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

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

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

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What's Different From 2000?

An expert describes new TV network election-night reporting techniques designed to correct the flaws plaguing the last Presidential election and calls for a national uniform poll-closing time.

By Kathleen A. Frankovic

Most Americans have vivid memories of the long-running 2000 election – and of the television networks' mistakes and embarrassment. We all know that the ultra-tight election showcased problems in the voting and vote-counting process, just as the television networks' 2000 election night mistakes spotlighted flaws in the system they had used for years estimating and projecting election results.

I have especially vivid – and painful – memories. I was in the control room at CBS News for the marathon 12-hour Election Night 2000 and for many of the following 35 days. On Election Night, at about 7:50 p.m. Eastern Time, all the data collected from exit polls, sample precincts and tabulated votes produced an estimate of a win in Florida by Democrat Al Gore. It then became clear as more data were collected that there was no clear Gore victory. In the early hours of the morning, after 2 a.m. Eastern Time, analysis of all the tabulated votes indicated a Bush victory in Florida – but even that projection was

not tenable once several counties corrected vote counting errors. CBS News – and other television news organizations as well – had first said Gore would carry Florida, later that Bush would carry Florida, and then that no winner could be projected.

A very unpleasant election night process for the country and for the news networks resulted in much discussion, deserved criticism and corrective action. Congress passed legislation to update voting equipment. The networks quickly focused attention on two election coverage concerns: the weaknesses in an analysis and projection system that had worked magnificently for 30 years, but was in need of updating, and the problems in reporting results on air in a way that made projections seem like reality and exit polls seem like vote counts.

Every television news organization involved in the 2000 problem reviewed its election night broadcasts, and produced a report promising changes. Along with Linda Mason, CBS News Vice President, Public Affairs, and Kathleen

Hall Jamieson, then the Dean of the Annenberg School in Philadelphia, I was one of the three-member CBS News panel. We produced and made public in January 2001 a detailed 87-page report. In February, Andrew Heyward, President of CBS News, joined other network news presidents and the head of the Associated Press at a Congressional hearing about media coverage of the election, where many of those changes were presented.

What should viewers expect on election night 2004? There are two areas where things really have changed: there will be technical improvements in the vote gathering and data analysis and differences in how elections will be reported. Here's a rundown of the changes that have been made and a guide to Election Night 2004.

Improving the System

After the 2000 election, the promise was made to "fix" Voter News Service, the consortium that collected and processed the Election Day data for nearly a decade, or – if that didn't work – to replace it. In 2001, VNS began a complete review of its operations. Its members (ABC News, the Associated Press, CBS News, CNN, Fox News and NBC News) demanded a rewrite of the statistical models that produced the errant projections, and a committee of statisticians representing all the partners and several outside consultants produced revised models in 2001.

The changes were to be implemented through a completely rewritten computer system, with a voice interactive system to take in data. The job of writing that system was outsourced to Battelle

Memorial Institute, a giant organization and major defense contractor from Columbus, Ohio. Battelle soon discovered the magnitude of the project and the real-time demands that Election Day data input creates for any system. On Election Day 2002, the new input and processing mechanisms were overwhelmed by the constant flow of exit-poll data and tabulated results.

Battelle learned that putting together election day systems is more difficult than the uninitiated might expect – data come in nearly every minute and computations are run continuously as new data arrive. Computer displays must be immediately generated and updated. All this takes place in real time, with system failures immediately apparent. Battelle couldn't create that system from scratch in the time it had and ultimately VNS couldn't be fixed – so it was replaced.

The managements of the six member news organizations brought back two veterans of news election reporting, Warren Mitofsky and Joe Lenski. Mitofsky had created the CBS News election system 35 years earlier. He and Lenski, who now runs Edison Media Research, built a system for CNN in 2002, with its own input mechanism, computations, and displays. That small and limited system could be expanded to the rewritten statistical and quality

Voter News Service, the consortium that collected and processed the Election Day data for nearly a decade, couldn't be fixed, so it was replaced...The 2004 system will have better quality control.

control specifications all of the news organizations' statistical representatives had urged after the 2000 election. As for the collection of the tabulated vote, the networks would rely on the Associated

Press, which after all had been tabulating votes since the 1800's.

What are the specific system changes? First, the 2004 system will have better quality control, with more data checks, for one. Second, 2004 vote results can now be compared with more than one past election – and the researcher, not the computer, chooses which past race to look at for comparison. In 2000, the computer system's comparison of the Florida presidential contest with the 1998 Florida Governor's election contributed to the mistaken Gore projection. Third, additional resources will be devoted to tracking absentee voters in more states than before; they will be interviewed by telephone in the days immediately preceding November 2. No absentee voters were interviewed in Florida in 2000; a sample of them will be in 2004.

The projection system still relies on probability samples of precincts, and requires good data collection by exit poll interviewers and sample precinct reporters, but if the current reforms had been in place in 2000, the Florida mistakes would not have been made. The new system was in place and worked well for the 2004 primaries; there is good reason to assume it will work equally well in November.

Changing the Coverage

Viewers won't see the computer system, and apart from a short explanation of how projections are made that all news organizations will offer early on election night, the computational models will be pretty much invisible to the public. What will be more visible will be the changes in reporting that have occurred.

First and foremost, even a brief explanation of how projections are made was missing from CBS News' 2000 Election Night broadcast. In its 12 hours of wall-to-wall coverage that night, we told viewers neither how the data were collected nor who collected it.

The CBS News post-Election Night Report promised that reporters would tell viewers how projections are made as well as explain reasons why a projection might not be made. In 2002, most networks assigned a reporter to explain the process, to show viewers what took place in the months before the election, the people engaged in preparation for election night (in 2002, the people at Voter News Service), and what was expected to happen through the day. In the case of CBS News, that reporter was Anthony Mason.

At CBS News, Mason showed viewers the decision team itself – the people responsible for making CBS News projections – to make it very clear that the projections didn't just emerge from a computer, or from the ether underneath the anchor's desk. He even appeared during the 2002 election night broadcast to explain why, even hours after polls had closed in Missouri, the outcome in the Senate race there was still unknown.

That decision team represents a second change from the 2000 election. CBS News, and other news organizations, expanded the number of its election decision makers after 2000 – more eyes would look at the data, more trained brains would analyse it, and more people would be able to stop a mistake before it went on air. In addition, at CBS News, a vice president was added to the group, to act as the liaison between the decision desk and management, the broadcast producers, and the anchor Dan Rather.

Vice President Linda Mason took on the responsibility of keeping all of them informed of the decision desk progress, what it could and – more importantly – could not project, letting the decision desk concentrate on the work at hand, and not the pressure of the broadcast or what competitors were doing.

Another change from 2000: in 2004, as in 2002, the CBS News Decision team will actually be in the election night studio. One of the discoveries of the CBS News post-Election Night Report was that correspondents in the field and in the studio were aware of vote-counting problems in Florida, but that information was never communicated to the people making projections. Had it been, the second Election Night 2000 Florida error might not have happened. Being located in the broadcast studio should eliminate that problem.

Third, the language associated with projections is now clearer and more carefully chosen. In the previous 35 years of successful election night reporting, the projection of results had lost any qualifiers. Reporters stopped saying, “CBS News estimates that when all the votes are counted, Ronald Reagan will carry Virginia.” They said simply “Bush wins Virginia,” making it easy for viewers to think that all the votes had been counted and that it was the television networks that had counted them.

Not only were the words far more definitive than they should have been, but so were the on-screen graphics. In 2000, CBS News election night graphics did contain the words “CBS News Estimate” but those words were small and gray, and placed at the bottom of the

screen. In 2002 and for the future, “CBS News Estimate” was and will be prominently displayed, in large type, in the upper left-hand corner of the screen. The viewer won’t be able to ignore the fact that an estimate is just that – an *estimate* – one made on the best available information, to be sure, but still an estimate.

Many news organizations will rely on their own resources as well as on the data collection of Mitofsky, Lenski and the Associated Press. In 2002, CBS News stationed ten stringers in critical states to

Correspondents in the field and in the studio were aware of vote-counting problems in Florida, but that information was never communicated to the people making projections.

alert the network to vote-counting problems and conducted its own polls of absentee voters in three states. Utilizing stringers provided a way of double-checking vote counts, discovering possible errors, and learning about problems faster than otherwise. And in 2002, CBS News absentee polls in three states where VNS was not interviewing absentee voters provided useful and exclusive information about voters missed in exit polls.

The networks will continue to make statewide projections as states close their polling places. But they have changed one long-standing rule: They will wait until ALL polling places in a state are scheduled to close before making a projection. That’s a change from the previous rule that permitted projections when the *majority* of a state’s polling places closed. This procedural change will affect eight states, including Florida, one of this year’s battleground states. And since all the polls must be closed before a projection is made, and since the

last polls close in Florida at 8 pm, there can no longer be any projection in Florida at 7:50 p.m. Eastern time – the time of the 2000 Gore call.

Of course, in a landslide – or even a clear victory – by one or the other candidate it will still be possible to know that he or she has won enough electoral votes to capture the presidency before the polls close on the West Coast, but at the very least the window in which that can happen has shrunk. News organizations

have an obligation to report the news; and the election results are among the most important news events in a democracy. The United States remains different from most other democracies, in that states count and report their votes as they close the polls, and poll closing times span six hours. Only a national uniform poll-closing time, something news organizations have supported since 1964, can eliminate that window.

Dr. Kathleen A. Frankovic is Director of Surveys for CBS News. She was a member of the *CBS News* panel which reviewed its *2000 Election Night* broadcast and is in charge of its *Election Night Decision Desk*. She is a former President of the American Association for Public Opinion Research and the current President of the World Association for Public Opinion Research.

Exit Polling: What's the Use?

Exit polls are the last, best chance the media have to explain the results of candidates' actions among specific voters groups.

By Steven S. Ross

Many media organizations are rethinking the use of exit polls this year. It is not hard to figure out why. There was the collapse of the Voter News Service exit poll in the 2002 congressional elections. There's the issue of whether broadcasters should continue to hold back exit poll numbers until the polls close, while Web providers are posting leaked poll totals on their sites. There's resistance among election supervisors to allowing pollsters close to polling places. And then, there's the cost.

Here, I'd like to argue that exit polls are important for viewers. I'll also provide some basic advice about conducting these polls, even if you are on a budget. Finally, I'll discuss how to report these polls ethically.

Polling drives almost all of politics today. Candidates conduct early, confidential polls to show to their potential funders. Candidates also poll to find out what their positions are or should be on issues – the same way toothpaste companies poll to find features customers might pay for. During

the campaign, candidates "track" their progress with weekly or daily polls, to see how the public responds to their actions and to the actions of their opponents. Exit polls are the last, best chance the media has to explain the results of candidates' actions among specific voter groups.

Exit polling, done well, may provide a check against tampering with voting machines, too – either the new computer-based models or the ancient pull-lever behemoths. Neither leave a paper trail.

Exit polls are far more accurate than pre-election polling. The pollsters can talk to people who have actually voted, rather than people who might vote and who might change their mind. They are also much cheaper to field. Pre-election polling is usually done by phone, and most people contacted refuse to participate. Only one in five contacted by phone agree to be interviewed. In exit polling, which is done in person, refusal rates are far lower – typically two out of every three people approached agree to be polled. Whether you do your own

Exit polls are far more accurate than pre-election polling.

computer-based models or the ancient pull-lever

polling or hire a polling firm or university, make sure that good methodology is followed.

Our increasingly complex, polarized and mobile society also confounds the pollsters. People are far more likely to vote by absentee ballot these days, especially in areas where the polling places are hard to get to.

That does not mean exit polling is perfect. Voter News Service, the cooperative run by major media organizations and the Associated Press, overstated the Democrats' vote in 1992 because Perot voters were often unwilling to be interviewed as they left the voting area. Statistical Assessment Service (www.stas.org) reports that in two Republican primaries, New Hampshire in 1992 and Arizona in 1996, exit polls overestimated the vote for Pat Buchanan. In New Hampshire, the polls predicted a small win for George Bush; he beat Buchanan by 16 points. Bob Dole ran a close second to Steve Forbes in Arizona but the polls had him a poor third to Forbes and Buchanan. Evidently, Buchanan voters were more willing to talk to pollsters.

On the other hand, the confusion about the 2000 Presidential race was more an issue of mistakes reporting actual votes than it was of exit poll totals. In fact, the exit polling helped alert broadcasters to possible errors in the final tallies.

As in so many areas of American Society, race also plays a role. Statistical Assessment Service notes that in the 1989 Virginia gubernatorial election polls predicted that black candidate Douglas Wilder would win by 10 percent. He actually won by less than 1 percent. Apparently, many white voters lied to the pollsters.

Our increasingly complex, polarized and mobile society also confounds the pollsters. People are far more likely to vote by absentee ballot these days, especially in areas where the polling places are hard to get to. More people travel on business, for instance,

and they are more likely to vote Republican. Many in the military also vote by absentee ballot, and they, too, are more likely to vote Republican. On the other hand, the aged and infirm and more likely to vote Democratic. None of these voters can be found by exit polling.

The problem first surfaced in 1982 when exit polls wrongly predicted Democrat Jerry Brown had won over Republican Pete Wilson for United States Senate from California, and that Democrat Tom Bradley had beaten Republican George Deukmejian for governor. The large number of Republican absentee ballots made the difference.

Standard practice is to poll in precincts that are carefully chosen to balance the sample by race, ethnicity, income and past political preference. If the precincts are chosen wisely, the results of a poll of 1,000 voters should be within about 3 percent of the actual tally, 19 times out of 20.

But what if the candidates, the issues, and the political environment differ substantially from past elections? In such cases, there is little basis for choosing precincts to poll. For exit polling in this year's chaotic Democratic primaries, major media picked the precincts randomly. This added substantially to costs, because they needed to poll roughly 1,800 voters to get the same "within 3 percent" precision.

This sounds bizarre at first, but think about what happens when we "poll" a coin about voting heads or tails. Most people understand intuitively that if a perfectly balanced coin is tossed many thousands of times, the poll will end up even. Half the time the coin will vote "heads" and half the time it will vote "tails." We also understand that if we toss the coin only 10 times it may vote seven heads to three tails. We call this a "winning streak." Thousands of tosses have many such streaks, canceling each other out.

Choosing a person to be polled is like tossing a penny. One person may say Bush (Heads!). A second person, demographically identical, might choose Kerry (Tails!). The pollster might talk to one and not the other. To make sure the streaks cancel out, the pollster must talk to hundreds of voters.

It turns out that such "luck" is predictable. The mathematician Jacques Bernoulli lived between 1654 and 1705, so he never met a senator. But he understood the process. He calculated that if we poll the coin 1,000 times, we will rarely get a 500-500 tie. But 19 times out of 20 we will get a result between 465 and 535.

Statisticians call that "19 times out of 20" the confidence level. If you divide 19 by 20, you get 0.95, or 95 percent. The difference between 465 and 500 (or 500 and 535) represents the margin of error or confidence interval – 35, in our example. The 35 divided by 1,000 (the size of the sample) is 0.035, or 3.5 percent.

When reported for the first time, polls usually carry a disclaimer based loosely on Bernoulli's math. A poll of 1,000 people would include a statement that 95 percent of the time the reported

results fall within 3 percent of the results that could be expected if the entire electorate were polled.

That statement is roughly in line with one approved more than a decade ago by the American Statistical Association (ASA). It actually overstates the perfection (Bernoulli's formula would widen the error limits to plus or minus 3.5 percent). Also in line with the ASA, some news organizations note that error limits for subsamples are larger. They never say how much larger, however. Thus, if a broadcaster polls 1,000 people and 500 are women, the error limit for women's opinions is plus or minus 5 percent, at a 95 percent confidence level. For 100 black females in the sample, the error limit reaches more than 10 percent!

Remember, this assumes a perfectly drawn sample, which can never be. Furthermore, Bernoulli is fairly generous. Other mathematicians note that the error margin gets larger as the sample gets closer to a 50-50 split. The error margin also increases as the choices increase – in a three-way or four-way race, for instance.

The "gold standard" for polling is a confidence level of 95 percent – 19 times out of 20 the poll will be within a certain percent of reality. With so many polls, however, some are bound to be wrong – even if they are well done by a reputable firm. No poll I've read over the past decade points this out.

The Wall Street Journal and NBC News, for instance, conducted a joint poll throughout the Dukakis-Bush presidential race of 1988. On October 18, they reported a poll of more than 1,300 likely voters showing Bush ahead by 55 to 38 percent. No other large poll showed such a huge gap between the two candidates. Part of the reason may have

had to do with the timing – the poll was taken just after a debate that Bush was deemed to have won. My review of all polls taken during that last campaign month suggests that the poll simply fell among the 1 in 20 outside the error limit. The real gap was probably 50 percent to 43 percent. The chances of that happening were only about 1 in 100. Of course, the 55 percent to 38 percent gap was widely reported, drying up the last of Dukakis's campaign donation stream.

It is bad enough that news organizations don't include all the relevant statistical information in their own stories. Print media are often guilty

of this. Broadcast media are almost always guilty. They tend not to include any such information when they report on polls by others. This fools the viewers, who assume that news organizations apply their own good news judgment to determine whether the original report is worthy of repetition.

In fact, just the opposite is true. A poorly done poll is more prone to error, and thus more likely to produce "surprising" results. For journalists, another word for "surprising" is "newsworthy." We can do better. But we should not give up the idea of polling.

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New Ethics Rules for Polling

- News organizations have always argued that space does not permit the sophisticated statistical detail that would fully explain the polls they conduct or report upon. The Web has changed all of that. Now news organizations can refer readers to their websites for more detail. Here's how polls should be conducted and reported ethically:
- Exit poll results are normally not reported until polls have closed. But many broadcasters (wink, wink) betray the rule by making on-air statements such as "sources say Smedlap is doing extremely well today." Don't.
- National exit poll results paid for by the major networks and large print outlets will be leaked and reported on the Web as voting day progresses. But major Web operators will respect confidentiality and the property rights of those who paid for the poll in the first place. Decide ahead of time on what to do if smaller Web operators report incomplete results – either report the reports with an explanation as to why they are inaccurate (small sample size, no accounting for demographics of voters changing throughout the day) or (strongly preferred) ignore them.
- Confidence levels and error limits should be fully reported, in detail, for subsamples as well as for the overall sample. At the very least, news organizations should provide a calculator so that readers can do the math themselves.
- News organizations should also provide an estimate of how accurately the sample being polled was selected. This "sampling error" should be added to the random errors described above.
- When reporting on polls of others, news organizations should either provide full disclosure of error limits (as above) or set and disclose their own standards about what is reliable enough to report. For example, a news organization might decide that no poll with a sample smaller than 500 will be reported. This approach is particularly useful for broadcasters who do not have enough airtime to go into details.

- News organizations should report possible sources of bias (circumstances that can affect poll results) - for instance, breaking news, high refusal rates or a multiple-day or multiple-week sampling period.
- News organizations should publish the full text of the polling script used by telephone operators.
- Wherever possible, polls should ask questions in multiple ways about issues that are hazy in the public's mind (the economy, for example; see main story).
- News organizations should publish their complete data sets in a generally usable format (Excel, CSV, HTML, XML), so interested parties can do their own analysis and so multiple surveys can be more easily combined.

Conducting an Exit Poll

- Decide whether your only aim is to call the election early, or if you intend to gather more information (on sex, demographics, party affiliation, age, previous voting history, and race, for instance). More information is useful, but adds to costs. Often, broadcasters will partner with local print media. The latter wants the detail. Iron out the issues early in the planning stage because detail adds to costs and reduces the number of people that can be polled by a given size team.
- Discuss your project with local election officials. Many states have electioneering laws that do not allow anyone to approach voters within, typically, 100 feet of the voting place. In the late 1980s, these restrictions were ruled to be unconstitutional when applied to the press and pollsters. But they remain on the books in most states. Local officials are not necessarily schooled in Constitutional law. Election day is not the time to provide lessons. Get letters acceding to what you want to do.
- Allocate a few hours for training inexperienced team members.
- Make sure all team members and members of the campaign desk staff understand the need for confidentiality, and sign statements to that effect.
- Arrive early at the polling place, perhaps a half-hour before the polls open, to talk to officials and show copies of letters from higher officials, if necessary.
- At this time, arrange any camera shots inside the voting place that you might find necessary.
- Pick voters randomly. To do that, use a system. You might start out early, approaching everyone who leaves the voting place. But as volume increases, you will often find it necessary to count off every third or fifth person to approach. Be as orderly as possible. You will need to note the intervals, to scale the vote totals later.
- Ideally, work in teams. A spotter approaches voter, asks if he/she has voted for specific office.
- Usually, the voter should fill out voter questionnaire privately.
- Report poll results to your campaign desk throughout the day on scheduled intervals, so that data can be entered and analyzed in preparation for going public after the polls close.
- Get voter comments, especially on-camera comments, AFTER the questionnaire is returned.
- Expect to stay after the polls have closed, to catch late voters and handle standups.

Washington and “Indecency”: Regulation or Censorship?

A veteran broadcasting insider spotlights current efforts by Congress and the FCC to set limits in the wake of the Super Bowl and Howard Stern.

By Tack Nail

Much to the relief of broadcasters and First Amendment advocates, the frenetic pace of legislators and regulators in Washington earlier this year to legislate and regulate against indecency (using a very broad definition to include profanity), obscenity and violence has slowed down considerably. But opponents and proponents both predict the crusade to place new and tougher restrictions (such as increasing the maximum fine for the airing of each indecent comment from \$27,000 to \$500,000, with license revocation a distinct possibility for repeated violations) on the users of over-the-air spectrum space will pick up speed again this fall and most particularly when the new Congress is in place early next year.

While alleged indecent broadcasts have been under incessant attack ever since FCC Commissioner Michael Copps

joined the agency nearly three years ago, fueling the most recent Washington outcries were the Janet Jackson “wardrobe malfunction” during the Super Bowl halftime in January and the earlier use of the f-word as an adverb by pop band U2’s lead singer Bono in accepting a Golden Globes Award. Dozens of members of Congress blasted Viacom’s CBS for airing the Jackson incident in statements and at hearings and all five FCC commissioners issued their own expressions of disapproval. In the weeks after the Super Bowl, the Commission noticeably increased its anti-obscenity activities – leveling large fines against Viacom-Infinity Radio’s Howard Stern program.

With an early Congressional adjournment planned for campaigning this fall, lobbyists and legislators agree that there is almost no possibility that any of several bills now pending in

Congress will get final approval this year. Some of those bills also provide for fines against performers such as Bono for broadcast indecency – almost sure to be declared unconstitutional by the courts if such fines become law, according to noted First Amendment attorney Robert Corn-Revere and others. But a former high-level congressional staffer, who is now a lobbyist, issued this warning: “The old baseball phrase ‘wait till next year’ is very appropriate here. Broadcasters had better not get complacent because the anti-indecency juggernaut on the Hill will return and ways will be found to draft legislation that will get around First Amendment strictures and stand up in court.”

That could be hard to do, according to staunch protectors of the First Amendment language saying: “Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech or of the press...” Veteran consumer advocate Henry Geller, general counsel of the FCC in the 1960s (during the Newton Minow and Rosel Hyde administrations) and former director of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration in the Carter Administration, points out that the 1978 U.S. Supreme Court *Pacifica* decision (438 U.S. 726) established that indecent programming – defined by the FCC as “material patently offensive by contemporary community standards” – is permissible between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. If Congress approves legislation extending the indecency ban beyond 10 p.m. or to cable programming, “such action would likely be held unconstitutional,” according to Geller – a position with which most First Amendment advocates agree. Said Geller:

“What is really involved here is that Congress and the FCC do not want broadcasting to become like the *Sopranos*, a place where minors will hear ‘filthy words like f---, s--- or p--- with great frequency.’ And, he said, if the FCC in its rule-making on indecent language ignores the context in which such language is used, it will encounter “serious difficulties” in court – such as in an airing of the famous Johnson and Nixon White House tapes containing verboten words.

Unlike obscenity – described by the FCC as “vulgar, irreverent or coarse language” – indecent language aired after 10 p.m. has the protection of the First Amendment. But, said Geller, the FCC’s standard for obscene language “is so broad and subjective that it is as if the FCC were the national ‘nanny’ of good taste in language... For an agency to reach out to use a standard for fines and/or revocation [of a license] shows amazing disrespect for the First Amendment and the promotion of robust, wide-open expression” on television and radio stations. And, Geller says flat out that if Congress and/or the FCC were to extend the indecency rules to also attempt to embrace cable programming “it would be struck down” by the courts as unconstitutional.

In a 1973 decision (*CBS vs. DNC*), the Supreme Court pointed out that the regulation of broadcasting calls for the FCC “to walk a tightrope to preserve the First Amendment values written into the Communications Act. But, contends Geller, the FCC in its attempts to regulate indecency “has done a poor job of ‘walking the tightrope’” by issuing blanket rulings “with no strong acknowledgment of the importance of

context and what is most offensive to First Amendment values to reach out to cleanse the airwaves of vulgar, irreverent or coarse speech. The result is to create a chill [among broadcasters]... The Commission should take prompt steps to correct the balance and to give a much sounder signal to the broadcasting media” about what is and isn’t permissible in the indecency area.

We solicited Geller’s views for this article as representative of the positions trade associations, First Amendment advocates and even some consumer groups – such as Action for Children’s TV founder Peggy Charren. Broadcasters complain that the FCC’s indecency rules are too vague and recent actions – such as a new proclivity to issuing fines, most particularly against the Howard Stern radio program – are having a chilling effect on what is broadcast. Just how chilling?

“I don’t think we should use the word ‘indecency.’ We should call it what it is – censorship.”

In a White Paper titled “FCC Regulation of Obscene and Indecent Broadcasts,” Washington lawyer Kathleen Kirby, outside attorney for the Radio-TV News Directors Association, stated: “In light of the increased aggressiveness of the Commission’s enforcement policy, the continued complexity of predicting what material the FCC ultimately may decide is indecent, and the likelihood of dramatically increased fines, we recommend that stations avoid broadcasting any material that could reasonably be considered indecent by the FCC” except during the 10 p.m. – 6 a.m. “safe harbor” hours. And from veteran cable executive Geraldine Laybourne: “I don’t think we should use the word ‘indecency.’ We should call it

[government actions] what it is – censorship.”

Major beneficiaries of the government crackdown have been the half-dozen or so manufacturers of equipment needed to delay live broadcasts for five or 10 seconds – as witness the heavy traffic at their exhibits during the April convention of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB). During a legal forum at the convention, attorney Dennis Corbett said “the only way” radio stations can protect themselves is to tape delay live broadcasts “even if you have a milquetoast format.” Echoing that sentiment, David Solomon of the FCC stressed that stations should use “effective delay” technology to screen out indecent comments. Schurz Communications TV Vice President Marci Burdick said stations would be “nuts” not to use such equipment, despite

the fact its “incredibly expensive.”

In mid-May, Jonathan Rintels, executive director of the Center for Creative Voices in Media, and board member Peggy Charren, founder of Action for Children’s TV, told the FCC that its “overly broad, vague” rules on indecency are causing the “censoring of appropriate, protected, salutary creative work, harming adults and children... Creative, original, controversial, non-homogenized, decent and appropriate programming, already in short supply on television, is severely endangered... Our concern is not hypothetical or far-fetched.” An veteran newsman told us the indecency legislative proposals and the FCC’s recent actions are “causing great concern and consternation” in newsrooms. The Radio-TV News Directors Association is dismayed that

broadcast news would not be exempted from the legislation now pending in Congress.

There are many in Washington officialdom who disagree with these assessments of the government's attempts to put a stranglehold on broadcast indecency and obscenity. And, there have been many proposals to place cable and satellite programming under the strictures. In March, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a bill raising the maximum fine for broadcasting indecency more than 1,000 percent – from \$27,500 to \$500,000 and restricting the hours such programs could be aired to late night. The measure also authorizes the Commission to not only fine the station which aired the indecency but also the individual responsible. A bill reported favorably by the Senate Commerce Committee March 9 and awaiting a Senate vote would raise the maximum fine to \$275,000 and places a cap of \$3 million in fines per 24 hour period against an offending station and \$500,000 per 24 hours for individuals.

“You knew that shock and indecency create a buzz that moves market share and lines your pockets.”

The Senate and House Commerce Committees each held separate hearings last winter, where the subject of broadcast indecency was very much in the forefront and all five FCC commissioners testified at both. In response to criticism of the agency for allegedly not enforcing the existing rules, FCC Chairman Michael Powell told the senators that the FCC currently has in place “the most aggressive enforcement regime in decades” to enforce rules against obscenity and indecency, including the possibility of license

revocation proceedings for “egregious and continuing disregard of decency law.”

On the House side, Rep. Heather Wilson (R-N.M.) chastised then Viacom President Mel Karmazin (who resigned June 1) and National Football League Commissioner Paul Tagliabue, in complaining about the Janet Jackson Super Bowl incident, that “we need to ask ourselves where you corporate CEOs went wrong... You knew that shock and indecency create a buzz that moves market share and lines your pockets.” Her sentiments were echoed by most of the other Committee members present at the well-attended hearing, with Rep. Edward Markey (D-Mass.) complaining that many station executives consider their licenses to use the spectrum “as mere corporate commodities and they air content replete with raunchy language, graphic violence and indecent fare... It is increasingly clear that the paltry fines the FCC assesses [for indecency] have become nothing more than a joke... simply a cost of doing business.”

Markey was critical of what he called the “FCC’s utter unwillingness” to revoke licenses or raise indecency issues during the license-renewal process. “Clearly, Congress will have to address these shortcomings at the FCC,” he said. Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) – who has been in Congress longer than any other House member – criticized “the seeming indifference” of broadcasting executives to do anything to curtail indecency and violent broadcasts and Fox and NBC officials for not accepting invitations to testify at the hearing: “I can conclude only that they are insufficiently aware of the

seriousness of concern [by member of Congress and the public]. It appears that these executives consider these [fines] nothing more than lunch money – a small cost of doing business.”

A majority of the FCC – Commissioners Copsps, Kevin Martin and Jonathan Adelstein – two Democrats and a Republican, have been most outspoken in urging stronger actions against indecent, obscene and violent programming. In his Congressional testimony, Copsps noted that when he joined the FCC two and a half years ago his first public statement was on indecency. “Every time I visit a town or city across America, I hear the same refrain from people: We are fed up with

“Today’s broadcasters are trying to retain audiences that have been deserting them in droves in favor of cable programming that is not subject to indecency restrictions.”

patently offensive programming... People all across this land of ours are demanding action – action now – to stop the increasing sex and violence bombarding their airwaves.” But, he said, the Commission still has not compiled “a record [against indecency] to match our rhetoric.”

In echoing Copsps’ sentiments, Martin said that “television today contains some of the coarsest and most violent programming ever aired – and more of it. Indeed, the networks appear to be designing programs to ‘push the envelope’ and the bounds of decency.” The FCC also should move against such programming on satellite and cable, Martin said: “Increasingly, I hear a call for the same rules to apply to everyone” – radio, TV, satellite and cable. “Like millions of others, I was appalled by the [Super Bowl] halftime show,” Adelstein

told the Committee members. “Not just for the shock-value [Jackson] stunt... but for the overall raunchy performance displayed in front of so many children... I could highlight any number of tasteless commercials that depicted sexual and bodily functions in a vile manner... Any sense of [network] controls appeared out the window so long as the advertiser paid the multi-million dollar rate... Enough is enough... Gratuitous use of swear words or nudity have no place in broadcasting... We need to act forcibly now.”

Powell also joined in his colleagues’ criticism, saying the halftime show “represented a new low in prime-time television [and] is just the latest example in a growing list of deplorable incidents

over the nation’s airwaves.” He said the Commission “has already begun wielding our sword” against

indecency and obscenity, pledged “we will continue to vigorously monitor industry developments...” The fifth commissioner, Kathleen Abernathy, said the Commission must enlist the help of broadcasters – such as the use of delay mechanisms in live broadcasts – in its fight against indecent programming. Today’s broadcasters, she said, “are trying to retain audiences that have been deserting them in droves in favor of cable programming that is not subject to indecency restrictions. As a consequence, broadcast licensees are constantly pushing the programming envelope in an attempt to be more like cable.”

The NAB was late in joining the indecency imbroglio, waiting until March 31 to host a “Summit on Responsible Programming” which was closed to the news media. At that

summit, the NAB announced the formation of a task force – but the Association has done nothing since then on “responsible programming,” except to name co-chairmen. No members of the task force have been named, nor has the first meeting been scheduled more than two months later. “My take on the whole thing is its nothing but window dressing, just window dressing, by the NAB,” according to a prominent lobbyist.

All five commissioners, many members of Congress and public service advocates have repeatedly called on the broadcast industry to adopt a voluntary code of ethics – a call the NAB has ignored so far but which, we’re told, will be considered by the task force. (Note: NAB President Edward Fritts did not respond to a request for comment on this

article.) The NAB did adopt a “Statement of Principles” on programming content in June 1990, which it reaffirmed in 1992, but its provisions “have been totally ignored,” according to a former NAB board member. The NAB had separate radio and TV “Code of Good Practices” until both were dropped in April 1983 – following a U.S. District Court decision ruling that only a small portion of the TV Code dealing with advertising time standards violated antitrust laws. Even when the Code was in force, “there was a history of avoiding programming issues,” according to former NAB Executive Vice President John Summers (who was the staffer overseeing the Code), who told us the Code Authority “was much more inclined to deal with advertising issues.”

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What's So Funny?

A television historian and media critic examines the powerful effect of TV comedy on politics.

By Bernard M. Timberg

Beyond the question of the "liberal" and "conservative" bias so prevalent in the news looms a larger pattern. The nation experiences a crisis, a series of contradictions. The crisis precipitates massive comedy and news coverage and a national debate ensues. Some kind of consensus is eventually forged within the echo chamber of the comedy/news process, and life returns to normal. Or almost normal. There are always a few unresolved issues left lingering in the air.

In the marketplace of ideas and entertainment today, topical comedy no longer simply supplements or comments on the news. News and comedy work together. The result is, to put it more accurately, ComedyNews, not news alone, and it is ComedyNews that frames the central debates and provides the building blocks of public opinion.

The full force of this first came home to me in the days leading up to the war in Iraq. Day by day, while the trumpets of patriotism blared on TV and in newspaper headlines, I found I had to have my daily fix of the Jon Stewart *Daily Show*. My 17-year-old son joined me. It was my antidote, and his, to the daily news, and in this we were joined by approximately a million other viewers of the Comedy Central.

ComedyNews gave me nourishment as straight news starved me. The ComedyNews shows (Jon Stewart's. Bill

Maher's, Dennis Miller's) complemented the information I was getting on the Internet, from the foreign press, from NPR and CSPAN. They raised some of the same questions and critiques-but did so in a humorous vein. They were, in fact, the only places on commercial television (that sanctioned center of American public life) where I could count on intelligent reflection concerning, and wicked laughter at, the excesses of the American media system itself.

I realize that I was watching these shows as someone who had opposed the war from the beginning. Those who supported the war might have been more comfortable watching Bill O'Reilly or Fox News rather than Bill Maher on HBO, listening to Rush Limbaugh rather than Jon Stewart, or enjoying Dennis Miller's rants against wishy-washy liberals. But all of us, for the war, against it, or on the fence, were participating in the same giant ComedyNews machine-an echo chamber that included the monologues, skits and commentaries of late night comedians as well as the reasoned prognostication of news and foreign affairs analysts.

The voices of comedy news I was hearing on television – of Jon Stewart, Bill Maher, Dennis Miller and their guests – were not just more entertaining than the traditional news, they were more substantial as well. I was finding an honesty in the political discussions of

these shows that was lacking in "straight" news. The hosts were not trying to hide their opinions behind a veil of objectivity that did not exist. What I was seeing in *ComedyNews*, was more fun, more enlightening, and I was learning more than from the newscasts I was watching.

If a metaphor might be used, it was as if real-world events (the concrete steps taken by the Bush Administration in the build-up to the war in Iraq, for example) plucked the strings of a giant guitar. The first strings struck represented first responders – the reporters and comedy commentators who could

be counted on to respond to the news events in precise and relatively predictable ways. Then came the follow-up commentary by columnists, editorialists, polemicists, cartoonists and wits of all kinds – on radio and TV, on the Internet and in the printed press. These were more varied.

News events amplified in the sound box were, for example, a contested national political election (the Florida Presidential elections of 2000), a debate before the UN (Colin Powell's presentation justifying the Bush Administration preparations for war), a soldier's capture and rescue (the Jessica Lynch story), a political stump speech (Howard Dean's famous "I Have a Scream" speech), or a series of shocking



Jon Stewart, host of *The Daily Show*.

reports on torture and prisoner abuse in Baghdad. The last four happened within a year of each other, and proved how rapidly even a topic as difficult as torture could be turned into a news and comedy trope.

After the first responders, all the other comedy and news sources that kicked in constituted the sound box of the guitar, picking up and reverberating the sounds of the initial commentary. It was an imperfect sound box to be sure—more sensitive to some tones than others, and prone to blending tones together without, at a certain point, any limits or effort to reproduce the original sound. There were some discordant notes, but within a relatively short period of time the sound that emerged from the box

sounded good and seemed coherent, without deeper examination.

But was the crisis that precipitated the ComedyNews cycle truly resolved? Usually not, or only seemingly so. The media (now pronounced almost universally in the singular, as it accomplishes its collective mission) had accomplished a small miracle. Through a synthesis and convergence of views, through a process of normative reasoning in newspaper articles and editorials, through jokes we all came to know and laugh at together because they represented the "common sense" of the nation, a consensus emerges. The consensus allowed the nation to go on, to live through this period of sharp questioning of its central values, to come to terms with a social fact, a contradiction, an unresolved paradox perhaps, and go about its business. What the media had done, in fact, was to construct what Levi-Strauss called a society's of myth: "a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction, which is impossible."

Let's take a take a look at a single example of how this process worked in the ComedyNews machine's processing of the Howard Dean "I Have A Scream" speech.

Dean was the one outside-the-Beltway anti-war candidate who seemed to have a chance to win. His campaign ended abruptly in a series of stunning primary defeats, the first of which was in the Iowa caucus in January 2004. What started out as an impassioned political stump speech on the day the results became, when the media was finished with it, one of the final nails in Howard Dean's political coffin.

In the days before the Iowa primary

Dean, the front runner, had been caricatured unmercifully, by his opponents and by sources in the press, as a "loose cannon," a guy who was frequently "out of control," who "shot from the lip." His "I Have A Scream" speech seemed to confirm this, and it was followed by a torrent of news and comedy commentary that led to a consensus – Dean was just not right for the job.

There was only one problem with the "I Have a Scream Speech" that seemed to show Dean so obviously and completely out of control. The video that people saw over and over again on all of the networks and comedy shows (replayed, by one count, over 200 times in the two days following the speech), was not what people saw and heard in the arena that day in Iowa at all. It was a media-created effect – the product of a filter-mike. This kind of mike, as Diane Sawyer pointed out in her careful report several days later, filters out surrounding sounds. The mike makes it appear as if the speaker is speaking alone. The filter mike can turn an impassioned collective roar – as a camera within the arena showed it – into a crazy, wild, individual "scream." And it could make Howard Dean look crazy, out-of-it, deranged.

How could something that was really an illusion created by a microphone play such a crucial role in a political campaign? Because it created a moment on the screen that was funny; because it was an irresistible "get;" because it played perfectly to the theme then providing the base line in the ComedyNews machine. The lesson was clear. Comedy could build you up, and it could also tear you down

In the progression that had occurred from the national elections of 1992

through the elections of 1996 and 2000 and into the 2004 campaign season, national politicians learned that they had to come to terms with comedy. In 1999, George W. Bush's jokes and folksy charm

Comedy now was not just about the news; it often was the news.

had captivated the camera (and filmmaker Alexandra Pelosi, the daughter of Democratic Party leader Nancy Pelosi) in "Journeys with George," broadcast first on NBC and then HBO.

By the time of the 2004 elections, not just Bush but all the candidates had been compelled to master the comedy curve. In an earlier era Nixon had done his bit on *Hee Haw* and played piano on the Jack Paar Show. A much more natural performer, Bill Clinton, had appeared on MTV and put on dark glasses and to belt out a saxophone tune on the Arsenio Hall show. But somehow it was different now. The now the term "poli-tainment" rose up in the lexicon. Time magazine media critic Richard Zoglin used it to describe Michael Moore's work in his cover story on "Fahrenheit 9/11." And those who didn't play by the rules of this new form of politics, who didn't ride the curve of ComedyNews to the election polls, were, like Howard Dean, destined to fall off it.

Robert Thompson, resident television critic of the Newhouse School of Communication at Syracuse University, had for some time argued that late-night comedy hosts like Jay Leno and David Letterman constituted a new "Fifth Estate." Though Thompson was competing with others in his use of this term-it had also been used to refer to the rising power of broadcast journalism, and the new reach and power of the Internet-I think he was on to something.

Letterman and Leno, through their history of network dominance, were still the first-tier national comedy jesters. But now there was a burgeoning second tier. Political comedy and comedy commentary on the news had become a staple of HBO and the cable networks.

Polls showed that many Americans, especially young Americans, were like my son and me, taking in a variety of sources but getting their television news from Jon Stewart and the comedy channels – not the traditional news networks. And there was another, more subtle Zeitgeist shift going on. The spin, the liveliness, the urgency – where people looked for trends in the culture – had passed from the well-worn, relatively safe jokes of Leno and Letterman to a new edgier brand of comedy espoused by faux news hosts like Jon Stewart, Bill Maher and Dennis Miller, and Sacha Baron Cohen, the English television agent provocateur who appeared ersatz announcer, bull-in-the-china shop reporter and talk show host on *Da Ali G Show* on HBO. The fringe-time surrealistic political comedy of the Conan O'Brien occupied a space somewhere between the traditional late-night network comedy and the avant-garde cable shows.

Were these television comedians and news/comedy humorists simply the descendants of Mark Twain, Thomas Nast, H.L. Mencken, Will Rogers, Lenny Bruce and Richard Pryor? Or was something different going on? And what about the political candidates themselves? What was happening to them as they were compelled to participate in this comedy sport?

During the 2004 election season, one by one they came into the lion's den of

the late-night comedy talk: Howard Dean, Wesley Clark, Al Sharpton, Dennis Kucinich, John Kerry. Republicans came too. Bob Dole had paved the way in earlier campaigns. By now Rudolph Giuliani, mayor of New York, was a regular on *Saturday Night Live*. Even George W. Bush joined the fray – though he was careful to be Presidential about his exposure. They would, one by one, pay obeisance to the kings of comedy and prove themselves to have what the American people apparently wanted them to have – a certain comfort zone that they could impart, a sense of humor, a sense that there was a "real person" behind the political persona.

Comedy was clearly no longer peripheral to the political process. Comedy now was not just about the news; it often *was* the news. For example, when early in John Kerry's campaign Bush joked about the Democratic candidate's waffling, it made front-page news in the *Washington Post*. Later, when the President tried to defuse Democratic criticism by joking about the missing Iraqi weapons of mass destruction while searching under his table at a Press Association's annual roast, Kerry's response was immediate. "Not Funny, Kerry Says," was the next-day headline.

Looking back, it was the OJ Simpson case that set the stage for the rise of ComedyNews. It followed the full blown news event/media event/crisis/debate/consensus model I described earlier. When the jury reached a verdict in the OJ Simpson case in early October of 1995, the country was braced for a tidal wave of publicity, but nothing prepared the nation for what followed. The OJ Simpson verdict seized and held the

attention of the country for days – virtually stopping all normal work on the day it was announced. It precipitated a debate on celebrity, race and criminal justice that went on for months.

While news experts debated, and late-night comedy hosts lay back and delivered, both were coming to the same conclusion. The comedy shows were, in effect, playing the same joke, again and again. These jokes were all based on the same premise. Yes, OJ was guilty; inexplicably, race and mistrust of the police had trumped the obvious evidence.

Some voices – especially African-

In the realm of credibility it appeared that TV newscasters were going down as comedy commentators went up.

American and women's-movement voices – stood out against this "consensus." Some of those voices (including talk-show host Tom Snyder) supported the jury's verdict, based on the evidence it had before it. Others persisted in asking what happened to the issues of gender and domestic violence, and why those issues had been eclipsed by the debate over race and police procedure in the final days of the trial. But by and large these voices were forced to the margins, buried on the inside pages of opinion journals.

In the new consensus, such questions were beside the point. Leno and Letterman's jokes were echoed by thousands of others on the Internet and in the comedy clubs. The consensus that emerged from the ComedyNews echo chamber was far from solid, but it allowed public discourse, the ComedyNews machine itself, to move on. By dint of repetition and a focus on the trivial, comedy hosts, journalists and

commentators had reassured the public.

Three years later the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal gave the ComedyNews machine its greatest single boost since the invention of television: a sex scandal and a cover-up too juicy for words (and demanding daily pictures). Clinton sex jokes were not just good for days or weeks after the headlines subsided; they are still being told today. Letterman managed to slip one in to his monologue after Clinton's rehabilitation speech at the Democratic national convention in June 2004. The jokes of national comedy commentators were deemed as "truthful" as the news, maybe more so.

So what is the situation today? Could Robert Thompson be right? Could the future he predicted be upon us, with the First Estate, in medieval times the monarchy but in modern parlance the President, locked into a mortal engagement not just with the Fourth Estate, the news establishment, but with a powerful new Fifth Estate as well? Indeed, in the realm of credibility it appeared that TV newscasters were going down as comedy commentators went up, and that during the 2004 Presidential election year, it was ComedyNews, not news alone, that represented the new balance of power in American politics.

A frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly*, Bernard Timberg is the author of *Television Talk* (University of Texas Press 2002), which received the top *CHOICE* magazine award for academic publishing. This article is part of a book in progress on the role of humor in American politics. Mr. Timberg thanks Dan Amundson, Tom Schatz and Horace Newcomb for their counsel.

Judy Woodruff: “The American People Are Counting on Us”

Interviewed by Mort Silverstein of
Television in America, she comments
forcefully on partisan journalism.

The interview traced not only Woodruff's acclaimed career in broadcast journalism, which began by overcoming the heavily polluted sexist atmosphere present in many newsrooms, but also reporting on the kitchen-table issues of health care, the economy, war and human rights, which surrounded the presidents she covered as NBC'S White House correspondent – Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. Subsequently, she anchored breaking news and developing stories for the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, and since 1993 has been anchoring such series as CNN's *Inside Politics* and now *America Votes 2004*. Silverstein began by asking Ms. Woodruff about the power of network news, quoting an anecdote in her autobiography, *This is Judy Woodruff at the White House*.

Mort Silverstein: Twenty years ago,

when you were NBC News's White House correspondent, you wrote in this book a chapter called “More Vast Than Wasteland,” an allusion to Newton Minow's famous line. Referring to the presidential campaign of 1980, you noted that some folks were floating the idea of drafting Walter Cronkite for president. A colleague said, not entirely in jest, why in the world would Cronkite want to be president of the United States and give up all that power?

Judy Woodruff: Twenty years later, there's still power, not just that the anchors have, but that the news organizations have. But it's a more diffuse power, I would say. Because the audiences are smaller. Quite frankly, we don't have the audiences today, in one place, at one network, or even at the three major broadcast networks, that we had in the 1960s and '70s and, and the 1980s yet

again. CNN had such a successful formula, some other people came along and said, well, we want to try that too. And so we have some competition now. I think competition's good. Some of our competitors have a different approach to doing the news than I do, but, you know, that's the way it is. The American people pick and choose.



MS: Fox News, you report, we report, you decide, or, we report, you deride, or something...what's your appraisal of the Fox News?

There was an ideological goal in the creation of Fox...To me, we're here to do news.

JW: You know, my view is that they do what they want to do, and let the consumer judge. I think, it seems to me that Fox has decided that it's all right for reporters to, from time to time, inject their own opinion. I think Fox was created with the idea that a lot of journalism tilted left. And it was their responsibility to correct that by moving, they would say, to the center. Others would say they moved to the right. I don't think my personal opinion matters so much.

But my problem with the whole premise is that, is that there was an ideological goal in the creation of Fox. At least it's my interpretation of it. And to me, we're here to do news. It's not, it shouldn't be the basis for the creation of a news



organization. But that's what they've chosen to do. And it doesn't change my thinking about journalism. I'm still coming from where I was coming from. It hasn't changed the thinking of, I think, a lot of people I know. And there's just a really healthy argument underway right now. I mean, I know, my good friend Brit Hume at Fox and I disagree very strongly about that. I mean, he's coming at it from a different place. He says the rest of the news has been too left, too tilted. In my opinion, it hasn't been. Yes, a lot of journalists are activists. We came out of the '60s. We wanted to make the world better.

We wanted to right all the wrongs, we

wanted to make a contribution. And if you want to interpret that as not just activism, but liberalism, I think it's going too far. But I do agree that it is activism. And to the extent you're a conservative and you're watching and you're thinking, you know, who are you to say whether we ought to fix a problem or not?

But there's a good, healthy debate going on right now. We'll see who wins. Where I'm coming from is, journalism is a profession that is intended to, to help people understand what's going on in the world, to help 'em understand what's going on around them, and to let people make their own decisions. Now, is the process, journalists share the platform, share the stage, with people who give opinion? I mean, every day on *Inside Politics*, the program I anchor on CNN, we have people that come on and give opinion. We have debates, almost every day, on the program. We label them as such. We identify people, we say, Babe Buchanan, from the right. We describe the organization that she's with, and then we'll say Donna Brazile, who was Al Gore's campaign manager. And they will have at it, on one issue another. Sometimes they agree. I'm entirely comfortable doing that. Am I comfortable giving my own opinion? No. I don't think I'm serving our viewers, our consumers well if I try to pass off Judy Woodruff's opinions as news.

When I first started in the business, when Huntley and Brinkley did their report, it was the stone tablets. Now we know, mistakes are sometimes made. But that doesn't mean that we don't try very hard, day in and day out, to get it

right. When I'm sitting there reading a story on CNN, or telling the audience what I'm hearing or what I'm learning, I'm trying very hard to get it right. And being very conscious of not making a mistake, of not misleading, of keeping things in context.

MS: And attribution is vital.

We are putting people on the air and letting them spout opinion and analysis and sometimes we don't label them adequately.

JW: Attribution absolutely, because people can be standing on a street corner saying, did you hear? And it's our job not to put that on the air. I mean, even if a good source gives us information. Unless we can check it out with other sources, think about the motivations of the people who are giving you the story, unless you can pull all that together, and, and help the viewer understand that this is...

An evolving thing, then you're not really doing them any, any service. But we have to be, I think a little more humble.

MS: In a Kennedy School lecture, you criticized the "networks' reliance on television pundits to analyze the recent events, which often undermine their own credibility." Referring to these pundits, you said, "they parade as journalists, but have never paid their dues. The concept of accountability is alien. All that matters are attention and ratings." Can you be more specific?

JW: We have gotten to the point that we are putting people on the air and letting them spout opinion and analysis and sometimes we don't label them

adequately. We don't tell people what their credentials are and where they're coming from and why we're giving them this air time. I think it's being done in too many places on television. I think it has long ago blurred the line between journalism reporting, and opinion. It used to be that it was pretty clear. We made a pretty clear distinction between reporting. On the one hand, news, and opinion, over here. And then at some point along the way, we threw in analysis, and we said, we're analyzing stories, you know, newspapers label it as analysis, typically. And we started to do that, but then at some point along the way, then we started mixing, we had reporters who were appearing at other times as commentators. Or maybe they were giving analysis, but then that sort of slid over into commentary. You know, there are those who argue, well, what the heck? Who cares? The public knows what's going on. I'm a little more old fashioned about it. Lines need to be drawn, and that when we cross those lines, we need to tell the audience what we're doing. I'm not saying the public is permanently damaged by this. I don't think the Republic is going to fall. I just think that, the public, the people, deserve better than that.

MS: You were talking about the body blow of 9-11 and the surprise. And I wonder how much of that is attributable to the fact that several years ago, we had – and then you talked about this – foreign correspondents were a significant element of network television journalism. Each had 15 to 20 foreign bureaus. Today they have less than half that. I remember the famous Larry Tisch tour of the CBS news bureaus. “Where is everybody?” he asked. “Why do we need

15 to 20 people?” and so forth. I think that's where CNN came in, right, to fill that gap?

JW: I think that's part of it...

JW: I was not there at the beginning of CNN, but I know that one of Ted Turner's goals was to cover the world, was to get news out 24 hours a day. Because his view was, you know, we live on a shrinking planet; we're all much more connected than ever before. And if that was true in 1980, when he started CNN, it's certainly true 22 years later, in 2002, when you and I are talking. We are connected; we've seen that even more now than ever before, with the terror attacks of September the 11th; we see it with what we watch going on in the Middle East; we see it with events in China, in, in Japan and North Korea. People watch the Japanese market, the Japanese economy. When we, they catch a cold, the rest of the world catches pneumonia.

MS: What was your reaction to the early White House request not to air, or if so, to dramatically abridge any videotapes of Osama bin Laden?

JW: Well, I think, first of all that was at a very scary time in our country. And we didn't know what was going on with Osama bin Laden. It wasn't clear just how widespread his tentacles were, how many more people he had planted in the United States who were waiting to do something horrible. And so the Administration was understandably shaky about that. We were feeling shaky about it. With all of us in the media the thinking was, well, we're the last ones to want to do anything to jeopardize lives in

this country. Or anywhere, for that matter. So I think at the time, people felt that maybe they're right. But I think it became clear pretty quickly after that that the American people can handle the information. Put it on, let them make the decision. And if there are secret signals in there, we're as likely to see them as they are. It became a little specious, I think, that [government argument].

MS: How has the coverage permitted by our government differed from Vietnam to the Gulf War to the present?

JW: Well, I think over the years, the government has gotten, the Defense Department has gotten, much more cautious.

MS: Why did they get more cautious?

JW: Well, they thought they were burned in Vietnam. They felt they probably let too much reporter access, after a time, on the ground. After initially there being not enough coverage, then there was a lot of coverage, and it clearly affected American opinion. We went a number of years, then along came the Gulf War, many years later, in the early '90s. There was an enormous effort on the part of the Administration, the first Bush administration, the Pentagon, to control access.

There's not that desire, as we sit here today, in the, in the waning days, or at

least we'd like to believe, the waning days of the war against Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. I think that the Administration went way beyond where it should have in denying press coverage. And I know that they were concerned about the safety of journalists [there]. They were very concerned about military secrets getting out. And I can understand that. Journalists don't want those secrets out either. We don't want, you know, information falling into the, the hands of the enemy. On the other hand, when you've got that many American military, young men and women over there, fighting, what they're doing is the business of the American people. The American people are paying taxes. The American people are funding this war. And there is a way, I think, a medium ground in there. Where the reporters can be there, the cameras can be there, covering what's going on. And at the same time, not jeopardize operations.

We already know that it has been an incredibly dangerous place for journalists. At one point late in the year 2001, there were more journalists who were killed than there were military, in hostile situations. So it is, it was, it remains, an inherently dangerous place for journalists, even to today. Journalists and journalist organizations have to have their eyes open when they go into these places. I don't believe anyone should be made to go in; it ought to be a voluntary assignment.

This concludes the first part of Mort Silverstein's interview with Judy Woodruff. The next issue of *Television Quarterly* will continue with her pioneering and rise to prominence as a TV journalist.

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Host: Steve Scheuer. Executive Producer: Alvin H. Perlmutter. Senior Writer/Producer: Morton Silverstein.

Is U.S. Television Ready to Learn Español?

The growing importance of Spanish-language television to the 40 million Hispanics in the U.S. – now over 13 percent of the population.

By Humberto Delgado and Lorna Veraldi

Every evening at six in Broward County, Florida, the Delgado household watches local news in English on WPLG-TV, Channel 10 – the Miami-Ft. Lauderdale ABC affiliate owned by Post-Newsweek Stations. At 6:30 PM the set stays tuned to WPLG for the ABC network news. But at 11 PM, the household watches the news in Spanish on WLTV-TV, Channel 23, Univision's owned and operated station in Miami.

Years ago, the Delgado household watched only English-language stations. But over the years, the Cuban-born, multilingual members of this South Florida home decided that Channel 23 not only presents all the important local stories covered by its English-language counterparts, but also includes stories from Central and South America and the Caribbean that are missing from local English-language newscasts.

Switching back and forth between Spanish and English stations is not unique to the Delgado household. Research shows that many U.S. Hispanics

want and use television in both English and Spanish and no longer see Spanish-language television as a temporary, transitional medium appealing primarily or exclusively to newly arrived immigrants. The U.S. Hispanic population is now the country's largest minority group. Close to 40 million people in the United States are Hispanic – over 13% of the U.S. population. By the year 2010, it is predicted that almost 16% of the U.S. population will be Hispanic – almost 50 million people. That figure will include 20% of U.S. children younger than 5. The U. S. Hispanic population is younger than the non-Hispanic population. (The median age among Hispanics is 27. Among non-Hispanics it is 37.) Average household size is larger among U. S. Hispanics than among non-Hispanics (3.6 persons in an average Hispanic household, compared to 2.4 persons in an average non-Hispanic household). Annual buying power of U. S. Hispanics is currently estimated at over \$530 billion dollars, twice what it

was ten years ago. That figure is expected to more than double again in the coming decade.

At the present time, Univision claims to entertain and inform more U.S. Hispanics each day than any other media company, noting in its promotional materials that “of all TV Networks programming a full prime time schedule, only the big 4 outrank Univision in prime time viewing.” Its television broadcast operations include the Univision Network, TeleFutura Network and the Univision and TeleFutura Television Groups. In any given sweeps, in markets like Miami-Ft. Lauderdale, the Univision owned-and-operated station may well outperform its highest rated English-language competitor in key local newscasts, in prime time and even sign-on to sign-off.

This Spanish-language media powerhouse grew from modest beginnings. In 1961, the first Spanish-language UHF station in the U.S. was started in San Antonio, Texas to serve the local Hispanic community. That station, KWEX, originally part of Univision's predecessor, Spanish International Network (SIN), today is a Univision owned and operated station. In 1970, Univision became the first U.S. network to provide live coverage of the World Cup soccer championship. Six years later, Univision began to link its affiliates via satellite, and in 1979, it launched Galavisión as the first Spanish-language cable network in the U.S. Now a publicly traded corporation, Univision also owns and operates Univision Radio, Univision Music Group and Univision Online.

Like the U.S. Census Bureau, Nielsen defines “Hispanic” households as those in which “the Head of House is of Hispanic origin or descent.” “Spanish

Dominant” households are those Hispanic households in which only Spanish or mostly Spanish is spoken. Univision says Nielsen estimates that almost 46% of U.S. Hispanic adults live in Spanish Dominant households, and that fully 90% of U.S. Hispanic adults speak at least some Spanish at home. This is true of all age groups and all income levels. Univision has predicted that Spanish-language television “will continue to benefit from high Spanish-language retention among Hispanics,” and predicts that Spanish will continue to be spoken in U.S. homes. The reasons? Approximately two-thirds of U. S. Hispanic adults were born outside the United States, and immigration will continue. An interest in preservation of cultural identity, the geographic concentration of U. S. Hispanics and the ease of travel and telecommunications will contribute to the continued vitality of Spanish in America. Spanish Dominant households are critical to the success of Spanish-language programming in the United States. But Hispanic households that are not Spanish Dominant also use Spanish-language television. This is true even in Hispanic households where little Spanish is spoken. And, says Univision, citing research by Rostow Research Group, Hispanics who view Spanish-language spots find them more persuasive and more memorable than English-language advertising.

Recent surveys show almost half of U.S. Hispanics consider it important to receive Spanish-language television channels on cable. Among urban Hispanics, 75% said that it was important for their households to receive Spanish-language channels. On the other hand, 40% of urban Hispanics say they

prefer English-language TV programs, and 20% of those in Spanish Dominant households say they prefer watching TV in English.

Once-reliable forms like the sitcom have lost their power to draw viewers and drive profits. Spanish-language television is coming to be seen as both a serious competitor and a source of new ideas....Attracting the growing Hispanic audience is important to advertisers.

This creates a framework for what retailers call “crossover appeal” and what advertising agencies label “crossover creative.” In programming terms, the authors suggest it might be called cultural convergence, a change in the literature of U.S. television as it evolves and adapts to incorporate new themes, stories, settings, actors and language. The old literature of television will not die or be replaced by something entirely new. However, neither will Hispanic or Latino culture or language simply be assimilated or co-exist with the rest of American television, in a parallel but separate universe. Latino culture and Spanish language are becoming part of a new American mainstream. This change will not be driven primarily by “public service” obligations, but by economics. Mainstream networks have watched audiences fragment. Once reliable forms like the sitcom have lost their power to draw viewers and drive profits. Spanish-language television is coming to be seen as both a serious competitor and a source of new ideas.

One approach, of course, is to incorporate Latino characters or themes into English-language programs. This is the approach exemplified in network series like *The George Lopez Show*, an ABC sitcom now in its fourth season that tells the story of a Mexican-American

family. Another example is *Sí TV*, an English language cable network with “Hispanic” content. This new cable network, launched in February 2004 with the backing of investors such as Time Warner Cable and Echo Star Communications, offers series like *New York Undercover*, aimed at U.S.-born Hispanics.

However, not just Latino themes and characters, but also Spanish language is making inroads into mainstream American television. As early as the 1970s, PBS broadcast *Qué Pasa USA?* – a bilingual series that portrayed Cuban immigrants in Miami and their survival in an English-speaking country. Both English and Spanish TV stations are still airing the series. Procter & Gamble's decision to air a Spanish-language spot for Crest toothpaste in the 2003 English-language Grammy Awards on CBS grabbed headlines. Other advertisers, including Coca-Cola and Volkswagen, are using bilingual ads in both Hispanic and general market advertising. One such spot featured Mexican actress Selma Hayek speaking Spanish in a restaurant kitchen and English at a table with companions; it aired on both English and Spanish-language networks without subtitles.

Attracting the growing Hispanic audience is important to advertisers. GE's acquisition of Spanish-language network Telemundo, long Univision's rival, reflected this reality. So did NBC's decision to air *Kingpin* during the February 2003 sweeps. The six-part series was scheduled like a Spanish telenovela, aired in its entirety over three weeks. Some heralded the series, the story of power struggles within a

Mexican drug cartel, as a modern-day *Macbeth*. Set on the Mexico-Texas border, featuring Latino actors and peppered with Spanish dialogue, *Kingpin*

To the degree that life north of the border is depicted as virtuous and orderly and life south of the border dark and dangerous, *Kingpin* perpetuated the stereotype of Latinos as illegal immigrants.

was an experiment (not entirely successful) in cultural convergence. Scenes of crime, violence and sex naturally led to comparisons with *The Sopranos*, and fueled speculation that *Kingpin* would bring NBC similar critical and ratings success. NBC hoped to capitalize on the buzz preceding the network premiere with repurposed versions of the series (in Spanish on co-owned Telemundo and in a more explicit version on co-owned cable network Bravo). When *Kingpin* premiered at 10 PM on Sunday, February 2, 2003, its ratings were promising, especially in the 18-49 demographic, giving NBC its highest rating for the time period in three years. However, ratings for subsequent episodes declined. By the finale, *Kingpin* ranked a disappointing 72nd in prime time for the week. Perhaps reactions to the series' negative stereotypes of Latinos were at least partly to blame for its ratings decline. Comments about the series were reminiscent of those made about the 1950s movie *Blackboard Jungle*: "It is impossible to have so many bad students all together in one single classroom." Unrelenting negative characters and themes may have overshadowed much of the initial attraction of *Kingpin* in the eyes of Latino and non-Latino viewers.

In *Kingpin*, the border that separates U. S. and Mexico also seems to separate

good and evil. Characters south of the border, Anglo or Hispanic, are corrupted by their surroundings. Take Marlene, the blonde American wife of American-educated cartel boss Miguel Cadena. Compared by some to Lady Macbeth, Marlene, a lawyer by training, secretly sinks into drug addiction in her husband's lavish

Mexican mansion. Her eight-year-old son, though protected by his parents and his bodyguard from the brutal power struggles of the cartel, seems unable to resist the corrupting influences of his surroundings, sneaking a sip from the communion chalice as an altar boy at the church, troubled by nightmares and bed-wetting. An American plastic surgeon, Dr. Howard Klein, who has supplemented his income dealing drugs, finds it hard to leave the life as he tries to pay for a messy divorce. When the kingpin's private jet ferries the doctor south of the border, he becomes an accomplice in an assassination.

Not a single character who lives south of the border is virtuous – not a priest, not a politician, not a policeman or a prison guard. And not a single character who travels from north to south comes back unscathed. Latina DEA agent Delia Flores gets her partner killed when she foolishly trusts a double agent south of the border, and struggles to regain the confidence of her superiors back in the States after she is shipped back over the border in the trunk of a car, wounded and betrayed.

The significance of the border as a dividing line between good and evil in *Kingpin* is particularly interesting in light of criticisms of U.S. network news by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. NAHJ has repeatedly objected

to stereotypical characterizations of Latinos on U.S. network news, writing in its 2002 report that news stories too often used “the image of the border to suggest a divide between the Latino and non-Latino populations and to define Latinos as illegal immigrants.” To the degree that life north of the border is depicted as virtuous and orderly and life south of the border dark and dangerous, *Kingpin* perpetuated this stereotype.

After *Kingpin* aired, over 300 students in journalism and mass communications classes at Florida International University in Miami were surveyed to find out what they thought about the series. The Miami-Ft. Lauderdale market is the third largest in number of Hispanic households in the nation. It has the nation's highest percentage of Spanish Dominant households (almost 70% of its Hispanic households). Almost 60% of the students in the FIU School of Journalism and Mass Communication are Hispanic. These are the young, multi-cultural viewers NBC targeted with *Kingpin*.

As *Kingpin's* disappointing ratings

suggested, despite its substantial promotion, few of the students surveyed had watched all six episodes of *Kingpin*. Those who had sampled the series were asked what they liked most about it. By far the largest number of respondents gave answers related to the series' Hispanic themes – Mexican setting, Latino actors, integration of Spanish into the dialogue. However, what students said they liked least was the negative stereotyping of Hispanic characters. In other words, the elements that drew them to the series also disappointed them.

NBC wanted a larger share of the Latino audience, and a larger number of non-Hispanic viewers hungry for innovative, cable-like television. But reaction to *Kingpin* suggested that, despite its attempt to be cutting-edge, NBC might not have moved far from the days in which Latinos were portrayed in movies and TV in *zarapes and sombreros*, a stereotype that insulted many viewers.

Finding a balance between negative and positive is not easy, and there is no



A scene from *The George Lopez Show*.

agreement even within the Hispanic or Latino community about what television ought to portray. *The George Lopez Show* was bashed during its first season by a Los Angeles *Times* critic for its “wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong” portrayal of Latinos. Lopez himself felt that critic missed the point. “His objection was it didn’t match his life. He sat there expecting to see his life with a happy family and everybody nurturing and he saw my life with no nurturing and an overbearing mother.” That, said Lopez, had been his reality, whatever other Hispanic families were like. Showing his character’s imperfection isn’t a bad thing, Lopez said in a recent interview with reporter Luaine Lee. “I don’t mind being held up as an example of somebody who’s learning to be better.” Negative stereotypes in *Kingpin* failed to reflect reality, but insisting on only positive images is equally unrealistic and restrictive.

The message? Cultural convergence creates both opportunities and risks. Programming elements that initially attract viewers, if not carefully handled, may ultimately drive them away. Creating programs that reflect the realities and complexity of Hispanic or Latino life and culture requires more than casting Latino actors or employing

“Hispanic” themes. In Spanish or English, or a combination of the two, U.S. television, fiction or news, needs to create stories that are truthful and balanced, that respect, rather than exploit, diversity. Advocacy groups have repeatedly pointed to a lack of representation of minorities on television in numbers that reflect their strength in contemporary America. Despite all the talk about attracting Hispanic viewers, critics charge that the 2004-05 season will feature fewer prime-time shows with Latino casts than the previous season. If television is to reflect the complex realities of Latino life, it is hard to see how that can happen without hiring Latino writers, producers and actors and increasing their visibility in prime time.

Hispanic purchasing and political power will continue to increase. Attempts to attract and serve this important and growing audience will continue. However, not every attempt at melding the old and new will succeed. Merging cultures, like merging corporations, requires delicacy and dedication. Attempts to find synergy can backfire. Only time will tell how soon and how successfully American television will learn *español*.

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Japanese Television: How Different It Is!

Now facing its greatest challenge: going digital

By Bruce Dunning

When Americans first come to Tokyo or Osaka, they often think: Wow, this is just like New York, or Chicago, or Dallas. Tall buildings, crowded sidewalks, and every American franchise you've ever heard of: McDonalds, Wendy's, Pizza Hut, and Starbucks, Starbucks, Starbucks.

But very quickly they find that McDonalds features teriyaki burgers, Pizza Hut puts corn, tuna and pineapple on a pizza and calls it the "Hawaiian special," while the Starbucks menu may be written in an indecipherable language.

And when a visiting American sits down to watch Japanese TV, the reaction is much the same. It looks familiar, but the language is indecipherable and the end product is very, very different.

Media scholars call the Japanese the world's "most enthusiastic" TV viewers, and for decades the Japanese have been watching more and more television each year. Various polling and ratings services agree that the individual Japanese viewer now watches TV for an average of just over four hours a day. Children,

interestingly, watch least. TV viewing increases in a smooth upward curve as viewers get older. One poll in 2002 found that 84.6 percent of Japanese say TV is "indispensable" compared to 60.5 percent for newspapers. But, just as in the United States, TV viewing here may be peaking. Kathleen Morikawa, who writes a column on Japanese TV for the English-language *Yomiuri Daily News*, pointed out that ratings for the top shows this past spring "were dangling perilously close to the single-digit ledge."

In the average Japanese home, the TV is switched on for more than eight hours a day, even if no one is actually watching. Television is said to provide companionship for house-bound homemakers, and some Japanese friends tell me they sleep better with the TV picture flickering through the night.

So what are they watching? The four-and-a-half commercial networks plus the huge public broadcaster, NHK, are full-service networks offering a mix of news, entertainment, sports and public service programming not unlike the traditional U.S. networks, but the

content and the thinking behind the programming is very different.

Entertainment

Comedy is a staple of Japanese TV, but not the American-style situation comedy. Much Japanese comedy is heavy on slapstick and heavy on word-play because the language has what amounts to a super-abundance of homonyms. Many so-called “variety shows” feature panels of celebrities who keep the comic banter flowing. The concept behind *America’s Funniest Home Videos* came from a popular Sunday night show on which celebrity panelists try to guess what the climax of the home video might be; the celebrities try to out-do each other with outrageous and funny guesses and mis-guesses.

Cartoons are popular; the *Pokemon* phenomenon of a few years ago started as a TV animated series here.

Entertainment programming includes drama serials, both in the daytime and in prime time. Dramas set in hospitals or schools are popular, as are detective shows although they are not usually as violent as their American counterparts. But there’s no equivalent to shows like *LA Law* or *The Practice* or even *Ally McBeal*. Japan is neither a litigious nor a confrontational society; court cases drag on for years, and the aim, except in criminal cases, is to reach a consensus acceptable to all involved. Courtroom drama doesn’t interest Japanese audiences.

Most shows don’t last more than one or two seasons, but a few do go on and on. The samurai drama, *Mito Komon*, has been on TBS (the independent Tokyo Broadcasting System) since 1969, one of the few survivors among the once-

popular historical costume dramas. The plots are thoroughly predictable. A band of samurai following their high-ranking leader Mito Komon, heavily disguised, travels the land righting wrongs and rescuing damsels in distress. The climax is always a confrontation with the evil-doers, who fall to their knees in shock and awe when Mito Komon reveals his true identity.

Fuji TV has also had a 35-year hit with the animated feature *Sazae-san*, about a three-generation extended family living the life that Japan thinks everyone ought to live. Even now, it regularly pulls a 24-plus share.

Back on TBS, Thursday night means *Wataru Seken wa Oni Bakari*, a title that loosely translates “The World is Full of Devils.” This prime-time soap opera, launched in 1990, was on hiatus for a few years, hit its peak in the late nineties, but even in the spring of 2004, held a very respectable 18.3 share. It follows the trials and tribulations, the foibles and follies, of two inter-related extended families, both in the restaurant business. Most of the action takes place in one or the other eatery, or around the dining table at home.

And this brings us to two distinctly Japanese programming themes – eating and bathing. This country is obsessive about food and the quality thereof, while cleanliness is, if not next to godliness, certainly next to Japanese-ness. Dramas like *Wataru* revolve around eating. Cookery shows fill the airwaves in daytime and prime time, featuring professional chefs or celebrity cooks giving instructions for making dishes both practical and bizarre. Cookery shows are cheap to produce, and consistently draw audiences.

Food Battle Club pits contestants

trying to stuff themselves with as much chow as possible during a 45-minute pig-out. The winner is the one who adds the most to his body weight, usually 20 to 25 pounds, during the broadcast.

Thursday night at 9 on NTV brings

Master of the Best Cooking.

The newspaper TV listings give a hint of the festivities:

“East competes against West

as teams led by Hiroshi Sekiguchi and Yuji Miyake make gourmet Japanese *oinari-san* (sweetened rice wrapped in fried bean curd) and French croissants.”

Or on another evening: “Skewered meat and fish dishes from Tokyo and Osaka are on the menu in tonight’s cooking contest. Panelists sample and pass judgment.”

Travel shows are perennial favorites in Japan, and the celebrities who host these make sure their viewers get plenty of eating and bathing. *Dreamy Trip* airs at 8 p.m. Wednesdays. “Former sumo star Konishiki takes his wife on a trip. In Kusatsu they stroll among the hot springs and try a traditional stirred hot water bath, and in Niigata dine at a sushi restaurant that specializes in jumbo-sized portions.” On another *Dreamy Trip*, a well-known comedian takes his family to the seaside “where they sample tuna and sea urchins, and to a hot spring inn where they learn to make ‘soba’ noodles.”

Plumpies – named for the amply proportioned hosts – airs at 9 p.m. on Friday. Recently the pair went “on a treasure hunt in Atami with the aim of creating a new boxed lunch for the seaside resort,” and also reported on “an interesting local hot spring bath.”

On *Hong Kong Quiz Special*, two pairs of Japanese performers “play games” in Hong Kong: “Winners get to dine at a top

restaurant while the losers have to stomach fried scorpion.”

Late-night programs generally feature a lot of raunchy and risqué repartee, with near nudity quite common.

Colombo was such a hit that Emperor Hirohito asked to meet the star, Peter Falk, when he made his only trip to the United States in 1975.

Foreign programs are rarely successful on Japanese TV, though American movies, usually the more violent or mindless action flicks, are major staples of primetime. Older Japanese remember the early days of television when *I Love Lucy* and other U.S. programs dubbed into Japanese were popular but as Japanese networks began their own producing, interest in foreign programs dwindled. *Little House on the Prairie* has been a perennial favorite, probably because of its family values and nostalgic aura; so too has *Sesame Street*. On the other hand, *Dallas*, a huge hit worldwide, bombed in Japan. In the mid-1970s *Colombo* was such a primetime hit, at least in the Imperial Palace, that Emperor Hirohito asked to meet the star, Peter Falk, when he made his only trip to the United States in 1975. The *X-files* turned in respectable ratings in the mid-90s, but in general, foreign programs have been increasingly unsuccessful over the years.

One recent exception has been the South Korean drama series, *Winter Sonata*, produced by the Korean Broadcasting System. This sentimental saga of love lost and love rekindled aired in 2003 on one of NHK’s satellite channels and proved so successful that it was re-broadcast on the terrestrial general channel this spring. The program has launched a boom in

Korean-language study and in travel to sites in South Korea seen in the drama.

News

Japanese networks have a serious commitment to news, especially NHK, which likes to be thought of as the network of record. NHK devotes about 45 percent of airtime on its general channel to news, while the commercial networks devote about 20 percent. The Japanese networks all have large news staffs doing a lot of routine reporting for which the American networks would rely on wire services.

There is very little investigative reporting on Japanese TV, or in Japanese newspapers, for that matter. And unless there is a major scandal that simply can't be ignored, TV news rarely reports unfavorably on government actions. In May, just before Prime Minister Koizumi made his second one-day trip to North Korea, one network reported that he would pledge 250,000 tons of rice to that starving nation to obtain the release of the children of Japanese kidnapped by North Korean agents. Koizumi's staff was so enraged by the premature release of the story that the network was told to reveal its sources or be barred from the press corps traveling with the prime minister. At the last minute and under intense media pressure, the prime minister's office relented. The offending network's reporters made the trip, and Koizumi did announce the gift of 250,000 tons of rice.

The news anchors are usually men, frequently teamed with attractive young women whom foreigners often refer to as "hai-hai" girls. "Hai, hai" means "yes, yes," and traditionally a woman's role at

an anchor desk was to agree meekly with her knowledgeable male partner. This is changing and women are being taken more seriously on-screen and off.

Anchors are not the celebrities that such people are in the U.S., though there are a few exceptions. In 1985, TV Asahi launched a 10 p.m. news hour *News Station* with Hiroshi Kume, a popular variety and game show host, as anchor. The broadcast was so different from the staid, stuffy, "just the facts, ma'm" approach dominating TV news that people talked about the "Kume phenomenon." Reminiscent of Kume's *Best Ten* music broadcast, *News Station* featured the "Top Ten" news stories. The broadcast was glitzy, and not afraid to skewer important politicians, and Kume never left viewers guessing what his opinion was on any news topic. *News Station* ran for more than 18 years, and changed Japanese TV news more than any single influence.

When members of the Imperial Family hold a news conference, it is always a "staged" event.

NHK airs a half-hour national news broadcast at 7 p.m., a 15-minute newscast at 9 p.m., and a full hour at 10 p.m. All the networks offer national newscasts at mid-day, and the commercial networks have major newscasts around 6 p.m. Morning news shows tend to be lighter with brief summaries of the main news, weather reports, daily horoscopes, and little features like the "pet of the day." On the morning newscasts, one tradition that seems odd to Americans is the practice of displaying pages from various newspapers with a newscaster summarizing and discussing some highlighted stories.

Most of these morning programs are

devoted to long reports on lurid crimes or celebrity news like engagements, weddings, or funerals of the rich and famous. One topic that became a morning news obsession last spring was a comment by the Crown Prince during a news conference before his May trip to Europe. When members of the Imperial Family hold a news conference, it is always a “staged” event. Questions are submitted in advance from the very tame imperial household press corps and the imperials recite their vaguely worded prepared answers by rote. The Imperial Household Agency controls everything the Imperial Family says and does, and all Japanese media acquiesce, so when the Crown Prince responded to a query about Crown Princess Masako, he apparently went “off script.”

Since early 2004, the crown princess had been in seclusion, apparently suffering from depression and other ailments brought on by pressure to conform to the isolated environment of the court and pressure to produce a male heir. The Japanese constitution says only a male can inherit the throne, and the current Emperor’s two sons have fathered only daughters.

At his news conference, the prince said he thought the princess had “completely exhausted herself” trying to adapt.

“There were developments that denied Princess Masako’s career as well as her personality,” said the prince, referring to his American-educated wife’s giving up a diplomatic career to marry him.

Such criticism of the Imperial Family minders was unprecedented. Japanese media called his remarks an “earthquake,” a “bombshell” and a “declaration of war” on the Household

Agency. The morning TV news shows, even prime-time specials, devoted hours to discussion and speculation as to what this all means. The Imperial Household Agency reportedly has let it be known that the prince will not be talking publicly any time soon.

Documentaries

Both NHK and the commercial stations are strong on long-form documentaries, although these almost never touch on controversial subjects. Typical projects include a three-part series on the Roman Empire or scientific broadcasts on the origins of life on our planet. In 1980, NHK and CCTV (China Central Television) collaborated on a major documentary series about the Silk Road, the legendary route of the first traders to link China and Europe. This highly-acclaimed series was sold to more than 40 countries. Now the two companies are developing *Silk Road 2005*, revisiting the fabled route and focusing on archeological discoveries in the quarter-century since the first series.

Typical of projects at commercial networks is the long-running TBS series on UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites, a well-photographed and sensitively-produced series.

Sports

All the networks broadcast sports extensively. Professional baseball is very popular with two networks actually owning teams; the Yomiuri group broadcasts the Yomiuri Giants on its NTV network and TBS owns the Yokohama Bay Stars. But professional baseball has been hurt by the departure of some of its top stars to the American

major leagues. Satellite broadcasts of U.S. games in which Japanese players like the Seattle Mariners' Ichiro Suzuki or the Yankees' Hideki Matsui are pulling viewers away from broadcasts of Japan's pro leagues. The biggest baseball event of the year, however, is the annual high school baseball tournament; the final games leading to the championship are carried nationwide.

Japan's traditional national sport, sumo, doesn't draw spectators the way it used to, either in the stadiums or on TV, but NHK still broadcasts two hours a day of the bouts every day during the six 15-day tournaments held each year.

Golf is a Japanese obsession and golf tournaments frequently hit the airwaves, especially as Japanese players are turning up on the international circuits. In 1972, TBS began broadcasting the Masters' tournament from Augusta, Georgia, and discovered that a respectable audience of golf devotees will wake up early for the live broadcasts starting at 5 a.m.

Sports that wouldn't make air in America are perennial favorites in Japan, like marathons and long-distance relay races. This past spring, when Japan's women's volleyball team was vying for a berth at the Athens Olympics, the final rounds were broadcast live and in prime time.

Advertising

When Japanese companies want to lure customers, television is their medium of choice. Television grabs more advertising yen than newspapers, magazines, and radio combined, nearly \$18 billion dollars in 2003. The "hard sell" is not common as advertisers go for the "feel good" factor. Sometimes it is almost impossible to tell what the

product is, so low key or "warm and fuzzy" is the sales pitch.

Foreign celebrities are frequently featured in commercials even if foreign programming isn't very popular. Brad Pitt is a hot pitchman right now. Many such celebrities do Japanese commercials with the stipulation that these are aired only in Japan. About 20 years ago, CBS News provoked the ire of one well-known Hollywood actress by including her commercial appearance in a story on this "foreign pitch-person" phenomenon. Sofia Coppola's movie "Lost in Translation" revolves around this theme.

Japan's television industry is structured differently from the America's. It appears to follow the British model, a mixture of a powerful, non-commercial or public network and several commercial networks. But the laws governing broadcasting were written in 1950 under the post-World War II American Occupation. The Civil Information and Education Section of the Occupation administration decreed that there would be one national public-broadcasting organization supported by user fees and locally based commercial broadcasters supported by advertising. And that is still the basic structure of the broadcasting industry.

The public broadcaster is Nippon Hoso Kyokai or Japan Broadcasting Association, a semi-governmental organization known worldwide as NHK. Virtually all of its revenue comes from license fees. These are supposed to be mandatory, but evading the NHK license fee collector is something of a national sport. Still, NHK subscriptions total about 38 million, one for every three or four Japanese. Those fees add up to about six billion U.S. dollars a year, or 97

percent of NHK's revenues.

NHK is huge, but its audience share has been falling for years as more and more viewers are lured to the commercial channels.

NHK has 57 stations around the country, almost twice as many as any commercial network, and broadcasts on two conventional channels, a general channel featuring diversified programming and an educational channel. NHK also operates three satellite channels and NHK World, for broadcasters around the world. It employs about 12,000 people on staff and thousands more work for independent production operations.

NHK is huge, but its audience share has been falling for years as more and more viewers are lured to the commercial channels. One dramatic example of NHK's problems is the annual New Year's Eve song contest, which has been a year-end habit for decades.

The New Year season is traditionally a family holiday and for years most Japanese TV sets were tuned to this musical extravaganza pitting women singers against men in a competition known as *The Red and White Song Contest*, red and white being traditional colors of celebration. All types of popular music are included, traditional, jazz, rock, etc. One of the highlights for years was the competition over who would have the most elaborate dress and hairstyle, a competition between veteran songstress Sachiko Kobayashi for the women's team and for the men's team, Kenichi Mikawa, an enormously popular singer whose on-stage garb is either androgynous or totally feminine. So expensive was this competition becoming that reportedly the two called a truce a couple of years ago.

The 2003 *Red and White* show drew a 50.7 percent share, impressive sounding, but way down from years gone by.

NHK began TV broadcasting in February 1953 and the commercial stations started coming on air that fall. They were, as intended, locally owned and operated, but soon began grouping themselves into networks. Japanese law ostensibly does not allow for station groups or network owned-and-operated stations as in the U.S., but large media conglomerates built around Japan's major national newspapers have created de facto networks through cross-ownership and close affiliate relationships. The result is four major networks and one smaller, weaker group, listed here in order of their profitability:

Fuji – part of the Sankei newspaper group. It is the profit leader among the commercial stations, reporting net profits of over \$200 million in 2003; it was the only commercial network to increase profits over 2002. . 28 stations.

NTV (Nippon Television) – controlled by the Yomiuri organization, publisher of Japan's largest-circulation newspaper, Yomiuri Shimbun, and owner of the most prestigious baseball team, the Yomiuri Giants, among many other properties. 30 stations.

TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System) – independent compared to other broadcast organizations but loosely affiliated with the Mainichi newspaper group with which it shares minority cross-holdings. 28 stations.

TV Asahi – controlled by the Asahi organization, publisher of what is considered the intellectuals' newspaper, Asahi Shimbun. It is financially much weaker than the other three. 26 stations.

The smallest is a group of six stations with the main Tokyo station, TV Tokyo, owned by Nihon Keizai Shimbun, or Japan Economic Newspaper, often called the Wall Street Journal of Japan.

Cable and satellite television have not had the same impact in Japan as in the United States. Only about 22% of Japanese homes subscribe to cable and there is nothing in Japan like TNT, CNN, or ESPN.

But now Japanese TV faces its greatest challenge since color bloomed on the cathode ray tube: Japan is going digital. Over-the-air, or terrestrial, digital high-definition broadcasting began December 1, 2003, in Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya. Although these are Japan's three largest markets, it is estimated that only about 300,000 digital TV sets are out there. The target for nationwide digital coverage is 2006. Parallel analog broadcasting will continue until 2011, but then the analog transmitters are supposed to be switched off

permanently. If you haven't bought your digital TV set by then, you probably won't be watching TV.

The costs will be phenomenal. The switch to digital will generate enormous profits for Japan's electronics industry, but already it is a serious financial burden to broadcasters. The cost may well force many stations in smaller markets to consolidate or to shut down, unable to afford the shift to digital. Just one of the commercial network "key stations" in Tokyo is estimating it will have to spend \$1.4 billion dollars before the 2011 deadline. Smaller market stations simply don't have resources for that kind of investment.

No one has a clear idea of where this is all headed. "It's a gamble," one Tokyo television executive told me. But certainly when – or if – the last analog transmitter is shut down seven years from now, the landscape of Japanese television will have changed more dramatically than it has in decades.

Bruce Dunning is the Asia bureau chief for CBS News. An award-winning journalist, he has lived and worked in all four Confucian cultures: Japan, China, Korea and Vietnam.

TV and the New York City Marathon

How television covers and enhances
this captivating annual event.

By Greg Vitiello

You can watch the New York City Marathon by staking out your favorite corner in any of the five boroughs and waiting to pass out water or oranges, wave a national flag, or shout encouragement to friends and the tens of thousands of runners from dozens of states and scores of countries. But if you want to *see* the New York City Marathon, switch on WNBC (if you're in the tri-state area) or NBC (anywhere in the United States) or in any of 150 territories where the international feed transmits the race.

On television, you'll actually get to see the lead runners glide over 26.2 miles of city streets, bridges and park roads at a mind-boggling pace. You'll hear step-by-step analysis of the race from experts

riding beside them in motorcycle sidecars or observing the runners from the NBC studio. And you'll get more – much more – as the television team introduces you to mid-pack runners (people sort of like yourself); identifies races within the race (such as the Foot Locker Five-Borough Challenge); profiles such neighborhoods as Williamsburg, Brooklyn, or Harlem, as the race pulses through their streets; and provides you



NBC's Bruce Beck (right) interviewed Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg at the awards ceremony for the 2003 New York City Marathon.

with overhead views of the City's autumnal beauty.

Covering the event in all its intricacy requires sophisticated technology, a great sense of pacing (not unlike that of the runners themselves), and a showman's ability to keep an audience hooked for five hours of broadcast time as the 35,000 runners traverse the course.

The five-borough course dates to 1976, when New York Road Runners Club President Fred Lebow persuaded the city to turn the streets over to the runners for a single day. The timing was apt: distance running was on the rise and the nation was celebrating its 200th anniversary. The response was extraordinary: For an event that had attracted just 126 runners at its inception six years earlier in Central Park, the initial five-borough race drew more than 2,000 runners and millions of spectators. It became, in Lebow's words, "a day of urban magic."

As broadcast producers, Trans World International relies on a crew of about 400 – including producers, directors, editors, cameramen, commentators and spotters. "We bring in about 80 members of the Columbia University track team as spotters," explains Steve Mayer, TWI's Head of U.S. Production and producer of the marathon broadcast. "Each of them gets a walkie talkie, stop watch and T-shirt and is assigned to follow a specific story or a point in the race."

TWI's technical director Gary Crichlow adds, "The spotters give us that kind of eye-to-eye contact with the runners that we primarily get from Kathrine Switzer and Tony Reavis," referring to the two commentators who report on the lead runners from motorcycle sidecars.

A former New York City Marathon winner who has covered distance running for the past 25 years, Switzer is adept at providing cogent analysis while clinging to a speeding vehicle. "We have expert motorcycle drivers, but we ride so close to the runners that I'm terrified we'll bump one of them," she says. "At the same time, it's a great privilege because you're closer than anyone else to the most incredible athletes in the world."

Operating from an office trailer on Central Park West, which serves as the main compound, Mayer's team must decide when to cut to the motorcycle teams or any of the other commentators and cameras spread around the city. "In addition to the main compound, we also have compounds at the starting area in Fort Wadsworth, Staten Island, and on First Avenue in Manhattan," says Mayer.

"Last year, we had a total of 33 cameras, including the stabilized mounts that we put in the bed of pick-up trucks to shoot the lead men and women. We also have cameras on the motorcycles that track the lead runners. And we have

Technologically, television has advanced light years since 1979 when WGBH, Boston, provided a one-hour taped broadcast of the Boston Marathon and WNEW, New York, covered the New York City Marathon.

two cameras with gyroscopic mounts in the helicopters that give you beautiful wide shots of the runners and the city."

Until three years ago, the helicopters also served to relay signals from cameras covering the race to the towers of buildings spread around the city. These signals provided the images seen on television – except when obstacles interfered. "In the past, when the runners got to the 59th Street Bridge, you'd get this visual static as the picture broke up,"

says Mayer. “Now, with the digital transmission we have, I can go directly from any of the cameras to a tower without any break-up.”

The broadcasters provide the context that we value as we try to assess which runner will have the staying power and speed to capture the race.

Technologically, television has advanced light years since 1979 when WGBH, Boston, provided a one-hour taped broadcast of the Boston Marathon and WNEW, New York, covered the New York City Marathon. At Boston, Switzer and fellow broadcaster Larry Rawson were assigned battery-operated golf carts from which they followed the lead runners. “The carts were fine on the flats and downhill parts of the course, but we could barely get up the hills,” recalls Switzer. “We were shooting with these great big video cameras. Every five or six miles we’d hand over the cassettes to guys who were waiting on motor scooters to take the tapes back to the studio.”

“For what was being attempted, we felt like the Wright Brothers,” says Rawson (who now co-hosts the New York race with veteran sportscaster Al Trautwig). The only prior coverage of a marathon, for the 1972 and 1976 Olympics, had merely contained portions of each race.

The technology and overall coverage improved during the 1980s when the race was broadcast in its entirety by ABC and included Al Michaels, Jim McKay and running legend Marty Liquori as commentators.

And yet even as recently as a decade ago, when the race was being covered by WPIX/Channel 11, Crichlow recalls: “We had to run a cable from the top of WPIX’s offices down the stairwell of the building to our control room out on the street. We

did some archaic things back then.”

However primitive the coverage was by today’s standards, television proved invaluable to the marathon and the city.

“Television allowed the world to see what New York City – and the New York City Marathon – was all about,”

says Allan Steinfeld, president of New York Road Runners since Lebow’s death in 1994. “Television captures visually and emotionally the strengths of our race – its great start on the Verrazano Narrows Bridge, the five boroughs with their diverse, multiethnic neighborhoods, and of course the race itself.”

Each year, Steinfeld ensures that the event has some of the world’s top marathoners, who compete for substantial prize money and the prestige of winning the New York City Marathon. And yet without an American champion in the past 20 years, viewers can easily lose interest in a race that spans more than two hours. This is where the coverage must excel. “I think we do a very good job of humanizing the runners,” says Mayer. “We provide stories people can relate to – and someone to root for.”

As the camera focuses on a lead group of runners covering a mile at a sub-5 minute pace, Rawson will interject: “Imagine running once around a quarter-mile track in 75 seconds or less – and think about doing that for 26.2 miles.” Or he will provide statistics on how the average height and weight of elite runners has dropped dramatically while their speed has increased. “I try to vary the information, finding good human interest stories and anecdotes with a bit of humor thrown in,” says Rawson.

Like the runners, the broadcasters come prepared. Calling herself “a very



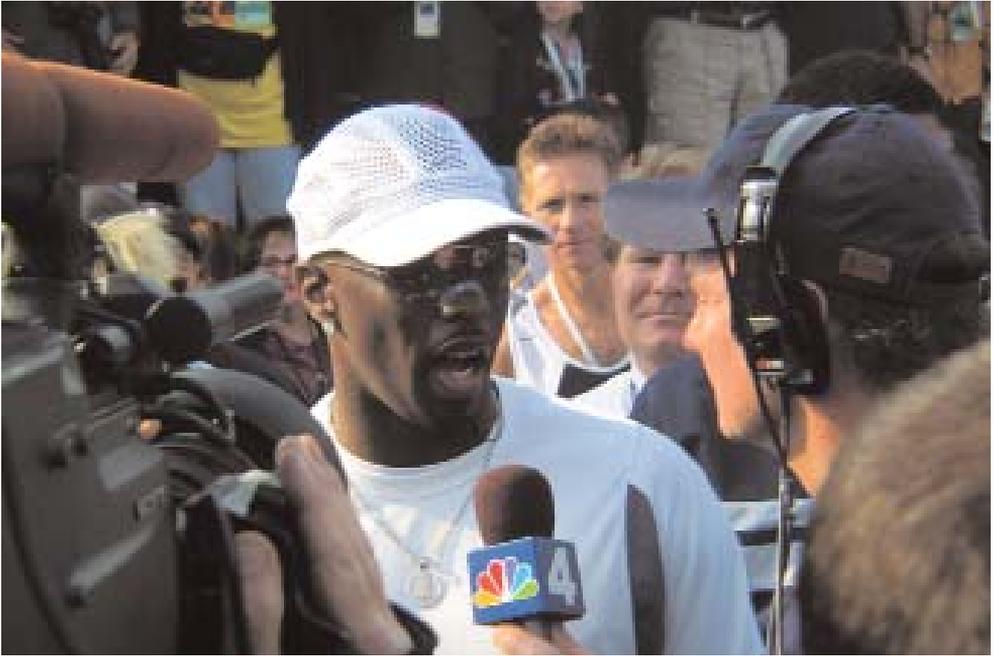
Beck talked with elite U.S. runner Deena Kastor at the start of the race.

good bird dog,” Switzer often picks up valuable pieces of information on early morning runs in Central Park during the week prior to the marathon. Sometimes it will be a snippet of conversation or a glimpse of an elite runner. “You can actually watch the way an athlete runs in training and learn a lot by their color, how they’re moving and the expression on their face. I remember seeing Billy Rodgers (the leading American marathoner in the late 1970s and a four-time winner of the New York race) on one of his training runs during marathon week. He was bouncing along like an elf while he laughed and carried on and I knew he’d have a good race.”

Above all, Switzer, Rawson and Reavis know the runners through personal contact and even friendship. A 4.07 miler while in college, Rawson knew the sport as a competitor and fan long before he did his first broadcast. His debut was serendipitous. While he was standing

near the finish line of the 1974 Boston Marathon, he heard the radio broadcasters struggling with the name of the lead runner. Finally, ducking under a rope, Rawson said, “That was Neil Cusack.” The bemused broadcaster said, “How do you know this?” Rawson barely had time to explain before the announcer handed him the mike and said, “Here’s Larry Rawson to tell us about today’s race.” Rawson has been doing just that ever since. Most importantly, he and his fellow broadcasters provide the context that we value as we try to assess which runner will have the staying power and speed to capture the race.

The art of sizing up a runner helped to expose Rosie Ruiz after this previously unknown marathoner apparently won the Boston Marathon in 1980. During the post-race interview, Switzer asked Ruiz about her training methods. Hearing that Ruiz ran about 50 miles a week (a piddling amount for champion runners),



Sean Combs ran for charity in the 2003 New York City Marathon.

Switzer said, “You must be doing some terrific intervals.” Ruiz had never heard of intervals – bursts of fast running interspersed with slower-paced moments. Flustered and devoid of credibility, Ruiz was exposed as someone who had jumped into the race in its last few miles and crossed the finish ahead of the other women runners.

For Switzer, the story brings a wry smile, leavened by her own experience of becoming the first woman to run the Boston Marathon officially. In 1967, she had entered the men’s-only race as “K.V. Switzer,” before being jostled at the four-mile point by race official Jock Semple. His attempt to force her off the course was thwarted by Switzer’s companion, a hammer thrower who was accompanying her on her historic run. As Semple went tumbling, Switzer kept running – and broke the Boston sex barrier. Her announcing debut came 12 years later.

After Switzer’s 1980 interview with Ruiz exposed a case of blatant cheating, the organizers of the New York City Marathon found Ruiz’s name among the top finishers in their 1979 race. Eyewitnesses subsequently recalled seeing Ruiz riding the subway uptown that day – just before she slipped in among the lead women and ran her own abbreviated version of the New York City Marathon.

Television will help to guarantee that no one manages a sequel to the Rosie Ruiz story. Unlike previous years, the 2003 race featured a separate start for the women, ensuring that the leaders were in direct contact with each other rather than running in the midst of other men. Commentators and cameras can follow the lead pack of women before cutting away to the men or focusing on other stories – the wheelchair race or the Five-Borough Race. Each race-within-the-race is given its own drama and shape.

Tim McLoon, a member of the television crew who covers the course on foot, often profiles midpack runners, interviewing them as he runs beside them. In 2003, his assignment was to report on the marathoning debut of P. Diddy, aka Sean Combs, rap entrepreneur and megastar.

On marathon day, perhaps the biggest star of all is New York City. This was never more true than in November 2001, less than two months after the 9/11 attack. With the city draped in mourning, many city events were cancelled. But Steinfeld never wavered about the marathon. When one of the commentators asked him about safety at the start on the Verrazano Bridge, he quickly said, "I'll be on the bridge and Mayor Giuliani will be on the bridge." The commentator said, "I'll be there too." On the morning of the race, more than 30,000 runners lined up

on the bridge where bomb-sniffing dogs had checked the course and scuba divers investigated the pylons beneath the bridge. With snipers on rooftops and undercover police running in the race, the New York City Marathon went forward.

"The television courage was just right, capturing the somber mood beforehand but focusing on its main theme that the marathon was an event that could unite the city," says Steinfeld. "It was like the phoenix rising."

Each year, on the first Sunday in November, New York City rises in pride as 35,000 runners navigate through its streets, dodge its potholes and bask in the crowd's encouragement. For the television team that covers this memorable event, there is ample pride at capturing its drama and its spirit.

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Alistair Cooke

Remembered

The cherished recollection of a personal relationship with this remarkable man.

By Michael D. Murray

With the retirement and subsequent passing of Alistair Cooke at age 95 this past March, America has lost a great international ambassador of good will. As the voice and interpreter of American culture to the world during the longest running one-man series in broadcasting history, Cooke maintained a tremendous worldwide audience over the BBC. But because he was recently most famous on our side of the Atlantic as host of *Masterpiece Theatre*, few Americans fully appreciated the role he had played both nationally and internationally for so many years. His early, eclectic television classic, *Omnibus*, the brainchild of Robert Saudek in the 1950s, aired for over a decade on all three major networks of that era, offering opera, ballet, theater, musicals and sometimes even science experiments. A youthful Cooke served as moderator/host. His televised bicentennial tour of the nineteen seventies, *America*, with a book of the same name that sold over two million copies to make him wealthy, also started to become a distant memory. And since so much time had passed since his departure from public television's *Masterpiece Theatre*, many Americans had lost track of him, even though his

BBC program continued on a worldwide basis almost right up to the time of his death. I shall always cherish a memory of a personal contact with him, beginning more than 30 years ago.

Cooke offered his broadcast audiences and readers seasoned perspective on the events of the day because of his wide range of experience and his keen and highly creative style of broadcast writing. The style he developed as a newspaper correspondent and radio reporter was one in which he would focus on a rather obscure issue, fact or personality and then tie it to something global and significant. This was consistent with his personalized approach to the documentary series, *America*. He visited many major points of interest. He compared the Boston Massacre to killings at Kent State University during the Vietnam era. He contrasted the American military dilemma in Vietnam to the British position in the American Revolutionary War. He discussed the influence of American jazz music while demonstrating prowess at the keyboard in New Orleans. But he also visited the underground plant of the Strategic Air Command in Omaha, and covered the important work of the Mayo Clinic in



Author Dr. Michael D. Murray (right), with Alistair Cooke at the reception preceding the Cooke lecture, "60 Years Before the Microphone and the Camera," sponsored by the Royal Television Society and held at the Cosmopolitan Club, New York City, December 3, 1997.

Minnesota, while diagnosing his own medical maladies from childhood.

Increasingly regarded as the ex-officio "Voice of America," Cooke became an American citizen in 1941 and his *Letters from America*, subsequently helped to shape the way the world regarded American culture – and its inhabitants – *The Americans*, the title of one of his other early books. His genial, soft-spoken yet authoritative approach to important topics translated well to both print and broadcasting and connected with audiences everywhere. He always tried to link news events with popular culture and key people in the news, including the art world and the Hollywood motion picture community. Under Cooke's tutelage, the audience got an interpretation of various aspects of the popular arts: such as music, particularly American jazz, with important lessons and ties to politics and history. This increased Anglo-American understanding. He also formed friendships with some important figures from American movies, such as Charlie Chaplin. He even worked in collaboration

with that film legend briefly on the development of a movie script. And while they were never able to bring the script to fruition, ties to Chaplin expanded Cooke's repertoire, reporting horizons, as well as his access to others in that cultural mix.

My own personal contact with Alistair Cooke began as part of a research project for graduate school over 30 years ago. Professor Edward C. Lambert of the University of Missouri School of Journalism required members of our graduate course dealing with television programming topics, to identify public-affairs programs that we highly valued and then to provide some kind of a rationale for our selection. I chose Cooke's *America* series because of its attempt to transport viewers to historic locations, to interpret important events and because of the excellent writing and repertoire of the host. I then began to explore my own ideas about the program's goals, its possible influence on viewers and also the historical accuracy. I published a piece about it in an academic journal and was encouraged by

another Missouri University professor to further follow-up and write to the consummate reporter, Cooke himself. I did, of course, and asked him about particular production aspects of the series and the people influencing his decisions on what particular topics to investigate – as well as those having the greatest impact on his work on this series – and life in America in general.

His response surprised me for its quickness and candor. He listed many influences including his own professors – both at Cambridge and Harvard, as well as popular American writers including his mentor, H. L. Mencken, the iconoclastic and controversial columnist for *The Baltimore Sun*. He also profiled Walter Lippmann, the journalist and counselor to Presidents, and subject of an anniversary piece for one of Cooke's books, *America Observed*. This is one of the best remembered of the dozen books he published, which were mostly collections of his broadcasts. Cooke mentioned some others as well, who were – often subliminally – most influential: E.B. White, Westbrook Pegler and Q (Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch).” He suggested that I might also want to add the English diarist and drama critic James Agate to that list since the nine volumes of his *Ego* were among some of Alistair's most favorite entertainment-oriented reading. Alistair also mentioned the overriding influence of Mark Twain in his writing and choice of words, adding the famed Twain advisory to writers about the difference between a perfect word and a near perfect word being like the difference between “lightning and a lightning bug.”

We corresponded sporadically as I investigated various aspects of his

success as a broadcast writer for well over a quarter century. I would sometimes be surprised to get a speedy response on a specific inquiry, but learned at the start that it would take quite awhile to get a reply when he was in San Francisco, his favorite western outpost. And I also discovered that his creativity belied what appeared on the surface as a total lack of organization. I once asked for copies of some old letters and he apologized profusely, saying his filing system compared unfavorably with that of W. C. Fields. But I also learned that his memory and personal contact with people and stories he retained about them more than made up for the challenges of being less than well organized. He also shared the fact that he had been regularly donating his work to the Mugar Memorial Library at Boston University, which I also discovered to be a treasure trove of source material on early broadcasting and Hollywood film. I formed a friendship with the Director of the Special Collections, Howard Gotlieb, and exchanged material whenever I published something about Alistair Cooke or his broadcasts, and he sometimes noted when Alistair himself was on tap for a visit to his collection.

As a result of my own scholarly work, I also became good friends with the British biographer and broadcaster, Nick Clarke, host of the BBC's daily *World at One* program and a close Cooke confidante. We compared notes on the oddity of someone like Alistair who had become so famous on two different continents – for two different aspects of broadcasting. We enjoyed the perception of Alistair by Americans as a most urbane of English gentlemen while the British viewed him as a rather unusually sophisticated American. But we always

agreed that success in both instances and in both places, was a by-product of his keen ability as a writer – to write the way we spoke. This was true whether as master storyteller for a Public Broadcasting Service series consisting of British imports to the U.S. and also the long-standing radio assignment explaining America and Americans for the BBC's international audience. He simply had no peer.

Honored to be invited to celebrate Cooke's 50th year anniversary broadcast when the Royal Television Society met in December, 1997, I gathered with luminaries to pay tribute to Alistair at New York's Cosmopolitan Club. The range of guests at that event included a Who's Who of people in American arts and letters, and reflected the depth of Cooke's cultural impact. Standing in an informal reception line, Lauren Bacall cued up in front of me to congratulate and shake the master broadcaster's hand. Her late husband, Humphrey Bogart, had been the subject of one of Cooke's best known personality profiles, which had also appeared in his classic book, *Six Men*. In it, he described "Bogie" as a very thoughtful, quiet and rather introspective person, at odds with his tough guy film image, more at ease saying "Tennis Anyone?" (His first theatrical line) than typical film talk, "Drop the Gun Louie." Cooke also wrote in that book about Charlie Chaplin. Not surprisingly, Cooke's first published book, *Garbo and the Nightwatchmen*, was an anthology of classic film reviews from the early film era.

Standing right behind me in the reception line was William F. Buckley. He took time to congratulate Cooke's wife, Jane White, the artist. As professional communicators – in print and broadcast,

Buckley and Cooke had a great deal in common. Ever the conservative, Cooke wrote *A Generation on Trial*, explaining McCarthyism in the 1950s while Buckley had co-authored *McCarthy and His Enemies*, a polemic on those opposing the Senator. Both were against '60s liberal causes they regarded as excessive. Prolific authors, they appeared on the PBS network during the next two decades – but in different contexts, Buckley as the brainy, effervescent host of *Firing Line* and with Cooke hosting, or what he referred to as being like a head waiter for *Masterpiece Theatre*. Regularly showing off their notorious sense of humor, on this particular occasion, Buckley told me at the time that he, like Cooke, had once been invited to host a PBS dramatic series. It was hard to tell if he was pulling my leg because he also explained that his children had talked him out of it, saying he would not attract many viewers, blowing a chance for *Sesame Street* recognition on a par with "Alistair Cookie."

When it was my turn to offer Alistair congratulations, I introduced myself as the esteemed "Cooke Professor from Missouri" because his disdain for academic "types" was very well known. But he quickly brushed it off with: "Oh Mike, I know who you are." He then reversed field and complimented me about a profile that I had just written about him for the alumni magazine at Cambridge University. Alistair then joked that he only wished that he could remember half as much about his broadcasting career as I had. When I mentioned to him the confusion about his continuing level of broadcast activity well after leaving *Masterpiece Theatre* in America he described regular instances of mistaken identity, particularly on the

golf course, a game he greatly loved. As an inside joke, he told me how he often enjoyed confusing people by claiming to be some other celebrity, especially Bob Hope. This usually worked, he said, until he ran into the real Bob Hope's wife, whom he did not recognize. But she responded to him with, "Well, that's interesting because I'm *Mrs.* Bob Hope. But hey, I must say, you're really looking great, *Bob.*"

In formal remarks to those who gathered to honor his on-air anniversary, he claimed to have almost lost his early television *Omnibus* job to a then actor, Ronald Reagan, noting with pride that later, as *President* Reagan, the retired actor offered praise, complimenting *America* for making history vivid and memorable. This kind of praise was very well received by Alistair – but not unusual. His *Letter from America* was presented on BBC radio through the course of eleven U.S. presidential terms. Cooke reported from the United Nations and became known in England as a voice reflecting national admiration for Franklin Roosevelt, and highly critical of Joseph McCarthy and the methods of McCarthyism of nineteen fifties America. Cooke's book about the Alger Hiss case established his credentials as a serious long-form writer. Of course Cooke became somewhat conservative himself during his later years, particularly during the next decade – the nineteen sixties, when much about America's values and American culture came to be regarded as especially coarse, inconsistent, and confusing to outsiders.

In his anniversary talk and in conversations with me, Cooke described instances in which he reported history in the making: covering a Nazi rally in Madison Square Garden with large

posters of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Adolf Hitler centered over the speaker's platform. He accounted for the shock of his first sight of a paraplegic President Franklin Roosevelt being lifted from a car, experiencing the effectiveness of Martin Luther King's oratory firsthand. Years later, he was at the location of Senator Robert Kennedy's assassination on the campaign trail in Los Angeles, the most indelible example of his reporting. Cooke sometimes alluded to the reporter's unique function, to try to offer insight while seldom in a position to accurately portray an event as it really played out. He always described himself as an observer of America but also understood the important role of journalism in a free society; the special status some reporter's enjoy as a result.

He often quoted his literary hero H.L. Mencken about the qualities and benefits of a reporter being able to "lay in all the worldly wisdom of a police lieutenant, a bartender, a shyster lawyer and a midwife." Cooke frequently tackled unorthodox stories, suggesting, for example, that some of the best reporters have trouble hiding big egos, secretly aspiring upon passing to have their obituaries on the newspaper front page, as a demonstration that they achieved notoriety on the level of the people they had covered. He also pointed out the particular oddity of preparing profile obituaries from afar, recalling one special broadcast essay, "Please Die Before Noon" in which he discussed anticipating and then creating an elaborate homage for the ultimate demise of Mencken himself, just so Cooke could meet his international broadcast deadline.

Alistair Cooke was a tremendous "on air" storyteller who skillfully conveyed important ideas and a love for his

adopted land. Of course his own story – an immigrant of modest means overcoming the odds – succeeding through talent, tenacity and educational opportunities to become an international literary figure via television and radio – it really sounds so much like some

“Hollywood version,” but any film account of this career might seem a little far-fetched. As he sometimes said on-air – “Only in America!”

Michael D. Murray is Visiting Professor and Director of the Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas. He is also the UM Curators’ Distinguished Teaching Professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. He received a Goldsmith Research Award from Harvard University for his study of Alistair Cooke’s writing and was a fellow at Cooke’s alma mater, Cambridge.

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Moyers on America: A Journalist and His Times

By Bill Moyers

The New Press, New York, N.Y.
(204 pages, \$24.95)

The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications

By Paul Starr

Basic Books, New York
(484 Pages, \$27.50)

By Bernard S. Redmont

Bill Moyers is a national treasure. Nobody on television – or on the printed page – makes us more proud to be American. He is more than a journalist, broadcaster, story teller, social commentator and moral beacon. In the words of that other national treasure, our CBS colleague Walter Cronkite, “Moyers speaks for, and to, the conscience of our nation.”

When Moyers announced he was leaving his weekly PBS magazine *Now* after the November presidential elections, his millions of fans feared his voice might wane. But that's not the case. Moyers is still going strong in other

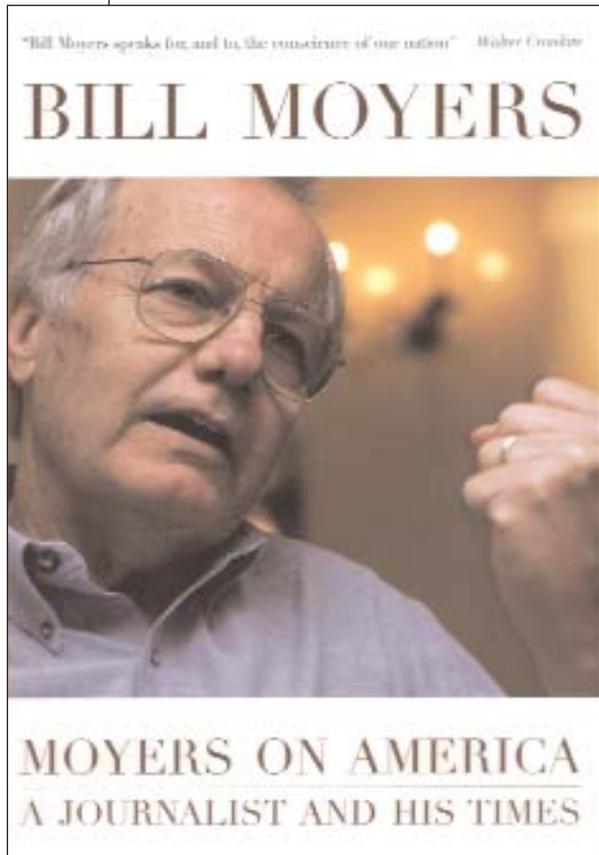
ways.

Moyers capped a broadcasting career of over 30 years with *Now*. He had hosted *Bill Moyers' Journal* on PBS back in 1970. He moved to CBS for a decade as a commentator, contributing to the *Evening News* and acting as chief correspondent for CBS Reports.

Returning to PBS, he created documentary series like *In Search of the Constitution*, *God and Politics*, *World of Ideas*, *The Power of the Word*, *The Public Mind* and *Listening to America with Bill Moyers*.

Some became successful books. *One, Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*, was a best seller for a year.

At one point, in 1995, Moyers joined



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NBC News as a senior analyst and commentator, and a year later he hosted the sister cable network MSNBC's Insight program.

At *Now*, he said his aim was "to tell stories nobody else is telling, and put on people who have no forum elsewhere."

Moyers has won more than 30 Emmy awards, and also Peabody and DuPont-Columbia University accolades. His name even has been floated periodically by political progressives who wanted to draft him to run for President.

He calls himself "a pilgrim." His pilgrimage began with birth in Oklahoma, but he didn't stay long. Moyers started his career as a cub reporter for a small town Texas newspaper. He was ordained as a Baptist minister. He served as deputy director of the Peace Corps in President John F. Kennedy's Administration. He worked for President Lyndon B. Johnson as special assistant and later as press secretary. He left Washington in the late 1960s to become publisher of *Newsday* on Long Island.

Working in partnership with his wife Judith Davidson Moyers, he turned to TV – and it was television at its best. He isn't giving up public TV entirely, but he will concentrate on writing a long-planned book on his former boss, LBJ. He hopes to complete a draft by the end of 2005.

Meanwhile, as a foretaste of the work to come, he tells a story or two in his latest book, *Moyers on America*. Moyers says that the first time LBJ asked him to be his spokesman, he declined. "He asked me again, and again I declined. The third time he didn't ask. My arm still hurts."

Moyers feels ambivalent about LBJ – positive on his progressive domestic

policies, negative on his deplorable Vietnam war policy.

When Johnson was on vacation in Texas, he would often go to the faculty club at the University, which was still off limits to blacks in 1964. Moyers remembers the night that changed. There was a stir when LBJ entered, and everybody looked up. "The President of the United States was entering with one of his secretaries on his arm – a beautiful black woman." A professor of law, Ernest Goldstein, who opposed the club's segregationist policies, asked Moyers if the President knew what he was doing. Bill said, "He knows." The next day, Goldstein called the club to announce he intended to bring some black associates to a meeting there. "No problem at all," said the woman on the phone. "Are we really integrated?" Goldstein asked. "Yes sir," she answered. "The President of the United States integrated us last night."

Eventually, Moyers, who opposed the Vietnam war, told LBJ he was leaving, and the President said, "If I had to do it over again, I'd come to the White House as a presidential assistant, not as president." Moyers asked why. And LBJ replied, "Because you can quit and I can't."

Moyers on America deserves to be read by more than his millions of TV fans. It is really about no less than "the soul of democracy." He feels "the soul of democracy has been dying, drowning in a rising tide of big money contributed by a narrow elite that has betrayed the faith of citizens in self-government."

The book is largely a selection of his commentaries, reflections and speeches edited to resemble essays and brought up to date to give them freshness and

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urgency. In it, Moyers not only tells stories from his life; he shares his wisdom, and his philosophy. Whether it be his analysis of the domination of news media by conglomerates, the poison of celebrity-obsessed journalism, corporate scandals, or the corruption and bribery of today's money-ruled politics, or the growing gap between rich and poor, Moyers hits the target every time, with candor, honesty and passion.

He recalls that one of the commercial networks commissioned a poll in which voters were asked, "Do you think that our elected representatives are dedicated public servants or lying windbags?" Forty three percent said that the officials were a bunch of lying windbags. Just 36 percent said they thought elected officials were dedicated public servants. This was true regardless of their party – Republicans, Democrats and independents alike.

"Millions of Americans," he says, "are alienated, apathetic and disillusioned about politics. Fewer than half of us bother to vote at all in our presidential elections – compared to 80 percent a century ago – and only about one-third vote in our congressional elections. People will tell you they feel betrayed, sold out by a political class of professional electioneers, big donors, lobbyists and the media."

Still, Moyers has an abiding faith that the good will and faith of Americans will ultimately prevail.

A plus for the reader is that Moyers writes beautifully and eloquently. He illuminates critical current issues with deep conviction, and can be erudite and humanly warm at the same time. One of the most moving parts of the book is a

simple, but meaningful story about an "average" American woman. Another is a eulogy about a dear friend. Other sections deal compassionately with aging and good dying.

Moyers begins his foreword by writing, "We journalists write on the sand and speak into the wind, and usually by the morning after, there isn't a trace of what we wrote or said."

That may be true about most of us – but it's not about Bill Moyers.

Television enjoys a reputation as an authentic creation of American culture, eventually bestowed upon an eager world. But it's not really an American invention. The U.S. came late into the medium. TV took off in the U.S. only after World War II, and really flourished in the past half-century.

Nevertheless, television had a "false start" during the 1920s, an oddity that few TV history buffs realize. At that early stage, inventors in both Europe and America developed prototypes based on the 1884 work of a German inventor, Paul Nipkow.

The concept involved a mechanical apparatus, a spinning disk with perforated holes, used for both transmitting and receiving moving images. By 1925, a Scottish inventor John Logie Baird was demonstrating a primitive working model.

During the 1920s, using a related system, the inventor Charles Francis Jenkins gave the first public demonstration of TV in America. In 1927, President Herbert Hoover appeared on an AT&T television demonstration transmitted from Washington to a

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receiver in New York. With backing from Wall Street and an experimental license from the Federal Radio Commission, Jenkins went into production of TV sets and began regular broadcasts from a TV station in Washington. By the end of 1928, the FRC had granted 28 experimental licenses.

Paul Starr, the author of the monumental work, *The Creation of the Media*, relates this “false start” of TV, as a little-known historical note. He says that 100,000 Americans saw a Jenkins TV during this period. There was no advertising. When the stock market crashed, so did TV in its first incarnation. Jenkins's company, depending on sales of receivers, failed.

But British and German state broadcasting systems, not depending on commercial success, continued telecasts during the early 1930s when America had none. The Nazi government began the first regular public TV service in Berlin in 1935, and by the late 1930s the BBC had regular telecasts. As a personal aside, while on a Pulitzer Traveling fellowship in the summer of 1939, I watched the Wimbledon tennis matches on British TV in the home of an acquaintance in Britain. TV was hardly a gleam in the American eye at the time.

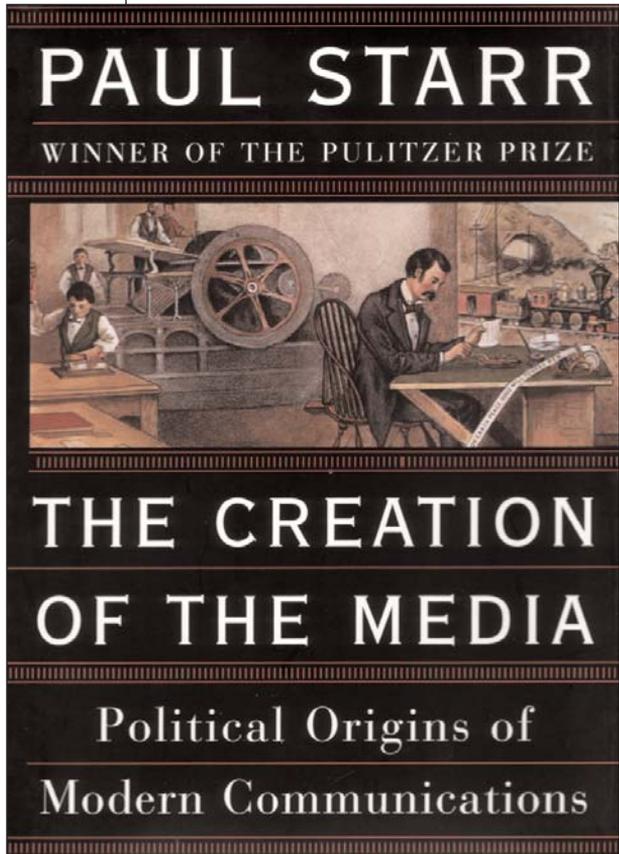
Starr reports that TV had been stalled in the U.S. by the specter of monopoly, The FCC and much of the radio

industry feared that a single company (RCA) was positioning itself to dominate the new industry. After World War II, TV in the U.S. began in earnest, and this time flourished.

This is all you will find about TV in Starr's sweeping cavalcade of media history, from the development of printing around 1450, through the press, the postal and telecommunications system, motion pictures and radio broadcasting.

Nonetheless, readers associated with or interested in television will find the work extremely useful. It is illuminating and fascinating as groundwork for understanding visual media.

Starr sets forth an original thesis, and



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he proves it convincingly. He argues that American media structure is not dictated by technology and innovation, but rather by political choices and decisions. In other words, politics created our media world.

A Pulitzer prize winner for non-fiction in 1984, Starr is Professor of Sociology at Princeton and the co-editor of the liberal magazine about politics, policy and ideas, *The American Prospect*. It took him a decade to write this extraordinary work.

What is especially valuable about the book is his attention to choices made in the U.S. about freedom of expression, ownership of media, the structure of networks, regulation, secrecy, privacy and intellectual property.

Starr writes frankly about the sordid history of repression, book burning and censorship in our country. One sees striking parallels in the book to such current topics as the USA Patriot Act, FCC licensing procedures and the media role in political campaigns.

Starr demonstrates how patterns were set in the 19th Century, when the U.S. chose to privatize telephones and telegraph, while Britain and most of Europe preferred public or state ownership.

Russia provides an extreme example of the influence of state interests in control on decisions about technological systems. Starr notes that in 1991, when the Soviet Union was dissolved, that country had fewer telephones than the nations of the West. The Soviet regime had instead invested in loudspeakers, which “allowed the state to communicate with the people” but not the other way round.

A few other interesting or surprising nuggets:

- In 1889, New York had 55 daily newspapers.
- Originally, the U.S. did not dominate international film production – before World War I, the leading role belonged to France.
- In the late 1920s, squeamish bosses of radio networks and stations barred commercials for such products as deodorants and laxatives.

Some readers may be scared off by the density and scholarly character of the book and its voluminous endnotes (67 pages). But they will be rewarded by lively writing and sharp analysis.

If we have one major criticism, it is that the work appears to end abruptly at the beginning of World War II, thus virtually cutting off the history of television, not to mention the advent of the Internet.

However, one has to admire Starr's erudite history of communications and journalism as far as it goes. Best of all, we applaud his dedication to understanding media as a safeguard for American democracy.

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

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Casualty of War: The Bush Administration's Assault on a Free Press

by David Dadge

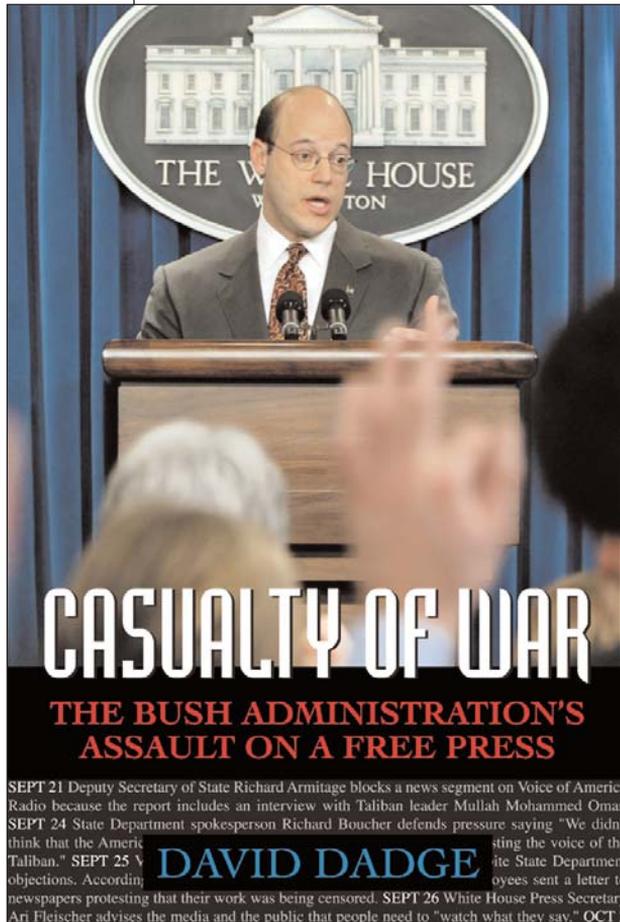
Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY
(330 pages, \$26)

By **Ralph Engelman**

David Dadge, editor of the International Press Institute based in Vienna, Austria, makes a powerful case that 9/11 precipitated a world-wide crisis for freedom of the press. He laments the emergence of a "second front" against human rights as a by-product of the war on terrorism, a development he attributes in large measure to the misguided policies of the Bush administration.

The author of *Casualty of War* effectively uses the case-study approach to illustrate his thesis. For example, in examining pressure placed on American media by the Bush administration, he describes the repercussions of Condoleezza Rice's conference call on October 10, 2001 to executives of the major network news departments and the cable news channels. Dadge criticizes the executives for reaching a joint agreement

to engage in self-censorship, referring to an internal CNN directive designed to temper any critical coverage of the war in Afghanistan as "one of the most abject statements ever handed down to the news staff of a television organization." He notes the appearance of flags in anchor lapels and graphics in television news, and the patriotic declarations of Dan Rather, among others. Dadge also chronicles the Bush Administration's ill-fated attempt to create an Office of Strategic Influence to spread disinformation, its attack on the Freedom of Information Act, and the attempt to monopolize satellite images.



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He is one of surprisingly few to raise the question of the propriety of Secretary of State Colin Powell's son Michael chairing the FCC. In general, Dadge accuses the Bush administration of creating a "censorial atmosphere" at home conducive to the jingoism of Fox News Channel but hostile to independent or critical reporting and to the free flow of information.

Dadge also singles out what he considers counterproductive information policies of the Bush administration in the international arena. He gives a detailed account of the attempt in September 2001 to censor an interview of Mullah Omar on the Voice of America (VOA). The attempt at censorship ultimately failed, but not before it caused a shakeup, demoralized the staff and had a chilling effect on journalistic independence at VOA. Dadge also criticizes the Bush Administration's attacks on Al-Jazeera, and its attempts to censor it through pressure on Sheikh Hamad of Qatar, as ineffective and self-defeating. Such actions, the author argues, weaken U.S. credibility and its quest to win hearts and minds in the Arab world. Moreover, Dadge suggests that the media policies of the Bush Administration, especially its attempts to harness the domestic press for its own purposes, put American journalists abroad at greater risk as targets of anti-American sentiment.

The most original – and disturbing – section of *Casualty of War* consists of documentation of how 9/11 has had a chilling effect on press freedom and human rights throughout the world. Dadge posits that the geopolitics of the

war on terror has led the U.S. to ignore violations of basic freedoms by its strategic partners. Furthermore, foreign regimes tarnish their opponents as terrorists both to justify repressive measures and to appeal for aid from the U.S.

Here Dadge provides a broad panorama of how anti-terrorism has replaced anti-communism as a rationale for anti-democratic practices. He writes how Russia denies basic liberties and commits abuses in Chechnya while linking its independence movement to Al Qaeda. The former Soviet Republics of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan exploited their proximity to Afghanistan in the war against the Taliban to get foreign aid from the U.S. while increasing their restrictions on the press and human rights. A chief U.S. ally, General Musharraf of Pakistan, is a dictator who muzzles the press, which was excluded from the trial of Daniel Pearl's murderer. China, which has extremely restrictive press policies, has invoked the terrorist threat, claiming that Osama bin Laden is aiding the separatists in Xinjiang. Dadge identifies this pattern throughout much of the world: "From Benin to Zimbabwe and from Egypt to Uganda countries have used the war on terrorism to attack the media." Europe is no exception. Dadge reports how the European Union enacted legislation empowering member states to give police, intelligence and customs officials greater access to the communications of journalists and ordinary citizens. Definitions of terrorism were broadened so that they could cover protests over the environment and globalization.

Dadge notes the proclamations

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addressing the problems presented in *Casualty of War* by various inter-governmental organizations, NGOs and other bodies he collectively refers to as the “press freedom community.” He echoes calls for expansion of freedom of information legislation in the world. He insists that in the final analysis the free flow of information will aid, not hinder, the war on terrorism. We are encouraged to investigate the root causes of terrorism, and to resist the impulse to shoot the messenger. However, the author provides little in the way of strategy or hope to reverse what he characterizes as a worldwide assault on a free press by the Bush Administration.

Some caveats. *Casualty of War*, which provides a wealth of information, unfortunately lacks an index. The book is redundant in places. A general discussion of human-rights issues at times broadens the scope of the book, but blurs the focus on the press as indicated in its title. The almost exclusive emphasis on Bush Administration policy obscures another

factor: the structural problem of concentration in the communications field, the power of a handful of conglomerates to control the flow of information in the world that makes it possible for the Bush Administration to implement its media agenda.

The book inevitably suffers as well from the rush of events. Apparently written in the aftermath of 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan, Dadge is unable to discuss important issues regarding the Iraq war, among them the failure of the press to take a harder look at initial claims of the existence of weapons of mass destruction and, once the war began, the use of embedded reporters as part of the military’s news management strategy. Nor can Dadge reflect on the role of the press in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal.

These reservations and limitations notwithstanding, David Dadge has written an invaluable book placing the problem of a free press in the post 9/11 environment in a global setting.

Ralph Engelman is Professor of Journalism at the Brooklyn Campus of Long Island University. He is coordinator of the annual George Polk Awards Seminar, and also serves as journalism consultant to the *Interactive Encyclopedia of Television* of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Foundation. He is the author of *Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History* (Sage, 1996).

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Edward R. Murrow and the Birth of Broadcast Television

By Bob Edwards

Wiley, New York
(192 pages, \$19.99)

By Greg Vitiello

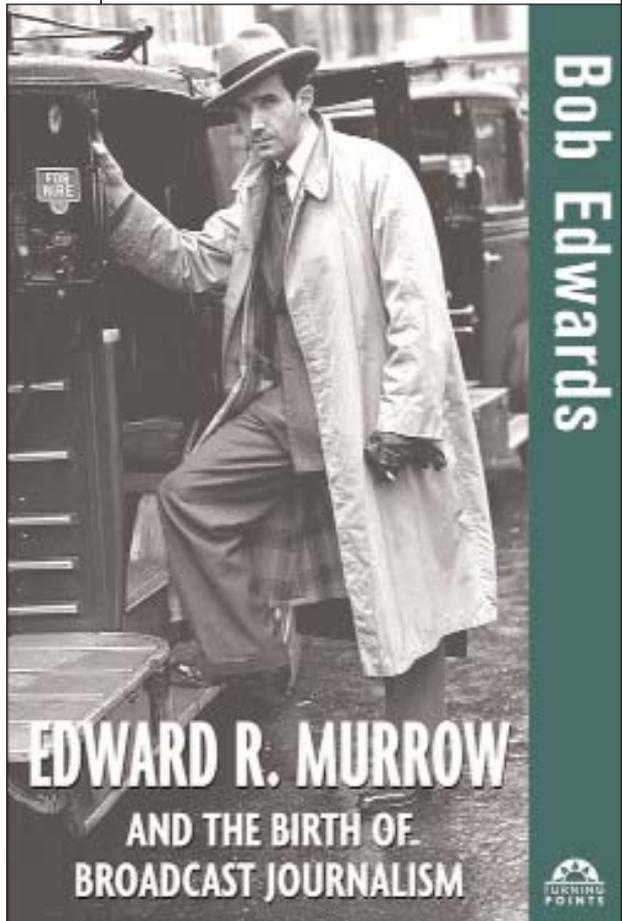
With his craggy face, impeccable grooming, and imperial bearing, Edward R.

Murrow was a riveting figure both on camera and on the street. The deliberate, resonant voice and thought-provoking message were even more riveting, whether he spoke from a London rooftop alight with Nazi bombs or in a TV studio crowded with monitors, cameras and wires. There was simply no one like him – no one with greater weight, conviction or ability to shape his medium, whether on radio or on television.

Murrow's blend of charisma and substance has already been the subject of several books, including excellent biographies by Alexander Kendrick, Joseph E. Persico and A.M. Sperber. In his new book, *Edward R. Murrow and the Birth of Broadcast Journalism*, veteran radio journalist Bob Edwards narrows his focus to Murrow, the pioneer, innovator and

“patron saint” of broadcast journalism.

Edwards singles out several prototypical events that shine their light on Murrow the pioneer. One of the best moments, in a chapter titled “Anschluss,” traces CBS's broadcast of Hitler's annexation of Austria in March 1938. We see Murrow leasing a 27-seat Lufthansa airliner and flying to Vienna as its sole passenger to link up with a broadcast team that included William L. Shirer from London and other correspondents in Paris, Berlin and Rome. We hear Murrow commenting on the Austrian accommodation to Hitler's rule: “They lift the right arm a little higher here than



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in Berlin and the 'Heil Hitler' is said a little more loudly." Edwards sums up: "Murrow, Shirer, and company had just devised and executed what became the routine format for the presentation of news. It not only had multiple points of origin, it also had included both reporting and analysis of breaking news, and was both a journalistic and a technological breakthrough for broadcasting."

Murrow did more. He recruited many of the best broadcast journalists (known fondly as "Murrow's Boys"), infused them with his reporting fervor, and brought reality, perspective, drama – and sometimes shock – into the nation's living rooms. Nothing could match the shock, despite Murrow's measured restraint, of his report from Buchenwald. And he was never more dramatic than when he reported from the cockpit of a British plane during its bombing mission over Berlin.

Edwards, like an orchestra conductor teaming up with a virtuosic soloist, lets us hear many of Murrow's greatest moments without intrusion. On the bombing mission, Murrow reports: "Berlin was a kind of orchestrated hell, a terrible symphony of light and flame. It isn't a pleasant kind of warfare – the men doing it speak of it as a job... The job isn't pleasant; it's terribly tiring. Men die in the sky while others are roasted alive in their cellars..."

When Edwards moves from the radio to the television years, we miss some of Murrow's dramatic flair and crusading zeal. Murrow's courageous, unforgettable coverage of McCarthyism and its eponymous subject, Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, is given almost perfunctory

treatment. Edwards touches the issues but misses the drama except when he quotes at length from Murrow's closing speech in the "Report on Senator McCarthy": "...the line between investigator and persecutor is a very fine one, and the junior senator from Wisconsin has stepped over it repeatedly... We must remember always that accusation is not proof and that conviction depends upon evidence and due process of law. We will not walk in fear, one of another. We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason if we dig deep in our history and our doctrine and remember that we are not descended from fearful men, not from men who feared to write, to speak, to associate, and to defend causes which were for the moment unpopular."

After the broadcast, Edwards reports, "Public reaction ran overwhelmingly in Ed Murrow's favor, but a far more important result from the broadcast was the transformation of political discussion."

Fair enough. Edwards captures the significance of Murrow's confrontation with McCarthy. What I miss is the passion that Persico expresses when he writes, "I was drawn not only by what Murrow did, but how skillfully he did it. What he managed in the course of a half hour was virtually to have McCarthy stand before millions of Americans, place a rope woven of his own demagoguery around his neck, and hang himself."

On Murrow the pioneer, Edwards writes, "he moved television beyond its function as a headline service and established it as an original news source." Edwards also credits Murrow with introducing techniques still in use today,

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such as the split-screen interview. Furthermore, Murrow “gave broadcast journalism a set of standards that matched those of the best newspapers in terms of what stories to cover and how to cover them.”

Sadly, Edwards informs us, those standards no longer pertain to profit-hungry commercial television. The profit mentality helped to drive Murrow from CBS in the 1960s after the network killed his pioneering series, *See It Now*. Today, Edwards argues, that mentality is so prevalent that Murrow could not – or would not – work in the medium. In the book’s final pages, Edwards summons his most potent arguments against “corporate bean counters,” “tabloid sensationalism,” the timidity of public

broadcasting, and the “obsessive total coverage” of cable TV.

Edwards is equally dismissive about commercial radio’s virtual abandonment of substantive news commentary. News, as Murrow practiced it, is left to public radio – the arena in which Edwards experienced his own disappointment by being removed as host of NPR’s *Morning Edition* after 25 years.

Would Murrow have foiled them all as he did on that day in 1938 when he flew into Vienna and damned Nazism from its own cradle? I wonder. Edwards prefers a valedictory ending, consoling us that “we had Murrow when we needed him most – at the beginning of broadcast journalism.”

A frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly*, Greg Vitiello has written about Ed Murrow’s famed McCarthy program and is the author of the article about the New York City Marathon in this issue.

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Shaking the World for Jesus: Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture

By Heather Hendershot

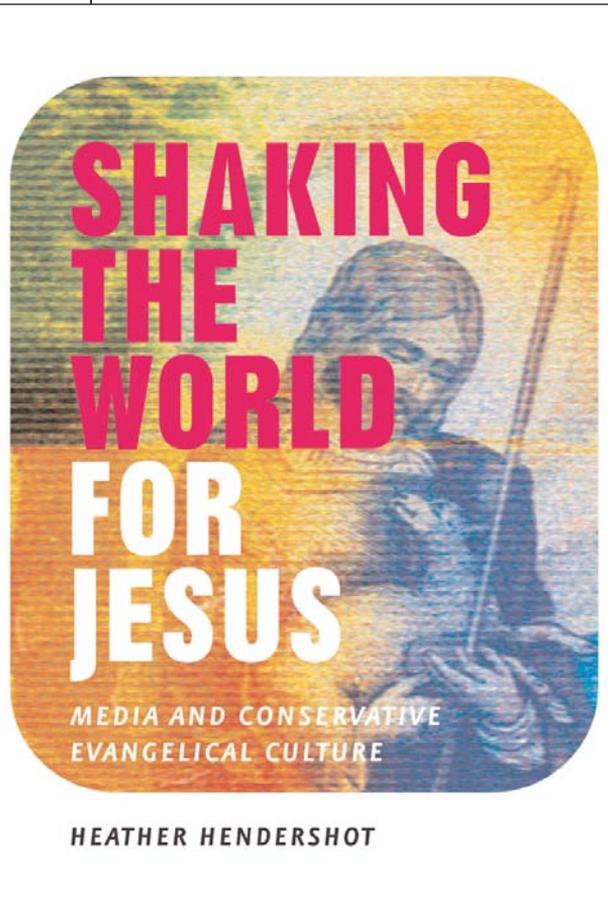
*The University of Chicago Press,
Chicago, Illinois*
(256 pages, \$27.50)

By Ron Simon

Contrary to the supposed cultural and religious wars inflaming the nation, a recent study by Princeton University found that there is now increasing agreement between the evangelical born-again and the mainstream Protestant establishment. In fact, the conservative evangelicals are not that stubbornly conservative; many have become more freethinking on such issues as race and gender roles. These findings might surprise many whose image of that new ol' time religion is Reverend Jerry Falwell outing Tinky-Winky, the purple creature from the children's series *Teletubbies*. Certainly, this "one nation" news would not shock Heather Hendershot, an associate professor in the media studies department at Queens College, who has just written a compelling and enlightening

book on how evangelicals have been using popular culture for many years to market their spiritual message. Her book, *Shaking the World for Jesus*, overturns many of the assumptions and stereotypes that non-believers have of the movement, which is indeed having a growing engagement with life in the 21st century.

Since the dawning of the mass media, evangelicals have been making use of every means of communication. Hendershot points out that the evangelicals – an amorphous culture of witnesses who have declared Jesus their own person savior – are very distinct



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from the fundamentalists who adamantly draw distinctions between the believers and the outside world, making them much more suspicious of contemporary culture. Evangelicals have been embracing of the latest technologies since radio, and their messages have been carried on film, video and now the Internet. Even with such a long and prolific history, few scholars have paid critical attention. Hendershot comes to the academic rescue, not to pass judgements nor make snide, ironic comments, but to illuminate a significant, but relatively unknown arena of religious culture. After 9/11, there was an onslaught of books about Islam. I would suspect that the sophisticated secularist from the American metropolis now knows more about the Sunnis and Shiites than about the homegrown born agians.

Hendershot says from the onset that these Christian cultural products are not an overt form of propaganda, a position that allows her to begin an intellectual journey to discover what is being communicated. Resisting the easy "propaganda paradigm," she delves into the more subtle meanings of the works as well as the industrial history and process of Christian media. For example, one of the most successful evangelical ventures targeting children is the animated series *VeggieTales*, starring Bob the Tomato and Larry the Cucumber. The series addresses family issues for children three to ten years old, presenting a benevolent view of God's power, but nowhere mentioning Jesus, something unheard of in old school evangelicalism. Consequently, the program has succeeded in the mainstream

marketplace, even leading to the release of a feature film. The program is decidedly wholesome, promoting such values as compassion and forgiveness, but would not alienate mainstream parents. For Hendershot, *VeggieTales* demonstrates that the potentiality of Christian media to cross over, speaking to and entertaining nonbelievers.

Hendershot finds that the discourse of the evangelicals has changed over the years. The evangelical movement was once very suspicious of psychology and therapeutic techniques that promised to heal the soul, something only that Jesus the Savior could do. As they accommodated to modernity and psychiatric concepts, evangelicals had adopted many familiar buzzwords from secular culture: feelings, anxiety, self-esteem. No longer is there a total reliance on sin to explain man's setbacks and failure. This absorption of therapeutic rhetoric has allowed evangelical books to be competitive in the publishing marketplace and make this particular Christian lifestyle less forbidding. The evangelicals have also adjusted the way they speak to teens. Hendershot notes how chastity has been repackaged for secular audiences with a more neutral word, abstinence. With this campaign the evangelicals have brought the old morality into public discussion without the anti-sex and anti-safe-sex diatribes of the original movement. This word substitution has had political ramifications as well. The Welfare Reform Act in 1996 provided 50 million dollars per year for abstinence education, legislation for which the conservative Christian community takes credit.

During her research Hendershot

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discovered an audiovisual auteur, Irwin S. Moon, whom she calls a “maverick Christian filmmaker.” From 1945 to 1962 Moon supervised the production of thirty films that were produced and distributed outside the traditional Hollywood system. The programs were seen by millions in schools and churches, syndicated on television, and played very well in the burgeoning international market. Moon recognized that the best way to reach a new audience was not with Bible thumping harangues, but films that explored the wonders of science. Such films as *God of Creation* offered arresting visual images of nature in full bloom and asked viewers to open their eyes and see God as a designer or architect. Moon helped set the template for filmmakers who want to remain “in the world but not of the world,” relying on logic and reason to understand God’s plan for salvation. Today’s Christian filmmakers, many working in fictional apocalyptic genres, still struggle with Moon’s dilemma: how to strike a correct balance between Biblical instruction and pure entertainment.

Hendershot has included one chapter that will surely provoke discussion. Instead of concentrating solely on the evangelical movement, she examines the growth and media message of the Cathedral of Hope, the world’s largest gay and lesbian church. Many members of this church located in Dallas were raised in the fundamentalist tradition and, after rejecting its reactionary understanding of sexuality, still have a deep belief in the Bible. Hendershot shows how this postfundamentalist church both defines itself against Christian conservatism while incorporating elements of that

culture into its liturgy and outreach. Like evangelicalism, the Cathedral of Hope seeks new converts by reworking secular forms.

Since the writing of *Shaking the World for Jesus*, Christian culture has erupted into popular consciousness. Instead of being Mel Gibson’s Folly, *The Passion of the Christ* has become one of the most financially successful films of all time. *Joan of Arcadia*, about a contemporary girl who listens to God in different guises, is one of the most popular new series of the television season while Christian merchandise sells more than four billion dollars a year at such retailers as Wal-Mart and Target. Jesus has never been hotter at the box office and the cash register. But what does this all mean? Heather Hendershot’s book is essential reading to understand this new phenomenon and how Christian evangelicals are negotiating their way in a secular American marketplace, attempting to appeal to believers and nonbelievers alike.

Ron Simon is curator of television at the Museum of Television and Radio in New York and an associate professor at Columbia University and NYU.

REVIEW AND COMMENT

Spy Television

By Wesley Britton

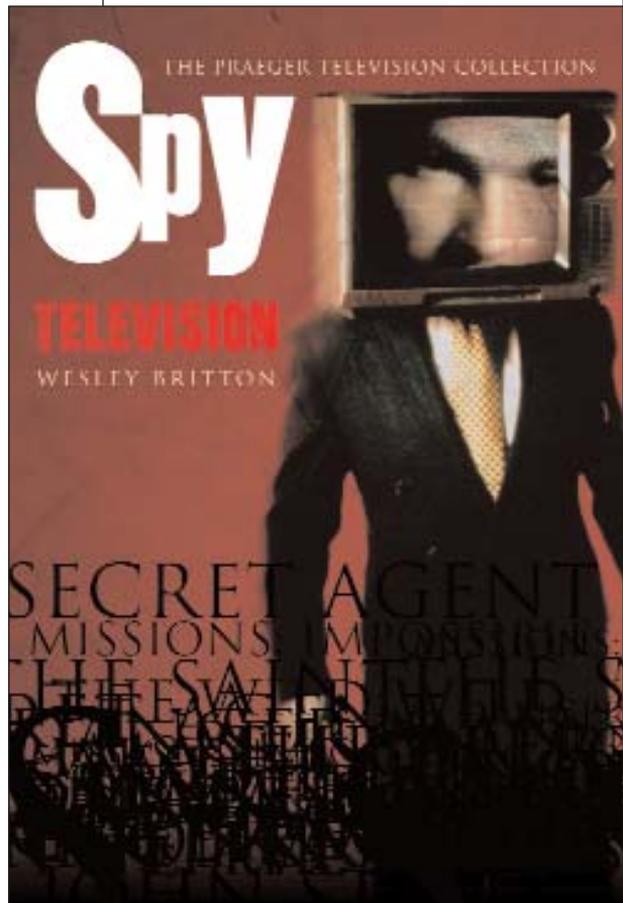
Praeger, Westport, CT
(272 pages, \$39.95)

By Paul Noble

It's no wonder that television series about spies, secret agents and the intelligence community are popular. The entertainment value of these programs is always reflected in daily news reports. Throughout the history of *Spy Television*, art imitated life imitated art. And this pattern appears to be accelerating each day.

While reading Wesley Britton's *Spy Television*, I learned, from television and newspapers, about an international "spy shortage." I was already aware, as we all were, of the monstrous intelligence gap which led to "9/11." The in-fighting between the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation is a reality which has had disastrous consequences for our nation and for the world. Abuse of enemy prisoners (torture, depending on whom one listens to) to extract important intelligence is a major 2004 campaign issue. There was the *New York Times'* admission that the "intelligence" it received colored its reporting

of the pre-Iraqi war period and the war itself. The rise of international terrorism, not only between or among nations, but based upon smaller, possibly but not necessarily government-sponsored cadres, cults and other hard-to-pinpoint organizations, has made intelligence-gathering more complex than ever. Viewers of spy television, of course, knew all that years ago, thanks to the delightful and successful programs described in great detail in Wesley Britton's book, which is one volume in the Praeger Television Collection, a series edited by television columnist



REVIEW AND COMMENT

David Bianculli.

Spy novels, movies and radio programs have a long history. John Buchan, Graham Greene and Eric Ambler were spy novel writers who set the standard and provided the model, especially in the twenties and thirties. In 1935, film director Alfred Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps*, an adaptation of a Buchan novel, is the first of the spy movies many of us recall, and Hitchcock continued in this genre, with *The Lady Vanishes*, *Foreign Correspondent*, and *Saboteur*, topping those thrillers in the fifties with his sensational *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and *North By Northwest*.

Ian Fleming's creation of James Bond in the nineteen-fifties set the stage for the memorable 007 movie series, which spawned the television spy series celebrated in Britton's book. The "free world" was battling against the forces behind the Iron Curtain, and Fleming tapped our curiosity about the behind-the-scenes activities which could spell life-or-death, including nuclear holocaust. According to Mr. Britton, "U. S. President John F. Kennedy listed *From Russia With Love* as one of his favorite novels in a 1961 *Life* magazine article." The impact of JFK's taste in 007 novels was felt everywhere, in the success of the Bond movies beginning with *Dr. No* and in the TV series which tried to replicate or spoof the phenomenon.

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. was the first major network response to the Bond series. It premiered in the fall of 1964. Oscar-nominee Robert Vaughn, Scottish-born featured player David McCallum and five-time Hitchcock character actor Leo G. Carroll took the roles of Napoleon Solo, Illya Kuryakin,

and Alexander Waverly, the agents of the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement. They fought against the forces of THRUSH, which Britton describes as "the blueprint for all fictional power-hungry organizations to follow on the small screen." Bond's SPECTRE, U.N.C.L.E.'s THRUSH and the real world's Al-Qaeda – just one potent example of Spy Television's predictive arts.

The influence of *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* extended far beyond *Spy Television*. The team-casting, the non-conforming fictional heroes, the "cool" nature and elegance of intelligent agents set the pattern for many other series, from *Starsky and Hutch* to *Scarecrow and Mrs. King*. After the events of September 11, 2001, renewed interest in *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* grew because of the organization's fictional blueprint for the new war against terror.

It was the British production – and exportation – of *The Avengers* which had an even more long-lasting impact on *Spy Television*. Patrick Macnee as Major John Steed and Diana Rigg as Mrs. Emma Peel continue in reruns for 40 years. Other *Avengers* characters, portrayed by Ian Hendry, Honor Blackman, and Linda Thorson, added their indelible presence to the proceedings, which tended to deal with smugglers, radar jamming, assassins, and, occasionally, the supernatural. Race and politics was treated humorously rather than seriously. Early plot lines such as a rustic English setting threatened by technological invasion morphed in later years to contemporary problems such as drugs and urban problems.

REVIEW AND COMMENT

Get Smart and *Mission: Impossible* were two giants of the genre in the sixties, one a hilarious spoof and the other a fast-moving team-driven thriller. CONTROL agents Don Adams and Barbara Feldon as Maxwell Smart (agent 86) and Susan Hilton (agent 99) fought KAOS, an international terror organization. “*Get Smart* combined slapstick, black comedy, social commentary, and wit served up by some of the best talents in the business,” writes Britton. The credits of *Get Smart* read like a who’s who of the Borscht Belt and the days of Sid Caesar, *M*A*S*H*, *That Was the Week that Was*, and *The Steve Allen Show*. Dan Melnick, Leonard Stern, Buck Henry and Mel Brooks were responsible for the hilarious concept and episodes.

Mission: Impossible, with its team approach to intelligence, lived on in reruns for generations. Martin Landau, Barbara Bain, Greg Morris, Peter Lupus and Peter Graves, and, later, Leonard Nimoy, Sam Elliot and Lesley Ann Warren, continued on into the seventies.

What Britton adds to our understanding of the role of *Spy Television*:

1 He links the birth of Spy Television in the fifties in two directions, to the spy novels and films of the thirties and forties, and ahead to the more contemporary series like *The X-Files*, *The A-Team*, *La Femme Nikita*, *The Agency*, *Alias* and *24*.

2 He provides a clear description of the development process of dozens of series, showing how concept, writing, casting, and directing

contributed to the creation of the program and then its modification during each telecast season.

3 He demonstrates the series’ impacts on future programs created by the same personnel.

4 His writing, while clearly that of a genre fan, is restrained rather than cheerleading, offering both casual and already-informed readers an intense study of the programs.

Last, but not least, the book is an informal catalog of the catch-phrases and fashions of Spy Television with which we are all familiar, and may use to this day. Britton has lifted the cone of silence on espionage, accepted his mission with his tape self-destructing in five seconds, and stands for “the forces of goodness, virtue, and justice. As Emma Peel (Diana Rigg) said in her farewell to Patrick Macnee, “always keep your bowler on in times of stress. Watch out for diabolical masterminds. Good-bye, Steed.”

Recently retired as vice-president of film acquisitions and scheduling at Lifetime Television, Paul Noble is chairman of the public-relations committee of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and a board member of the New York chapter.

Crazy Like a FOX: The Inside Story of How Fox News Beat CNN

By Scott Collins

Portfolio, New York
(228 pages, \$24.95)

By Michael J. Jordan

It was late 2000, and a polarized American electorate was almost evenly split. This had been reflected in the presidential vote, but now also in how Americans viewed efforts to resolve the crisis – each side accused the other of electoral theft.

As Scott Collins writes in *Crazy Like a Fox: The Inside Story of How Fox News Beat CNN*, conservatives registered such disgust with events that more of them turned to the network that seemed to ratify their viewpoint – Fox News Channel.

“I think what’s going on is the Democratic lawyers have flooded Florida,” Fox News anchor John Gibson said on the air. “They are afraid of George W. Bush becoming president and instituting tort reform and their gravy train will be over. This is the trial association’s full court press to make sure Bush does not win.”

Such election coverage catapulted Fox ahead of MSNBC for the first time, and the upstart network was now nipping at the heels of mighty CNN. The final hurdle over

CNN came soon after the 9/11 attacks and would be cemented during Gulf War II. All of which was infused by Fox’s open embrace of patriotism-tinted news, famously embodied by the undulating American flag placed over Fox’s on-screen logo. Rupert Murdoch, who had often branded CNN as “too liberal,” had indeed found the right person to guide Fox, Roger Ailes. And Ailes, a former media adviser to presidents Nixon, Reagan and the elder Bush, made no apologies for rewriting the rules of broadcast news.

“There’s a whole country that elitists will never acknowledge,” Ailes is quoted as saying. “What people deeply resent out there are those in the ‘blue’ states

The Inside Story of How Fox News Beat CNN

Crazy like a

FOX



Scott
Collins

thinking they're smarter. There's a touch of that [resentment] in our news."

With central characters like Ailes, Collins has written an entertaining, personality-driven account that breathes life into a topic that could instead resemble the dry score-keeping of industry mergers and acquisitions that marks some financial writing. Rather, Collins engagingly profiles the people and events, decisions and trends that enabled Fox to upend CNN as cable news champ in less than six years.

"The story of the cable news wars involves seized opportunities and failed strategies, corporate arrogance and executive intrigue, intense battles for ratings, advertising, and multimillion dollar anchors," writes Collins, a media reporter for the Los Angeles *Times*. "And the surprising outcome of this unlikely battle has changed the way Americans get – and use – the news."

Curiously, given the book's title, Collins actually raises the curtain with the December 1995 launch of MSNBC, the highly anticipated joint venture of heavy-hitters Microsoft and NBC. Yet the third cable news network struggled from the get-go to establish its own identity, and today languishes well behind the Big Two.

But Collins has introduced MSNBC as a cautionary tale, to highlight what becomes a central theme to the book – that hard-charging, Type-A personalities with grandiose plans and deep pockets backing them are equally likely to fail in the heated, crowded competition to win over fickle television viewers.

Collins is indeed shrewd in spotting metaphors. He tells the tale of Fox's Paula Zahn and CNN's Greta Van Susteren, for example, not to gossip about how Ailes compared Zahn to a "dead raccoon" when

he fired her, or how aggrieved Van Susteren was over a chair, but to underscore how celebrity-driven cable news had become, with multi-million-dollar anchors. Some two decades earlier, in 1980, Ted Turner had pronounced that "news was the star" and launched his no-frills CNN with a handful of steady veterans and scores of lowly paid, recent college graduates.

But personalities on television have become a reality, and so, too, are they essential to this book. While *Crazy Like a Fox* boils down to the battle between Fox and CNN – floundering MSNBC becomes something of a distraction from the main event – the undercard features fascinating matchups: Turner v. Murdoch, Ailes v. most everybody, GE's Jack Welch v. Bill Gates. Time Warner's Gerald Levin, NBC President Bob Wright, CNN President Tom Johnson, Fox host Bill O'Reilly and others also scuffle.

Collins offers a fly-on-the-wall perspective that allows readers to eavesdrop on boardroom and newsroom exchanges he presumably captured through interviews and cross-referencing. This is not unauthorized biography, as in the acknowledgments he thanks almost all the major players for their time, recollections and insights.

So, how did Fox beat CNN (for now, at least)? As Collins illustrates, it's too simplistic to say Fox exploited the notion of "liberal bias" – a critique first articulated in Edith Efron's *The News Twisters* (1971) – or pounced early on the red state-blue state trend. Whether media bias is real or perceived is still a source of fierce debate, of course. But there is a very real sense among many that mainstream media disrespect

conservative sensibilities and issues. Fox executives admit to Collins that they tap this anger.

Fox, however, also needed to maneuver to gain access into markets and onto cable systems, before it could begin winning over hearts and minds. And while Fox drives home a clear editorial slant, the network has also benefited from CNN's corporate inertia, managerial turnover, and erosion of its popularity – fueled by its infamous 1998 Tailwind report, in which CNN asserted that US forces used nerve gas against American defectors in Laos in September 1970, only to later retract the story.

Overall, Collins is remarkably “fair and balanced” in writing about a network that claims to do so, but whose executives concede in revealing quotes that they are actually correcting an existing “imbalance” by providing a counterweight.

Since 9/11, “Fox decided that it was going to take sides, giving ‘fair and balanced’ an elastic meaning,” Collins writes. “This was not a war but our war.”

In reading how Fox rose to the top, one can't help but wonder: to what effect?

The so-called “Fox effect” or “Foxification” of TV news has caused much hand-wringing among news purists and liberals. And as Collins writes, “Where television news once only presumed to cover political warfare, it now feeds it.”

But there's more: how does it affect the audience?

A widely reported October 2003 survey by the Program of International Policy Attitudes suggested that 80 percent of Fox viewers believed one of three following misperceptions: the U.S. had uncovered evidence demonstrating a

close working relationship between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda; the U.S. had found the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq; and most people in other countries had backed the U.S. war against Saddam. Forty-five percent of Fox viewers believed all three, by far the highest percentage of any group of TV viewers. Fox, wrote the survey's authors, “was the news source whose views had the most misperceptions.”

Then there was the documentary film released this summer, “Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism,” in which director Robert Greenwald alleges that arguments offered up by Fox anchors and commentators so closely mirror those of the Bush White House, it's as if they're reciting from the administration's talking points.

Whether this is less journalism than propaganda, and what potential harm is caused – say, helping to take the country into war – is probably best saved for another book. And Collins may be just the writer for the job.

The United Nations correspondent for *The Christian Science Monitor*, Michael J. Jordan is a Brooklyn-based freelance journalist specializing in international affairs and an associate adjunct professor of journalism at Long Island University.

The Fourth Network: How Fox Broke the Rules and Reinvented Television

By Daniel M. Kimmel

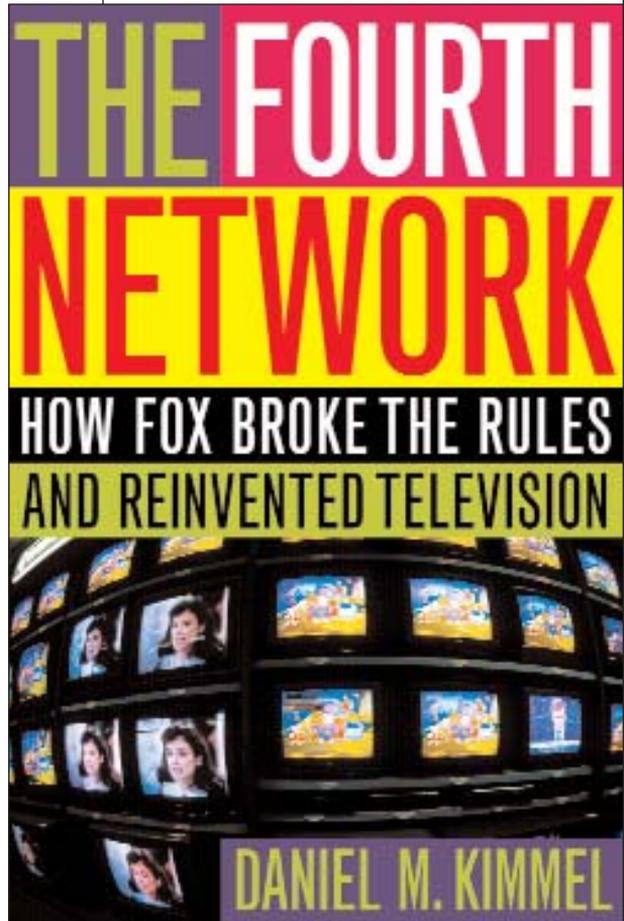
Ivan R. Dee, Chicago
(320 pages, \$27.50)

By Jimmie L. Reeves

Alison Picard's evaluation of Kimmel's book in *Publishers Weekly* concludes with a statement that serves as a nice opening for this review: "This is a solid but rather dry account of a network and its impact on TV." In fact, "solid" and "dry" are apt descriptions of *The Fourth Network: How Fox Broke the Rules and Reinvented Television*. But, unlike Picard, I do not consider the arid quality of Kimmel's work to be a negative. Dryness, after all, can be a good thing. Consider wine, for instance. Or diapers. And as a scholar of television who regularly teaches a course in broadcast programming, I savor the exquisite dryness of Kimmel's documentation of the birth, childhood and adolescence of the Fox Network.

Indeed (especially given the overstatement in the book's subtitle), I was pleasantly surprised to find that Kimmel's prose is relatively free of the wet hyperbole that floods typical accounts of the launching of successful media

enterprises. Here, Hank Whittemore's fawning *CNN: The Inside Story* comes to mind. But, of course, Whittemore's "authorized" history of the early years of the world's first all-news network was made, ironically, both more and less credible by his status as a CNN insider. In contrast, Kimmel's reserved and balanced treatment of the Fox record is at least partially attributable to his outsider status. This status elevates the truth-value of Kimmel's words – but, again ironically, it is also responsible for hampering his ability to gain access to key players still employed by the media group. As Kimmel decries (and rightly so) in his Acknowledgements, the Murdoch empire's refusal to cooperate



with Kimmel stands as a ringing indictment of the current wave of media consolidation. Kimmel was told that “since News Corp. owned its own publishing division, they might choose to do their own story of the FOX network someday, so they saw no reason to help with a potentially competing product.” I share Kimmel’s righteous indignation when he argues that “The notion that FOX would consent to interviews only with an author working on an in-house book should be troubling not only to journalists, but to anyone who treasures the free flow of information.”

Maybe the in-house and “authorized” history of the Fox Network will be penned by Newt Gingrich? But whoever is assigned this public-relations/propaganda project is sure to render a “fair and balanced” account of the Fox experience that is as jingoistic and congratulatory as the Fox News Network’s coverage of the exploits of the Bush Administration. Rupert Murdoch, I imagine, will be accorded the kind of awe assigned to Der Führer in Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*).

Which brings me back to Picard’s use of the word “solid” in the *Publishers Weekly* review. Solid is an apt description because Kimmel presents a three-dimensional holograph-like image of Fox, not a one- or two-dimensional sketch. In other words, the book tells the Fox story from multiple perspectives. In this regard, Kimmel won me over with his prologue. In ten concise pages he manages to relate the history of failed attempts at establishing a fourth broadcast network, convey the difficulty of such an undertaking, and report the intrigue surrounding Murdoch’s acquisition of Metromedia, the station

group that would become the nucleus of the young Fox network.

The rest of the book is made up of 16 chapters divided into three parts.

The first part is titled “The Coat-Hanger Network,” which refers to NBC’s Brandon Tartikoff’s legendary dismissal of the upstart Fox. The nickname suggested that, because so many of Fox’s first affiliates were located on the UHF band, viewers would have to attach coat hangers to their antennas to receive its programming. Each of the seven chapters of Part I chronicles a season in the early life of the network – beginning with 1985-1986 and ending with 1991-1992.

This period was basically the Barry Diller era at Fox.

The second part of the book, titled “The Revolving Door,” refers to turmoil at the top of the network hierarchy in the years following Diller’s exit stage right. Again, each chapter, beginning with 1992-1993, considers a season in the flow of Fox programming. And it is “The Revolving Door” part of Kimmel’s book that Picard finds most problematic. Apparently Picard wanted Kimmel to inject more personality into his discussion of the scores of executives and programmers identified as temporary hires during this period. As Picard put it, “Innumerable executives and programmers, many of whom he has interviewed, are rarely displayed with any distinguishing characteristics (a notable exception is the colorful Barry Diller).”

But Picard’s evaluation is marred by an assumption worth challenging – that the executives of the post-Diller years at Fox actually possessed distinguishing characteristics.

After all, as an ilk, corporate

executives – in any industry – are not often rewarded for displaying individuality. Consider, for instance, the case of Bill Rancic. Remember Bill? He was one of the most forgettable of the so-called job candidates on *The Apprentice*. The other contenders who displayed even an ounce of “personality” (Troy McClain) or daring (Sam Solovey) or “color” (Kwame Jackson, Omarosa Manigault-Stallworth and Tammy Lee) were systematically eliminated by Donald “You’re Fired” Trump until the white-bread Rancic was the last suit standing.

The point is that deep pockets like Donald Trump, Ted Turner and Rupert Murdoch seek out innovators when they launch a new enterprise, whether it be skyscraper or television network. But architects, both of buildings and networks, are expendable once the edifice is complete. Reese Schonfeld, the “co-founder” of CNN, discovered this harsh truth when Turner sent him packing in 1982, a scant 24 months after the unveiling of the network that would later land the “Mouth of the South” on the cover of *Time* as the magazine’s “Man of the Year.” Barry Diller’s seven-year tenure at Fox (1985-1992) was over thrice as long as Reese Schonfeld’s time at CNN – but in the end, as Turner did with Schonfeld, Murdoch made it abundantly clear who was at the top of the corporate pecking order. In Diller’s words (as quoted in Kimmel’s book), “He [Murdoch] told me, not meanly or coldly, but just realistically, ‘There is in this company only one principal.’”

The juiciest passages in this “dry” book are associated with Kimmel’s discussion of the highs and lows of Fox programming – from Fox’s triumphant colonization of children’s programming (exemplified by the success of *The*

Mighty Morphin Power Rangers) to its disastrous adventures in the late-night fringe (that damaged the careers of both Joan Rivers and Chevy Chase). Want to learn how Terry Rakolta’s attack on *Married . . . with Children* was something of godsend to the fledging network? It is explained in Kimmel’s book. Want to know how Fox’s exploitation of *In Living Color* infuriated Keenen Ivory Wayans? It’s also addressed by Kimmel. Want to know why the axing of *America’s Most Wanted* was one of the shortest cancellations in network history – or why David Duchovny sued the network for rerunning *The X-Files* on FX? These “why” questions, too, are answered in the book.

The third part of the book, tagged “21st Century Fox,” only contains one chapter which speculates on the future of the network. For me, this part is anticlimactic and does not measure up to the quality of the rest of the book.

But, despite its unsatisfying ending, *The Fourth Network* still deserves a place on the shelf of any serious observer of the American media-industrial complex. Though Murdoch and Diller’s accomplishments pale in comparison to what Turner and his crew did with WTBS and CNN, or what Gerald Levin did with HBO, Kimmel does present a convincing case for recognizing Fox as a major force in the recent history of the television medium. Indeed, I intend to make Kimmel’s book required reading for students enrolled in my programming class.

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