such action-adventure extremely visible.

There are various practical ways in which crime shows can be significantly diminished without doing harm to any one of the three networks. One such way is to let each network respond on its own to the growing avalanche of criticism coming from the Surgeon General's office, from academia, from public bodies such as the PTA, and from the world of commerce. All three networks, to this observer, are responding in new directions which should soon meet with general approval from the various critics.

There is, also, a public avenue that is open to the networks. This method would permit the networks to make use of the government by taking united, voluntary action, with only the action of meeting to settle an issue approved of in advance by the Justice Department. Such advance approval would free the networks from the possible charge of conflict with the anti-trust laws. No approval would be sought for the decisions which might emanate from such discussions.

The networks, according to published reports, used exactly this approach when they recently questioned the Department of Justice on the matter of their taking concerted action which would have permitted them jointly to pool resources in assuming the costs of broadcasting the 1980 Olympics. The Justice Department maintains a business review procedure which permits dominant corporations, within an industry, to ascertain in advance whether such actions will compel legal response from the Department.

Even an interested party—the PTA, a General Foods along with other major business concerns, a J. Walter Thompson and other top advertising agencies—could join the networks in approaching the Justice Department for obtaining such an advance ruling; once obtained the three networks (and the NAB) could hold a joint conference. What such a conference might possibly lead to, as a minimum consequence, is a set of general guidelines, for instance:

(1) a prohibition against back-to-back crime time programming by any one network (action which would break up the concentration of "crime time" programs in the nine to eleven time periods),

(2) a limitation of a single crime program series to one and a half hours maximum duration.

(3) a limitation of the number of time periods per week per network for such programs—perhaps three or four—to commence by a mutually agreed upon date—perhaps by the start of the 1978–1979 season.

This voluntary action, free of the charge of censorship, would give the networks sufficient time to develop new program formats for the 1978 season as well as provide opportunity for current producers of such programs to turn their creative resources toward new forms.

It should also satisfy the social critics of television who see dramatized violence as damaging to society. It should receive the approval of advertisers who find the advertising of their goods and services often incompatible within programs of contemporary violence. And it should win the applause of responsible public groups as a statesmanlike move to improve the general quality of network programming.

* * *

If the violence issue could be resolved by voluntary joint action of the three networks with the advance approval of the Justice Department's antitrust division, a new method—*a new structure of social machinery*—

will have been created by which the networks could find solutions to other network-industry problems. Such joint meetings would permit the networks to take united actions which would enhance the general welfare without subjecting any one of them to unfair competition from the others.

This proposed solution will not end all of the problems of television violence. But it is a beginning, and it would eliminate some major time areas where the sound and fury of violence would vanish, and that would be an achievement, to many, of real significance. Greater achievements for the improvement of television programming lie ahead, but as a start, the beneficiaries of this first proposed joint industry move would include the viewing public, the broadcasting industry, and the advertisers who finance it, in short, just about everyone.

A third door is now open to the networks. Recently, all three television network presidents, Fred Pierce for ABC, Robert Wussler for CBS, and Robert T. Howard for NBC, met with representatives of the Caucus for Producers, Writers, and Directors. The Caucus is an organization representing a broad spectrum of the creative community which creates and produces network television programs. The group was organized in line with its basic aims and objectives "for the purpose of assuming a more direct responsibility to the American viewing public."

Its primary objective is to "be concerned with fundamental industry issues that transcend the specific interests and functions of the Guilds."

Caucus members include many of the leading creative voices responsible for primetime entertainment—Leonard Stern, Harve Bennett, George Eckstein, Alan Courtney, Norman Felton, Ed Friendly, Jackie Cooper, Roy Huggins, Gene Roddenberry, William Blinn, Robert Radnitz —to name but a few.

Under the leadership of the Chairman of the Caucus, Charles W. Fries, three Caucus-Network Relations Committees, composed of members of each network and representative members of the Caucus have been formally set up. These committees will, for the first time, bring into being a new industry structure of social machinery which will permit the creative community, along with the leadership of the three networks, to explore leading issues which affect the television industry.

The subject of TV violence and what to do about it is one which affects the well being of the networks as well as the producers and creators responsible for the production of programs of all types. Out of the interaction of such debates within the industry, at top levels, some constructive achievements for the good of the industry, the men and women who work in it, and for the public which the industry serves, are likely to occur.

Fred Pierce, president of ABC Television, in a recent speech before the Hollywood Radio & Television Society, announced that an informal Symposium would take place in June, under the aegis of the network, to which a broad representation of the Hollywood creative community would be

invited. Not only would the network top echelon participate, but members of the Board of Governors of ABC's affiliates would also be present. Mr. Pierce described the Symposium as a forum in which there would be a "candid, uninhibited free exchange of ideas, problems, and interests between producers, directors, writers and a broad range of ABC management—as well as representatives of our affiliate body."

Which leads us to Sex.

No one, to my knowledge, has ever raised the question of why sex and violence are linked as questionable areas of programming, with the exception of producer/writer William Froug, who discussed this linkage as one of dubious merit in the first *Newsletter* published by the Caucus.

But sex, and all of its attendant connotations, seems likely to replace violence as the next big debatable issue in network television.

Daily Variety already sees a new "cloud" on the horizon. In its April 18 issue, it pointed out that although "the PTA action (vis-à-vis violence) may be a belated rear-guard response to the gradually dwindling number of action shows, the severe penalties recommended by the PTA may have a lasting effect . . . against the industry for years to come. If, as some project, sex replaces roughhousing on TV, the industry may be in for another trip to the woodshed."

Sex is getting to be more explicit on television, whether it's the sometimes raunchy language once prohibited by the networks (and in many homes still off-limits), or the indulging in overt physical acts of questionable propriety. Profanity and occasional near nudity are becoming a part of the television scene—with total nudity implicit in scenes in some recent dramas.

"Charlie's Angels" may well result in television offering more and more scantily clad young, nubile women. To some this will be a welcome relief from watching a parade of corpses strewn across the TV screen. To others it will be condemned as still another attack on acceptable community standards. These latter standards are hard to define and vary from one section of the country to another, indeed from one section of a city to another, and even from one home to another.

This places a burden on all those who deal in the mass media. The motion picture business, when it was threatened with extinction by the development of television, abandoned all pretense to a production code which had once served the industry well, and set up its grading of pictures under the G, PG, R, and X labels. Magazines, in similar response to television's inroads on their revenues, tossed out past rules of editorial judgment, and now openly feature pictures and copy designed to titillate the most primitive of instincts—in short, they have for some, substantially vulgarized their product.

Television, in its own response, has inserted warnings intended to guide viewers as to the so-called maturity of some productions.

The problem, to many observers, is that the television home is not a Hollywood movie house, a Broadway theater, or a Las Vegas night club. There are 71,000,000 homes with TV sets according to Nielsen; nearly half of these homes have at least two sets. The TV set in the average home is in use during the peak season for 6 hours and 49 minutes. The Family Hour, far from turning viewers off, actually increased audiences from the spring of 1973 to the spring of 1975 by 12%. That figure alone should serve as another cloud looming up over the horizon; it indicates that the American TV audiences *liked* the clean, cheerful Family Hour concept. Even so sophisticated an observer as Frank Sinatra—commenting in a recent interview in TV Guide on song lyrics and magazines said, "I loathe what they're doing in many of these lyrics. If disc jockeys had any class they wouldn't play them. Same with magazines. Kids can wander in and read them. I'm not implying that we should become book burners. But we need decency somehow."

"Community standards" are hard to define. So is obscenity. So are such terms as right, decent, and good. Yet, somehow, the public common sense has an awareness of these hard to define areas—which is why groups of public minded citizens have attacked the proliferation of TV violence. And why, if the final authorities in television fail to heed them, there will be similar protestations on the gradual disintegration of standards with respect to nudity, profanity, and programs containing other elements of dubious taste.

Television is too pervasive a medium to permit any individual to cloak himself in the First Amendment as he gives voice to his private, personal quirks and notions. His answer to those who would seek to restrain him within tolerable limits—"Turn me off!" Their response—"You shouldn't be there in the first place."

Within these two virtually irreconcilable positions the proposed ABC Symposium may seek some guidance and offer some solution. There were great magazines before "Playboy," great motion pictures before many of the violent and permissive films of today, great TV comedies before *MARY HARTMAN*.

The forces which once shaped our society, which encouraged and nurtured our culture—the school, the church, the state, and the press—have been joined by a fifth force, perhaps the most influential of all—television—quietly chipping away at the others for almost 7 hours a day in virtually all of our homes.

Perhaps, it's time that those in television recognize even more their enormous social responsibility—as being the most influential force in shaping our society—in influencing today's children who must eventually lead that society. Perhaps, some will argue, it's time that the ultimate decisions of what is to enter the minds of our children not be dictated by

what serves the interest of advertisers, by what kinds of programs achieve the highest number of prospective purchasers of goods and services.

There are those, both in and out of the television field, who claim it's time to examine the system that determines the kind of programming that goes on the air. There are those, too, who insist that it's time we establish national goals for television, goals that will do more to open up the vast storehouse of culture available.

A new Television Industry Committee has just come into being, composed of outstanding producers (all of whom are members of the Caucus) including James Komack, Aaron Spelling, Lee Rich, Grant Tinker, Norman Lear, David Gerber, and Danny Arnold and key executives of the major studios. This committee was formed after conferences between some of its members and a group from the N.A.B. This new Television Industry Committee will organize its own campaign to counter various attacks on television. The N.A.B. intern will set up meetings between the Television Industry Committee and representatives of the P.T.A. and a wide range of other public groups.

All of this bodes well for the public interest since issues of great concern will be studied from many points of view. With a new allegiance between industry producers and the N.A.B., the voice of the producers and studio leaders hopefully will be heard.

To this observer the actions of such Industry Committee, if it is to achieve public support, call for considerate reaction to those, like the P.T.A., interested solely in the social effects of television programs and policies, both local and network.

As the new Television Industry Committee begins to function, as the Caucas-Network Relation Committees begin their dialogue, as the upcoming ABC Symposium listens to a variety of voices, perhaps all should heed the words of Isaiah:

"Come now, and let us reason together."

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Fresh Light on a Legal Snarl—What's Behind the "Restrictive Practice Charge?"

By JAMES ARONSON

The Federal Communications Commission in mid-April issued a quietly-worded policy statement rejecting a petition by the Westinghouse Broadcasting Company to require the three television networks to screen prime-time programs for affiliates four weeks in advance.

That in itself was hardly earth-shattering news. But for those in the industry who find a perverse pleasure in slogging through the righteous language of petitions and proposals before the FCC, the statement had special significance: it may prove to be a barometer for FCC comments scheduled for delivery soon about a variety of subjects of deep concern to the industry. Chief among them is "network dominance."

The FCC in fact is looking into a wide range of charges and countercharges engulfing ABC, NBC, CBS and their affiliates dealing with "restrictive practices" and "programming discretion." Add to this an inquiry by the Justice Department that could lead to divestiture by the networks of some of their owned-and-operated stations. On top of that, the communications subcommittees of both House and Senate are gearing for hearings on changes in a Federal Communications Act which has straddled the technological and economic development of the telecommunications industry with archaic codes and codicils. And to pile Pelion upon Ossa there will be two FCC vacancies for President Carter to fill this summer with the departure of Benjamin Hooks for the chairmanship of the NAACP and the expiration of the term of Chairman Richard Wiley.

Much of this activity in the Washington-New York axis flows from the Westinghouse petition dated September 3, 1976, urging the FCC to review the role and function of the three networks in these areas:

- To assess the impact of increases in scheduled network programming on affiliated stations and their service to the public.

• To review current network practices to determine whether they limit or prevent the stations from judging in advance the propriety and merit of network-offered programs, particularly for sex, crime and violence.

• To inquire whether unilateral network action forestalls an increase in compensation to affiliates in the face of expanding network programming and profits and increased local station costs.

• To promulgate a rule requiring the networks to permit previews of network programs by the affiliates with sufficient headway to allow for substituting alternate programs for those deemed unsuitable.

Last January the FCC posted a carefully-phrased notice of inquiry. The notice said the FCC was seeking only the facts. But it made clear that it was aware of the delicate nature of the task—the first large-scale inquiry into network practices in many years (the last, according to Westinghouse, was the so-called Barrow Report of 1957, which took its name from Roscoe L. Barrow, dean of the University of Cincinnati Law School). The Commission vote was 7-0.

The FCC noted that network programming accepted by affiliates had risen from 50 per cent in 1960 to over 66 per cent in 1976. In the same period network profits rose from $33.6 million to $208 million. For its part, Westinghouse asserted that affiliate compensation from such programming in the same time span had dropped from 23 per cent to 13 per cent. (Parenthetically, it is fair to note that 13 per cent of $208 million is considerably larger than 23 per cent of $33 million.)

Commenting on the Westinghouse petition, Donald H. McGannon, Group W's chairman of the board, gallantly recognized the networks' contribution "to the industry and the general public" and found no fault with "the system and structure of commercial television, as originally conceived." What he sought was "an appropriate balance of power and responsibility," with naturally "the public interest being the overriding consideration." He worried about a "*unilateral* decision" (his emphasis) to expand network evening news coverage at the "expense of audience-preferred local news," the "excessive amount of violence and adult material" in prime-time programs, the "threatened takeover" of scarce local time, and "the distortions of economic relationships for over a decade."

In response the networks in November 1976 insisted that they did not get programs from suppliers far enough in advance to comply with the four-week preview demand. Somewhat acidly, they suggested that the proposed schedule was much more in the interest of *TV Guide*'s deadlines than in the public interest. They noted that plans for increased evening news time had either been abandoned or set for a distant future. They cited their efforts to reduce the crime-and-violence content of prime-time shows, complained of "assumptions" rather than "facts" in the West-

inghouse petition, and of errors in the presentation. They opposed an FCC inquiry and thundered against rule-making in the areas proposed by Westinghouse.

Last November also, the Justice Department entered the lists with a comment that if the Westinghouse allegations were borne out, "they would raise serious issues both as a matter of communications policy and of antitrust policy." Justice recommended that the FCC set up a "task force" to issue subpoenas for testimony and comments to help interested persons frame recommendations to the FCC. Thus the lines were drawn.

Then, in mid-April, the FCC issued its preliminary comment on the four-week preview bid. While it rejected the idea of immediate "rule-making," the FCC, however, did not dismiss the preview issue. Rather, it said that Westinghouse had presented no compelling reasons for separating the issue from the FCC's overall review of network policy. And even as it seemed to rebuff Westinghouse, the agency "encouraged" the networks to make their programs available to affiliates as early as possible.

That's the way things stood as this issue of Television Quarterly went to press. Much interest was focused on the extended FCC comments scheduled for May and the industry responses in June. But it was unlikely that the exchange would resolve any of the issues immediately. Final policy more likely would be set later in the year, perhaps by an FCC at full strength with the new Carter appointees.

As background material, excerpts of the Westinghouse petition and attachments and the CBS response are published below.

The Westinghouse Position

The FCC's last major study of television network broadcasting was completed nearly 20 years ago. Since then, the relationship between television networks and their affiliates has undergone significant restructuring. The networks have altered their basic mode of operation from sales of sponsored or co-sponsored programs to sales of participating announcements; they have gained complete control of the form and content of network programming eliminating roles previously played by advertisers and their agencies; and they have inexorably expanded their programming into time periods previously left to affiliated

stations—without fairly compensating the stations for the additional time taken.

This restructuring and expansion has, in turn, led to a dramatic shift in the relative balance of power between networks and stations. The quasi-partnerships which once existed between network and affiliates have now all but dissolved. Major decisions on expansion of the network schedule, the content of programming and compensation to affiliated stations are now made unilaterally by the networks . . . who are trying to change local stations into mere extensions of the national network program pipeline.

* * *

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the amount of violence and adult content in network prime time entertainment programming. Standards of acceptability for television programming obviously vary across the country and, as a result, individual broadcasters obviously have different standards and concepts as to what is undesirable in program content. Under present conditions, there is little a local affiliate can do to deal with network programming it feels may be objectionable. In the first place, affiliates are not consulted as to the content or make-up of network program schedules during the developmental process. Second, and more critical, the affiliate has no way to preview particular episodes of many network programs to determine acceptability under his local standards.

There is no reason why network program suppliers could not meet earlier deadlines to accommodate review by affiliates. One suspects the networks wish to avoid this because it might lead to some reduction in clearances.

The lack of any meaningful input into network programming coupled with the inability to properly preview programs prior to broadcast make it virtually impossible for the affiliate to carry out its responsibility, imposed by the Commission, for program selection.

* * *

Over the past 10 years (1965–1975), the three networks have increased their net income more than 300 per cent. Network earnings have now grown to a point where for the past three years they have accounted for an average of 43 per cent of all profits in this 700-station industry.

Further, the networks exercise complete control over compensation payments to their affiliates. When combined with their own income, Group W estimates the networks receive or effectively control the distribution of more than two-thirds of all income in television.

The dramatic growth in network profits is attributable to the increased profitability of networking (as distinguished from "owned and operated" stations). Until 1971, the 15 network "O & O" stations combined generated more income than the network operations of these organizations. That situation has changed sharply in recent years. Income from network operations has averaged nearly twice that of "O & O" stations between

1973 and 1975. This profitability, in turn, has been substantially at the expense of the station affiliates.

Closely related to the growth in network profits is the disturbing expansion in network influence over major facets of the national advertising market. First, increased network programming combined with the reduction in the basic network commercial time unit from 60 to 30 seconds have increased the inventory of available network advertising time by 65 per cent since 1967.

Coupled with the more basic change in network sales from program-length time periods to commercial length messages, the networks have moved directly into competition with the national spot advertising market. Second, by refusing to increase station compensation payments, the networks have limited a major expense element in their operation. Thus, they have achieved the ability to undersell their affiliates in the *national spot* advertising market.

As a direct result, the growth in network sales to advertisers in recent years has been significantly sharper than the growth of national and regional sales by individual stations. If these trends continue unabated, station revenue will become increasingly dependent on local sales efforts and the disparity between the economic positions of the networks and their affiliates will increase even more.

* * *

From 1969 to 1975, network income skyrocketed by 124.9 per cent while network compensation to stations increased only 1.7 per cent.

There is no logical or reasonable justification for the growing disparity in the relative network and station shares derived from networking. Operating costs of stations in recent years have increased in roughly the same proportion as the broad economic indices. And, there has been a corresponding increase in the value of station time, as indicated by the rising costs of both network and spot advertising time.

While, in many instances, network compensation can mean the difference between success and failure, between profit and loss for a local station, the typical affiliate has no real choice in the matter. There is no practical alternative to continuing the relationship, even on disadvantageous terms, because no other viable source of programming exists for most stations.

Furthermore, it is not the affiliated stations but the public which will ultimately suffer most if present trends persist. Most affiliated stations will survive on a minimal basis because their continued operation is essential to the networks. But, as more and more of the broadcast day is programmed by the networks, the local station's revenue base will shrink still further relative to the increasing costs of local programming. Local news and public affairs efforts (the bulk of all local programming) are bound to suffer in this process.

The CBS Response

Westinghouse states that it "recognizes and applauds the marvelous contribution the three national networks have made to the television industry and the American people over the past thirty years." It says that it is prompted neither by a desire to injure the networks nor by any conviction that the role of the television networks should be directly altered. It claims rather that it is attempting to call attention to what it says are "imbalances and inequities" existing today between the networks and their affiliated stations.

While noting that the Administration of President Nixon engaged in a strident attack on the networks, Westinghouse engages in its own strident attack. Curiously, both attacks relate to network news programming—for Westinghouse's primary basis for seeking immediate relief stems from discussions that the networks have been having with their affiliates concerning the possibility of expanding the early evening network news broadcasts.

Westinghouse opposes such a prospect and seeks Government intervention to foreclose any such possibility. (It should be noted that ABC and NBC have each recently announced that expansion of their respective evening news broadcasts is not a prospect for the immediate future, nor is it at CBS.) It seeks an immediate freeze at the "current levels of regularly scheduled programming" and, to justify the freeze, it provides charts and other data which are inaccurate and misleading.

Westinghouse suggests that the Commission's last major study of television network broadcasting was completed nearly twenty years ago. While it makes reference to the Prime Time Access Rule proceeding, it ignores the fact that it, too, was an inquiry, following which the Commission affected network practices in substantial ways as recently as 1975. Indeed, in one respect, Westinghouse is seeking to reopen the Prime Time Access Rule decision, which permits the networks to schedule important broadcasts contributing to an informed electorate during the "prime time access" period.

* * *

Westinghouse has requested that the Commission immediately "order the networks to freeze at present levels the amount of regularly scheduled programming during specified day parts." Westinghouse suggests "the 'freeze' take the form of an order or policy directive of the Commission."

CBS submits that there is no authority in the Administrative Procedure

Act for such an extraordinary agency action, nor is there any Commission or judicial precedent for such relief.

Section 553 of the Administrative Procedure Act sets out the due process safeguards applicable to agency rulemaking proceedings. It is axiomatic that before substantive rules are adopted, an agency must invoke its procedures for notice and public participation, except "when an agency for good cause finds . . . that notice and public procedure thereon are impracticable, unnecessary, or contrary to the public interest."

* * *

The Westinghouse discussion on scheduled network programming contains arithmetical errors and serious omission of analysis.

Thus, for example, Westinghouse purports to show that the total weekly half hours of regularly scheduled network programs, 7 a.m. to 2 a.m., Monday to Sunday, was 434 half hours in 1960 and 530 half hours in 1976. Utilizing the same source as Westinghouse, the Nielsen Television Index ("NTI") 1st March Report for each year we find that the NTI figures are 411.8 half hours in 1960 and 492.5 half hours in 1976. As for CBS, the chart purports to show that CBS scheduled 152.5 half hours in 1960 and 179.5 half hours in 1976; the NTI figures are 146.8 and 172.5.

As for the number of regularly scheduled half hours on CBS, the Westinghouse data are in error. More importantly, in selecting 1960 as its base year Westinghouse selected a year in which CBS offered no morning news hour, a year in which the CBS Evening News was only 15 minutes in length, and a year in which CBS offered no regularly scheduled late night programming.

To demonstrate an overall increase in regularly scheduled programming on CBS one must reach out to include the Monday through Friday, one hour CBS Morning News and the Monday through Friday, approximately two hour CBS Late Movie, which are scheduled in low audience time periods, and only then is it possible to mask the fact that since 1960 there has been a *decrease* in the regular schedule of programs at other times.

Westinghouse seeks to show that the networks exert an undue influence on stations' programming decisions. (Westinghouse itself has apparently felt no compulsion. For instance, in the calendar year 1975, KPIX-TV preempted a total of 333.5 half hours of CBS Television Network programming and did not clear an additional 674.5 half hours for a total of over 1,000 half hours of CBS Television Network programming that it did not carry.) Yet despite the effort to create this impression, the clearance of these programs on the CBS affiliated stations belie the Westinghouse conclusion that CBS imposed its will on its affiliates. In fact, the current range of non-clearance among CBS affiliates of the CBS late night offering is from about 40 to 52 stations; the actual number varies on different nights of the week. Further, about 32 affiliates (including about 6 affiliates which are

not interconnected) do not carry the CBS Morning News. While virtually all affiliates carry the CBS Evening News on a Monday to Friday basis, it is by affiliates; choice and public expectation and not network "compulsion."

* * *

Central to its argument that the network prescreening schedule is designed to preclude affiliates' decision-making is Westinghouse's embrace of television's severest critics on program content, including those who count slapstick comedy, accidents and natural disasters to reach high totals of alleged "excessive violence" on television. CBS has answered these critics in other forms.

Since September 1962, the network has transmitted to its affiliates—by closed circuit, on virtually a daily basis—programs of particular interest. Programs thus closed-circuited for affiliate preview and decision include those the content of which, in the network's opinion, justifies such previewing. In addition to such screening, CBS distributes to its affiliates descriptive program material as a further aid to their local decision-making.

CBS has concluded that it can and will schedule affiliate screenings of theatrical movies approximately four weeks before the scheduled broadcast date whenever practical, and we expect that in most instances such scheduling will be practical. To the extent that other types of product, such as made-for-television movies and specials, are available, we will prescreen such programs as far in advance of broadcast date as is practicable. In many instances, because of production schedules, it may not be possible to arrange such screenings more than several days in advance of broadcast.

Westinghouse, however, appears to argue that more is needed. It argues in effect that the networks should be required to change the work schedules of the entire television creative community so that all programs that might be listed in television guides are completed and in final broadcast form at least four weeks before air date.

Westinghouse apparently believes that by the magic wand of a Commission Rule the entire creative community—including writers, musicians, performers, directors and producers—could somehow be maneuvered into a Government-directed timetable, based on *TV Guide*'s deadline. It is hard to imagine a more inappropriate enterprise, whether or not "immediately promulgated," than for a federal Commission to try to supervise creative timetables to be sure they meet a deadline required by a privately-owned weekly magazine.

* * *

Westinghouse argues at length that the Commission should launch an investigation into what it calls "the financial and contractual aspects of network dominance."

As a threshold matter, we believe profitability to be irrelevant and totally inappropriate to use, as Westinghouse urges, as the hook on which to hang a full scale government inquiry into the financial arrangements

between networks and affiliates. It would be fully as inappropriate to use Westinghouse Broadcasting's unmentioned, but undenied, profitability as the basis on which to investigate its local business practices.

While CBS acknowledges the right of Petitioner to express displeasure with its network compensation, Petitioner's display of selected charts does not add up to a demonstration, or even a cogent argument, to undermine the conclusion of the *Barrow Report* that "the overall station share of network-time sales is [not] unreasonably small."

Thus Petitioner, while putting forth what at first glance may appear to be an imposing showing, has in fact dipped very superficially and selectively into a vast vat of economic data and has drawn conclusions about "dominance," etc., which are not supported and which therefore should not be considered by the Commission as a basis on which to commence an official inquiry.

James Aronson is a professor of communications at Hunter College of the City University of New York. A long-time journalist and media critic, he is the author of Deadline for the Media: Today's Challenges to Press, TV and Radio and The Press and the Cold War.

QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

"To what extent are American families influenced by their fantasy counterparts on television? Do we pick up our cues for domestic role-playing from shows like *The Waltons* or the new ABC series simply called *Family*?

"Indeed, do we learn techniques of acting from watching professionals at work? Years ago, in his novel *Farenheit 451*, Ray Bradbury took this notion to the extreme of envisioning a future in which reading was proscribed and everyone was forced to watch a daily soap opera beamed on a wall-size screen."

—Karl E. Meyer
Saturday Review

ABC Television Network

A Scientist in Television-land

By STEPHEN ROSEN, PH.D.

To write a book, you must be an introvert.

To promote the book on television, you must be an extrovert.

I wrote a book last year and made a discovery. I'm a closet extrovert.

Having written an optimistic preview of the new world a-coming, *Future Facts*, I appeared on dozens of radio and television shows to publicize my work. Over a period of months, in many cities, I was asked hundreds of questions. I learned, in time, how to give show-business answers. I'll explain that technique later. What seems to me more significant, looking back on the "promo-tour" is the kind of questions put to me.

During the studio interviews, my host (or hostess) asked one type of question, over and over. Viewers and listeners asked strikingly different kinds of questions. My hosts, I now realize, have much to learn from the plain folks sitting at respectful attention out there in television land.

My first appearance was on *The Today Show* in New York. Barbara Walters and Jim Hartz were still presiding. Five minutes before air time Mr. Hartz gave me a copy of his introduction and a list of the questions he planned to ask. Here is an abridged version of it:

> *There's a new book out designed to help you cope with change. It's called "Future Facts." The way things are going to work in the future in technology, science, medicine and life. It was written by Dr. Stephen Rosen, a former research scientist and now a management consultant. Welcome to the Today Show, Dr. Rosen.*
>
> *What are "future facts"? How do you separate the real from the fanciful development?*
>
> *Will you comment on each of these developments illustrated in your book: an anti-glaucoma drug released slowly from a tiny unit inserted in the eye. . . . Floating windmills in the ocean. . . . An instant cold drink. . . . A magnetic-levitating subway train to go coast to coast in 21 minutes. . . . Non-lethal weapons. . . .*
>
> *Science and technology have been blamed in many quarters for all our ills. How do you answer these critics?*
>
> *How do we get out of this technological mess we're in?*

Although I was on camera for some twenty minutes, I had approxi-

mately 30 seconds in which to answer that last question. It wasn't the closet extrovert who felt denied; it was the conscientious scientist.

* * *

My second booking was on a local New York show called *Mid-day Live*. The substitute hostess, a reporter for *Women's Wear Daily* confided that this was her first time on television.

A fellow guest was Robert Redford's wife, Lola. She spoke feelingly about ecology, pollution-free solar energy and the need to clean up the environment. Thus encouraged, the hostess turned to me.

"How can you say that technology helps us?", she demanded. "It's really dangerous most of the time. Look at all the terrible things like pollution and food additives, things that hurt us. . . ."

I was interviewed for 35 minutes on another New York show, *Straight Talk*. The opening question from my hostess, Phyllis Haines, was: "Theodore Roszak, Lewis Mumford and others have said that technology is destructive—is it? And aren't we frightened of technology?"

In Cleveland I was interviewed by a marvelous 82 year old TV veteran on her own show—*The Dorothy Fuldheim Show*. Her questions were bright and sharp. She was more alert than some interviewers half her age.

In Washington, on the *Panorama* show, the host contrived to focus the interview on himself, rather than on his guest.

My book, *Future Facts,* takes a generally optimistic view of tomorrow. But on *The Good Morning Show* in Boston the first question hurled at me was, "Why is the world of tomorrow going to be such a dismal place to live?"

Boston's *Bob Hilton Show* offered a pleasant novelty. A *live* studio audience. Here were hundreds of warm bodies, asking warm, interested questions.

The questions were the natural, logical ones I had expected from the famous talk show hosts. A few examples:

"What kind of jobs will there be in the year 2000?" (Asked by an 11 year old boy)

"How are we going to be heating our homes in the future?"

"How far are we from a cancer cure?"

"Are they working on anything to alleviate nerve deafness?"

This Boston interview was a turning point. From here on I had live audiences in the studio or telephone calls from listeners. Here, at last, I was in touch with the people, and it was a revelation. There were no hostile or abrasive or pessimistic questions. My eyes and ears were opened. My respect for audiences grew.

Over the next six months I was caught up in a whirlwind of radio and press interviews, TV talk shows and book-and-author luncheons. I made the full circuit in Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco. Johnny Carson got some laughs with a lampoon of *Future Facts* in his monologue. In New

York I appeared on the *CBS Evening News*, in Philadelphia on the *Mike Douglas Show* and in Toronto on *Ninety Minutes Live*. Wherever I went now I kept track of the questions. Over and over again, it was the audience, not the interviewers, asking the bright, concerned questions.

The lesson I learned was simple. Television interviewers ask the questions they *think* viewers at home would like answered. The viewers, by contrast, ask questions that reflect their own honest self-interest. The gap here is cause for concern.

The size of that gap was apparent when I asked dozens of my hosts, the interviewers, this question: "How many Americans—do you estimate—feel that science and technology are doing more harm than good?"

The interviewers systematically estimated that about 60 percent of the public felt hostile to science. Well, it just happens that a recent public opinion poll (commissioned by the National Science Foundation and carried out by Opinion Research Corp) came up with a strikingly different answer.

According to the poll, exactly *two percent* of our citizens believe that science is doing more harm than good.

The difference between sixty percent and two percent is, in this context, enormous. And it's disturbing.

How did my interviewers react to this poll, when I explained results? Not with elation, to understate the matter.

* * *

Interviewers are suspicious of science and scientists. They assume that the public shares their bias.

It seemed to me, as I travelled the country and talked with interviewers, that certain prejudices afflict nearly all of them. They tend to believe the following propositions:

That science and technology fuel our military engine and are therefore anti-life and intrinsically evil.

That improving the environment, reducing poverty and expanding social welfare projects should take precedence over basic research.

That any increase in productivity due to science and technology exhausts our natural resources or contaminates the environment.

That increased productivity creates mass desires which cannot be satisfied.

That science is out of control, that it manipulates our personal lives.

Granted, not all media interviewers believe all these propositions. But enough believe them to constitute an important bloc of doubters and naysayers, a bloc that should be of great concern to men of science and especially to science-policy makers.

The question that began to trouble me, as I went from city to city, was this: How does one dissuade opinion makers from holding views one believes to be harmful or wrong?

One way is to take an adversary position in interviews, to offer arguments defending science and technology. Had I done so, I would have stressed such points as these:

First, scientific research and technological development promote the general welfare of society. The total cost of all basic research from Archimedes to the present is less than the value of ten days of the world's current industrial production.

Basic science, research and development provide a natural pool of talent, ideas, leadership, and thus insurance for the future.

National morale and pride are deeply involved in the international competition for scientific excellence.

Applied research and development are the seeds from which new products and new techniques are the harvest.

Improvements in personal, national and global exchange flow from scientific research.

Yes, I might have talked about these points. But I did not do so because this sort of talk does not *entertain*. It's always understood in these TV interviews that one is there as an entertainer.

I could have cited statistics showing that three-fourths of American adults feel that science is changing our lives for the better, providing "hope", "excitement", "wonder" and "satisfaction". I could have pointed out that the public consistently ranks scientists second in prestige among the professions.

I could have, but I didn't. Instead I strove for the light touch with anecdotes.

One question I was asked at practically every stop was, "What's the greatest invention of all time?"

I finally worked up an acceptable answer to this one, one I hoped would preserve my goal of presenting positive, optimistic views of science.

Greatest invention? "Albert Einstein said it was compound interest. Alfred North Whitehead said it was the invention of the method of invention. Mel Brooks said it was Saran-Wrap."

This is the kind of amiable,idle chatter viewers have come to expect from talk shows. But could not a TV program be made about technology of the future? Wouldn't people be interested in such imminent innovations as voice command of machines, power from garbage, synthetic blood, three dimensional television, a flying backpack, and that rocket speed subway ride from coast to coast?

Somebody, somewhere, is at work on each one of these ideas—ideas whose time—and technology—are about to come.

Then there are the marvels people have been imagining for centuries. Telepathy. Levitation. Intelligence enhancers. Free energy. These are all fantasies, beyond our technology. But they could be projected in fascinating ways on the TV screen.

Finally, there are the utterly mad inventions. Would audiences be amused to hear about a device for producing dimples or a butter churn operated by a rocking chair? These are inventions necessity is not the mother of.

Arthur Clarke, the author of *2001*, whose science fiction is attaining a kind of classic status, once made this interesting observation. That when an elderly authority says that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. But when such an expert says that something is impossible, he is probably wrong.

Countless examples dot the intellectual landscape. History remembers the experts who blundered, authorities who bungled and so-called geniuses who botched up their world—and sometimes ours.

But let us remember, too, the hapless amateur, the outsider, the child, the improviser, the inventor who overthrew the conventional wisdom with the dazzling simplicity of an outrageous hypothesis.

There's drama, humor, romance in science. There are marvelous gadgets, (proved and unproved) new products, new theories, all suitable for show-and-tell events on television. Clearly, some sort of scientific education is in order to overcome what my TV experience tells me is a media suspicion of science.

The time has come to close the gap between television interviewers and their audience. It's too large.

Dr. Stephen Rosen received a B.S. degree in physics from Queens College, New York. He was granted an M.S. degree by Bryn Mawr College (where he also served on the faculty) and he earned his Ph.D. at Adelphi College on Long Island.

Dr. Rosen's articles have appeared in The New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and in 150 newspapers of The Field Syndicate. His scientific papers have been published by Nature, The Physical Review, Il Nuovo Cimento and La Recherche. His book, Future Facts, was published last year by Simon and Schuster.

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