

THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF TELEVISION ARTS AND SCIENCES

# TELEVISION QUARTERLY

VOLUME XXXVIII  
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## How FCC Justifies Relaxing Media Ownership Restrictions

An Interview  
with the  
Chairman

BY ANDREW JAY  
SCHWARTZMAN

**Is TV  
Dead?**

By Gali Einav  
and John Carey

**Bob & Ray in  
TV Advertising: Remember  
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COVER: FCC Chairman Kevin Martin.

Photo by Joshua Roberts / Bloomberg News / Landov

# How FCC Justifies Relaxing Media Ownership Restrictions:

## An Interview with the Chairman

By Andrew Jay Schwartzman

*Kevin J. Martin has served on the Federal Communications Commission since 2001 and was promoted to Chairman by President George W. Bush three years ago this March. During this time he has presided over drastic changes in long-standing rules, notably those affecting media ownership and media consolidation. Last October he announced a plan to repeal a decades-old rule that forbids a company to own both a newspaper and a television or radio station in the same city.*

*Seeking his rationalization for these proposed changes, Television Quarterly invited Andrew Jay Schwartzman, President and CEO of the Media Access Project (MAP), to interview Mr. Martin. MAP is a non-profit public-interest telecommunications law firm which promotes the First Amendment's rights to speak and hear. Mr. Schwartzman has appeared on behalf of MAP before Congress, the FCC and the courts on such issues as cable TV regulation, minority and female ownership and employment in mass media. Salient portions of his recent interview with Mr. Martin follow. --Ed.*

**ANDREW SCHWARTZMAN:** Mr. Chairman, you've long stated a belief that newspaper/broadcast cross-ownership rules should be modified. And you voted to lift the rules in 2003. Without discussing what's presently before the FCC, can you explain why you've taken this position in general?

**KEVIN MARTIN:** In general, Congress actually modified all of the ownership rules in 1996, except for the newspaper cross-ownership rule, which they

deferred to the Commission to study and update as they saw fit. When I was Commissioner, I think you said that I voted to lift the rule. What I voted for in 2003 was a removal of an absolute ban that said that if you owned a newspaper you couldn't own any other broadcast property in that same market. So in New York city, if you owned a newspaper you couldn't even own a single radio station. And actually the court upheld the Commission's

decision in determination to remove that ban.

And I think the reason why is that they said that they upheld it as a rational decision in today's media environment with the proliferation of other outlets and the changes that occurred in our other rules. To say that the newspaper/broadcast ban, which was put in place in the mid-1970's before there was cable, before there was an opportunity to get access to information on the internet; we needed to update that rule, to take those other avenues for information and for entertainment into account, was appropriate. And I continue to think that today. The Commission has to take those things into account in our rules.

**AS:** Do you think that the newspaper/broadcast cross-ownership rule merits special attention from the Commission or should be viewed holistically in connection with all the other ownership rules?

**KM:** Well, I think that all of the ownership rules have to be looked at in the context of the other rules. So they all have to be looked at in context. When you say does it merit special attention, I think what's special about it is that the other rules have all been changed and that one wasn't changed. In other words, prior to 1996 there were rules prohibiting you from owning two TV stations in the same market, except in a very limited circumstance. And that rule was changed to allow much more widespread ownership of two TV stations in the same market. And I think that similarly the Commission has been talking about making changes to the newspaper rule since Reed Hundt was chairman, three chairmen ago. He opened up the initial inquiry and said there was no need to have a prohibition on a newspaper owning

a radio station any longer. And while that's been discussed for a long time at the Commission, that change has never occurred. Other rule changes have moved forward. The only special attention that I think they deserve is to get the same kind of attention to their rule as we've given to the [others].

**AS:** I use a book as a text in my college class called *Fighting For Air* by Eric Klinenberg. There's a chapter in there about an incident, which I know you're familiar with, in Minot, North Dakota. [On January 18, 2002, a toxic spill occurred outside the town. A train derailment sent a cloud of poisonous gas over the area. But emergency services were unable to advise residents what to do and when to evacuate. All six of the area's non-religious commercial radio stations, owned and operated by Clear Channel Communications, were empty of humans. Their play lists and disk jockeys originated several states away. The result was one death and over a thousand injuries.--Ed.]

**KM:** Yes.

**AS:** Which raises the question of how public service can suffer in the cost cutting environment of deregulation. Do you think the actions of competition can threaten public safety? Do you think this is a valid concern that's related to deregulation?

**KM:** The question is: In the absence of competition, can that threaten public safety?

**AS:** Yes.

**KM:** I'm not sure I agree with the premise [that] there [is] a non-absence of competition. But do I agree that if there was no competition that it could be harmful to public safety? Sure. Because I believe that a vibrant competitive market is one of the best things of driving innovation



Stanley Zenor

*Andrew Jay Schwartzman*

and consumer choice out to the market place. But I actually think public safety is something that in many ways, I almost put it as more important than competition one way or another—even in the other areas. We provided deregulation because we want to see competition between telecommunication companies and cable companies in the delivery of video services; or between the wireless platform and landlines and voice providers. We've still said that even in that area of vibrant competition, public safety is something that transcends it. And we have to make sure that all of those providers still provide access to 911. So in many ways I think that public safety is something that's more important; whether there's a whole bunch of people competing or there's fewer parties competing, public safety is something that we



Joshua Roberts / Bloomberg News / Landov

*Kevin J. Martin*

have to mandate and it's critical to ensure, no matter what.

You were asking if a lack of competition adversely affects public safety. Some people could argue that, sure. Some people have argued to us before that actually increased competition on the telecommunications side has hurt public safety. For example, voice providers come in and are competing with landline telephone companies and don't want to have to provide public safety because it costs too much. So that competitive pressure has led them to cut back on services.

I think what the Commission has to do across the board, and across all these media platforms is to say that public safety is something that we need to ensure irrespective of what else they're trying or not doing. And so we need to be requiring that above

and beyond the other issues.

**AS:** That's very interesting.

**KM:** Now what occurred in Minot was troubling. There was an investigation done with them. I think there could have been several failures that occurred in Minot. I think that one of the public safety people called the wrong phone number. There were a series of events that occurred, both on the public-safety side and that occurred by not having someone live there. But what I would say is that: do I think that what occurred there is troubling? Yes. And indeed, that's one of the reasons why the Commission has asked recently whether we need to modify our rules about always having always somebody present in the context of radio broadcast.

**AS:** That raises a question. What did you take away from the Commission's examination of the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina and what insights you might have gained about public safety broadcasting in that context?

**KM:** I think that one of the most important things that the Commission would have seen from Katrina is the really critical and unique role that broadcasting still plays, particularly during disasters. Because many of the other means of delivering news, information, entertainment are more dependent upon physical infrastructure that can be damaged. And broadcasting can still be damaged. A tower goes down and some broadcasters have difficulty. But it's not the same as the cable wires and telephone wires going ... Even when they have had access to cable services or their telephone services cut, people can still have battery-powered radios and still get access to information. So it only highlights in an emergency like that the critical role

that broadcasting can play. And it's really a unique localized role that they play. It's because of the nature of the distribution makes it more resilient and the fact that it's distributed locally and with more local content makes it more unique. And so I think that that's one thing.

But I think there was another thing that was interesting to learn. When we had panels of people come and testify to us about what occurred is that some of the broadcasters there, including the public-broadcast stations that end up relying on the commercial broadcast facilities after their facilities have been damaged, talked about the support they got from being part of a larger media company financially; to be able to continue to broadcast in a way that would have been very difficult for them if they had only been a local community and from a financial perspective.

So I do think that it was an example both of the unique role broadcasters provide and why people are so concerned about so many issues surrounding the broadcasting media; but also the importance of understanding at times how broadcasters can benefit financially from being connected to other broadcast companies.

**AS:** I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about indecency, which is an area of particular concern to the readers of this interview. How do you reconcile your strong position on broadcast and decency enforcement with your laissez-faire views on other issues and on content questions and on media ownership?

**KM:** While again, I'm not sure I accept the premise that I have a laissez-faire view on everything else. And there's times I think you probably

could ask other companies and they might not describe me that way either. So do I think that there are times when we need to update our other rules, including media ownership? Sure. But I don't think that I think that that means we should get rid of all the rules. And I think that the rules for example that ensure that limitations on network ownership, national network ownership, I thought were important and indeed in even in 2003 I said that the change we made in that rule ...

On indecency, I also think that Congress has passed a law that says that the Commission should restrict the broadcast of certain kinds of inappropriate content during the hours that children are likely to watch. And I think that that is something that we have an obligation to enforce, like any other group. And I think it's an important rule; again, because of the unique role that broadcasting plays. Just the same as the underpinnings of why people are concerned about broadcasting from an ownership perspective regarding a hurricane, or the content that's provided to their children are all similar in that they play a very unique role in our communities and a unique role historically.

I think that actually—even legally—many if not all of the concerns still arise from what we call “the doctrine of spectrum scarcity”—the fact that there's a limited number of broadcast stations in any one market. And as a result there's more people who would want to get in than we have spectrums to accommodate. And as a result we have certain obligations and expectations that we think should apply to the people who get the privilege of doing it. I think that same philosophy and legal understanding that arises out of indecency is also

important when you're talking about issues of ownership.

**AS:** I would observe that one of the benefits of addressing market power in broadcasting through ownership rules is that it's content neutral. Are you comfortable with more content-based kind of regulation such as indecency regulation? Or would you prefer to do more through structural rules like ownership regulation?

**KM:** I think it's always easier for the Commission to try to do more through structural changes as opposed to direct regulation of content. It's the very reason why I think the biggest single most important issue that we can make to empower or to address both some of the content issues and some of the price issues in cable is to empower the individual consumer to pick and choose the channels they want. Because if the consumers get to pick and choose their own channels, then they are in more control of the content that they are receiving. So I think if we had a la carte cable service out there, where people could pick and choose different channels, they would have more control over the prices and more control over the content. Then the government wouldn't have to be in control of either the prices or the content. Instead, we'd have individual people in control of both.

I think that's an example of a real structural change, where we're really empowering consumers to be able to make those choices. But I think that there are times when consumers don't have any of those choices or that same choice. And it's in those contexts that at times Congress has said the Commission has to set some minimum standard ...

**AS:** Do you think that documentaries and live or almost real-time broadcasts

should be subjected to the same kinds of indecency standards as recorded or film program?

**KM:** You know, we take context into account for all of our decisions. And I think that that context includes whether something is a documentary or a live documentary—or whether it's live or not; on programming, we take context into account in all of our decisions about content.

**AS:** A lot of broadcasters report that the effect of the Commission's strengthened enforcement on indecency is to make them err on the side of toning down their material, to steer wide of possible problems. Are you happy about that?

**KM:** I don't know if that's true or not true. I don't know. We also have a significant increase in the number of complaints that the Commission has received. So I don't know if the premise of your question that they're toning down their material is true or not. I know the number of complaints that we get at the Commission has increased significantly since I first arrived. When I first arrived at the Commission we got a few hundred complaints. Then we went up to a few thousand, then tens of thousands, and then hundreds of thousands of complaints. In 2004, we had a million complaints. And, indeed, we've had hundreds of thousands of complaints in every year since then. So I'm not sure whether that's true or not.

**AS:** In a somewhat related area, you've used your position as a "bully pulpit" to encourage broadcasters to tone down their programming, to restrict advertising of junk foods to children. Do you think that that's an appropriate role? You must, because you do it, I guess. Why do you think it's an appropriate role?

**KM:** I think we have a significant problem in this country related to childhood obesity. And it's an issue that can't be addressed alone. The media plays an important role ... And I think that this has been increasing problem, an increasing health crisis that's occurring to some of our children today. And I think that that involves both the food manufacturers, the advertisers, and the media that distributes that advertising. We've formed a task force trying to look at ways, all segments of the industry, along with the advocates, the children's advocates—and there are advocates concerned about this—to get together and try to provide a forum that maybe can make some progress without the Commission having to adopt regulations. But yes, I think that's an appropriate role. We are concerned about the impact that these things are having on our children.

**AS:** Would you like legal authority to address cable content and indecency on cable and violent programming?

**KM:** You know what? I would like for consumers to have the authority and the ability to address it fully; and for them to be able to say, "I don't want a channel and [will not have to] pay for it any longer." That's what I'd like.

**AS:** What about legal authority to address violence?

**KM:** It's the same thing. I think that the most important thing we could do is to give consumers the real ability to have a meaningful choice, and for their choices to have meaning. So that when they make a choice out it has a meaningful economic consequence; that they no longer have to pay for a channel that they don't like.

**AS:** You advocated steps to lower barriers to entry for video programming. Do you think there's a

market failure in that area?

**KM:** Well, I think there have been some barriers or difficulties for people to be able to get on with additional independent programming. And I think that one of the things the Commission needs to reexamine is the ability of independent program providers to get across to the underlying cable platform through leased access and through program access, through our program access rules. And I think the Commission needs to go back and reexamine those and see if the current rules are providing enough support and avenues for those who are independent producers of programming, to be able to get access for the distribution of their content. And I think it's something the Commission can take some steps to address.

**AS:** You obviously have to meet with and balance the input of many, many different groups and constituencies. Have you had any difficulty in connection with your contacts with the artistic and production communities in understanding and addressing their concerns?

**KM:** You're going to have to ask them as well. But I think we've tried to address some of their concerns. At the most recent ownership hearing we announced we're going to be looking at, for example, changing our rules on product placement because that was a concern we had from the artistic community; the pressure they were coming under for placing products in the writing of shows. And that was one of the concerns that was raised with us actually when we were out in Los Angeles at a community ownership hearing that I took it very seriously and we're trying to find a way to address it. So I would like to say that I try to work with all the different constituents.

**AS:** Last question. What benefits do you think you've drawn from your travels to Silicon Valley, to Hollywood and elsewhere around the country, to learn about issues relating to media and telecommunications?

**KM:** I think whenever you have the opportunity to get outside of Washington you get an additional perspective on some of the problems that individuals and companies are facing. And I think it's been important when I get outside of Washington to hear about the complaint that average people have about the high prices they're paying for their cable television service for a whole bunch of channels that they don't want. I think it was important when we were in Silicon Valley to hear from some of the developers of additional innovation about the difficulties they were having in getting that innovation on the wireless platforms of the major carriers. When we were in California hearing about the concern that the Writers Guild had about the pressure that was being put on them on product placement. I think those are all examples where there were issues that were able to be highlighted when we got outside of Washington and there are steps the Commission can take to try to address them.

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*Andrew Jay Schwartzman, since 1978 President and CEO of the Media Access Project, graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and its law school he was staff counsel to the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ and later worked for the U.S. Department of Energy. He teaches at Johns Hopkins University and serves on the International Advisory Board of Southwestern Law School's National Entertainment and Media Law Institute, among many other academic positions.*

# Who Invented Television?

A trenchant comparison of real life with Aaron Sorkin's Broadway play, "The Farnsworth Invention."

By Greg Vitiello

**W**ho invented television? In his new play titled "The Farnsworth Invention," Aaron Sorkin leaves no doubt that the achievement belongs to the eponymous Philo T. Farnsworth, a boy genius who intuited the medium's workings while still a high-school student in Rigby, Idaho. Clearly, Sorkin might have chosen another title, leaving the theatergoers in suspense whether the true inventor was Vladimir Zworykin, who filed an earlier patent than Farnsworth, or RCA magnate David Sarnoff, Zworykin's employer and the ultimate winner of the protracted struggle to rule television's commercial development.

Not that Sorkin ignores the issue. We learn much about the science underlying Farnsworth's and Zworykin's decades-long efforts to transmit a picture, and get an abbreviated version of the legal battles between RCA and Farnsworth. And yet Sorkin's dramatic aim is larger than a saga of warring claims. It is

the story of television (hence, "The Farnsworth Invention") in the context of commercial, economic and political events underlying its creation.

As the creator of *The West Wing*, television's incisive look at the American presidency, Sorkin has the credentials and insight to explore a major institution and its impact on a nation's citizens. He is also the author of a successful court-martial drama, "A Few Good Men," which appeared on Broadway in 1989 when Sorkin was 28 years old. "The Farnsworth Invention" represents his long-awaited return to the stage.

Unfortunately, Sorkin tries to pack too much into the two-hour drama that opened in December 2007 at New York City's Music Box Theater. He opts for speed and breadth rather than depth. His cleverly written, often witty, well-staged work leaves us emotionally distanced, wishing we learned as much about Farnsworth and Sarnoff as we do about cathode tubes. One of Sorkin's most



"The Farnsworth Invention" onstage: (l-r) Jimmi Simpson as Philo T. Farnsworth and Hank Azaria as David Sarnoff.

Photo: Copyright © Joan Marcus 2007

ingenious devices moves the story along but contributes to the chill: He relies on Sarnoff (played by Hank Azaria) to tell Farnsworth's story and Farnsworth (Jimmi Simpson) to recount Sarnoff's tale, though occasionally they jump into each other's narratives and contest its version of the facts.

In truth, they never met, though the play depicts an encounter in which Sarnoff offers Farnsworth a job. But as Sarnoff quickly admits, the meeting exists merely in his imagination. The fantasy suggests a soupcon of guilt for his dismissal of Farnsworth's legitimate claims as the inventor of television, and for his description of the inventor as a "hayseed savant."

And though one character attacks Sarnoff's behavior as "corporate espionage," Sorkin lets the RCA magnate off quite lightly. Certainly we see Sarnoff's capacity for guile, not least when he dispatches Zworykin to Farnsworth's San Francisco laboratory to gather intelligence about the young inventor's technological edge. Still, in "The Farnsworth Invention," Sarnoff comes off as a likable, though ruthless businessman who's merely pressing his financial advantage by outspending Farnsworth in the battle for the right to control television.

In Sarnoff's world, there is no room for compromise or capitulation. During his lifetime, he frequently boasted that he never paid royalties. Instead, he hired legal staffs to defend RCA's patents, however they were acquired.

In "The Farnsworth Invention," the only indictment of Sarnoff's behavior comes from his wife Lizette who confronts him, saying: "I think you just stole television." She is equally contemptuous of the medium, calling it a "toy for rich people." Sarnoff counters



*Philo T. Farnsworth and Mable Bernstein inspect one of the first portable TV cameras, built in 1934.*

Farnsworth Papers, Arizona State University

her, promising television will "end war...and cure illiteracy." Members of the audience laugh, knowing television's limits as well as its strengths.

If the play is not an indictment of corporate espionage, what is its author's perspective? In an interview with *The New York Times*, Sorkin calls the play "an optimistic story about the spirit of exploration." Thus, Sarnoff becomes a fellow explorer, eager to

develop the new medium, rather than an exploiter of Farnsworth's invention. Sorkin even notes that when he read up on the two men, "I began, suddenly, to identify with Sarnoff. It's pure

**In "The Farnsworth Invention," the only indictment of Sarnoff's behavior comes from his wife, who says, "I think you just stole television."**

coincidence, but he happens to come from the same shtetl [in Russia] as my grandparents."

In one of the play's brief tableaux,

we see Cossacks burning the Sarnoffs' Russian home when the boy is just ten years old. How does the experience mark him? Apparently it fills him with determination to leave Russia and its bigotry behind him. Instead, he embraces his new life in America, quickly teaching himself to speak accent-free English and rising through the ranks of American Marconi Company while still in his teens. The sinking of the *Titanic* becomes his "exclusive," as he wires minute-by-minute news of the ship's survivors to an anxious nation.

Sarnoff's youthful feats are more than matched by Farnsworth's, as depicted in Sorkin's play. One scene shows the young Farnsworth requesting that he skip basic science and take the advanced chemistry course. When his teacher, Justin Tolman, turns down his request, he appears the next day with a pile of completed homework assignments for the entire year. Soon, Farnsworth is using the class blackboard to draw his sketch of a device that can produce a television image by manipulating electrons. Decades later, Tolman will produce one of Farnsworth's early drawings in court as evidence that the boy was the true inventor of television.

Occasionally theatergoers may feel overloaded by the play's scientific information. Even before the curtain rises on "The Farnsworth Invention," the scrim displays a set of intricate diagrams showing the workings of a television set. And during the next two hours, we will learn far more about the technical minutiae that would enable inventors to develop the television medium.

But to Sorkin's credit, his explanations are clear, informative, and often even witty. After all, the scientific details are essential to understanding the differences between Farnsworth's image

dissector and Zworykin's iconoscope, and the role of a cathode ray tube with a perfectly flat end, created by Farnsworth's brother-in-law, an amateur glass-blower, in advancing Farnsworth's work.

Sorkin is not the first playwright to require theatergoers to brush up on their science. In recent years, New York audiences have lauded Tom Stoppard's "Arcadia," Michael Frayn's "Copenhagen" and David Auburn's "Proof," all of which involve arcane knowledge of physics and mathematics. Are we congratulating ourselves that we "get it"? I don't think that's the point. Rather, skilled playwrights are embedding crucial information about these subjects in their heady – and entertaining – plays.

**W**here Sorkin shortchanges his audience is in his failure to flesh out his two competing characters. At best, we get glimpses of Sarnoff's overpowering blend of slickness and drive. And we see Farnsworth as an overwrought genius, bending under the pressure of trying to produce moving images before his seed money runs out. When his young son dies, Farnsworth turns to drink. As Sarnoff will later say of his rival, "He died drunk and a joke and in obscurity." This cheap shot undermines Farnsworth's battle against huge financial odds to commercialize his discovery.

Sorkin compresses the court battles, which actually consumed almost a decade, into several minutes. We see Tolman being grilled by RCA's lawyers and Farnsworth losing his rightful patent claim (though Sarnoff, recalling the events years later, says he doesn't remember precisely who won which of the various trials). In reality, the court battles ended in 1939 with Farnsworth being awarded "priority

of invention.” At that time, Sarnoff reluctantly paid Farnsworth \$1 million plus licensing fees for his invention. But even then, the RCA juggernaut would move forward relentlessly, developing the sales potential of television. Even bolstered by the settlement money, Farnsworth’s own venture would be unable to compete.

**T**he issue here isn’t simply what happened in and out of court, but what makes compelling theater. We might have benefited from a more complete depiction of Farnsworth fighting through years of frustration before he achieved his first television picture. Similarly, seeing him more clearly endure the succession of court battles might have helped us understand how he succumbed to depression and alcoholism. Sarnoff is also deprived of some of his complexity, blurring his ascent to the pinnacle of television broadcasting.

Instead, we get a long scene on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange on the day of the 1929 market crash. Its relevance? The play indicates that money will become difficult to come by, thus increasing the odds that Farnsworth will ever realize his vision. In fact, Farnsworth did press on and in 1934 managed to present the world’s first public demonstration of a fully electronic television system. The play includes other key historical moments, such as the first moon shot and landing. In a lighter vein, Sorkin offers a flatly written scene in which Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and other motion-picture luminaries visit Farnsworth’s lab, only to have the scientist mistake Fairbanks for Charlie Chaplin. The scenes place television in a historic context, but add little to the story’s emotional arc.

It may be noteworthy that Sorkin originally set out to write a film based on the memoir of Farnsworth’s wife Pem. And indeed the play’s short takes have a cinematic quality to them. Equally, the two acts might have formed the pilot for a new television series. Is this why the author adhered to a two-hour time span when he had a more expansive story to tell?

I don’t mean to carp or impose my own vision for a play based on these two intriguing figures, because “The Farnsworth Invention” offers an entertaining, informative view of a pivotal time in the history of television. The play also provides interesting glimpses of the two men’s visions for television. They imagine that the medium will be a conduit for great speeches, great music and the telling moments of history. But Sarnoff’s early belief that television will be a public service fades when he realizes the lucrative possibilities of selling advertising space.

What is Sorkin’s vision for the medium? As a writer for *The West Wing*, he knows that television can both entertain and inform, treating political issues with complexity. He chooses to end “The Farnsworth Invention” with a flashback to Farnsworth in a bar watching the moon landing – one of television’s finest moments but cold comfort for its inventor.

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

# All the World's an Electronic Stage:

The Metropolitan Opera Ventures  
into the Media Future

By Brian Rose

**F**or an august institution, operating at the very highest reaches of high art, it's surprising how responsive the Metropolitan Opera has been to new electronic technologies. The Met's embrace of each new medium has been not only rapid but often futuristic in terms of new directions and applications. In 1910, it sent out its first live broadcast, featuring

Enrico Caruso, fully a decade before radio became a household appliance. By 1931, the company was actively involved in a regular series of one-hour programs, broadcast on NBC's 190 radio stations. The broadcasts were such a success that complete performances began the following season. With television barely past its public launch, the Met produced a special TV program in 1940. This would

Ken Howard / Metropolitan Opera



*Christine Schäfer as Gretel and Alice Cooté as Hansel  
in Humperdinck's "Hansel and Gretel"*



*Alice Coote as Hansel (left) and Philip Langridge as the Witch in "Hansel and Gretel."*

Ken Howard / Metropolitan Opera

be followed eight years later with a live opening night telecast of *Otello* in 1948 on the fledgling ABC network. And when it was still in its experimental infancy, the Met utilized closed-circuit television to send out its opening night presentation of *Carmen* to viewers in 27 cities across the U.S. in 1952.

This testing of the frontiers of TV technology would continue once the company found a willing home on PBS. Its 1977 series, *Live from the Met*, provided a powerful demonstration of how the thrill and drama of live stage performances could be captured with a minimum of interference to audiences actually attending the event (experiments with the challenges of low-light cameras had been ongoing since 1973). Additional technical landmarks included a worldwide live broadcast in 1983 of its 14 hour-Centennial Gala, an early HD telecast for Japan in 1991, as well as an experiment in live opera pay-per-view in the same year.

The Met's navigation through the sometimes bumpy waters of new technologies was always seen as part of the company's constant demand for new audiences (and new sources of revenue). Despite its reputation as the favored pastime of plutocrats, opera has its roots in popular theater (before the rich enshrined it in the late 19th century, it was a staple of mass audiences throughout Europe and America), and the Met understood earlier than anyone else how the electronic media could serve its purpose as a tool for mainstream audience appreciation and potential box-office growth.

**W**ith the appointment of general manager Peter Gelb in 2006, the Metropolitan Opera entered a new phase in its far-sighted media ventures. Gelb's strong background as a producer of films, radio and TV broadcasts, concerts and recordings (both popular and classical) led him to understand the importance of

showcasing the Met's activities in a way that would potentially intrigue and excite a younger, media-savvy public, wary of opera's embalmed status and stratospheric ticket prices. Thanks to a new contract with the organization's unions, which facilitated media programming, Gelb embarked on a series of innovative initiatives.

Starting with the opening night of its 2006 fall season, the Met launched a city-wide technological showcase, sending out a high-definition feed of *Madama Butterfly* to thousands of New Yorkers watching from seats in the plaza at Lincoln Center and, via satellite, to numerous screens in Times Square. The "plaza-cast" had been tried previously in 2001 for a special fundraiser for the victims of September 11, but this was the first effort in HD, and the results were spectacular. Even on a broad 32-foot-wide screen, hung from the pillars of the Opera House, the image was crystal clear, vividly rendering the dynamic colors and details of Anthony Minghella's celebrated production. Standing off to the side by the New York State Theater, I was so hypnotized by the ravishing quality of the visuals and the surprising richness of the audio, that I found myself oddly preferring this unique outdoor experience to the "in-house" version which I finally saw a year later.

**T**hen, in a "back to the future" movement recalling its 1952 closed-circuit TV experiment with *Carmen*, the Met embarked on a series of six, high definition live satellite transmissions of Saturday matinee performances. The first was an abridged English-language version of Julie Taymor's inventive production of *The Magic Flute*, sent out to some 100

movie theaters throughout the U.S. and Canada, as well as several in England, Japan and Norway. The cinemacast (as they would come to be known), in full Dolby 5.1 surround sound and complete with English subtitles, was a surprising success, with most of the theaters sold-out in advance at ticket prices of \$18.

**P**roducing this groundbreaking event was an enormously complex operation, utilizing 10 high definition cameras, 20 microphones positioned throughout the auditorium and an ingenious remote-controlled tracking camera that was attached underneath the lip of the stage. This complicated apparatus, based on designs by camera operator Hank Geving, required extra cameras to monitor its movements and make sure that it didn't run off the track and onto the musicians in the pit below, but it permitted the program's director Gary Halvorson an extraordinary flexibility in terms of shot composition. To enhance the experience for those watching in the theaters, special material was also provided, including opening remarks by Peter Gelb outside the Met and a montage of pre-recorded views of the goings on behind stage, which was shown during the overture.

Subsequent cinemacasts also utilized a wide variety of live and pre-taped features primarily for the intermissions, offering theater audiences a chance to see behind the curtain and observe stagehands changing the set, costume and make-up personnel feverishly at work, as well as interviews with singers fresh from the stage and profiles of the artists associated with the performance. Attending a transmission of Jack O'Brien's lavish production of *Il Trittico*

at the Walter Reade Theater in Lincoln Center last March, I was intrigued by these well-produced backstage portraits, particularly the sense that those of us watching via satellite worldwide were somehow getting a special view of the Met's interior operations unavailable to the company's regular patrons in their seats just a block away from where I was sitting. What added to this feeling was the sheer power and presence of the HD surround-sound presentation of the three one-act operas, which, through the skill of director Gary Halvorson, provided a perspective that balanced the intimacy of close-up cameras with long shots fully capable (thanks to high definition) of registering every detail on the stage. Though I was under no illusion that this could equal the experience (either orally or visually) of attending the performance in person from a nice orchestra seat, I was also aware that its vividness and impact was far stronger than I usually felt from my more affordable vantage point high up in the rear of the Met's Family Circle.

**A** total of six operas were transmitted live on Saturday afternoons during the 2006-7 season, with the number of theaters jumping to 200. One of the most interesting cinemacasts was Bartlett Sher's production of *The Barber of Seville*, which posed unique problems due to its use of a passerelle walkway that extended the stage around the top perimeter of the orchestra pit and out into the audience. This presented new challenges for camera placement, especially for those already stationed down below in the pit, but the end result was a fresh sense of intimacy and some comic horseplay when one of the opera's characters interacted directly

with a camera positioned nearby.

The popularity of the cinemacasts prompted many theaters to repeat them, with great success, but there were also additional opportunities to see them thanks to rebroadcasts available on PBS several months later. The televised versions, however, were not quite the same. While still transmitted in high definition, they were gently re-edited with an awareness that what worked in large movie theaters would not necessarily translate effectively to smaller screens (even in the new age of massive home media centers). The primary changes involved camera positions and pacing, with a more frequent use of close-ups and an occasionally speedier editing rhythm to reflect the differences in perceptual scale. Nevertheless, the razor-sharp clarity of the HD image provided a significant improvement over previous PBS Met telecasts, making it possible to appreciate subtle details of lighting, color and set design, even when viewed on a comparatively small 27-inch screen (the broadcast of *Eugene Onegin*, for example, offered a striking demonstration of high definition's ability to capture the evocative atmosphere and moody palette of Robert Casten's minimalist production).

The Met's foray into new technologies continued throughout the season, including satellite radio with the launch of a dedicated channel on Sirius, and onto the internet with the availability of digital downloads of past performances on the Rhapsody online music service and live audio streams on metopera.org. By the start of the 2007-8 season, the Met has essentially redefined the role of a cultural organization in

terms of the new-media landscape. Its HD theater program had grown to 600 theaters worldwide, including new venues throughout Europe and Australia, and an expansion into universities, public schools, and arts organizations. Big-screen opera had proven itself to be such a potent box-office lure that many regional opera companies linked up with local movie theaters to sponsor the cinemacasts, recognizing that the surprisingly large audiences flocking to these events could also enhance their recruitment drives. Perhaps the surest sign of success was that the Met's major competitors, including La Scala, San Francisco Opera and Washington National Opera, announced that they too would begin their own closed-circuit transmissions, with San Francisco Opera bragging that theirs would utilize an even better high-definition technology.

It's difficult to predict what this all means for the future of opera or the Metropolitan itself. General manager Peter Gelb has announced that subscription sales are up 10% for this season and the cinemacasts (which cost \$1 million for each transmission) are now breaking even—impressive figures in an era of declining revenues for most large arts institutions. Clearly the Met's new media initiatives have revealed a far larger appetite for opera throughout the world than anyone had originally anticipated, but it should be noted that this appetite is for opera in a reconceived environment, radically removed from its customary gilt-edged trappings and opulent ticket prices.

From my experiences, and the observations of many music critics,

the cinemacasts largely attract audiences who appreciate the comfort and informality of the movie theater "stage." They applaud the singers, attentively watch the intermission features, all while happily munching on popcorn, brownies and brought-from-home sandwiches. While the HD programs have drawn mostly an older crowd (similar to the Met's standard demographic), the many children who came for the special abridged version of *The Magic Flute* or a 2008 New Year's day transmission of *Hansel and Gretel* seemed equally involved in the dramatic stories and large screen images projected in front of them.

By the same token, the PBS HD rebroadcasts (and eventual DVDs), and the Met's satellite channel and online activities, also point the way to a new electronic version of the opera house, which permits "patrons" to experience opera on their own terms and in a variety of formats and settings. In its willingness to experiment with untraditional approaches to one of the past century's most traditional high arts, the Met may have found a way to return opera to its popular roots and restore its viability to new types of audiences, wherever they decide to listen and view.

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*The author wishes to thank Mark Schubin, engineer-in-charge of the Met's Media Department, for his invaluable assistance in the preparation of this article.*

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*In many homes, a laptop computer has become a "second TV."*



John Carey

# Is TV Dead?

Absolutely not, say two experts, but the environment is changing radically.

By Gali Einav and John Carey

**O**n April 8, 1966, *Time* magazine startled readers with a provocative cover that asked in large type, "Is God Dead?" After reading newspaper, trade and journal articles over the past year, we might ask a similar, if less profound, question— Is TV Dead? The headlines have been screaming about the demise of television: "Let's Just Declare TV Dead and Move On...The End of TV as We Know It...The Internet Is About To Kill TV."

The atmosphere of doom and gloom, fueled by fundamentalist Netizens (those who believe in the Web with a near-religious fervor), is reminiscent of the story of Chicken Little who, after being hit on the head with an acorn, declared to the world that "The sky is falling." Looking at the changes in the TV viewing environment through the

prism of a researcher's eye, we will argue that not only is the sky not falling, but we are actually at a very low risk of bidding goodbye to the television business. Further, rather than looking at the rise of new digital platforms and technologies as a threat, we believe the TV industry is on the verge of a Golden Age of Media, a time when vast new opportunities are opening up for content creators and distributors, and, most importantly, for the consumer.

We are at an important point of change in television viewing. There are many new ways of accessing and watching television. We have to re-examine many of our assumptions about television, for example: all TV viewing follows a schedule; with a few exceptions such as sports or movies, programs are 30 or 60 minutes in length; we watch TV programs only on a TV set; most people use print guides to find out



John Carey

*TV programs are one way for passengers to occupy time on a car trip.*

about TV shows; and, TV gets to us in one of three ways: over-the-air broadcast, cable or satellite. Significant changes in the television-viewing environment have occurred before. The first major change, which industry veterans will remember, was when TV viewing moved into the home. In the late 1940s, when TV sets were very expensive, most TV viewing was in bars or department stores. Media historian and scholar Leo Bogart called this the era of "Tavern Television." In the early 1950s, as the price of TV sets dropped, millions of people purchased TVs and began to enjoy television in their homes. Other substantial changes in TV viewing patterns occurred with the adoption of remote controls (more channel changing and a greater sense of control over TV viewing), the purchase of a second or third TV set for a bedroom or kitchen (more personalized viewing),

the construction of large cable systems in cities (more niche channels) and the introduction of the VCR (time-shift viewing of recorded programs). Each time, some industry analysts saw these changes as a threat to the existing television business, when, in fact, they created opportunities for those who did not have their heads in the sand.

**T**he new Millennium brought with it an accelerated pace of change—more changes in the past several years than in the previous 50. The internet, digital cable and satellite, broadband, laptops, videogame consoles, wireless networks, portable TV devices, HDTVs and DVRs have created a world in which content is available to consumers whenever and wherever they want it. TV programs are available simultaneously on display devices that are larger and smaller than in the past

and there are more ways to transmit programs to consumers. Further, the presence of laptops, broadband and wireless networks in homes has created a powerful new video portal that can make Web television available anywhere in a household, often in combination with regular TV viewing. While none of these technologies is in as many homes as TV sets, many of them are becoming mainstream - adopted by very large numbers of consumers. Technologies such as HDTV-enabled sets, broadband and video games have crossed the 40-percent household-penetration mark in the United States. Other technologies such as DVRs and video-capable cell phones are trailing behind, but they are growing rapidly and with them alternative options for TV viewing.

**O**ne might think that the mainstreaming of these technologies is achieved at the expense of others, with new video media replacing established technologies, but this is not the case. It is true that online streaming has been experiencing phenomenal growth and has gone from rare to occasional to mainstream in a very short period of time. According to Comscore, within a period of 18 months, from early 2006 to mid 2007, the number of unique streamers doubled from approximately 65 million to 130 million. The number of total streams grew from approximately 3.5 billion to 9 billion. Currently, nearly three quarters of Internet users stream video content in any given month. Interestingly, television viewing has not been affected by this growth. According to Nielsen Media Research, the persons using television (PUT) ratings among

people 18-49 have grown from 16.9 to 18.8 over the same period. PUT growth is also strong among teens.

How is this possible? The buzz word of the media industry is multitasking. According the Ball State University Middletown media studies, we manage to consume more than 12 hours of media in nine hours during an average day, through multitasking (for example, a person who listens to an iPod for

### **“I just wanted to catch up on shows I missed”**

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ten minutes while simultaneously watching TV would be classified as consuming 20 minutes of media). By comparison, we experience seven hours of sleep and nine hours of work on an average weekday. As a result, we are experiencing more media use than ever before. This is one reason for our argument that we are entering a Golden Age of Media in which there are many more opportunities to reach new and existing audiences over a plethora of platforms. We are experiencing a move from viewing habits to new choices, framed by the availability of new technologies.

**T**elevision viewing is breaking out of the conventional box that marked our expectations for how people utilize TV. New viewing platforms and behaviors such as time shifting with the help of a DVR, streaming online via broadband and watching TV over bigger and smaller screens are all legitimate forms of viewing television content. Does choice have a negative effect on television viewing? A number of studies have shown that DVR owners watch more

television, especially prime time shows, since they have control over when to watch them. Further, they like TV more since they are watching shows that they can choose from the entire 24 hour lineup. In addition, specific prime time shows garner viewers who may have been lost if not for the option of time shifted viewing. Nielsen has begun to capture this viewing in new ratings data that include live plus the next seven days of time shifted viewing. By way of example, *The Office* during the week of October 1-7, 2007, showed an exponential growth of more than 40 percent once time-shifted viewers were included. Online streaming adds even more viewers and the distributor can control whether or not people can fast forward through commercials while watching online.

Looking more closely at online video, new viewing patterns are beginning to emerge. In addition to “video snacking” of short clips, the main form of online video available only 18 months ago, there has been an incredible growth in full episode viewing. Although they are a small share of TV viewing overall, TV episodes have been a significant driver of streaming video growth, according to Harris Interactive, rising from a very small percentage of all online video streaming in the spring of 2006 to nearly 20 percent in the spring of 2007.

NBC’s study of its Rewind video player, showcasing prime-time shows on nbc.com, uncovered another interesting pattern of viewing. While there has been some video “snacking” of (mainly) short form video content during the day, the majority of NBC Rewind viewing has taken place at home and at night, a behavior similar to TV viewing. This is not to say that

online viewing is replacing traditional television viewing. The study showed that online viewing is creating an incremental audience, with the majority of people falling into a “catch up viewer” category, stating that they have used Rewind to watch an episode that they missed on TV. In addition, a majority of respondents in the study were new viewers, who were exposed to a show for the first time online. Many of these viewers remained loyal to the show and kept on viewing both online and on TV. A second pattern of online video use is to re-watch favorite shows a person has seen before, sometimes in their entirety and sometimes to re-watch favorite scenes. A third use of online video is to watch shows that friends recommend after the show has aired. In this way, online video has an advantage over DVRs. With DVRs, you have to anticipate what you want to watch and set the DVR to record it; with online TV programs you can go back and watch a program that was on TV yesterday even though you didn’t record it. This suggests that the online video experience, at this point, is not cannibalizing viewers but building loyalty to favorite shows and exposing people to new shows they have missed.

What is the effect of smaller, portable screens on media consumption? Although there is a proliferation of small screens such as video iPods and cell phones, the majority of Americans still prefer to watch television content on a bigger television screen. According to a Harris Study, two thirds of people would always prefer to watch video on their TV versus a computer or portable video device. However, laptops and

portable video devices are useful secondary TVs when a big set is not available or to watch a second program along with the TV show on a large set. The same study revealed that only 6 percent have ever connected a computer to a TV to watch internet video. So, while TV programs are being viewed

**Is TV dead? Clearly not, but the viewing environment is changing as profoundly as the shift from Tavern TV to Home TV in the early 1950s**

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on the Web, videos created for the Web are not being viewed on TV sets, at least not yet or in large numbers.

Most Americans do not use their cell phones and video MP-3 players for video at all. However, those who do use an MP-3 player for watching TV programs, report that it is a positive experience. How could watching a TV program on such a small screen be positive? It is important to remember that people sit much closer to an MP-3 player screen when they are watching TV programs compared to regular TV sets. Viewing a TV program on an MP-3 player that is 18 inches away is like watching a 30 inch TV set from six feet away. People also have developed many ways to position an MP-3 player so that it is not tiring, for example they set it against a pillow, rest the hand holding the MP-3 on a lap or use one of the stands that are made for the devices. It may come as a surprise to some that much viewing of TV programs on MP-3 players and other portable video devices

is in the home. Some people watch TV programs on a portable device while in bed, before they go to sleep. They report that earbuds are very useful since they do not disturb a spouse but if they laugh too loudly at a comedy show, it may lead to a poke in the side. Others use portable video devices to stay in a room even when they do not like the show playing on the main TV. People have told us that when they are watching TV with a spouse and a favorite show of one person comes on (which the other doesn't like) it was common in the past for one to leave the room and watch a different show on a TV set in another room. One person called this the "TV divorce." Now, they stay together and while one watches the main TV, the other watches a recorded show on the portable player, using earbuds to not disturb their spouse.

There is an important distinction to be made between television content and its distribution screen. Good television content is still and will always be in demand. There is a strong preference for professionally produced content online now that the video quality has improved. A few years ago, in a dial-up narrowband internet world, streaming video was the size of a postage stamp and frequently out of sync with the audio. In that environment, professional content and amateur content all looked bad. In the new broadband environment, high quality video looks very good, if not quite as good as regular television, and viewers can see a difference between amateur and professional content. Though many like short, off-beat amateur content, professional content dominates long form viewing.

The Digital Divide Narrows As Mainstreaming Takes Over.

A decade ago, a widely read government report, *Falling Through The Net*, proclaimed that there was a wide digital divide between those who had access to new technology and those who did not, based on age, ethnicity and geographic location. Recently, communications research scholar Horst Stipp analyzed a range of data on technology adoption and demonstrated that the digital divide has narrowed considerably. Focusing on age, young people are more likely to use a device such as a video MP-3 player, but for DVRs, HDTVs, broadband and laptops, there is considerable adoption across age groups. This supports the concept of mainstreaming which we introduced earlier. While most of these technologies are not yet in a majority of US households (broadband has passed the 50 percent mark), they have moved past the early adopter stage and have found wide acceptance across a broad range of households.

Is TV dead? Clearly not, but the viewing environment is changing as profoundly as the shift from Tavern TV to Home TV in the early 1950s.

It is difficult to predict what the television landscape will look like ten years from now. What we do know is that old habits are slow to change. Traditional media habits still apply, with television viewing growing and big screen preferences still the norm. On the other hand, consumers are exploring new choices, time shifted viewing, online viewing and video over portable media and their growing expectation of control over content consumption is not likely to recede any time soon. What has not changed is people's desire to be entertained

but they might choose to do so over less traditional platforms than the television set depending when and where they are at the time.

To return to our original question, is TV dead? The answer is clearly, no, but the TV viewing environment is changing in ways as profound as the shift from Tavern TV to Home TV in the early 1950s. We need to keep a perspective on change and continue to monitor it. Let's lean back, or forward, and enjoy one of the most exciting times the television business has experienced since the introduction of the television set those many years ago.

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# Public Television's Struggle to Survive:

An Interview with Bill Baker

By Morton Silverstein

CUNY-TV



From the left: Steve Scheuer, Mort Silverstein and Bill Baker, president emeritus of New York City's Educational Broadcasting Corporation.

Last fall William F. Baker “retired” from his position— held for more than 20 years— as president and CEO of the Educational Broadcasting Corporation, licensee of Thirteen/WNET and WLIW New York. Now President Emeritus, Bill Baker spoke with Steve Scheuer and Mort Silverstein for the public-television series *Television in America: An Autobiography* when he was part-way through his tenure and again at its recent “conclusion.”

Excerpts from these interviews follow as a two-part article. In this issue of *Television Quarterly* the focus is on Baker's diagnosis of— and profound belief in— public television, which was in dire straits in New York when he arrived in 1987. Part two will recall his 10-year career at Westinghouse Broadcasting, where, among other

achievements, he introduced Oprah Winfrey as a talk-show host.

In response to a question about the future of public television:

**Bill Baker:** Public television is an interesting animal. It is always struggling. In some ways, that struggle may be a healthy one, because we're always trying to define ourselves. It is a genuine struggle and it is really difficult. One of the reasons why I've stayed in this job so long—because I thought when I took it over in 1987, I'll come in and do that for a couple of years. It seemed like a pretty simple thing to me. Turn it around. Move on. Go back to the business of making money. Two things happened. One, I got so involved with the mission of what public television is that it became a religion. I couldn't just go back to making money. The second

thing is that it also turned out to be much more difficult. I was used to running a very large broadcasting and cable business [at Westinghouse where he was president and chairman of Group W Satellite Communications]. I thought this should be a cream-puff relative size. But it turned out to be a much more complicated and difficult business. It's still taking every piece of whatever ability I have. I still feel like I'm barely up to it, if at all. So the struggle goes on.

**Steve Scheuer:** For the more than thirty years I've been tracking the welfare of public television, starting with Lyndon Johnson and his effort to find a way to fund public television properly, initiated by a White House aide, S. Douglass Cater, among many other people. For a variety of reasons, it has never come to pass. Carnegie Commission I and II came and sank. The commercial broadcasting lobby is so immensely powerful, they have seen to it that one of the proposed remedies for public television of a tax on their gross profits and income has never [happened]... Are you now optimistic, as we move along in the 21st century, that there'll be a serious, long-term answer to public television?

**BB:** No. The TV business is a mature business. The reason public television in this country—unlike, say, England and others which have a government funding basis—is that we are, in fact, an afterthought. By the time public television was thought of in this country, the commercial interests, the economic interests, were so big and so powerful, there was no way they were going to let this entity really take off. Frankly, I don't blame them. I understand. The TV set-manufacturing business was

big enough that they weren't about to have taxes slapped on their sets, the use taxes that the British have. The commercial broadcasting interests were so powerful, they weren't about to have any additional taxes slapped

**“We can't let  
this die.”**

onto them for their profits. So we were left hanging out there in a great idea, but totally and completely underfunded. The interesting thing is that we are able to exist at all. The fact is that we somehow still keep existing, despite the fact that any economic theoretician, any business school graduate, would say, this is impossible, there is no way you can raise that.

During the darkest days of public television's attacks—and I happen, unfortunately, to have been here during the second wave of the darkest days, which was during the time of Newt Gingrich attacking the system, it looked like literally we were going out of business. As a matter of fact, we were having secret meetings with our board, looking at shutdown scenarios. If the government funding would have gone away, we figured we would have to shut down the TV station.

**SS:** Who saved the day?

**BB:** That's the beauty of it. Those who saved the day were not us, were not our richest friends, but the regular people of America who said, 'We can't let this die.' They went out and basically flattened the attackers of public television. The Senator from North Dakota who was a major attacker lost his seat. Newt Gingrich ultimately lost his power. It was really the American people who saved us... Now, all of that said, I'm not sure we can withstand another quick attack, because I think

the American people say, Okay, been there, done that. I don't think they're up to saving us every year or so. We're one of the biggest operating charities in New York, outside of the hospitals and universities, and among the biggest membership organizations in the tri-state area. So it's really quite something. It's almost a miracle.

I was at a dinner party last night and a friend of mine who is a big supporter of public television was saying, "Can't you do this, can't you sell more tapes, do this or do that?"

I said, "I define the business we're in as an economic business; that is, almost negative economics. The fact is, if we did the kind of television that could be profitable, that could make money, then we shouldn't be doing it. Some commercial entity will do it. There is good television being done by commercial entities. But there is the kind of television that needs to be done that is simply not commercially viable, but yet needs to be done for the betterment of our broad society.

Take *Religion and Ethics News Weekly*— there is no way that any sponsor is going to pay for that. It's never going to get a big enough audience to be supported by some commercial interest. So the only way it's going to happen is philanthropy. The *NewsHour* and *Great Performances* are other examples. So there are many of those kinds of programs that just would never exist.

**Morton Silverstein:** How did you define your mission in '87, when you were first talking to the board, and then ultimately to your audience? Was it to fulfill the vision of E. B. White's celebrated "Here is New York" – particularly, his letter

to the first Carnegie Commission ("Non-commercial TV... should be our Lyceum, our Chautauqua, our Minsky's and our Camelot. It should restate and clarify the social dilemma and the political pickle. Once in a while it does, and you get a quick glimpse of its potential.")

**BB:** Those are beautiful words. Of course, E. B. White is one of my literary heroes in the sense of articulating the highest-minded words for public television. Those were, in fact, the quotes and the words that I used when I first started in this business. A friend of mine said, "I remember when you first started in public television how you'd go on the air and do these long and convoluted, intellectual explanations of why people should support television. Now you just look into the camera and say, 'We need money! Here's the number.'

And that's the end of it. It's kind of like me, when I started being a headmaster. I would go and explain to the parents the necessity of supporting the school. Finally, in effect, I just grabbed them by the ears and just shook them and said, 'These are your kids! Pay up!' That's kind of where I am.

**The documentaries you see on commercial cable are often infotainment.**

I'm kind of simplifying my message, figuring that what we do either speaks for itself or it doesn't. If it speaks for itself, the folks know what to do. If it doesn't speak for itself, then they're not using us anyway.

**SS:** Ten or fifteen years ago, public television was, for all practical purposes, the only game in town for

really good shows about the arts and dance and archaeology... Now, in a much-fragmented telecommunications world, there are places across the dial, the cable dial particularly, where on occasion there are interesting things on Bravo, on A&E, on the History Channel, and so on. There was just one ballgame fifteen years ago. Now there are other options. Has that been detrimental to public television?

**BB:** I think it's a bit detrimental in the sense that it's a little harder to explain our mission. That has been a problem. Articulating our mission is difficult. That's why I wind up saying, "Those guys do nice stuff. They do excellent things, but there is still so much that needs to be done that they will never do, simply because it is not economical." I point again to a *Great Performances* and say, "Here's a show that costs a million dollars an episode to do. It gets maybe a 1- or 2- rating. Those are not economically viable." If you want to see American opera on television, we're the only ones that will do that. None of the other arts-type channels on commercial cable will do that. If you want to see a show as distinctive as the *NewsHour*, even though there is a CNN, a CNBC, an MSNBC, nobody will put those kinds of economic resources into that kind

of content. Certainly, there will be no *Washington Week in Review*. The subtleties are important, but in fact they have become more and more subtle. For example, the documentaries we do—the Ric Burns documentaries on the history of New York were a ten-hour



**The big networks said: "Your job is to be our Tiffany."**



CUNY-TV

series, a million dollars an episode, a ten-million-dollar series. All of the documentaries we wind up doing—the difference between us and what you might see on cable is: the technology of television is so advanced, you can do a nice little documentary fairly inexpensively, but it may not be right. While you can do all of the TV tricks, the secret still is the vetting, the research, the scholarship that goes into those. Every documentary we do is like a doctoral dissertation. The documentaries that you see on commercial cable are often infotainment. They are in the form of documentary, but they're infotainment. That's a hard thing to explain, because you'll often see one and say, "Gee, that was really interesting. I didn't know such-and-such..." Well, sometimes you didn't know it because it wasn't true. I think also

there needs to be some entity that holds the high-water mark, whose goal it is to do one thing, which is to stay at the high-water mark, because there is no pressure anywhere else.

Even in the bigger television organizations, like the big networks, where they had these loss-leader news organizations, they said, your job is to be our Tiffany, your job is to make us be the very best there is. We're prepared to lose money because we're making so much over on this other side. So you just do God's work over there. Well, there's not that pressure any more on them either; it's just the pressure to make money. So somebody still has to be in the business of holding the high-water mark. I think that's a valid position in a business as powerful as television and telecommunications in general—arguably more powerful than religion in this country. So that's what I like to think is our goal and our mission.

**SS:** It seems to me we are now in a very parlous state because of the immense power of the broadcasting, and now the cable, lobby. I would argue that it's the most powerful lobby in America. Part of what has happened is that the networks and the cable stations are so important. The single most important man in the life of an upstate New York Congressman is his local television station. If he wants them on the air, there are a million ways to do it; if he doesn't want them on the air, it's very simple. So there is now, and has been for almost half a century, a deep antipathy among the people involved with commercial television to doing anything that they view as antithetical to the financial well-being of the commercial television industry.

**BB:** I think you summarize it fairly well. I would make one potential correction. I don't know that I'd use the word "lobby," because while commercial, cable and broadcasting interests do certainly have strong lobbying positions and are very powerful, I think there is

an even more subtle power. That is the power you talked about: They are the gatekeepers. Especially as the industry consolidates even more, the gatekeepers become more and more powerful. I talk to senators and congressmen all the time and they are privately sympathetic to my views. I've sent them copies of my book about the regulatory environment, and they all say, "We agree with you, but we don't have the courage to take on, in effect, the hand that feeds us." They don't mean economically; they mean that the only way they can get their message out is through media. They don't want to get those gatekeepers mad at them, so they do everything they can to avoid that. If you're a major gatekeeper and you say, "I'd like to talk to you about something," whether there is money involved or not, it's almost irrelevant. It doesn't make any difference. You're such a powerful force in your community.

The point is, if you can't count on the government because of whatever pressures there may be to come up with a regulatory environment to solve these problems, where is it going to come from? That, of course, is the dilemma. We don't know where it's going to come from. My view is that we have to keep waving the flag, because in this country sometimes all it takes is one incredible champion. I think that everybody is feeling more and more that something is wrong, that the system is broken. Witness the outcry we had when public television was being threatened. I think there is a chance that something will happen. We just have to be ready to see the hole and go through it. That's my general feeling. I wish I had a stronger position than that. The only secondary and tertiary positions I might have are as follows. I think we can demand of the industry to go

back to some kind of self-regulation of broadcasting and cable. There used to be a TV code of the National Association of Broadcasters. George Dessart, [formerly of CBS and co-author of *Down the Tube: An Insider's Account of the Failure of American Television*] and I have been pushing for some kind of self-regulatory environment. The industry has even avoided that. You would think that would be the easiest thing of all, to be self-regulating. That's certainly one possibility. There was an opportunity, I think, when Gore established the Gore Commission, which was the last big wave of regulatory environment, for there to be something really serious done. I think we would have had a major change in telecommunications policy, had not the presidential Lewinsky thing happened all at that time, because suddenly the President, and indirectly the Vice President, lost credibility and power. They were fighting another battle over here and couldn't really stand up to the most important issue.

**SS:** The Gore Commission reminds us that one of the many differences between the English and American television system is that one thing English television has done is that, every ten years, they take a hard and long and serious look at the status of commercial television, and whether or not it is serving the public weal. It was started by John Reith.

**BB:** You're right, there is that kind of Reithian thing that happens in England, where they look at it, but they do it with teeth, knowing that they could pull the plug on the BBC. On a couple of occasions, they have threatened to do that, and almost did that. So it's not one of those academic exercises; it's a serious one. Recently, in Canada, they have done that, where the

CRTC looked at telecommunications in Canada and looked at their policies of Canadian content, etc., and made some very hard decisions, ones with teeth. One of the things that is possible in this country... You think about the entities that have a great deal of power—and that means those that have money. Right now, because of the way the stock market has gone, these foundations in America are incredibly wealthy and powerful. If a number of them got together the way Carnegie did thirty years ago, or a combination of the biggest foundations—I'm talking about foundations like Ford, Lilly, Pew,

**I look at Bill Moyers, who is one of my heroes, and I say "Gosh! Why Can't We Do More?"**

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Gates—and said, We're going to really delve into telecommunications policy, they could have a massive influence.

**MS:** On the national public-affairs front, beyond an occasional *Frontline* and an all-too-infrequent Bill Moyers program and the ongoing Lehrer *NewsHour* (co-produced with Washington's WETA), some observers—journalists, activists, audience members—say that the flame no longer burns as consistently or as brightly in public television as it did in the Jack White and Jim Day eras of N.E.T., in which documentaries flourished and *The Great American Dream Machine* was born.

**BB:** I would agree with that. I would give anything to start a program like my predecessors did, *The Fifty-First State*. I look at Bill Moyers, who is one of my heroes, and I say, Gosh! Why

can't we do more? Every time he puts something on the air, it is magnificent and important. Why are there so few of those? A couple of things. First, let's talk about the positives. The positives are that we were able to start Charlie Rose. That was one of those things that was done on a shoestring. Charlie came to me and we talked. I wanted to do a local program of significance, but had almost no money. He was one of the few significant stars with talent who was willing to say, I'll work for a little bit, because I believe in what this is. He has continued and become a terrific success. So I think that's one for the good guys. But, the fact that we have not been able to build—and this is something Bill Moyers himself says—a kind of Bill Moyers, Jr.—somebody coming behind Bill Moyers—is indicative of the economic problems we're facing, which are worse than they were during the heyday of public television, when the Ford Foundation was throwing a lot of money, in relative scale, at this industry. So I am troubled and embarrassed by that. One thing is that Bill, because he is such a substantive and substantial figure himself, has been able to go out and raise money for his own projects. We are talking seriously with Bill now about doing a weekly public-affairs program, which would be wonderful. [Editor's Note: It became *Now*.]

Now let's start getting into the negative side of this. I think the record speaks for itself. We are not doing as much as we should or could, but we can't, because we don't have the money. It's that simple. The other is that our public television community is not as pure as we would all like to be, not that we're all that pure either. You talk to them about doing a high-

minded public-affairs series, or a serious performance program. A lot of the stations around the system say, "It won't get enough ratings." You hear ratings discussions that I think should not plague a mission-driven institution like ours. Nevertheless, we are a bunch of three hundred public TV stations, all separately controlled. Everybody with a slightly different agenda. So we have to listen to the rest of the system. Some are incredibly high-minded. Obviously, we know who those stations are. But some just talk like commercial broadcasters. That hurts us, too. So I think all of those things coming together have made it a very hard haul for us.

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*Morton Silverstein is an eight-time Emmy Award documentary filmmaker whose television career began with Nightbeat with Mike Wallace and continued at all the networks, with a stint as Public Affairs Director for the CBS Flagship station WCBS-TV in New York. At National Educational Television (1963-72) he produced Banks and the Poor, What Harvest for the Reaper, The Poor Pay More and Justice and the Poor, among many other investigative reports. He is today Senior Writer/Producer at the Independent Production Fund, where with Executive Producer Alvin H. Perlmutter and CUNY TV's Executive Director, Robert Isaacson, he continues to produce the Steven H. Scheuer series Television in America: An Autobiography, which appears on many public television stations.*

# Young People Flee from the News, Whatever the Source

By Thomas E. Patterson

A few decades ago, young Americans were heavy consumers of news. More than half of the adults under 30 years of age were regular readers of a daily newspaper. Most of them also watched the evening newscasts on a regular basis. As Martin Wattenberg notes in his recent book *Is Voting for Young People?*: “There was little variation in news viewing habits by age. TV news producers could hardly write off young adults, given that two out of three said they had watched such broadcasts every night.”

Analysts agree that today’s young Americans are less interested in news than their counterparts of a generation or two ago. However, estimates of the decline vary widely, and some analysts claim the digital revolution is a generational watershed that is bringing young people back to the news. “The notion is that no young person cares about news, and that is wrong,” says Lee Rainie of the Pew Internet and American Life Project. “They’re moving to a different distribution system.”

We recently conducted a large national survey to discover what can reliably be said about the news exposure of today’s young Americans.

The study had several special features. For one thing, our sample included teenage (ages 12-17) respondents, who’ve seldom been polled nationally on their news habits. We also stratified our sample, overselecting young adults (ages 18-30) in order to estimate more precisely their news habits. Finally, we used several measures of news exposure, looking not only at the frequency of Americans’ news exposure, which is the typical focus of media surveys, but also at the depth of their exposure and their familiarity with specific news stories.

Precise assessments of young adults’ news habits are important in at least two respects. First, young people’s interest in news will affect the economic vitality of news organizations and thus their ability to invest in quality journalism. Also at stake is the grassroots vitality of America’s democracy. Although it is inaccurate to equate the news-consuming citizen with the informed citizen, the news, as the journalist Walter Lippmann noted, is our window onto the world of public affairs. If we fail to look through that window, we will know little of the world that lies beyond our personal experience.

Most older Americans have a daily “appointment” with the news. Many of them, for example, routinely sit down each evening to watch the nightly news. Many fewer younger Americans behave this way. Most of them do not set aside a particular time of the day for news.

Whereas one in five older adults is a heavy user of the newspaper—meaning they read it every day and pay reasonably close attention to its stories while doing so—only one in twelve young adults and a mere one in twenty teens rely heavily on the newspaper. The picture is marginally brighter in the case of television news. For both national and local television news, about one in six young adults, and a like proportion of teens, are heavy viewers. They watch television news almost daily and sit through most of the newscast while doing so. Nevertheless, this level is far below that of older adults—more than twice as many of them, two in every five, are heavy viewers of national news and a slightly larger proportion follow local TV news closely.

Age differences shrink for Internet-based news but do not disappear. Even though older adults are somewhat less likely than young adults and teens to access the Web, they make greater use of it as a news source. Nevertheless, only a fraction of each age group uses it extensively. Roughly one in seven older adults, one in eight young adults, and one in twelve teenagers are heavy consumers of Internet-based news.

When news use is viewed from the perspective of the non-users, teens and young adults far outnumber older adults. Indeed, in the case of the newspaper and the Internet, an absolute majority of teens and young adults are non-users. The newspaper particularly has little appeal to young Americans.

Two in every three young Americans largely ignore the daily paper. A smaller proportion—two in every five—pay almost no attention to national and local television news.

Of course, citizens do not have to avail themselves of every conceivable source of news in order to stay informed. It may be enough that they play regular attention to a single medium only. Roughly half of older Americans do so. Among teens and young adults, the number is closer to one in five. In fact, roughly a fourth of younger Americans pay virtually no attention to news from any source, and another fourth are moderately

### **Searching for a Source: Are Young Americans Getting News from Non- traditional Outlets?**

attentive to a single medium only.

Clearly, there is a wide generational gap in news consumption. The daily news is not an integral part of the daily lives of most teens and young adults.

There remains the possibility that young Americans have devised new ways of getting the news, relying on entertainment programs, new media, acquaintances, or an irregular mix of traditional media.

To assess that possibility, our study deployed an innovative measurement technique. Each day of our national survey, respondents questioned that day were asked about their awareness of a current top news story. The next day, a new top story was the basis for the questioning. Respondents who claimed exposure to the story in question were then asked to identify the source of this news. If they encountered the story in the newspaper, on a late-night entertainment

program, heard about it from their uncle, or any other source, this information was recorded.

The findings from this method of questioning were remarkably similar to what we found using standard measurement techniques. Older adults were substantially more likely than younger adults (62 percent versus 43 percent) to claim exposure to the story in question. Teenage respondents were even less likely to claim exposure; their recall level was 10 percentage points below that of young adults. Younger adults and teens were also less likely to correctly identify a simple factual element contained within a story they claimed to have encountered. Overall, whereas slightly more than a third of older respondents claimed awareness of the story and could identify accurately the factual element, only a fifth of younger respondents could do so.

In regard to the source of young people's story awareness, "old media" predominated. Roughly 50 percent of older and younger respondents who claimed awareness of the story in question cited television news as their source. No other news source was cited even half as often. The daily newspaper was at the bottom of the list for young adults and teens.

Conspicuously missing from the list of sources were television entertainment programs. Only a tiny number of the teens and young adults cited Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show* or some other late-night television program as their story source. Such programs have a hard-core following, but it is a relatively small audience in the context of the full public.

The notion that young Americans get their news from "a different distribution system" was not borne out by our survey. It is true that teens and young adults make more use of "the new media" than

do older adults, but the fact that many young adults spend a lot of time on the Internet and watch a lot of entertainment television does not necessarily indicate they are using them as news sources. When it comes to news, young adults are far more likely to get their information from television than from one of the new media and, within television, from a newscast rather than an entertainment program. The large fact about teens and

### **The Changing Media Environment, and Why It Leads to Less News Exposure.**

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young adults is not that they are heavily dependent on new media but that they partake only lightly of news, whatever the source.

News exposure is at a historic juncture. From the early 1800s until recently, the news audience was expanding. The introduction of the hand-cranked rotary press in the 1830s drove down the price of the newspaper from five cents to a penny, and newspaper readership immediately began to rise. By the end of the 1800s, helped along by the invention of newsprint and the steam-driven press, some metropolitan newspapers were selling as many as 100,000 copies a day. Radio news came along in the 1920s, expanding the news audience beyond those reached by the newspaper.

Television news' contribution was even more substantial. Early studies of the television news audience produced a startling finding: many of the people who watched TV news regularly had only a slight interest in news. Georgetown University's Michael Robinson was one of the first analysts to recognize the significance of these viewers. They were

“inadvertent viewers,” brought to the news less by an interest in news than a fascination with television. The news in most markets had a monopoly on dinner-hour television, and viewers who were intent on watching television had no choice but to sit through it.

Over time, some of these viewers developed a liking for news, and it rubbed off on their children. Television news was an early-evening ritual in many families and, though the children might have preferred to watch something else, it was the only dinner-hour programming available. By the time many of these children finished school, they had acquired a news habit of their own.

Television’s capacity to generate interest in news through force feeding ended in the 1980s with the rapid spread of cable television. Viewers no longer had to sit through the news while waiting for entertainment programming to appear. Television news did not lose its regulars, a reason in the cable era why its audience has aged as it has shrunk. But TV news did lose much of its ability to create interest in news among young adults who preferred other programming. And its capacity to generate interest among children was greatly diminished. Fewer of the parents were watching the news and, even if the parents were watching, the children, as a 1999 Kaiser Family Foundation study revealed, were usually in another room watching something else.

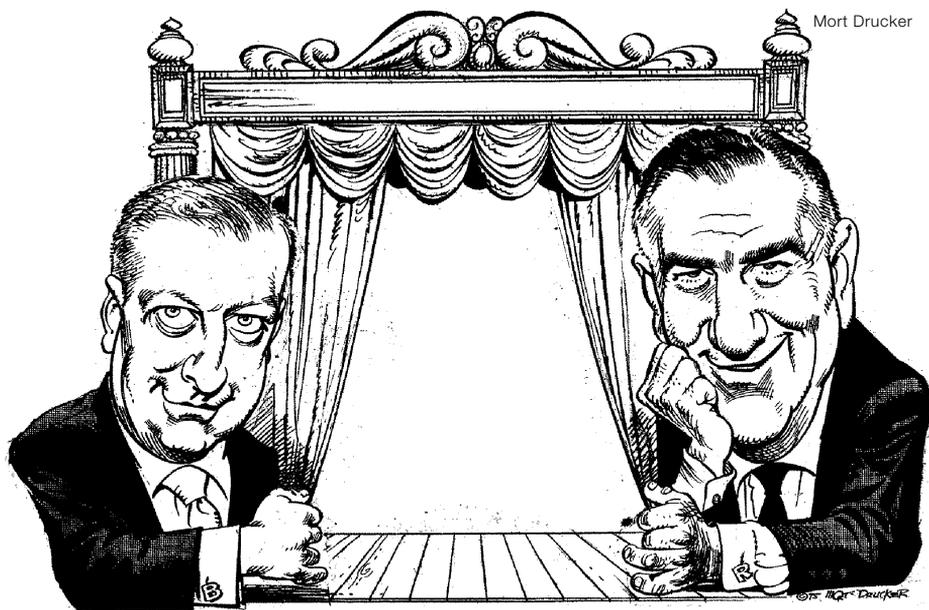
The Internet has even less capacity to generate a daily news habit for those without one. Although, like television, the Internet has its addicts, their pursuits are largely determined by the interests they bring to the Web. Their existing preferences govern the sites they choose to visit. A 2006 Pew Research Center study indicates that the Internet is not even

particularly powerful in strengthening the news habit of those who use it as a news source. Compared with the typical newspaper reader or television news viewer, the typical Internet-news user spends many fewer minutes per day attending to the medium’s news. Even the on-demand feature of Internet news can work against the formation of an online news habit because it breaks the link between ritual and habit. Newspaper reading, for example, is a morning ritual for some Americans— the almost unthinkable walk to the door to retrieve the paper, followed by the almost unthinking opening of the paper to the preferred section. As the scholars Maria Len Rios and Clyde Bentley note, online news exposure is less fixed by time, place, and routine—elements that reinforce, almost define, a habit.

The Internet cannot be faulted for the decline in news interest among young Americans. Other factors, including a weakening of the home as a place where news habits are acquired, underlie this development. Notwithstanding the cartoon father with his nose buried in the paper after a day at work, news exposure in the home was a family affair. The newspaper sections were shared, as was the space around the radio or in front of the television set. Today, media use is largely a solitary affair, contributing to the tendency of media use to reinforce interests rather than to create new ones.

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Mort Drucker's Playbill cartoon of Bob (left) and Ray for their 1975 Broadway show.

# Bob and Ray on Television:

A slow start and then a huge success in advertising:  
Remember the Piel Brothers?

By David Pollock

**T**hough known primarily for their highly celebrated, over 40-year radio career, almost forgotten is the fact that Bob and Ray (Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding), also played a significant role in television's infancy. The nightly *Bob and Ray Show* on NBC-TV featured a total of 75 minutes a week of live, back-to-back sketches, a creative output unheard of today.

Having explored the team's somewhat bumpy 1951 television debut, and the public's reaction to it, in the last issue of *Television Quarterly*, we now turn our attention to their subsequent struggles and their ultimate smashing success in advertising.

In January of 1952 Coby Ruskin was brought in as both producer and director. In addition to the nightly ad-libbed *Linda Lovely* soap opera spoofs,

head writer Ray Knight transplanted many segments from the team's NBC radio series, one of the most popular being the *Bob and Ray Overstocked Surplus Warehouse* offers. These hard sell pitches dealt with inventories of dubious merchandise, such as war surplus items returned from Cuba. ("...We have 124 full cases of canned corned beef, which are clearly stamped San Juan Hill, 1898, on the tops of the cans. If you do not find this corned beef all you had hoped it would be, just leave word with the executor of your estate to return the remaining cans to us.")

Do-it-Yourself Kits, such as the Bob and Ray Boomer Political Kit ("which comes with a list of explosive issues such as: 'Why is it that President Truman has his own personal airplane when little boys and girls have to walk to school?'" ) easily made the transition to television.

In February, the team's popular *Mary Backstage*, *Noble Wife* made its television debut; but, not until the continuing *Linda Lovely* plot was neatly resolved in one tidy episode when all characters were conveniently killed off. As with the previous *Linda Lovely* episodes, all action was confined to three extremely cramped sets: The *Backstage's* "luxuriously appointed Skunk Haven, Long Island living room" and backstage and stage door areas of the Summer Garden Theater, scene of *Lament of the Locust* ("by young playwright Greg Marlowe, secretly in love with Mary"). Audrey Meadows played both Harry's devoted wife, Mary, and his scheming leading lady, Jessica Culpepper.

The program continued through May 1st, then, following a two-month hiatus, retuned as a weekly Saturday

night half-hour summer replacement for *One Man's Family*. In NBC's eyes, the Saturday night half-hour show had one important element the fifteen-minute series lacked: a sponsor, Miles Laboratories.

Replacing Audrey Meadows, then on Broadway with Phil Silvers in *Top Banana*, was the former Miss Chicago of 1946, Cloris Leachman. "I just remember it was the hottest summer in my history in New York City," recounted Leachman. "And I was staying in an apartment... and there was no air conditioning and, oh, my God! I'd lie there with a wet towel over me and I couldn't sleep at all. ...So all summer long I was absolutely cuckoo-tired. And I'd go down there to do the show and I had no ability not to laugh. Being so tired, I couldn't control

**"You never knew what they were going to do next," said Cloris Leachman. "We were live television. I didn't have any scary bones about it."**

it. ...And they would start this sketch and I would just start laughing at them. Helpless! Helpless! ...You just beg for mercy."

Coby Ruskin split the directing duties on this series with Grey Lockwood. "Nobody was in-sync like those two guys," recalled Lockwood, "They just quickly picked up on each other when they were ad-libbing. One guy would have a character and the other would immediately step in with a counter-character. It was unbelievable - absolutely in sync."

"You never knew what they were going to do next," said Leachman. "We were live television. I didn't have any scary bones about it." Unlike their other television series, the material on the half-hour show, though satirical, reflected slightly less of a Bob and Ray vibe and tilted more to traditional variety-show sketches. Having twice as much time, the sketches (from Knight and, in succession, Tony Webster and Billy Friedberg) were often longer and, from a production standpoint, more ambitious. Some parodies contained musical numbers with special lyrics and choreography featuring vocals by Elliott, Goulding and Leachman, all backed by Alvy West's band.

Among the special mock offers was the Bob and Ray Shipwreck Kit, which included an inflatable island "with one friendly native" and a supply of beautiful bottles, "each one containing a message written by some of the world's greatest authors."

**C**loris Leachman performed the Mary Backstayge and Jessica Culpepper roles as if they had been created for her. "I didn't know comedy," said Leachman. "It's silly business to me – funny business. ...I'm good at that. And that's perfect with them. That's just what they did."

"They imitated real people incredibly well," said Lockwood. "That ordinary quality. It was that combination of everyman speech and everyman's sound. ...There was no 'theater' about it at all. There was no 'theater' about anything they did."

An ill-conceived Elliott and Goulding television series was to follow – a 15-minute, 10:30 p.m. Tuesday night program called *Club Embassy*. The contrived setting was

a fictional nightclub (unabashedly named for sponsor P. Lorillard's Embassy Cigarettes) with the sketches introduced by hostess Julia Meade and performed for appreciative guests, who were, of course, paid extras, seated at tables.

The *Club Embassy* premiere featured a "scathingly funny satire," in the words of *Variety*, centered on Richard Nixon's famous "Checkers" speech. "We had a Boy Scout troop leader instead of Nixon," said Elliott. "The troop leader had been dipping into the funds." *Variety* however found fault with the simulated nightclub surroundings. "Whoever lined up the format...did NBC's zany comedy team dirt," it stated, claiming they were "almost straight-jacketed" by the phony concept. The "comics distinguished themselves... despite the show, certainly not because of it," said the review.

Concurrent with *Club Embassy*, in the late fall of 1952, Pat Weaver had called on the duo to add some comedy to his brand-new *Today* show, which was broadcast every morning from a street-level studio, actually a part of the RCA Exhibition Hall. Large windows facing onto West 49th Street enabled tourists and passersby to stop and watch the broadcast. Monday and Thursday mornings, *Today* host Dave Garroway would switch to Elliott who would proceed to interview Goulding as one of the gawkers. According to Elliott, one morning a call came from NBC senior programming executive, Niles Trammell, angrily wanting to know about "those two idiots outside. Doesn't the one guy know that he's talking to the same guy everyday?" And they had to explain, "Yeah, he knows."

On April 27, 1953, the team

appeared at yet another new time and day. This, their final NBC series, would run through September, Monday nights at 7:30 p.m. Since the program was only 15-minutes once a week, Elliott and Goulding assumed there was a good chance Meadows could again join them. However, her manager, the legendary “Bullets” Durgom, protective of her deal with the Gleason show, resisted. Words became heated and “an impasse was reached,” recounted Meadows in 1994. Gleason was summoned to rule from on high.

“Why do you want to do this, Aud?” he asked.

“Because when I needed a job, they took me on when they didn’t have to,” she said. “Now they need me.”

“That’s the best reason I know,” said Jackie. “I’ll be watching the show if it doesn’t run into the cocktail hour. Leave Alice here. Go be Audrey.”

**The studios had just recently been converted from stables for carriage horses, a fact that on humid days made itself readily apparent.**

This 1953 edition of the program didn’t have a sponsor, didn’t have a studio audience, in fact, really didn’t even have it’s own studio. “We would always be in the smallest studio, or in one corner of the biggest studio,” said director Grey Lockwood. “We were always running from one little theater to another.” On several occasions, NBC couldn’t provide a studio at all. During that summer, when it was still light at 7:30, the network originated the show

at various outdoor sites around the city, including Aqueduct racetrack, the Weehawken ferry slip, and the Polo Grounds, home of the then New York Giants baseball team.

Later that year *The Bob and Ray Show* originated from yet another new address: 7 West 66 Street, the home of The American Broadcasting Company. The studios had just recently been converted from stables for Central Park carriage horses, a fact that, according to Elliott, “on more humid days made itself readily apparent.”

Returning again to five nights a week, the new 15-minute ABC show aired at 6:45 p.m. for the entire 1953-54 season. The over two-year association with NBC, the network that had brought them to New York had, for the time being, come to an end. “We shifted our allegiance rapidly,” said Elliott. The nightly commitment made it impossible for Audrey Meadows, by then starting her second season with the Gleason show, to continue. Auditions were held and a 22-year-old shapely blonde named Marion Brash, whose only television experience was a few months on *Rocky Corbett Space Cadet*, was chosen to replace her.

This series introduced a new continuing serial, a medical spoof called *Hospital Corners U.S.A.*, later changed to *Hospital U.S.A.* (“A story of today, based on sickness and disease, reflected in the life of a small-town country doctor.”)

Brash played two roles: Dr. Greg Norton’s shrewish wife, Belle, and the sexy nurse, Eileen Dover. “Eileen Dover was a very buxom kind of nurse – bosomy,” explained Brash. “In other words, you put it all together, it’s ‘I leaned over.’”

An American Airlines ticket agent and aspiring comedy writer, Earle Doud, was hired, based on a 28-page sample script. "I'd characterize him as a big animal lover," Elliott said of Doud. "Every type of bit had a camel in it or something... We'd show up at four o'clock or whatever and, jeez, they'd be holding a camel outdoors." Doud put his stamp on the inherited Ray Knight templates. There were the tongue-in-cheek pleas for viewer's assistance, such as the time a group of Belgian Congo Head Hunters had been invited as guests: ("Unfortunately not being able to speak English, they arrived a month early. If you have an empty room in your house, you can be of service to us...").

**M**ock commercials were well represented, including The Bob and Ray Bank for convenience minded customers: ("...We had the safety deposit boxes built on the outside of the bank") and a personalized Bob and Ray Home Butter Printing Kit: ("Why should a hotel have their initials in the butter and not you?")

One evening, in the program's last segment, Goulding, as Mary McGoon, was demonstrating how to prepare octopus pie, or "octa-pie," as Mary called it. In so doing, Goulding, meaning to say "tentacles," inadvertently said "testicles." By the straight-laced standards of over a half-century ago, this was shocking to hear on television.

"The cameraman...was hysterical," recounted the team's secretary, Ann King. "And oh, did we get mail! Like, 'Oh, you should have seen the look on my great-aunt's face.' People had great things to say. ...They wouldn't even notice the difference today."

Hank Behar, then a 29-year-old ABC

## The germination of a fabled advertising campaign and the creation of the Piel Brothers

lighting director, was never officially assigned to *The Bob and Ray Show*. However, being a huge fan, he made a point of regularly stashing himself in the control room and watching the program from a spot behind director Paul Burgraff.

"Truth be told, all the bits didn't work, just as they didn't in radio," Behar remembered. "But their charm was that they just went on as if nothing had happened. Above all, they were supremely gentle souls. You couldn't imagine either of them raising his voice or protesting if he was grievously overcharged by a mendacious sales clerk."

In the spring of 1955, when Elliott and Goulding returned to prime time as co-moderators of the Goodson-Todman ABC game show, *Name's the Same*, then in its fourth year, their paths had already crossed with a 26-year-old New Yorker and Dartmouth graduate named Ed Graham. A copywriter for advertising giant Young & Rubicam, Graham had been tasked with creating a campaign for one of the agency's regional beer clients; one, like many smaller breweries, forced to battle for market share one tier below the major national brands. In the northeast, these companies included New York area brewed Schaefer, Ballantine, Rheingold, Knickerbocker and, at, or near, the bottom, Y&R's flagging client, Piel.

"Ed was very brash," recalled his talented art director on the Piel's account, Jack Sidebotham, then 27.

“His persona was very much like Larry David. He would say outrageous things. ...He was truly a crazy person.”

Elliott, remembered Graham as “very self-assured, a little wild and a little ‘wise guy,’ at times.” The previous Piels campaign, an innocuous jingle and hard-sell pitch by veteran voice-over man Art Hannas (“Piels contains less NFS, non-fermented sugar!”) had been scrapped. In its place, Graham came up with the Piels Brothers – half-pint, bullying Bert and lanky, befuddled Harry – animated owners and pitchman of the brewery.

### **“If that sells beer, I’ll quit!”**

(The actual firm had been founded by brothers William, Gottfried and Michael Piel in Brooklyn in 1883.)

The “genius of the idea,” said Sidebotham, was that Graham had created complete biographies of each. “Harry was the quiet, shy guy and Bert the bumptious, wise-apple kind of guy. The characters were developed even to the point of Ed making up where they went to high school and stuff like that...” [Harry was an all-Metropolitan forward on Brooklyn’s Samuel J. Tilden High School basketball team of 1921 (undefeated). Bert was at one time a Graham-Paige Motor Car distributor.] “...The Piels brothers were totally Ed’s imagination.”

Because the concept was so completely counter to conventional beer ads of the early black-and-white TV era (close ups of Pilsner glasses being filled with frothy heads tantalizingly dripping over the side) it was an almost impossible sell at the agency. “For the suits of the day,” said Sidebotham, “it seemed not dignified

enough for a big brewery to be selling the beer with these joker characters.”

Elliott would later remember a Y&R higher up, after looking at the storyboards, proclaiming, “If that sells beer, I’ll quit!”

Jobs at agencies were very tenuous, Sidebotham said. “If an account was lost, then there would be heads chopped.” When the chief executive on the Piels account totally rejected the Bert and Harry campaign, it went to a board of senior people from each department. Though three or four thought it was terrific, Sidebotham said, “the concept was so controversial, that a rare thing happened.” The final decision was left to Y&R’s chairman and CEO, Sigurd Larmon.

Larmon, with his dark suits and ever-present white carnation, which he had delivered everyday, resembled a bank president. He was considered “sort of a stuffy guy,” said Sidebotham, but was a “very good manager and advertising man. ...There was enough adversarial stuff going on with Bert and Harry that he was asked to pass judgment on it. He approved it – that was great!”

**B**ut there remained one more obstacle: “I took the first script, along with Jack Sidebotham’s storyboards, to Bob and Ray,” recalled Ed Graham. “I had heard their voices in my mind as I wrote the scripts. [But] our Y&R production people didn’t want Bob and Ray to play Harry and Bert. We had to audition forty teams, plus Mel Blanc playing both roles.”

“Ed’s idea really embodied them,” Sidebotham said. “The idea for the campaign and Bob and Ray were one and the same. ...But there was pressure from the senior people...suggesting

## “Manifestly the two of them were put on earth to do Bert and Harry Piel”

other actors to do it. I remember Tony Randall was one of the first people we had to audition. The people who were doing that had no concept of the concept. Tony Randall is a wonderful actor but...”

“They had a lot of people try out for it,” Elliott said. “And we went back more than once. It narrowed down, I think, to us and Ed was pushing. I mean, Ed was adamant in his aims and he wanted us for that.”

Ultimately, according to Graham, after hearing their final audition, “Bob and Ray were unanimously selected.” Bert and Harry debuted in New York as radio spots in August of 1955, and on

television, produced by UPA Pictures, first in two test markets, Harrisburg, Pa., and Syracuse, N.Y. In December, they appeared in all Piel markets, radio and TV, in 20 and 60-second commercials.

“When we did the campaign as radio commercials,” Graham said, “they were a mild success. But with the same soundtracks and Jack Sidebotham’s visuals, suddenly everybody was talking about them. ... Jack had a natural warmth about him that he communicated in his work. Even an angry Bert became loveable when Jack drew him.”

“He was on the same wavelength as Ray and Ed and I,” Elliott said.

Bumbling their way through the blurbs, the endearing Bert (Goulding) and Harry (Elliott) mocked themselves and traditional advertising speak (“Throat wise, it’s delicious.”),



Jack Sidebotham

*Jack Sidebotham, a co-creator of Harry and Bert Piel, created this reminiscence especially for Television Quarterly.*

frequently addressing the audience as “consumers” and not above reminding them that “these commercials cost us a fortune.”

“As entertaining as those spots were, Bert was hard sell,” Elliott pointed out, referring to the cranky brother’s blustery pitches (Piels tastes best of all because it’s driest of all!). Coming from a little short, fat guy,” Elliott said, “it was the reverse of what we’re used to. So agreeable and acceptable – and that was part of Ed’s psychology. ... We give him full credit for Bert and Harry.”

The campaign became so popular that the brewery, inundated with requests, began publishing the commercials’ scheduled broadcast times and stations in Manhattan newspapers. One Piels promotion had Bert and Harry give away an actual island, with Elliott and Goulding on hand in the Bahamas to make the official presentation to the winner. By 1956 sales were up by 21 percent, according to *New York Daily News* reporter Jay Maeder, who, in reference to Elliott and Goulding, wrote, “Manifestly the two of them were put on Earth to do Bert and Harry Piel.”

**T**he spots even poked fun at their own success. In the middle of one, a studio tour guide (Elliott) interrupts, telling his group, “This is Bert and Harry’s studio. They do beer commercials, which claim to be funny. The shrimpy guy on the left acts very obnoxious and the big dumb guy gets everything mixed-up. Most of their gags are wearing thin now.”

When sales later couldn’t keep pace with Bert and Harry’s increasing popularity, the brothers struck back. In one spot, Bert scolded viewers, “Some of you – and you know who you are

– were laughing at our commercials and not buying our beer. The free ride is over! We have a new theme: ‘I’m laughing with Piels in my hand.’ What’s fair is fair.”

In the heels of the Piels success, which ran for six years plus a couple of revivals, Graham left Young & Rubicam, joining the comedy team to form Goulding–Elliott–Graham, the advertising enterprise which created national and regional commercial campaigns for other major advertisers, including Tip-Top bread, General Motors, Andersen’s Split Pea Soup, Alcoa, General Electric, Nationwide, Paper-Mate, and Calso Water, a San Francisco campaign that was on the air for ten years.

**I**n March of 1990, Jack Sidebotham and his wife, Bernadette, were somewhere having a drink when they learned Ray Goulding had died. Sidebotham suddenly found himself doodling a drawing on a napkin of Harry, a tear on his cheek, standing next to a gravestone marked, “R.I.P., Bert” Coming from the grave was a balloon of Bert speaking, “Lighten up, Harry.”

Though not quite sure if Liz would find it appropriate, with Bernadette’s encouragement, Sidebotham went ahead and sent it to her. “She called me,” he remembered, “and said she had loved it and had copies made for all of the family.”

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*David Pollock and his partner Elias Davis have written for The Steve Allen Show, Mary Tyler Moore, All in the Family, M\*A\*S\*H, Cheers, Frasier and The Carol Burnett Show. They have won an Emmy, Writers Guild, Peabody and two Humanitas awards.*

# The Live Television Debate That Could Have Been: Saddam Hussein and George W. Bush or The “Mother” of All Live Television Debates

By Howard A. Myrick

**M**arshall McLuhan, the 1960s guru of global telecommunications-based interconnectedness, would surely have risen from the dead had this television event actually occurred. Unfortunately, the challenge offered by Iraq’s President Saddam Hussein to the U.S.’s President George W. Bush to engage in a live television debate was not accepted. Saddam Hussein’s challenge was made on February 24, 2003 during his historic face-to-face televised interview with the former CBS *Wunderkind* of television journalism, Dan Rather— the interview that garnered Mr. Rather as much criticism as praise (criticism from those who thought this was but another CBS- facilitated propaganda opportunity for the Iraqi President and praise from

those who marveled at his success in getting his second interview with this elusive and secretive Iraqi leader).

What was especially significant about this particular interview was the fact that it occurred just days before the launch of the preemptive military assault on Iraq by the U.S.-led “coalition of the willing.” What was – or should have been – even more noteworthy was the clear and unexpected challenge communicated by Mr. Hussein to President George W. Bush— a challenge to engage in a live televised debate on the subject that was at the core of the “will to war” being championed by the Bush White House at that very moment. So direct and unexpected was Mr. Hussein’s debate challenge that the unflappable Dan Rather appeared near-speechless and



*CBS News Anchor Dan Rather (left) conducting an exclusive interview with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein (second from right). The interview was shown on 60 Minutes on February 26, 2003.*

so unsure of what he had heard that he probed for clarification and confirmation of his understanding of what he thought he had heard. (Perhaps Mr. Rather was recalling the adage “what you thought I said was not what I meant, etc.”).

The words uttered by Mr. Hussein and conveyed through his translator were: “If the American people would like to know the facts for what they are ... through a direct dialogue ... I am ready to conduct a direct dialogue with the President of the United States, President Bush, on television ... in front of all people – in a direct – uncensored manner.” Dan Rather, still appearing unsure of what he had heard (and, perhaps, striving also for a heightened level of journalistic theatrics), responded: “You are suggesting ... urging a debate with President Bush? On television?” Mr. Hussein responded: “Yes. That’s my proposal.” Dan Rather continued to probe: “... a satellite television debate. Live. ...a live international debate via satellite ...” Mr. Hussein continued to

clarify and reiterate, responding: “I do not mean that I ... make a speech at the United Nations. ...What I mean is that we sit – as we are sitting, you and I – I will address questions to him and he will address questions to me. ... Without make-up. ...Without editing – without prepared speeches ...”

Had this debate occurred, would it have been just so much political *Shauspiel* or reality-show-like palaver between two heads of state, engaged in a tragic-comic display of big boys behaving badly? Or, would it have been, indeed, “the ‘mother’ of all live TV debates”? Or, would it have been (to use Mr. Hussein’s words to Dan Rather) “...an opportunity for us to insure peace and safety ...”?

Why was Saddam Hussein’s challenge not accepted? Answers to President Saddam Hussein’s questions shall remain forever unknown, given his subsequent death by execution carried out by the U.S.-backed Iraqi provisional government – a penalty which, arguably, if it were to have been carried out at all,

should have been administered by an international tribunal. It is still not too late, however to ask: why was Saddam Hussein's challenge not accepted? Did CBS or any news organization consider the challenge serious enough or worthy enough to press even harder than reportedly they did to facilitate what could have been, potentially, an example of the highest level of public service--as well as a true demonstration of the power of the media to provide stimulus to the conduct of discourse in the international marketplace of ideas?

Now, so as not to appear to have lost sight of the reality that network news departments are profit centers and that the business of the business of news is profit, not public service, (except as posited in journalism classrooms and in broadcast license-renewal applications), the following assertion is offered as a viable example of the intersection of business considerations and serving the public good.

**S**uch a live international satellite debate between the two men at the center of the brewing storm that has now consumed both men's national treasure of money, physical and human capital and caused political instability throughout the whole Middle East would have – even before these cataclysmic events occurred – garnered such large audiences and, concomitantly, such large profits that it is still bewildering that the combined clout of the broadcast networks, the National Association of Broadcasters, the Radio and Television News Directors' Association and the legions of so-called political think tanks could not have made it happen! Without a doubt this would have been the kind of television opportunity for which any

television news executive (sans political or corporate fear from the "suits" upstairs) would walk through fire to get.

**T**he challenge, for whatever reasons, was not met. The media opportunity was missed. More importantly, the public was denied the benefit of seeing another side of Saddam Hussein and hearing an interpretation of world events as seen through another prism – however flawed these perceptions may have seemed through the filter of Western ideology. Theories and considerations of the impact of culture and ideology on the formation of different world views aside, the application of canonical techniques

**This would have been the kind of opportunity for which any television news executive would walk through fire to get**

of content analysis reveals that many of Saddam Hussein's assertions and predictions concerning the pending war and its consequences were credible – some, even, prophetic. The following list contains just a few of the more salient and prescient points made in his far-ranging commentary, containing his expectations and suggestions, even pleadings – sometimes exceeding the face-saving boundaries observed by Middle Eastern rulers:

(1) An American-led preemptive military attack against Iraq was imminent, with or without the United Nations' endorsement or sanctions.

(2) There would be at the start of such military action a state of divided public opinion among American citizens and

politicians – an ideological chasm which would widen with the passage of time.

(3) An American-led military invasion of Iraq would incite worldwide Anti-American sentiments and heightened antagonisms, especially among Muslims throughout the Middle East.

(4) U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney will evolve or be revealed as the principal cheerleader for launching war against Iraq – and, as a prognosticator whose prophecies would prove false.

(5) Big business, multinational companies and war-profiteers will be revealed as being instigators, lobbyists and co-conspirators in the decision to go to war. They will also be major proponents of continuation of the war beyond the time limits and tolerance of the American people.

(6) The expectation that American and/or coalition military forces would be greeted as liberators and not as occupiers was a grossly false expectation.

(7) The expectation that Saddam Hussein would flee Iraq, seeking and/or accepting exile in another country, also, was an ill-founded expectation.

(8) The presumption that Iraqis would be compliant and grateful recipients of U.S. largess – and not defiant anti-westerners, too, was a misguided notion.

(9) The U.S. assertion that there was a connection between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden – posing an imminent threat to the security of the U.S., forecasting a mushroom cloud over Manhattan – was either a figment of someone's overactive imagination or a diabolical construct of Administration Spinmeisters.

(10) There were no weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or viable capability to produce such weapons.

The media-relevant implication

here is: Did the collective investigative journalism workforce fail to analyze and evaluate Hussein's assertions, predictions, and more importantly, his allegations of wrongdoings and misrepresentations by his Western adversaries? Or, did the media do a redux of Vietnam: play the role of "journalist as patriot" (to borrow a phrase from Kathleen Hall-Jamieson's book, *The Press Effect*) then, when the public got ahead of, especially, television – chose to follow the public's lead into the anti-war movement and, now, claim too much credit for helping to end the war?

**O**n the question of Saddam Hussein's anticipation of an impending attack by the U.S., there can be no doubt that he fully expected it to happen, sooner than later. On further analysis of his remarks, it now appears that he erred in his belief (or just could not imagine) that the American people and the U.S. Congress would accept the Administration's claim that it was his intent to engage in another war with the United States. It did not appear then, nor in retrospect, that Hussein was being disingenuous when he accepted Dan Rather's offer to him to speak directly to the American people about questions on their minds. Accepting the offer, Hussein responded: "The officials of the United States have themselves spoken about their intentions to commit aggression against Iraq. ...I say to the honest Americans that if such a thing happens, do not capitulate, do not give in. ... Do not commit aggression against us. ... We have not committed aggression against the United States."

Saddam Hussein's other remarks along these same lines are so pointed that to repeat them carries the risk, even now, of appearing to be too sympathetic to the former Iraqi dictator. Most pointedly

and with a degree of humility unexpected of the “butcher of Baghdad” (to use the moniker applied by his Western detractors), Hussein stated: “We hope that the attack will not take place. ... we pray to Him [Allah] that the Americans will refrain from such an eventuality – to spare the Americans from committing such a mistake – and also spare Iraq and the Iraqi people from being involved in such an experience.”

Was Saddam Hussein being obsequious or disarmingly coy in his choice of words – especially in his near-deprecating acknowledgement of America’s superior military power and the suffering it would cause his people? Reviewing the transcript of the Dan Rather-Saddam Hussein interview reveals a foresight that borders on the prophetic. Hussein stated: “The United States can destroy – but the question is, why should America destroy? And why should America generate hostility – the hostility of the world – towards the United States?”

Saddam could not have been more prescient regarding the U.S. public opinion fallout – indeed, political crisis – that would occur attributable to ballooning anti-war sentiments, the likes of which America had not experienced since its catastrophic Vietnam misadventure. It now appears that Hussein “... among the most insular of leaders... knows little of the outside world, especially the West.” (a characterization attributed to an unnamed foreign diplomat by Dan Rather in his book, *Deadlines and Datelines*) ...possessed a clearer understanding than

most American politicians of the uniquely American cultural and psychological attitudes regarding war. Saddam seemed to have known that Americans are by nature, force of environment and socioeconomic development, a practical people (and at the same time) curiously imbued with great idealism. His opinions, in this regard, coincides almost exactly with the assessments posited by the noted historian, Robert Endicott Osgood, who observed: “

War upsets the whole scale of social priorities of an individualistic and materialistic scheme of life, so that the daily round of getting and spending is subordinated to the collective welfare of the nation in a hundred grievous ways –from taxation to death.”

It is possible that Saddam Hussein may have mistaken the “American way in war” as a lack of

“stomach for war” – a simplification which overlooks America’s capacity for ferocity in war when the requisite set of conditions (psycho-socio-political) exists. If, on the other hand, he recognized that the American “will to fight” would be challenged by the American public becoming suspicious of the government’s stated reasons for going to war (e.g., that the reasons were ill-founded or deceptive), he had every reason to anticipate that the public would turn vehemently against the government that dared to impose the sacrifices of war upon them. This was the dynamic which in large measure explains the U.S.’s debacle in Vietnam–

**“Would a live television debate have provided information upon which all parties to the pending crisis could have made more informed decisions about alternative courses of action?”**

and which appears to be developing in Iraq.

Would a live television debate have provided information upon which all parties to the pending crisis could have made more informed decisions about alternative courses of action?

Would a live satellite television debate between President George W. Bush and President Saddam Hussein have provided information upon which all parties to the pending crisis could have made more informed decisions about alternative courses of action? Would the U.S.-led invasion have occurred and would the subsequent and current calamities in Iraq have been avoided? Would such a televised debate have provided (using Saddam Hussein's words) "an opportunity ... to insure peace and safety"?

**T**he big question for the U.S. television industry: Why was not Dan Rather's and CBS' pre-invasion "scoop" profiled so highly that President Bush (in true Texan fashion) would have felt obliged to accept President Hussein's challenge and why did not at least one of the network's "Special Investigative Units" find President Hussein's predictions and allegations too compelling and too time-sensitive to ignore? Was it because the mass media had participated so willingly in the demonization of Saddam Hussein, denigration of the "marginalized" United Nations, acceptance of the "righteousness of our cause" and caught up in the fervor of "somebody has got to pay for 9/11, whether that somebody was or was not the actual perpetrator"?

There is probably not a television journalist alive who has not heard

the adage: "The first casualty of war is truth." The lessons of this present episode in the annals of media history suggest that "the second casualty of war is the truth-sayer," especially, if he or she can be labeled unpatriotic or fails to heed Bill O'Reilly's edict as enunciated on the Fox Network: "If you can't support our military once the war begins, then SHUT UP!"

**W**hether or not, or to what degree, the U.S. television industry has played the Jeffersonian role of "the watchdog of government" or has earned the contemporary epithet of "the lap dog of government" are questions that deserve serious consideration. Perhaps such an analytical exercise might provide an answer to the question of why the public's perception of television's news credibility ranks about as low as the public's perception of the performance of the U.S. Congress and the Executive Branch of Government. Television may not be rocket science, but it once enjoyed the reputation of being not only the most used source of news but also the most credible. What happened?

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# The Biggest and Most Controversial Reality Show on Television

Those hurricanes provided “bifurcated images” of African Americans?

By John Arnold

As thousands of residents of Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas were displaced during the storms of 2005, a coincidence occurred: these natural disasters developed at the beginning of America’s traditional television fall line-up schedule. For the last several years, television has been dominated by reality TV shows like *Survivor*, *Temptation Island*, *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire*, *Big Brother*, *American Idol*, *So You Think You Can Dance*, *Wife Swap* and *The Apprentice*. In 2005, and in contrast to these simulacrum of American life, viewers in the U.S. and the world were glued to the television coverage of the 2005 Hurricane Season, making it arguably the biggest and most controversial reality show of them all. Just as Owen Hanley Lynch argued in a recent issue of *Television Quarterly*, presenting empirical findings that the depictions of African Americans were not by accident. The “framing” of news by FOX and CNN played a major role in forming public opinion for the larger viewing community.

In the immediate months after hurricanes Katrina and Rita pounded America’s Gulf Coast, two seminal theories grounded in race matters come to the forefront. The first theory is George Gerbner’s *Bifurcated Images* a derivative of his *Cultivation theory* where heavy viewers are repeatedly exposed to particular images of African Americans, which eventually results in desensitized viewers. Most often the images are exaggerated depictions of African Americans as healthier, more middle-class than characters in general; suggesting racial inequality problems are a thing of the past. Simultaneously, newscast depictions of African Americans are “twice as likely to show them in connection with crime, violence, drugs, with all the negative and vulnerable characteristics that television characters encounter.”

The second theory was put forth by civil-rights activist W.E.B. Dubois, the first African American to graduate with a Ph.D. from Harvard (in 1895) and one of the principal founders of the NAACP (in 1909). He defined the “Double Consciousness Theory” in his

1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folks*; wherein blacks suffer from a “two-ness,” a double-consciousness, “the sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” Seldom do we realize the impact of images depicted in media on those persons who are marginalized, when the [African American] “simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.”

Media portrayal of the behaviors of African Americans during these devastating hurricanes presented a disjointed kaleidoscope of people struggling to survive against nature

**Many of these black people were portrayed as “looting,” while whites were portrayed as “survivors.”**

at any cost. Particularly with regard to Katrina, dramatic television news coverage subjectively and arbitrarily awarded certain victims of the storms with the title of “citizen” and others with that of “looter” and “refugee,” depending for the most part on the race of the victims.

Viewers watched the drama of Katrina as the wind movement reached unprecedented speeds, and the aftermath of the broken levees. For viewers, watching the consequences of the floods, the chaotic and disorganized mass migration of evacuees to the Super Dome, the 150-mile traffic jam with vehicles running out of fuel in Corpus Christi was

stunning, unreal and unscripted.

The portrayals by the owners of white media of the “Others” (blacks) were consistent with what social-identity theorists posit as marking cultural “others” as uncivilized and uncooperative as the blacks were attempting to “subsist” in a hostile weather environment, needing food, water, medical supplies, clothing, toiletries, etc. Many of these black people were portrayed as “looting.” Conversely, the chaotic images depicted of whites, on television and in newspapers, were that of “survivors.” Indeed Dr. Lynch noted in *Television Quarterly* that “CNN viewers were much more likely to recall the voices of residents and remember their comments than FOX viewers, who tended to recall images of ‘looters,’ all African Americans.”

The negative portrayal of blacks as looters for doing the exact same things as whites, in trying to endure nature when trapped by the storms, is a continuation of America’s perpetuation of the images depicted of blacks as uncivilized, uncooperative, uneducated, and animalistic by nature dating back to D.W. Griffith’s 1915 movie *Birth of a Nation*. Lynch’s study documents 22.2% of FOX coverage and 14.7% of CNN coverage, or 378 segments studied depicted images of both blacks and whites taking merchandise that did not belong to them. Notwithstanding the idea that children needed Pampers, everyone needed fresh water and food, and people with chronic illnesses needed their medications, the human need for these items was overshadowed by a few locals taking advantage of abandoned electronics stores casting a broad net on a whole race of people as “uncooperative.”

African Americans have always suffered from what W. E. B. Dubois referred to, in 1903, as a double-consciousness, that is, being black and living in white America. According to Dubois, the term was used to describe whites' stereotyping of blacks. For blacks, double consciousness is a state of confusion of one's self with that of how others perceives blacks, as having always to look at one's self through the eyes of others.

The image of the "uncivilized" African American is often perpetuated in contemporary media, notably when former president George Herbert Walker Bush's Secretary of Education William Bennett, also a Salem Radio Network talk-show host and CNN television news commentator, stated that America's crime rate would go down "if you wanted to reduce crime, you could—if that were your sole purpose—you could abort every black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down." In response to Bennett's comments, only 64% of viewers and those participating in the October 2005, 14 question survey conducted by University of Cincinnati, in a Mister-poll, *Psychologists' Facts on Racism in Relation to Your Views*, found Bennett's comments "reprehensible." A more recent commentary on African American civility came from radio and TV host Don Imus, who called the Rutgers Women's Basketball team "nappy-headed hos," despite the fact they were all honor students. It stings just as badly, when Hip-Hop rappers negatively generalize and stereotype others.

Blacks left behind in New Orleans were chastised, degraded and made to

feel unworthy of rescue and recovery efforts, because they could not leave earlier. According to the U.S. Census Bureau updates, the Median Household Income in New Orleans in 2005 was \$29,500, and for renters the average income was \$18,800. New Orleans' population demographics were 28.5% white v. 67.25 black.

The typical New Orleans job, for blacks, was that as a housekeeper in the wealthy French Quarter, the tourist part of the city. Add to this problem, Lisa Myers of MSNBC reported that busses which could have taken people out of the city were kept docked by order of the mayor, September 6, 2005, (*What Went Wrong in New Orleans*, 2005). Ironically, in preparation for Hurricane Rita, many southeast Texans, mostly non-black, failed to leave their area—also an uncooperative act—however, they were quietly and unceremoniously rescued. According to Gainesville Southeast Texas City Data, the demographic populations were 71.7% white v. 21.5 black, with white household incomes of \$53,000.

Perhaps the most disturbing example of the power of media projections of framing of the lack of cooperative behavior by minorities during Hurricane Katrina had to do with the actions of Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco. In response to media reports of looting in the city, according to ABC News, Blanco said, "[Troops are] under my orders to restore order in the streets...They have M-16s and they are locked and loaded...These troops know how to shoot and kill and they are more than willing to do so if necessary and I expect they will."

For African Americans, imagery of the issues depicted aery of the issues depicted in media is complicated.

African Americans own less than 6% of all radio and television stations in America and none of the broadcast networks. Sociologists point to the exaggerated images of blacks on television (comedies), or extreme images as uncooperative, uneducated, and uncivilized people on TV news programs, where black images are overwhelmingly presented in stories concerning violence, crime and drugs.

**F**urther, mass media present confusing images of blacks not only to the white population, but to other blacks as well.

In 1997 George Gerbner, the former Dean of the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, referred to this confusing way of presenting images of African Americans to African Americans as *bifurcated images*.

Unfortunately, Bennett's ignorant remarks in 2005 may trickle down to other conservatives and then become incorporated into American culture. After all, Mr. Bennett trained a whole generation of workers in drug enforcement as the Director of the Office of National Drug Policy (1989-1991) and as the United States Secretary of Education (1985-1988), and those same trainees are now the experts that talk-show hosts and newscasters access most often for opinions on social issues. Is there any wonder why all American viewers may be confused about their fellow African Americans?

One notable media exception to fragmented images was *NBC Nightly News*, hosted by Brian Williams, who from the outset made a point of providing compassionate coverage of African Americans in New Orleans.

Williams received his fifth Emmy, his Fourth Edward R. Murrow award, and the prestigious George Foster Peabody award. Most were given for his work in New Orleans while covering Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. It was only after NBC took the lead that other networks shifted their coverage.

When it comes to "fair and balanced" media coverage of African Americans and other minorities, much work remains to be done. Or, maybe America should rethink its affirmative-action program of only allowing non-minority males to own and operate licensed broadcast facilities to deliver news and information. The U.S. Surgeon General's 1971 Report argued that if minorities also owned licensed facilities, at parity with demographics of census populations, images of minorities would mirror the real America rather than stereotypes. As a result of more realistic depictions of minorities, possibly more minorities would participate in the democratic process in this indirect republic. After all, what American wants to be referred to as a "refugee" in a time of crisis or disaster, on a news program or on reality TV?

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*John Arnold, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the department of journalism at Howard University, received his doctorate in Media Arts and Studies from Wayne State University and his M.A. and B.A. degrees from the University of Michigan-Dearborn. He has had extensive experience in broadcasting, both as producer and as a talk-show host.*

## REVIEW AND COMMENT

### We Interrupt This Newscast: How to Improve Local News and Win Ratings, Too

By Tom Rosenstiel, Marion Just,  
Todd Belt, Atiba Pertilla,  
Walter Dean, Dante Chinni

*Cambridge University Press,  
New York*

(244 pages, \$75 hardcover, \$22.99  
paperback)

**By Bernard S. Redmont**

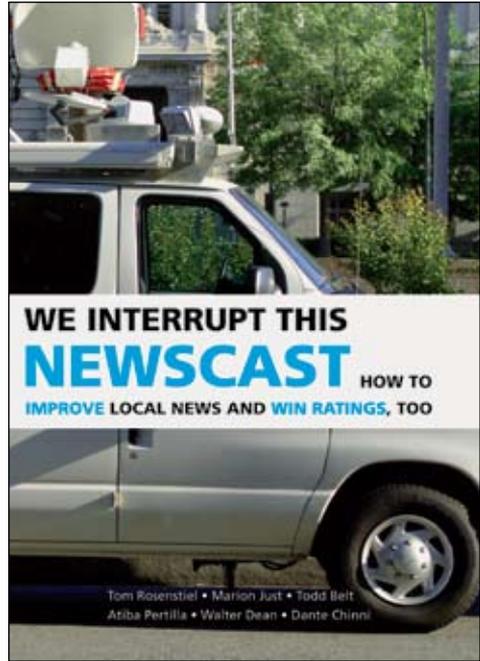
**P**repare to discard your notions about how to do local TV news.

No, local news doesn't have to "bleed to lead." Crime doesn't pay. Nor does mayhem, extreme weather, and celebrity gossip. Quality sells. The local news doesn't necessarily have to be "live, local and late-breaking." The latest word is: Try a new approach.

Producers, news directors and station managers now can shed the conventional wisdom that serious broadcasts are money losers. This so-called "wisdom" is now called demonstrably false.

Take a look at local TV newscasts around the country. For the most part they look alike. They're filled with "CAD"—crime, accidents and disasters.

Interviews with thousands of TV journalists show that the news looks this way because of the belief that "eye-ball grabbers" are the only way



to build an audience.

Now we have the data to disprove the myths prevalent in the local TV markets. Research groups have spent five years gathering material from 1,200 hours of newscasts from 154 stations—more than 33,000 stories, followed by three more years of analysis. They've consulted more than 2,000 local TV news people—professionals, academics, statisticians, print and broadcast journalists, and media observers. This is without a doubt the largest survey of local TV news ever done.

They've come up with data that demolish the myths that dominate the world of local TV news. Nearly every station operates unquestioningly by these myths:

The myth that a newscast should emphasize stories that shock and amaze. The myth that immediacy is the most important value in local TV news.

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The myth that flashing police lights, yellow tape, and other “hot” visuals are “eyeball magnets.”

The myth that TV is an emotional medium in which pictures are more important than words or ideas. The myth that every lead story must have a live shot from the scene. The myth that viewers are voyeuristic and like to be titillated.

The myth that viewers care only about local news. The myth that some stories are more important as promotion than as news. The myth that viewers won't watch long stories about issues.

The study shows that viewers for the most part see these myths as gimmickry and show business, fed by wrongheaded consultants. Research suggests that what the professionals consider most important—crime, accidents and other misfortunes—are usually not the same things that affect the daily lives of the audience.

The study has become a book with the title, *We Interrupt This Newscast: How to Improve Local News and Win Ratings, Too*. It has six authors, headed by Tom Rosenstiel, who directs the Project for Excellence in Journalism. The Project compiled the data and worked with the Committee of Concerned Journalists.

This is not a “do good for goodness sake” project. It aims directly at the bottom line, seeking intelligent business practice. Commercial success is the goal.

The study shows that how a story is reported is more important for building ratings than what the story is about. It turns out that local journalists can succeed in making money for

their stations by putting in the extra effort to get good stories, finding and balancing sources, seeking out experts and making stories relevant to the local audience. This means that covering health issues, tax debates or educational policy may attract as much or more interest than a celebrity divorce or a brewing storm.

What works best, according to the study—bolstered by audience measurement, charts and graphs—is what the book calls “The Magic Formula.”

This consists of six steps:

1. Cover Important News—and give it resources and emphasis.
2. Invest in Enterprise—Time and effort pay off. Give reporters time to investigate important issues in the community.
3. Make Sourcing Authoritative. Use data and consult experts.
4. Provide Perspective. Get more sources and viewpoints into stories. Have a balance of views on controversial issues, especially political questions.
5. Look for Local Relevance. Viewers watch if they know how stories affect them. The authors observe that “even

**“Local stations that take the trouble to produce higher quality newscasts attract more viewers than other stations.”**

local stories need some explanation about why the audience should pay attention.”

6. Make Important Stories Longer—and don't pad shallow ones. A newscast can contain a mix of story lengths.

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In the end, the authors prove that doing good means doing well. They argue that the broadcast industry has already invested untold fortunes in technology, sets, audience research, consultants and talent contracts. But they contend that “to improve content, the most important factor in viewing, it’s time to focus on the people who produce content.”

The authors argue that stations should reconsider such things as the need for dual anchors on every newscast, “a practice that is probably the most economically inefficient in local TV.” They suggest that with the salary paid one anchor, most stations could hire two reporters and in some cases three or four.

In the future, they assert, anchor talent will not become irrelevant, but it may become less dominant.

Old ways will have to be jettisoned. There is evidence that audiences are getting wise to the “flash and trash” approach taken by many stations. The culture can be changed.

The authors show how “good journalism means more ratings points that can translate into tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of dollars to local stations.”

Some of those who are unconvinced cite the failure of the “noble experiment” by WBBM-TV in Chicago. In February 2000, WBBM, the CBS affiliate in Chicago, decided to offer a no-frills presentation of news featuring a single anchor, who would deliver important stories without hype and happy talk.

**“You don’t have to dumb down the news to get more viewers.”**

What went wrong was that the newscast appeared to be cold, aloof and one-dimensional. The newscast had pedestrian writing and unimaginative production. Some critics suggested it was “PBS on CBS.” After eight and a half months, the experiment was abandoned.

Much of what the books says may startle you. But the hard data collected shows that “local stations that take the trouble to produce higher quality newscasts attract more viewers than other stations, even taking into account other factors that increase ratings, such as the lead-in program, time slot, station size, and network affiliation.”

The facts show, for example, that “newscasts that run longer, more detailed lead stories, attract larger audiences.”

Survey research indicates that local TV audiences have almost as high an interest in national and international affairs as they have in local issues.

News audiences prefer hard news to entertainment. “Doing stories that focus on issues, policy, and civic institutions leads to greater station revenue... Continuing down the path of celebrity, human interest, and superficial sensation does not.”

As CBS News’ Bob Schieffer puts it, “You don’t have to dumb down the news to get more viewers.” His prediction is that if enough news directors just read this book, TV news could be changed forever, and for the better.

Americans depend more on local TV news than any other news source, say

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the authors. "It attracts a bigger audience than cable or national news. Local TV news is the main source of information for many Americans about what is happening in their neighborhood, their economy and their culture. How well local news serves its audience matters not only for the station's bottom line but also for the bottom line of the democratic enterprise."

All in all, this is an important "must-read" book for all TV professionals. And for everyone who cares about the future of TV news

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

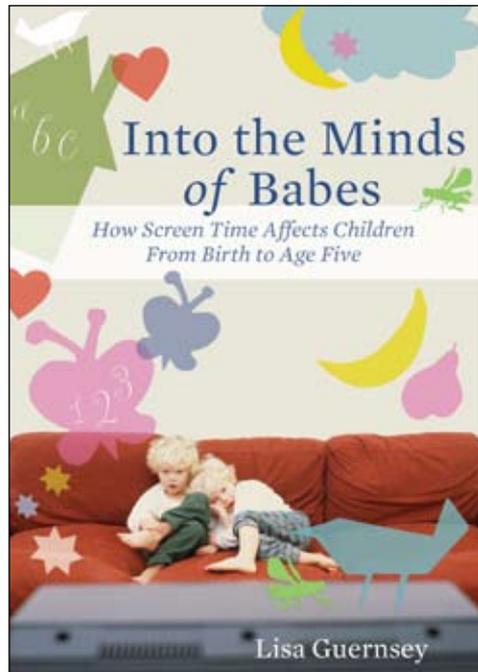
### **Into the Minds of Babes: How Screen Time Affects Children from Birth to Age Five**

By Lisa Guernsey  
Basic Books, New York  
(287 pages; \$25.00)

**By Carla Seal-Wanner**

Reading *Into the Minds of Babes* reminded me why, as a developmental psychologist, I decided to become a creator of children's

educational and interactive media. I wanted to synthesize all that is known about children's cognitive, emotional, social and moral development and build it into exemplary programs that would be accessible to all. I was convinced that well-designed, precisely targeted educational media would benefit all kids and could even help level the playing fields— that children growing up in educationally stimulus-deprived environments who gained access to these programs and products might have an advantage that they would not otherwise have. Call me naïve? No, as Guernsey aptly describes, my fellow co-conspirators from educational and commercial media companies can fairly boast that some of us have been privileged to have taught children valuable lessons and entertained them along the way. Her book offers the



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insight that it is due to the emergence of these very claims, that media can educate as well as entertain, that has led to the significant role “edutainment” media has come to play in children’s lives today. In this context she analyzes the question: for better or worse? She informs the incendiary debate over whether media is beneficial or not in the developing child’s life by taking a microscopic look at the claims made by producers, the content of the media itself, research findings on the impact of these media and parental expectations.

Guernsey is motivated as a journalist and as a parent who frankly recognizes how overwhelmed she is figuring out what media is good for her own young daughters. Considering the 24/7 multiple-media landscape created just for children from birth to school age there is a lot of media out there to discuss. She is correct, starting with the cluster of preschool programs on PBSKids that surround *Sesame Street*, perhaps the most important evolution (or revolution?) caused by media that claims to both educate and entertain was the creation of developmentally designated programming blocks on the major kids channels. The development of Nick Jr., based on the success of *Blues Clues*, being perhaps the best commercial example. Preschoolers suddenly had media destinations all their own with shows intentionally designed to meet their developmental needs and the intrinsic preoccupations of toddler hood. And since CD-ROMs emerged as a “user-friendly” home computer product in the early 1990’s the resident and wireless edutainment media available from birth to senility has exploded. Enter the all-

media-all-the-time universe that children grow up in.

Talented producers and children’s media experts have contributed superb shows and products, have done exacting research to keep improving them and others in the academic community have attempted to objectively assessed their value and summative impact. In general, we are a field of optimists, devoted to getting it right for kids. But despite the best (and usually pure) intentions of producers, all children’s media are not created equal – or equally well; leaving pediatricians, cognitive and developmental psychologists, teachers and parents worried about its potential negative impact.

One rarely discussed honest explanation for this is that making excellent children’s educational media is monumentally difficult. Despite the best training and intentions, we – too often – do not get it exactly right. Understanding the complexity of the child’s cognitive and socio-emotional development and translating it to a media experience that will stimulate, benefit, perhaps even inspire is an intellectual and creative challenge that is extremely hard to achieve. Trust me, it is not out of lack of trying, that children’s media sometimes falls short of its intended “learning objectives.” This is why extensive formative and summative research is a critical part of any program or product development budget!

Additionally, parents must become savvy about the fact that the media creators are not alone in this endeavor. The dirty little secret is that children’s media is a HUGE business. There are the company executives who have to care about such trivial things as the

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**BOTTOM LINE.** There are those who are charged with marketing the programs and products we make to ensure that they make a profit. Imagine that? To keep making more quality media for kids it is necessary for them to be a financial success as well as a hit with the target audience. Therefore, unfortunately too often, the business elements behind the screens encourage the hyping of educational goals and outcomes to attract viewers and sell products. Buyer Beware: children are a market!

Add to the sometimes inflated messages used to sell children's media the pressures parents seem to feel today raising kids in a world where there is a (perceived or real) hyper-competitiveness in schools from preschool to college entrance. Can we blame them for seeking out the shows and products that will give them confidence that their child will not be "left behind"? Herein, lies the downside of the 24/7 multimedia supplementary "learning environment." What's a parent to do? The American Academy of Pediatrics is telling them that children under age two do not need any of these additional mental stimuli to be ready for school—arguing that one-on-one interaction with parents and caregivers is the only 'educational' experience they need. In the meantime, media producers are filling the airwaves and the shelves of Target with such parent guilt-inducing titles as *Baby Einstein*.

This is where Lisa Guernsey's considerable talent as a science, technology and education journalist comes into play. She dutifully analyzes

the claims of producers against the extant research on the positive and negative effects of media on growing brains and minds. She employs her journalistic skill to tackle the tedious task of sorting hype from reality in the children's media-marketing maelstrom. Examining current research on how exposure to television and other "screen time" affects babies and toddlers, Guernsey helps to allay parents' fear that any use of media before age two will be detrimental. She argues that the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) 1999 guideline instructing parents not to allow children under two to use any screen media is too extreme given the lack of robust evidence of negative effects. Yet she wisely does not conclude that parents should let down their guard about what media children can watch and how much of it. Moderation, moderation, moderation!

Her approach is a gift to parents because she encourages them to decide what the best media choices are for their particular child. She presents this recommendation in a clever mantra suggesting that parents focus on "the three C's": context, content and the individual child. An obvious prescription, yes, but for many exhausted parents who grow overly anxious from the constant barrage of contradictory messages concerning how media may affect child development, some welcome, calming common sense.

Going beyond this simple notion, she digs into the careful meta-analysis of volumes of research studies she has conducted and pairs down findings to digestible facts such as: avoid the hype to use media to stimulate your infant or

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toddlers brain to give them a cognitive jump-start on schooling (brain development does not require jumper cables); media modeling behavior that leads to happy social relationships and good habits (sharing and caring) is valuable at this tender age when children are just beginning to interact with peers; media with age-appropriate language activities reinforces natural literacy skill growth; etc. Even these types of recommendations, and there are many other valuable ones sprinkled throughout the book, are nuanced and complex concepts not necessarily obvious to many parents.

As the old adage goes, *“The stork does not deliver the baby with a training manual.”* Ironically, despite the vast number of articles and books addressing these concerns, many busy parents are overwhelmed by the task of parenting well when it comes to inculcating healthy media habits. This book will give them a short cut to the GPS mapping system they otherwise need to navigate through the ever-changing media landscape.

My only worry is that the book is being hailed as allowing parents to ignore the AAP’s recommendation (and those made more recently by other pediatric associations and research institutes). This is a misread of the author’s genuine intent, which is to put parents in charge of the menus for their kid’s media diet by helping them become more critical media consumers themselves. She emphasizes how important it is to recognize that screen time should be used in such moderation that the beneficial interactive time between parents/caregivers and children is not significantly reduced. Let’s face it, babies and toddlers are not

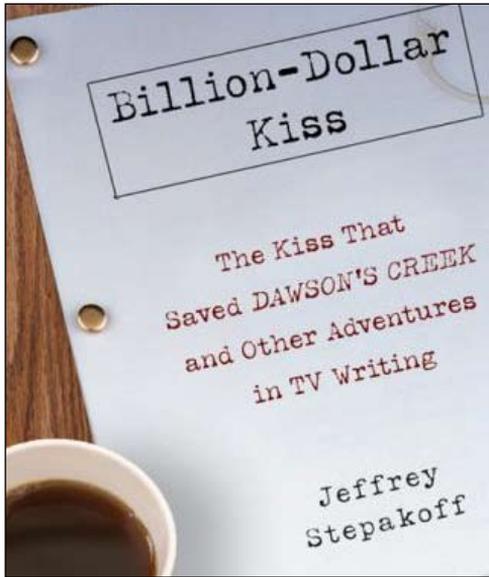
awake very much of the day; their alert time should mainly be spent with the best nurturers of language and social development – parents and caretakers who hold them, look them in the eye and react to their speech and gestures.

For this reason I hope that parents are not the primary target audience for this book. It is equally important for all children’s media creators to read, ponder and assimilate the careful research synthesis that Guernsey has provided. In particular, it should give anyone making media for preschoolers pause that there is so much controversy, all with the noblest intentions, about whether or not the very youngest minds should be spending any time in front of electronic screens. Those making shows and products for this target audience must not simply do so because they are a new lucrative market, but because they believe there is truly a benefit for wee hearts and minds. As I have said before in these pages, any media intended for a child younger than preschool must be used in moderation because no electronic toy will ever be able to provide the immediate and individual feedback that face-to-face interaction with a loving parent provides.

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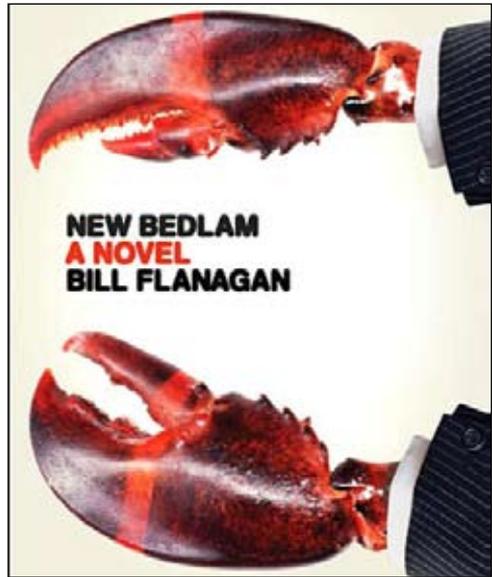
*A former professor at Columbia University, where she created and directed the graduate program in instructional technology and media, Dr. Carla E.P. Seal-Wanner is the Founder/President of @access4@11, a public-interest advocacy organization promoting universal access to quality interactive media for children. She received her doctoral and master’s degrees in developmental psychology from Harvard and her BA in psychology from Hampshire College.*

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### **Billion-Dollar Kiss: The Kiss That Saved Dawson's Creek and Other Adventures**

By Jeffrey Stepakoff  
*Gotham Books, New York*  
(323 pages, \$26.00)



### **New Bedlam A Novel**

By Bill Flanagan  
*Penguin Group,  
New York*  
(342 pages, \$24.95)

#### **By Ron Simon**

Over the last 15 years the new digital technology and a profusion of programming have transformed the television industry. There have been a multitude of books on how this media revolution is affecting the consumer, but little has been written on how talent and management are coping with the broadband challenges. Two newsbooks, a memoir by one-time *Wunderkind* writer Jeffrey Stepakoff and a novel by a MTV executive Bill Flanagan, give a report from the creative trenches of a

business in constant flux.

Jeffrey Stepakoff believes that modern television was invented while he was in college. He graduated from Carnegie Mellon, whose alumni include Steven Bochco and John Wells, hot writer/producers who revolutionized the cool medium. Stepakoff's entry into this "West Coast Drama Clan," where quality television was produced with mind-boggling perks, is the narrative core of his engrossing and informative *Billion-Dollar Kiss*. With a revealing honesty about his economic success, Stepakoff places his rise to creative power against

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### Sopranos Update

Since I reviewed *The Sopranos: The Book* in the fall 2007 issue of *Television Quarterly*, there has been an updated version released four months after the series ended on June 10. This new tome, *The Sopranos: The Complete Book*, offers 35 more glossy pages and added commentary about the final nine episodes. Not only is there a map of Jersey where one can find the restaurant where the family had their last supper, there is a four-page spread, photographed by Annie Leibovitz, with cast members recreating Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece. To the very left of the grouping is creator David Chase peering outward, revealing little. Chase did generate a lot of the headlines from an interview in the book stating definitively that there is "nothing definite" about the ending. Although Chase first indicated that the ten-second blackout suggested Tony's demise, he is now leaving the door open for future mob hits.

Before that shooting begins, there will surely be more Sopranos product. HBO has just released the DVD set of the final episodes, Season Six, Part II. Although there is good-hearted commentary by some of the actors (several of whom argue they feel there were seven seasons, not a super six season), nothing is revealed about the meaning of the finale. Chase only reveals the meaning of his sound track in a bonus feature. We will have to leave the search for profundity to such scholars as Maurice Yacowar, who has now updated his *The Sopranos on the Couch* (Continuum) three times, still trying to illuminate "the central tension between the viewer's familiar morality and its violation by this criminal subculture." Yacowar and other professors will gather for a conference, *The Sopranos: A Wake*, at Fordham University in May 2008. Fans of the departed series can gather and mourn together, until something becomes definite.--R.S.

the backdrop of structural upheavals and seminal strikes that galvanized television during the later eighties and nineties. Stepakoff also brings his own experience to the party, having written for 14 different series, including the Emmy-winning staff of *The Wonder Years*.

Today's television writer is more than an artistic loner with a laptop, Stepakoff points out that the writer is involved in the entire production process, from casting to editing. Because of the strike of 1988, the

television writer attained a wealth and an influence never dreamed by the budding Reginald Roses or Rod Serlings of the past. A staff writer who creates the average four scripts a year, while assisting on production advice for the entire series now makes \$800,000 for nine months work, which translates into more than a million with the standard pilot-development deal. Stepakoff considers the nineties the "golden age" for the writer in Hollywood, with the emphasis on gold.

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Much of the writer's clout comes from the union's focus on residuals, which allows the scribbler to maintain future ownership of something that he creates. Because of Writers Guild of America's efforts, writers now receive up to 17.5 percent of syndicated revenues when their shows are sold in syndication. Stepakoff points out that writers, like everyone else in the entertainment complex, "have either great abundance or they live hand-to-mouth."

The "Billion-Dollar Kiss" of the title was an effort to keep the youthful franchise *Dawson's Creek* afloat after the departure of creator Kevin Williamson. Stepakoff, then in his early thirties, got on the staff, having eliminated some of his earlier credits like *Simon & Simon* that made him seem too old. The writers devised a kiss that would foment a love triangle among the three main characters, helping to propel the series into TV nirvana, syndication. But when *Dawson's Creek* finally hit that magic 100th episode, it was questionable how profitable the teen soap would be in a business wracked by so many changes.

Stepakoff is chagrined by the direction of the industry in the 21st century. A writer's strike was averted in 2001, but executives had their ammunition in place: reality productions, which Stepakoff describes as "the sweatshops of modern day Hollywood." Although Stepakoff realizes that strikes now deal with revenue streams not working conditions, he worries that another prolonged strike could be devastating to everyone involved. It could be 1988 all over again

with television losing of "a large part of its continually shrinking and highly fragmented audience for good."

Bill Flanagan knows the contemporary TV business from the inside. He is executive vice president of MTV Networks and free-lance commentator on all things pop culture. He has transmuted the insanity that envelops the industry into a wickedly, laugh-out-loud romp, skewering the medium as much as he delights in its wackiness. Like Stepakoff, he recognizes the change is the name of the game, with executives and businesses disappearing at a moment's notice.

His protagonist, TV executive Bobby Khan, knows the rules all too well. Even though he has one prerequisite of the modern suit—he loves to fire people—he realizes that being in his early thirties is "late middle age for a television executive." When a reality show scandal costs him his job, he hooks up with a dysfunctional family dynasty (think *Arrested Development* meets *Dallas*) trying to revive its cable operations in the sleepy town of New Bedlam, Rhode Island. As an adolescent, Bobby created fantasy television schedules, counter-programming against the dominant network of the day. In his new position, he now must revitalize the idiosyncratic cable channels set up by the patriarch's children: from the pretentious arts station Eureka! to the final resting home for tired sitcoms, BoomerBox.

With lucid, goodhearted prose, Flanagan delights in the way good and bad TV has shaped our cultural sensibility. He relishes in the fact that children growing up from the sixties on

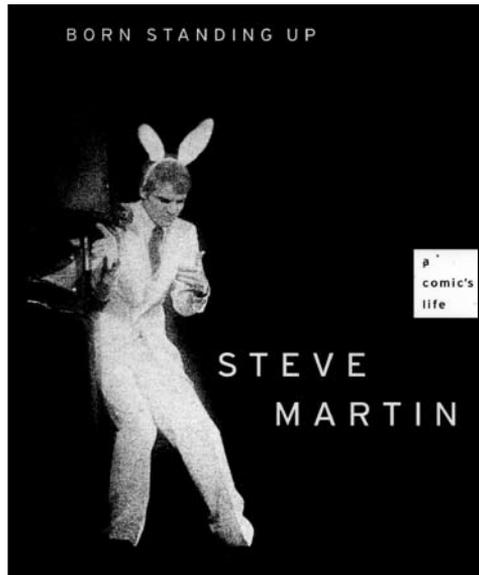
## REVIEW AND COMMENT

all share useless reference points: cutting across all social and class differences, every kid can name every member of the Brady Bunch. Bobby, the born TV programmer, creates a series of stunts on the cable channels that mashes up fiction and history, as well as high and low culture to save the family fortune. One of his brainstorms is devoted to “Three generations of America’s First Families”—the Kennedys, Cartwrights, and Corleones. Yes, he programs *Bonanza* episodes with the *Godfather* saga, sprinkled with every Kennedy-related movie. His cable company becomes the talk of the town, even mentioned in a Conan O’Brien monologue. Being referenced in a comedian’s monologue has become a new parameter for success, as anyone who watches the “Sunday Funnies” section of *This Week with George Stephanopoulos* knows for sure.

Both Stepakoff and Flanagan stress that the TV business now changes almost as frequently as viewers switch the channels. *The Billion-Dollar Kiss* is essential reading for any novice writer, providing the juicy details and dollar amounts of making it in new millennium Hollywood. *New Bedlam*, the title itself a perfect description of the industry today, is a hilarious take on the manipulations at the lower end of the cable spectrum; hustling is still one of the business’s art forms, at any level. Both writers are guys you would like to hang out with, and technology now makes that possible. Stepakoff has a page on MySpace, the popular social networking website, and provides updates on his life. Flanagan regularly appears on *CBS*

*Sunday Morning*, examining the state of pop culture; viewers are welcome to post comments about his thoughts on CBS’s website. Being a writer in this new media environment means interacting with your audience; as Bobby Khan would say, “it comes with the turf.”

*Ron Simon is the curator of television and radio for the Paley Center for Media, formerly The Museum of Television & Radio. The Center changed its name to embrace the new digital and broadband worlds, with a mission to examine the impact of all media on our lives.*



## Born Standing Up: A Comic's Life

By Steve Martin  
Scribner, New York  
(210 pages; \$25.00)

By Earl Pomerantz

## REVIEW AND COMMENT

In his career as a stand-up comedian, a career escalating to rock-star proportions, Steve Martin went to war against show business, and won. The enemy? A longstanding show-biz cliché:

“You’ve been a wonderful audience.”

Most people, I suspect, had little problem with “You’ve been a wonderful audience.” Maybe they believed they actually *had* been a wonderful audience, and maybe they didn’t. Maybe they didn’t care much, but appreciated the kindness of being told they’d been a wonderful audience, whether they’d actually been one or not.

Maybe they knew “You’ve been a wonderful audience” was a cliché and it didn’t bother them. The only thing they knew for certain was when a performer said, “You’ve been a wonderful audience,” the performance was coming to a close. “You’ve been a wonderful audience” was the show-biz equivalent of the Two-Minute Warning. Look for your coat, find your purse, slip your loafers back on, it’s time to go home.

“You’ve been a wonderful audience.” A harmless affectation, most would say, if pressed for an opinion. But Steve Martin was having none of it. Quoth Steve:

“Closing the show, I’d say, ‘I’d like to thank each and every one of you for coming here tonight.’ (This is the more personal cousin of ‘You’ve been a wonderful audience.’) Then I would walk into the audience and, in fast motion, thank everyone individually.”

The battle was on. “You’ve been a wonderful audience” and other rickety show business clichés would be laughed into oblivion. Along with

the conventional comedy we knew and loved, and now found increasingly passé.

We’re talking comedy revolution here. Steve Martin, David Letterman and Lorne Michaels of *Saturday Night Live* fame, among others, came of age in the flower-powering sixties, when everyone over thirty was viewed with mistrust and irony-free sincerity was branded as laughingly hypocritical.

Some comedians (Mort Sahl) took aim at government; others targeted the impossibility of relationships (Nichols and May). Comedians also skewered the absurdities of the workplace (Bob Newhart, Shelly Berman). And then there was race (Richard Pryor).

Steve Martin attacked show business.

No target was too trivial for Steve’s sardonic tomfoolery. “In my opening seconds, I would say, ‘It’s great to be here,’ then move to several other spots on the stage and say, ‘No, it’s great to be here!’ I would move again: No, it’s great to be here!” Not satisfied with annihilating “You’ve been a wonderful audience,” Martin proceeded to eviscerate “It’s great to be here.” You can never hear those words again without thinking, “Oh, come on!”

Steve Martin was the Sultan of Smartass. And when anyone challenged him for being childish or immature, sardonic Steve was ready was an Oscar Wilde-worthy retort:

“Well excuuuse me!”

When you think about it, show business seems a curious target. Who expects entertainment to be real? Sure, there’s good entertainment and shoddy entertainment. And yes, the best

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performers obscure the illusion, making the incredible totally believable. But why lampoon as dishonest an enterprise, which, by its nature, is grounded in illusion? On top of that, show biz is the greatest racket in the world. As Irving Berlin lyricized, "Everything about it is appealing." Steve Martin himself agrees, explaining his precarious career choice by asking, "Who wouldn't want to be in show business?"

Why make fun of the business you love? Or is that even the right question?

To explore the issue, we turn to Steve Martin's *Born Standing Up*.

*Born Standing Up* is a beautiful book. Literally. The font is sharp and super-easy to read. The graphics are tastefully arranged. The punctuation is impeccable. The paper is so thick, every time I turned the page, I thought I was turning two pages. The entire endeavor is the equivalent of slipping between the coolest, crispest sheets at the finest hotel. *Born Standing Up* is a Five-Star production.

It's also graceful, elegant, generous and humble, attributes all emanating from its enormously decent author. No girlfriend was ever a bitch, no show biz associate ever stabbed him in the back. Everyone mentioned is portrayed flatteringly, or, at least, protected. Early on, Martin noticed another comedian cribbing material from Lenny Bruce's act; he graciously omits the thieving comedian's name. When Steve talks about collaborating with Bob Einstein on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*, no mention is made of Einstein's arguably more comically inventive brother, Albert Brooks. Most writers

would have thrown that in. Not Steve. He was writing about Bob.

Only once did Martin's acerbic aggressiveness come to the fore. Martin's then girlfriend who, while on a film shoot in Budapest, was "swept away" from Martin by the film's director, John Frankenheimer. Martin then reports that 20 years later, the same director tried to seduce his then wife, Victoria Tennant. Martin completes this improbable tale with the words, "Frankenheimer died a few years ago, but it was not I who killed him."

*Born Standing Up* chronicles Martin's rise from teen-aged magician's helper at Disneyland to performing at Knott's Berry Farm, to writing for tv variety shows, to years performing on the road with occasional visits to *The Tonight Show*, to headlining performer, to *Saturday Night Live* guest host to superstar, entertaining crowds of up to 45 thousand. As a performer, he was as meticulous about his craft as the greatest illusionist. Honing his material and, more importantly, his accompanying physical moves, Martin accumulated valuable insights, including those concerning his onstage wardrobe. "I really wore the vest so my shirt would stay tucked in my pants." That wasn't his most important insight, but it was the most trivial one. I'd rather not give the important ones away.

Blending concepts from magic, philosophy, absurdist poetry and modern art, Martin crafted a new, participatory form of comedy. Traditionally, the comedian told a joke and the audience, as if on cue, would laugh. Comedian Jack E. Leonard *literally* signaled the audience to laugh by slapping his gut at the end of each punch line. George

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Burns did it by puffing on his cigar. The audience barely had a choice; they were programmed to laugh. Steve's innovative approach sent old-style comedy into permanent retirement. As Martin describes it: "The act's unbridled nonsense was taking the audience – and me – on a wild ride, and my growing professionalism, founded on thousands of shows, created a subliminal sense of authority that made the audience feel like they weren't being had."

Then, at the top of his popularity, Steve Martin quit performing stand-up comedy. It wasn't the same working in front of those massive crowds; creativity surrendered to spectacle. "I was a party host, presiding not over timing and ideas, but over a celebrity bash of my own making." So that was that. Martin went on to other ventures, including movies, retaining throughout his endearing humility. Steve tells the story of a woman, who, after seeing *The Jerk*, came up to him and announced, "I loved this movie. And my husband loved it, and he hates you!"

Did Steve Martin hate show business? Of course not. It wasn't show business Martin was mocking in his act, it was Appropriate Behavior. Old-fashioned Orange County good manners. "Is that stuff stupid, or what?" his performance was saying, defying the entire Emily Post instruction manual by talking seriously with an arrow stuck through his head. On stage, Martin could engage in the outrageous rebellious behavior he was smart enough not to try and pull at home, where a

compliant mother yielded to a scary and, at least once, abusive Dad. Steve's anti-authority persona is a "Take that!" to Mean Poppa Glenn Martin. He then adds insult to injury by becoming enormously successful in a profession his father secretly aspired to but was never gutsy enough to try.

It was Steve's good fortune to attack proper behavior when proper behavior was ready for a fall. Every kid hated to "behave," and Martin was their ringleader. Can you imagine how many times a father in those days snapped at his offspring, "I do not appreciate that tone of voice, young man" only to hear back the totally unrebutable "Well excuuuse me!"?

The irony is, as I mentioned, that Martin himself is relentlessly polite. On the few occasions I was fortunate to meet him, the man was scrupulously decent, once even searching me out to apologize for a slight he felt he had committed. The incident embarrassed me, hinting perhaps that I was the one at fault and I perhaps should be apologizing to him; unfortunately, I lacked the comparative good manners to pull it off.

Many show folk write memoirs, offering little more than the disclosure that they'd once had sex with Eve Arden. Steve's work is 50 levels above that. As I was reading his memoir, I couldn't help thinking of Cyrano de Bergerac, a character Steve played in the self-written movie, *Roxanne*. I don't think it was an accident that Martin chose to take on that role. Fictional Cyrano and real-life Steve are two of a kind:

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elegant, decent, dangerously funny, graced with what Steve Martin's *Born Standing Up* happily overflows with from beginning to end...

Panache.

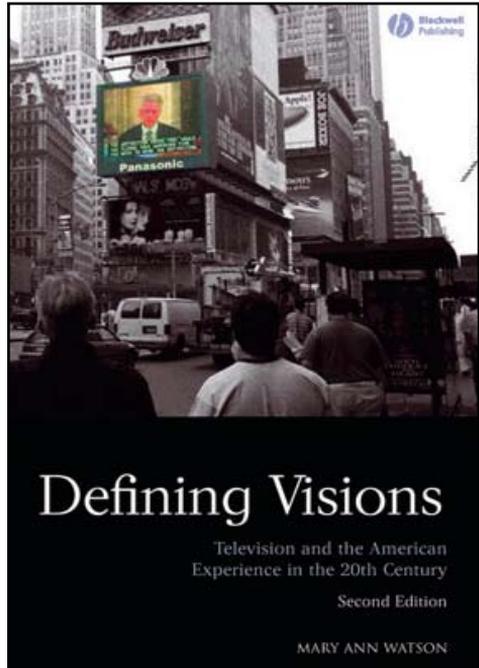
A frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly*, Earl Pomerantz was executive producer of *The Cosby Show*. His comedy-writing credits include *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Cheers*. He has won two Emmy Awards, a Writers' Guild Award and a Cable Ace Award. He has recently completed a book titled *Both Sides Make Me Angry*.

## Defining Visions: Television And The American Experience In The 20th Century— Second Edition

By Mary Ann Watson  
*Blackwell, Boston*  
(320 pages, \$34.95)

### By Michael C. Keith

In the last year or so, I've noticed an increase in the number of car bumpers sporting the sticker, "Kill your television!" I first came across this moving message in the late 1990s while inching my way through the congested streets of metropolitan Boston on my way home after teaching my course in broadcast history at an area college. It immediately struck



me as an indicator—a sign, if you will— that I should be more fully probing the dark side of the medium's influence in that course, and in the ensuing months my lectures were instilled with a solemnity uncommon for them. Up to that time I had been far more inclined to wax positively about the medium for the many gifts I believed it had imparted than to condemn it for its shortcomings.

My lectures soon became fraught with examples of the video screen's power to corrupt and contaminate the youth of the world through its violent and sordid images and mind-numbingly banal programming. Alas, my students were about to take to the streets with placards condemning the networks for their numerous tyrannies when a new book crossed my desk that mitigated my admittedly overwrought rage and indignation. It was the first

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edition of *Defining Visions*, and its cogent and discerning assessment of television's place in American culture steered me toward a much-needed reevaluation of my course's thrust. Indeed, it was the perfect balm for someone suffering from chronic telecondemnititis—a widespread condition whereby individuals perceive only toxic content emanating from their television sets.

Mary Ann Watson has now refined her powerful antidote to this contemporary affliction with a comprehensively revised second edition, which further sharpens the picture of television's role in our lives. It does (as its promotional flyer justifiably claims—a rare example of truth in advertising) provide high definition to our understanding of the medium's message and meaning through a powerful narrative social history that examines television's rise as the great "certifying agent" in American life. It achieves this through extended and updated coverage and analysis of key historical events of recent years, such as the Monica Lewinsky scandal, Columbine shootings, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, while adhering to its sound initial approach to the subject. It worked then and it works now.

As one of our most astute media observers, Watson makes an estimable case for a connection between television and American culture from beginning to conclusion when in her prologue she writes, "It is the premise of this book that in the second half of the 20th century, TV has been the primary means by which

Americans have defined themselves and each other;" and when in her epilogue she declares "Television's most transforming power has been to provide social scripts for postwar America. The medium did more than just hold up a mirror. It provided validation for ideas and behaviors that have had impact on the life of every citizen." What lies between these defining statements is a myriad of corroborating evidence eloquently and vigorously conveyed.

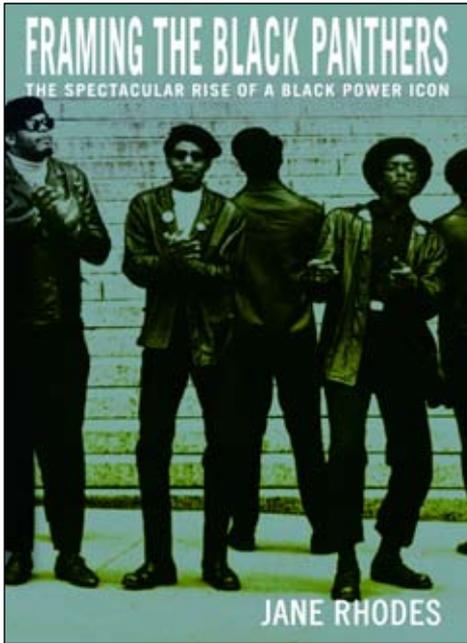
Indeed, Watson's book adds enough to our understanding and appreciation of the medium that it is no longer necessary to pull an Elvis on our TV sets. Turning them off is enough.

One final note, I'm glad to see the second edition has been better packaged. The first edition of *Defining Visions* was misleading in that its contents were far more substantive than the made-for-junior-high-school-library packaging they were wrapped in. Thankfully, Blackwell has improved on the overall look and feel of the volume to make it reflect the quality and weightiness of its interior.

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*Michael C. Keith is a member of the Communication Department at Boston College. He is the author of two-dozen books on a variety of broadcast topics, in particular those related to radio's role in American culture.*

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## Framing The Black Panthers – The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon

By Jane Rhodes

*The New Press, New York*

(416 pages, \$35.00)

By Howard A. Myrick

It was the 1960s, the decade in which television news found its voice – its niche in the panoply of voices competing for attention in a season of turmoil. Not unlike a teenager or college freshman with an undeclared major, television news did not really know what it wanted to be when it grew up. This was the stormy, cacophonous decade so aptly described by Tom Brokaw (in his book, *Boom! Voices of the Sixties*)

– a time of successive booms coming at a cataclysmic pace with concussive impact.

It was also the decade in which television news became a business and discovered the entertainment value of news and its marketability, its economic bearing and identity. What television news is today is, in large measure, attributable to what happened socially, culturally and politically in the 1960s. This relatively new medium of television, trying to process and respond to the dramatic and, often, frightening stimuli resulting from the crises of the era, had to mature rapidly. The television “business” began to perform like a fast-grinding mill trying to keep pace with raw material being fed at furious speed and facing the necessity of turning out a useable product which informed, entertained and produced a profit. Among the entities and phenomena providing grist for this industry-defining mill was a group representing themselves as the Black Panthers – a group presenting dramatic visual impact and even more dramatic rhetoric – imagery that was simultaneously attractive, engaging and fear-arousing and attended by language that was exceedingly disturbing.

The Black Panthers, beyond the public persona projected by the media, who were they? Briefly – and, admittedly, too glibly stated – they were the 1960s group of self-avowed militant African Americans whose mantra was Black Power, a radical ideology rooted in seeking redress for transgressions against black people committed, notably, by the white “establishment”. In many ways they looked and acted like central characters from blaxploitation films, Hollywood films which they both inspired and

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mimicked. Their ideological and political platform was based on addressing the grievances of the black “community,” inspiring self-pride and seeking self-determination for oppressed black people. In word and deed, they espoused their willingness to achieve their goals by “any means necessary” (a threat borrowed from Malcolm X, the *bête noire* of “blue eyed devils” everywhere).

Of special relevance to the mass media, especially television, was the Black Panthers’ intent to take back the control of their image and presentation (i.e., the framing of their identity) from the mainstream media. In the 1960s, to an even greater extent than is the case today, who black, brown, yellow and, indeed, all “other” people were was a product of the construction of mainly the white male-dominated mass media. Not only were racial and ethnic minorities nearly absent, when they were not, their presentations were too often caricatures and stereotypes –mostly negative. Thus, a sizable amount of the Black Panthers’ effort was directed toward the media – in the process becoming quite adept at manipulating the media, especially television. Their relationship with the media was, indeed, symbiotic: they used the media and the media used them ...sometimes to their mutual advantage and, variously, to their disadvantage.

Were it not for the efforts of such scholars and social anthropologists as Jane Rhodes, author of *Framing the Black Panthers*, today’s audiences and, indeed, contemporary journalists would probably refer to the Black Panthers as just old news. The epithet “old news” being used in the manner that some CBS network officials have used it recently

to denigrate former CBS anchor Dan Rather’s \$70 million law suit against his former employer, charging malfeasance and prejudicial treatment associated with his “forced” retirement brought on apparently in connection with his “inadequately vetted” (although, not proven false) news report concerning President George W. Bush’s military service (or lack thereof).

But are the Black Panthers old news? Jane Rhodes asks her readers to consider the significance of the appearance of a group calling themselves the “New Black Panthers” showing up in their signature regalia and demeanor at the arraignment of Zacarias Moussaoui, the 9/11 terrorist suspect; later sentenced to life in prison for his role in plotting the tragic September 11, 2001 hijacking. Their stated purpose: to serve as self-appointed guardians of people “of color” everywhere. That act, although not making much good sense, did make the evening news. Not mentioned by Professor Rhodes, probably because it happened after the publication of her book, was a most ironic instance of another “New Black Panther” spokesperson (also accorded TV news exposure) defending the rights of a white Texan to bear arms in a case in which that person was being charged with the fatal shooting of two unarmed would-be-burglars. So, are the “Black Panthers” like the proverbial bad penny that cannot be gotten rid of, or are they recurring manifestations of a dormant malignancy which reemerges when the requisite social, cultural and political climate reappears?

The question is not whether the media should report such “news”. The lesson of *Framing the Black Panthers* is: the media

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can and does influence the way subjects are portrayed; people and groups can and do manipulate the media...and singularly and/or jointly...the net effect on public discourse and the formulation of public policy can be profound. In the case of the Black Panthers, it was television that provided the first combined “visual and aural glimpses of the group to a mass audience”. Such glimpses (combined with so-called credible FBI “intelligence”), no doubt helped frame J. Edgar Hoover’s perceptions of and lethal actions against this “subversive” group.

So is this all just so much old news? Jane Rhodes apparently anticipated the question; thus, reminding her readers of the admonitions of the nineteenth-century freedom fighter, Frederick Douglass, who exhorted the nation not to forget the era of slavery and the trauma of the Civil War. In 1884, Douglass wrote “It is not well to forget the past. Memory was given to man for some wise purpose. The past is the mirror in which we discern the dim outlines of the future, and by which we may make them more symmetrical.” Whether knowingly or not this has to be the guiding motivation of the really serious television documentarians.

In this reviewer’s opinion it is a tribute to Jane Rhodes’ intellectual acuity and her gift to contemporary media practitioners that she focuses on the dialectics of the Black Panthers using the media to “frame” themselves and “frame” the media (i.e., placing the media in an establishmentarian posture allied with the dominant, power-holding majority society}. Her analyses shed light on the “spin” phenomenon

in contemporary media operations by recounting how J. Edgar Hoover planted fabricated information to the media for the express purpose of denigrating and discrediting, not only the Black Panthers, but all civil rights organizations, their members and leaders – including former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Andrew Young, former Georgia State Senator and current NAACP Chairman Julian Bond, and the venerable Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – all products of the turbulent 1960s civil-rights movement – all dedicated to the actualization of the “American dream”, so proudly proclaimed to the world.

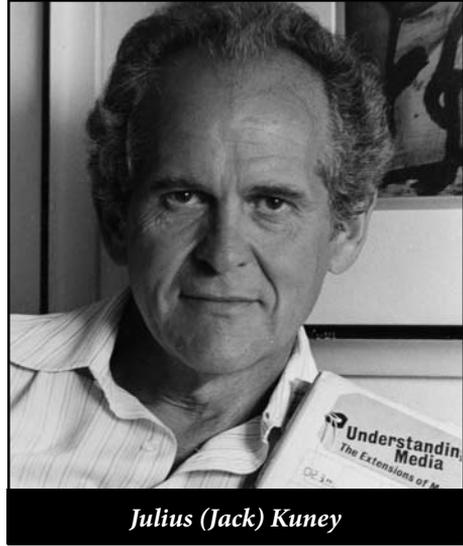
*Framing the Black Panthers* is an exceptionally good read. Its relevance to contemporary issues in the mass media is what makes it so valuable; for the incomparable American dream is not yet fully realized and “the mirror in which we may discern the dim outlines of the future” just may be the television screen or some technological configuration of what we now regard as television.

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*Howard A. Myrick, Ph.D., is a professor of Broadcasting, Telecommunications and Mass Media at Temple University and a commissioner of the Pennsylvania Public Television Network. His article, “The Live Television Debate that Could Have Been,” appears on page 44 of this issue of Television Quarterly.*

# Remembering Julius (Jack) Kuney

*Last November the pioneer television producer Julius (Jack) Kuney died in Bradenton, Florida, at the age of 88. Television Quarterly invited several of his former colleagues to write tributes to him. A selection follows*



*Julius (Jack) Kuney*

## A Major Contributor to “Television’s Golden Age”

**By Lawrence K. Grossman**

Jack Kuney, a versatile, award-winning producer, director, writer and pioneer of television’s early years, was a major contributor to what some have called “television’s Golden Age.” Born Julius Kuney, he changed his name to Jack, he told me one day, because with a football scholarship to his beloved University of Illinois, Jack seemed tougher and more appropriate for the gridiron than Julius. So Jack Kuney stuck as his professional name, and only his friends and relatives called him Julius.

Julius was a man of passion, as anyone who worked with him would verify - - passionate about quality television; passionate about good writing and good theater; passionate about justice, racial equality, and peace; passionate about food,

and passionate about his adored family and in later years, his musically accomplished grandchildren, and his surviving wife Marjorie.

Often Julius’s passion was endearing; at times it was infuriating. In 1968, after dozens of American cities erupted in inner-city riots, a group of us organized a challenge to the television license renewal of New York City’s WPIX, channel 11, a woefully underperforming station owned by the then influential Chicago media powerhouse, the Tribune Company, and run by its rich tabloid subsidiary, the *New York Daily News*. We sought an FCC hearing to replace WPIX with a responsible, civic minded, independent commercial television station that would truly serve the New York metropolitan community with unprecedented daily hour long local news broadcasts and multiple public affairs programs. Our challenge was a quixotic effort, but we were determined to provide a blueprint that would demonstrate how a quality commercial TV station should operate. Julius was one of the first to sign

on to Forum Communications, as our company was called. We named him our program director. Our group ended up being interracial (unprecedented at the time) and filled with accomplished, strong-minded, outspoken New York City community leaders, well-known television professionals and Wall Street financial supporters. It was a brave move for Julius, who was unemployed at the time, because being part of an FCC license challenge, we were warned, was like being a traitor to the broadcasting ownership establishment. He had to worry about becoming unemployable in television, which, fortunately as it turned out for all of us, did not happen. Julius was so passionate about what programming proposals we would submit in our station application to the FCC that he drove everyone crazy, arguing through the night for his ideas, unwilling to compromise or accept anybody else's suggestions of what would be "realistic."

What was always amazing to me was Julius's remarkable versatility throughout his years in television, producing all-star classical dramas in the ground-breaking, magisterial *Play of the Week* series for WNTA, Channel 13, then a commercial station; quality children's TV series, *Let's Take a Trip* starring Sonny Fox, and *One, Two, Three, Go!*, which introduced a young Richard Thomas; as well as the brilliant interdisciplinary religious series seen in CBS's Sunday morning television "intellectual ghetto," *Look Up and Live*; the highly original Variety/Documentary alcoholism special, *Drink, Drank, Drunk*, starring Carol Burnett, still seen from time to time

on local public television stations, four annual Emmy Award-winning telethons for the United Jewish Appeal.

Julius wrestled with, dealt with, fought with, and successfully produced and directed television productions with the most remarkable and diverse pantheon of legendary stars, among them: Zero Mostel, Burgess Meredith, Alfred Drake, Jo Van Fleet, Tammy Grimes, Eddie Bracken, Lillian Gish, Woody Allen, Warren Beatty, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, George C. Scott, Colleen Dewhurst, Billy Dee Williams, Tony Randall, and Max Von Sydow, Merv Griffin, Steve Allen, Regis Philbin, Mike Douglas, Alan King, Hal Linden, Judd Hirsch, Ed Asner, Bette Midler, Leonard Bernstein, Itzhak Perlman, and Placido Domingo.

Julius's most endearing traits were encouraged and reinforced by his delightful wife of 50 years who died in 1997, Francine, a beautiful and bright former Busby Berkley dancer and talented cook. Their friends partook happily and often in their good-hearted hospitality and took full advantage of the Kuneys' enthusiasm for discovering and introducing obscure new restaurants; out-of-the-way places to buy wonderful and exotic vegetables, fruits, meat, pasta and breads; interesting destinations to visit in the city and country, in New York, Connecticut, California, and the Florida Keys.

Julius started his career in radio while still at the University of Illinois. During World War II, he served as a dashing Navy Lieutenant, the communications officer on the destroyer *USS McCalla* in the Pacific Theater. He pursued his storied and varied television career

during the medium's formative decades. And, fittingly, spent his final working years of a long life teaching at the City University of New York, directing the Master of Fine Arts Program in Television at Brooklyn College.

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*Lawrence K. Grossman is former president of NBC News, PBS and Forum Communications, and for 50 years a friend and colleague of Julius (Jack) Kuney*

## His Passion for Quality Broadcasting Enriched his Classes

By Sister Camille D'Arienzo, RSM

To say that Julius (Jack) Kuney was an interesting person is to oversimplify his reality. He was a man of many friends, abiding loves and multiple interests: husband, father, grandfather, soldier, broadcaster, producer, director, writer, and entertainer. Trying to describe him conjures up an image of a reversal of *The Blind Men* and the Elephant. You knew him by that part of him that touched you.

Along with Professors Jim Day and Bob Williams, I hired him for a position on the faculty of Brooklyn College's TV and Radio Department. His passion for quality broadcasting and his personal history in media enriched his classes.

A few weeks after he settled in, he made an offhanded, meant-to-amuse comment about prayer. I chided him gently for that. "Julius, I want you to understand that prayer is important to me, as is faith, anybody's

faith, and so is my life as a Sister of Mercy." Years later when I wondered aloud when our friendship began, Julius went right to that conversation, that moment of honesty.

In the early 80's Julius called me one night with this message:

"Camille, Francine and I have the use Larry Grossman's home this weekend. It's a beautiful place in Westport, Connecticut and it has a pool. We'd like you to come with us on Friday morning."

"Sorry, Julius," I replied, "I have another engagement."

Five minutes later he called back. "Francine wants to know what you have that's more important than the two of us,"

"Well," I replied, "I was arrested on Good Friday for protesting the nuclear arms production. I have a court appearance in Manhattan at 9 a.m."

Minutes later, he called again with this directive:

"Francine and I will meet you for breakfast in Ellen's Café on the corner of Broadway and Chambers. Then we'll come to court with you. And when that's over, we'll all go to Westport."

We had a long wait before my case was called. I approached the judge and said softly, "Your honor, the words inscribed on the wall behind you read, 'In God we trust.' I cannot believe that the God in whom we trust wants us to kill one another. That's what these weapons are for."

My case dismissed, I returned to find Julius in tears. Putting my arm around his shoulder, I teased, "Now, Darlin', was it something I said?"

He replied, "I didn't hear a goddamn word you said! But you're up there doing this for the rest of us!"

He and Francine had protested injustice on many fronts. They had crossed the

bridge at Selma with Martin Luther King. Now they were pleased to encourage me.

That day I knew again that the relationship we three shared was deep and durable. There are families of blood, families of faith and families formed by shared values.

We went to Westport and later that afternoon, Francine looked on from a poolside lounge chair as Julius and I floated on rubber tubes shooting at one another with water pistols.

“Some pacifists you are!” she observed.

---

*Sister Camille is a professor emerita of broadcast writing in the TV Radio Department of Brooklyn College, from which she retired in 1993 to assume the presidency of her congregation, the Sisters of Mercy.*

## **We Shall Never See the Likes of him Again**

**By Mort Silverstein**

I was fortunate enough in my television writing career to have had a terrific time with Executive Producer Jack (Julius) Kuney at NBC, Westinghouse, N.E.T., New York public-television station WNET/13 and other venues. Not only was the work fun—and challenging—but so was our friendship, which endured with his late wife, Francine, whom he married when she was a dancer under contract to Columbia Pictures. She taught him not only the two-step but also civility under stress.

The reader will know that television

is one of the toughest of all businesses—creatively and fiscally. During our long tenure together, Julius and I had each other’s backs: always being in sync whenever we were faced with those pejoratively known as “suits,” who, we felt, just didn’t get it—or refused to. Most often we prevailed, remarkably.

In one of our last collaborations, a documentary on the Little Rascals (from Hal Roach’s *Our Gang* shorts), Julius provided a fadeout which became—damn it—autobiographical.

As Spanky and Alfalfa walk down a road into the distance, Julius writes, concerning their originality and feistiness: “We shall never see the likes of them again.”

Julius, we celebrate you!

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*Mort Silverstein is an award-winning documentary film maker whose interview with Bill Baker, recently retired head of public television station WNET Channel 13 New York, appears on page 25 of this issue of Television Quarterly.*

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