

# BROADCASTING AND THE NEWS

---

BY ROBERT E. KINTNER

Reprinted from Harper's Magazine  
by special permission

© 1965, BY HARPER & ROW, PUBLISHERS, INCORPORATED



## FOREWORD

*Most of the time, television is too busy gathering and reporting the news to take a detached view of broadcast journalism.*

*Such an opportunity arose a few months back, when the editors of Harper's asked Robert E. Kintner to write a three-part series on the status, progress and aims of broadcast news.*

*Mr. Kintner is uniquely qualified to tell this story. As a working newspaperman and political columnist for many years before joining the broadcasting industry, he has a wide background in the traditional forms of journalism.*

*And as President of NBC, the acknowledged leader in broadcast journalism, he knows the added dimension the new medium has brought to news reporting. He knows, too, the tremendous opportunities ahead for broadcast news in the era of satellite communications.*

*Mr. Kintner's three articles were written for the April, May and June (1965) issues of Harper's. They are being reprinted here because we believe they furnish an unusually valuable insight into the structure, objectives and achievements of journalism's most modern medium.*

ROBERT W. SARNOFF

*Chairman of the Board, National Broadcasting Company*



# PART I

---

On election night, 1960, the news desk at NBC received an unexpected telephone call. The voice at the other end of the line identified itself as the Associated Press, and it wanted to ask a favor: “When you run down the board, could you keep the figures on the screen a little longer? You’re going so fast we can’t copy them.”

Less than a quarter of a century before, the Associated Press had established a secondary service to supply radio stations with brief reports, mainly synopses of the detailed items that moved to the newspapers on the AP’s trunk wires. Newspapermen in those days—and I was among them—regarded broadcasters as upstarts, whose idea of legwork was to run out and buy all the newspapers so they could read the headlines over the air.

In all fairness, as I have learned, the radio networks

were trying. At the urging of William S. Paley, then president and now chairman of CBS, a Columbia News Service had been established as early as 1933, General Mills picking up half the bills, CBS the rest. Columbia News died in less than two years, but by then CBS executive Ed Klauber and news manager Paul White were planning the great staff that would dominate broadcast journalism in the 1940s—Ed Murrow, Elmer Davis, Bill Shirer, Howard K. Smith.

But nobody in the trade really took broadcast news seriously in the 1930s. I was working in the New York *Herald Tribune's* Washington bureau and later writing a column with Joe Alsop, and he didn't even own a radio. I had one, but the only things I listened to were President Roosevelt's fireside chats, "The March of Time" on Sunday nights, and a fellow on Mutual who gave advice on family problems, a program so grotesque it was amusing.

Up until 1939 Washington newspapermen wouldn't let radio correspondents into the House of Representatives or Senate press galleries. The way we saw it, if the broadcasters wanted somebody to tell the news from Washington, they could pay a working newspaperman to give a talk every once in a while. They did, too.

But by 1960, the press associations were admittedly getting their election figures from broadcasting. It was a milestone, though not quite the end of the road. After the 1962 election, the AP appointed a committee of managing editors to explore ways to make the wire-service reporting of election returns more competitive with broadcast

coverage. Then, last June, on the night of the California primary, the AP found itself moving a midnight bulletin that Rockefeller had gone into the lead. Our NBC team had just left the air (it was three o'clock in the morning, New York time), having reported on the basis of far more complete returns that Goldwater was the winner. Forget the projections—this was the real vote. The next day, the early editions of afternoon papers in the East carried an AP election story that was, simply, wrong. Ironically, our early-morning radio news programs followed AP rather than our own people in California, so they went wrong, too.

The wire services thereupon decided that if they couldn't lick us they would join us. A few days later Wes Gallagher, general manager of the AP, and Earl J. Johnson, vice president and editor of UPI, waited outside the office of CBS News president Fred Friendly, while representatives of the three television networks met to hammer out their own agreement on a pool to gather election returns in November. When the networks had settled among themselves, Gallagher and Johnson were invited to join the meeting and to arrange for the press associations to have access to the pool as nonvoting partners and to contribute a share of the cost. In the future, the press associations will have a vote in any such syndicate, and they should have had one last year. This job must now be done collaboratively; no one company can afford the accuracy and speed the public demands and should get.

In 1936, the year of the Roosevelt landslide, the total

NBC revenues for *two* networks (the Blue, now ABC, and the Red) came to \$38 million. In the year of the Johnson landslide, the NBC News Division—one of the company’s five operating divisions—alone *spent* \$53 million. Among them, the three networks last year spent more than \$125 million to present news-as-it-happened, reports on news, and special programs probing at the facts behind the stories. On election night, the Network Election Service, combining the resources of the three networks and two press associations, employed 150,000 people to gather data.

#### WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR NEWS?

The results show, in a survey taken by Elmo Roper’s organization, more people answered “television” than anything else to a question on “where you get most of your news about what’s going on in the world.” Even more significant, to me, were the answers to the question, “If you got conflicting or different reports of the same news story from radio, television, the magazines, and the newspapers, which of the four versions would you be most inclined to believe?” Of those who had an opinion, 44 per cent chose television and 15 per cent radio; fewer than 30 per cent chose newspapers.

Competition between newspapers and broadcasters no longer exists in a true sense. The day of the EXTRA is gone—a broadcaster can put the same news on the air, in starker detail, hours faster than a newspaper can set a banner headline and a one-paragraph bulletin, print the paper, and get out onto the newsstands. For such fast-

breaking big stories as deaths, key votes in Congress, verdicts in notorious trials, people are going to turn a dial rather than hang around waiting for a delivery truck.

Still, the papers can cover much *more* news than television, and do a more complete job on almost any story. The last few years have seen a rash of newspaper strikes—in New York, in Cleveland, in Detroit—and we have all learned that no amount of broadcasting makes up for the absence of the daily paper. NBC's toughest competitor, Walter Cronkite, once put it this way: "Daily newscasts can only supplement newspapers." There are time limits on the programs and on how much the average viewer wants to hear about a given story. "In the daily newscast," Cronkite said, "I rarely use a story of more than 175 words as a straight on-camera report. Even a film report seldom runs over 350 words. At the other end of the scale, a front-page story in the *New York Times* runs to one thousand words or more." NBC's experience on "The Huntley-Brinkley Report" is similar.

Today, the principal competition between newspapers and broadcasters is for personnel. The networks have used both the papers and the wire services as recruiting grounds for their own talent—in fact, Bill McAndrew, executive vice president in charge of NBC News, doesn't like to hire people without press experience. "City editors," McAndrew says, "teach them the importance of middle initials, getting the address straight and how to write a simple declarative sentence. Without that, they're no use to us." Four to five years is usually enough, and

the people the broadcasters take are the people the papers should be trying to keep.

### THE QUINTUPLE-THREAT MAN

Obviously, a man needs a lot more than a sound newspaper background to be a television correspondent. He has to be acceptable on screen. It's heartbreaking to see an excellent reporter fail as a broadcaster because he isn't articulate on his feet or his appearance is unsettling. (Or he doesn't have sense enough to keep his jacket on and wear long socks.) A top man needs other talents, too. Julian Goodman, vice president of our news division, talks about "the quintuple-threat man—he can write, report, speak, edit, and put it all on the air." Particularly in the more remote bureaus, in Africa and Asia, the reporter has to be a "producer-correspondent," taking on himself all the responsibility for the words and pictures that tell the story. Perhaps the most accomplished practitioner of this new profession was George Clay, who died in Stanleyville, murdered by the Congo rebels, on November 24, 1964.

The new breed of correspondent, as much as the extra money we are willing to spend, accounts for the great jump in quality of broadcast journalism since the war. Many of the newscasters of the 1930s, though they might be reporters when doing other jobs, were strictly script readers on the air. Lowell Thomas is the greatest sight reader who ever lived; sometimes he would come to the studio only a minute or two before broadcast time, pick up the document, and go right to the microphone. He had

been a newspaperman, of course, and he could write—but not for radio. One year he was given an award for radio writing; generously, and publicly, he turned it over to the late Prosper Buranelli, the man who actually prepared his scripts. Gabriel Heatter wrote more of his own material, but he didn't do much digging. He got his "Good News Tonight" from the Transradio News Service, whose ticker was installed in his home.

But there was something about the disembodied voice coming over the radio that made people sure they were getting inside stuff. Bill McAndrew remembers an evening when he called Congressman May, then chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, and May said, "Bill, I can't talk with you now. Gabriel Heatter is reading some manpower figures on the radio, and that's something I want to know about."

This air of omniscience, given freely by the microphone, was a terrible temptation to broadcasting columnists who really had their own chains of contacts below the surface of the news. When I took over the news division of the newly formed ABC network in 1945, its prime properties were Drew Pearson and Walter Winchell, who supplemented their newspaper earnings with once-a-week fifteen-minute broadcasts.

Winchell and Pearson, who then drew the largest pay in broadcasting news, are extremely well informed, their sources ranging from Presidents to thugs. When I went to ABC they also had the largest audiences of any commentators. They had been on NBC's Blue Network, and

when the chain was sold to Edward J. Noble, the Life-Saver king, their contracts were part of the deal—some said because their broadcasts were so hard to handle. Both were politically liberal, and they expressed their opinions on the air in the strongest terms. Still, despite hundreds of threats, the record of successful libel suits against them is virtually blank.

With commentators like Pearson and Winchell, ABC needed conservatives to balance its schedule. For this purpose we had George Sokolsky and Paul Harvey from Chicago and Henry J. Taylor, who was engaged directly by General Motors. The revenues from these sponsored shows gave us a little margin to build an ABC staff that would take no sides, politically. When Elmer Davis was about to leave the Office of War Information, we hired him. We also brought in, from CBS, another top newspaperman, John Daly, to head the news department and to offer competition to NBC's John Cameron Swayze and CBS's Doug Edwards.

Bob Sarnoff and I—and, I think, Bill Paley and CBS president Frank Stanton—feel strongly that news broadcasters should not use the camera and microphone to expound their personal views. Men who prepare and present news programs should be full-time members of the news staffs, and broadcasting managements, in turn, should assume complete responsibility for the handling of the news. I have always felt that Elmer Davis and Ed Murrow were the men who first gave broadcast journalism real stature and importance, in the early years of

the war. They used a new medium to cover the news in a calm, intelligent way. Both did, at times, inject opinion in their broadcasts, but their basic commodity was hard news, carefully interpreted, and such opinion as they did express was based solidly in fact. Both found support for their positions in unusual public acceptance of their personalities.

When I came to NBC in 1957, I found the company ready to develop a big, aggressive news division. Everyone, especially Bob Sarnoff, who was then president, was annoyed and embarrassed by the general belief that CBS was doing a better job than NBC in news and public affairs. He wanted to fight and was prepared to spend money. I sometimes find myself agreeing with the critics who say that network competition in the entertainment area has bad effects on the quality of the bread-and-butter television drama or comedy series. But in the area of news and public affairs, competition is wholly beneficial. I have three television sets in my office, one for each network, built into a wall cabinet. While watching the screens, I can control the sound with a dial by my desk, and if another network has a story we don't have, or seems to be doing a story better, I like to know why. McAndrew tells me my record is thirty-five memos to him in a two-day period.

We compete for prestige, for public attention, and for public acceptance, and the rivalry among the networks has an intensity that has not been seen in American journalism since the days of Hearst and Pulitzer. Competi-

tion drives us to abandon commercial programming to cover a fast-breaking story, with or without sponsorship. It sends us after the unusual story, like the films of the Yemen royalists in battle, which ran five minutes on Huntley-Brinkley and cost \$20,000. Goodman says, "We're still sending people to find Livingstone in Africa." I'd like to think we would do it even if CBS weren't breathing down our necks, but it's true that in television news, competition is the mother of initiative.

By the time I came to NBC, the bell had tolled for the original television once-a-night news show, an announcer reading bulletins and showing still pictures or films purchased from newsreel companies. Advertisers were beginning to learn that it was the better part of wisdom *not* to seek control over the content of news programs: the best answer to the complaining customer was, and is, "We have nothing to do with the show; we don't even see it before it goes on the air."

Planning NBC coverage of the 1956 political conventions, some bright lad (many claim the credit) had hit on the idea of teaming Chet Huntley and David Brinkley. That fall, they went on with their own fifteen-minutes-a-night news report, opening, incidentally, on the day when the Suez crisis broke and topped the continuing story of the Hungarian revolt. During his tenure as president of NBC, Sylvester "Pat" Weaver had launched the "Today" show, which has been deliberately and gradually news-oriented to become the most influential continuing public-affairs program on the air, partly because of its

early-morning time slot, when important people can see it while breakfasting or dressing. Seven out of ten Congressmen watch “Today” as do many officers in the Executive branch.

In a relatively brief time, we have built a news gathering, processing, and presenting organization with eight hundred employees scattered throughout the world, all of whom, except for a few stringers in remote spots, are fully employed by NBC and owe no allegiances anywhere else.

#### HAZARDS OF THE FAST BREAK

Because you have to maintain speed, you particularly need responsible people on television. When I worked for the *Herald Tribune*, I’d see what everybody had said in the afternoon papers, what AP and UP and the *Washington Post* were going to say the next morning, and then I’d get started writing at six o’clock; I had all the time in the world. And editors would read it before it got into print. In television, there is little or no time to edit a fast-breaking story. You rely on the ability and judgment of the man on the scene, whose “copy” goes direct to the viewers at home.

A first warning of how sensitive broadcasting could be was sounded on a Walter Winchell show in 1934. A bulletin came in and, as any broadcaster then would have done, Winchell read it—there had been a fire in a Dartmouth fraternity house, and nine students were dead. Instantly, telephones rang at stations all over the country, frightened people calling to find out whether rela-

tives or friends were among the victims.

Today, NBC will not announce a plane crash without first getting the details of exactly which flight was involved, on which airline, heading from where to where. Our news staff is alerted by an inside intercom system, but nothing goes on the air. This one can be handled by policy, but many others can't. We were the last network to announce that President Kennedy was dead, though I believe we had the first definite statement of the fact. One of our sound men, at the hospital, got on the line with the words, "They say he's dead." We sent him back to get positive identification of his "they" before we would broadcast the news.

Correspondents and producers need solid judgment, too, on the question of what is and what isn't news. Every afternoon at 2:30, producer Reuven Frank opens the direct line between David Brinkley's offices in Washington and our news division on the fifth floor of the RCA Building in New York. For two hours, a half-dozen senior people in the Huntley-Brinkley team (there are forty-one all told, employed on this show alone, plus the services of all other NBC reporters) debate the question of which stories are important enough to demand inclusion that night, which features should be taken from the shelf, what should come out first if a story breaks between 4:30 and 6:30. Frank maintains what he calls a "magazine department," stories which are or look likely to be timely, but need not run on any given evening. "Like the Spanish pressure on Gibraltar," he says, "it's not some-

thing that stops people from eating their lunch, but it's interesting, and they ought to know about it."

### STAGED FOR PUBLICITY?

Like the newspaper, the news program is the predestined victim of events staged for publicity. Producers have to live with this problem, decide for themselves whether a refugee rally or an American Nazi party is worth time on the air on a given day. An organization without any real membership could picket a political convention and stand a chance of putting itself, at least briefly, before a huge public. A network news division must rely on the editorial judgment of experienced people on the scene, whose decisions are final because the story goes right out on the air. Frank occupies the "slot" at national conventions, and decides whether the real news value lies in the interesting characters demonstrating outside the doors or in the speech somebody is making inside.

The area of greatest and most complicated responsibility is that of news analysis and interpretation. The NBC network does not editorialize, and we do not employ "commentators." Our aim is to present the news with enough background to make it comprehensible. But every reporter knows that when you write the first word, you make an editorial judgment. Different reporters covering the same event and gathering the same information will write different stories.

Still, there is a line somewhat between interpreting and editorializing. Nobody can draw it precisely—Paul White once tried to, in a rule book for CBS, and corre-

spondents found themselves crossing it all the time, though they were not in fact editorializing. The best you can do is hire responsible people and editors and supervisors, drill into them that you don't want their personal opinions, and then let them go.

Questions about the fairness of interpretation are most likely to arise in connection with what we call "actualities," and most people call "documentaries." Some of these programs are not controversial at all, like Lou Hazam's portraits of Vincent van Gogh and Shakespeare, Lucy Jarvis' tour through the Louvre, George Vicas' story of the French Revolution.

But often programs expose a scandal (like David Brinkley's "Great Highway Robbery" or CBS's "Biography of a Bookie Joint"), or go behind the slogans in a big fight (like Robert Northshield's and Chet Hagan's three-hour program on civil rights, Irving Gitlin's dissection of the welfare battle in Newburgh, New York, or the CBS documentary on birth control). Many programs take an important story from the recent past (the U-2 episode or the Cuba missile crisis) and try to see it for the first time under the eye of eternity.

Such programs raise hackles, and they should. Their producers' responsibility is not to be bland and unobjectionable but to present all the major angles of approach to a controversy. The correspondent should confine his comments to highlighting the issues, but, of course, the issues are what *he* sees as the issues. Like the judge addressing the jury, he does not attempt to tell the audi-

ence which witnesses to believe; he assumes that people can spot untrustworthy testimony. Editing the film, the director and producer should neither protect people from their own folly nor cut back and forth for the purpose of making someone look foolish. Men who live with a story for weeks or even months almost inevitably become identified with one side or another, and it takes great professional acumen and self-restraint to make a fair program.

We have had to defend a number of programs against attack by government officials, industry associations, political groups. In every case, I think we have done so successfully—that is, we have demonstrated not that the programs were right in every interpretation, but that they were factually correct, reasonable, and fair.

In a few cases, I think it can be said that the medium's need to simplify for a big audience—coupled with a general-news reporter's inevitable lack of expertise in a specialized subject—leaves us open to legitimate accusations of superficiality. We admit we need more experts, and we are trying to get them, even though most good reporters hate to tie themselves down to any one subject. And, of course, the big financial rewards in broadcast journalism lie in a reporter's establishing himself as a personality, which he can't do if all he reports on is, say, medicine.

### **TV'S FINEST HOURS**

Somewhere between the regular news show and the studied “actuality” is the program which presents events as

they are happening or takes a longer look at today's news. These programs have been television's finest hours; they are what the medium is made for. They range from the glory of space shots to the tragedy of a President's assassination and a nation's mourning, from the malevolence of a Mafia renegade testifying before a Senate Committee to the good cheer of an Inaugural parade. These are done live, supplemented by tape and film, and people work on them until five minutes before they go on the air. Obviously, the authority and prestige (indeed, the legal liabilities) of the company must be given trustingly into the hands of a few producers, editors, correspondents.

Such programs can be called into being at any time—McAndrew has authority to drop the regular programming and take over the network for news whenever he feels it necessary, though normally he checks first with me. The specials are more expensive than most people realize. Beyond the costs of time and production, there is the additional, sometimes brutal, expense of preempting a scheduled, sponsored show—paying the producer for the program that didn't run. This "preemption cost" is always absorbed by the network. Without the help of Gulf Oil, which has given us a commitment to pay part of the costs for instant specials and leaves racks of commercials with us to run in such programs, the burden might be too heavy for the network to bear.

All these programs must be ours, from top to bottom. We must know all the people involved in the production; we must have someone to hold accountable for every

piece of work that goes into the show. If humanly possible, we will shoot our own film, though sometimes we have to buy film from others (for example, the six hours of pictures of Communist China made by two French cameramen, which we edited down to one hour and fitted to a script by staffers). And we have an absolute rule against broadcasting any news or public-affairs shows made by outside producing companies.

Occasionally, packagers come to us with documentaries and with sponsors for them, and we refuse to accept. We cannot undertake the responsibility of presenting actualities to a nationwide audience unless we have detailed supervision. The risks are too great. We cannot know enough about where the information came from, or about how the cooperation of the participants was secured.

Making public-affairs programs is an immensely complicated business. You are always asking people for cooperation; they grant you access and spend considerable time with your crew without being paid for it. The network must know, more certainly than it ever can with an outsider, that the process has not compromised its integrity. We had a revealing demonstration of this difficulty one afternoon, when a capable outside producer showed us a program he had made about American missiles. It was a good job. The producer assured us that it was ready to run, that he had already made the changes demanded by the Department of Defense.

“Oh,” said Bill McAndrew. “Security?”

“No,” said the producer. “Editorial.” We turned down the program.

By far, the most complicated clearance arrangements NBC News ever made were with the Soviet government, in connection with “The Kremlin,” George Vicas’ brilliant exploration of the history of Russia through art treasures of the Russian sanctum. After much negotiation, the Soviet government gave us access to areas of the Kremlin that had never been photographed, and Soviet historians and art historians helped with the script. They insisted on our employing Russian camera crews and technicians, but we supervised the entire activity. They wanted to develop the film themselves, but they permitted us to fly it out to Paris for that purpose because it was Eastman Color and they did not have proper facilities for handling it. The cooperation from the Red Army was superb. Russian soldiers set bonfires outside the windows of the museums to help us simulate an episode from Napoleon’s occupation of the city. The Red Army chorus learned a Czarist hymn and sang it as a musical background for a painting of the funeral of a Czar. In return, we gave contractual guarantee that the film and the script would be shown to the Soviet government before we ran the program and that we would make any changes necessary for historical accuracy. They would have a week in which to propose changes.

The week passed, and we did not hear from them. On May 8, 1963, four days beyond the week’s limit, we received a laconic telegram from Soviet Radio and Tele-

vision announcing that “we categorically object against the showing of the film in its present form.” Meanwhile, Vicas in Paris received a telephone call specifically protesting the Czarist hymn and denouncing the statement in the script that the Palace of Congress was “built with the assistance of architects from the Western World.” Since the statement was correct, and the hymn did not fall into the category of “historical accuracy,” we rejected the protest and informed the Russians that we would broadcast the program as it was.

Six weeks later, a detailed memorandum of complaint arrived from two eminent Soviet scholars. Mostly, they were picking nits (“About the guns should be said not ‘abandoned,’ but ‘taken as trophies’”). Among the more general objections was that the program was not really nonpolitical, as we had promised, because it concentrated on the Czars themselves “without any mention of the social classes and forces whose policy they represented and carried out.” Julian Goodman wrote a reply stressing that “at no time in its negotiations with Soviet authorities did NBC profess to represent Marxist positions. ...References to NBC in current Soviet writings provide ample evidence of our network’s non-Marxist character.”

We went ahead. I doubt strongly that any independent packager would have done so—or would, indeed, have got its films out prior to complete clearance by Soviet authorities. There is an interesting comparison to be made between “The Kremlin,” representing the independent judgment of NBC News, and the various recent documen-

taries from China. These were put together by impeccably non-Communist Western packagers—but their bargaining position was much weaker than ours.

While we were having our troubles with the Soviet Union over “The Kremlin,” two of our White Papers—“The Death of Stalin” and “The Rise of Khrushchev”—turned out to be unexpectedly expensive for NBC News. We were thrown out of Russia, our correspondent was expelled, and our bureau closed. For a year and a half we were handicapped a great deal in our news coverage. CBS and ABC got things out of Moscow we couldn’t get. CBS, by the way, found their victories almost as distasteful as we found our defeats. Richard Salant, then president of CBS News, called McAndrew and generously offered the use of their bureau and their people in Moscow. McAndrew turned him down because we were afraid that if the Russians got wind of it they would throw CBS out, too. Khrushchev was personally angry at NBC. One of our Russian diplomatic contacts once told us he was afraid even to reopen the discussion of whether the question should be reopened.

We were allowed to start up again in Moscow, at the beginning of this year, only through the direct intervention of Secretary of State Dean Rusk. From the beginning, Rusk took this expulsion as seriously as he would take the closing of a U. S. consulate. He negotiated the matter personally with Foreign Minister Gromyko.

#### **IMPORTANT TO THE PRESIDENT**

Rusk’s conversations with Gromyko show one strand of

the tangled interrelationships that have grown up between government and broadcasting during the great expansion of television. It is important to the State Department that millions of Americans who rely on NBC for news coverage shall not be deprived of information from Moscow. It is important to the President that the White House be plugged directly into the nation's television transmitters. President Johnson has turned over space in the White House to be equipped as a studio by the networks. The networks are spending a million dollars on this job, and hereafter will spend half a million a year on engineers to keep the room "live" and ready for use at any moment. Washington newsmen call it "The Little Theater off Lafayette Square."

Every public figure wants to use television as much as he can, and where public figures are in conflict television is in the middle. Nobody has written precise ground rules: definition is lacking in many important aspects of television's relations with the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government at all levels. And unlike newspapers, broadcasting stations and networks live within the great penumbra of government authority.

## PART II

---

**W**E DREW lots, and CBS won the first. So we all gathered on September 26, 1960, in the studios of Columbia's Chicago station, WBBM-TV. The CBS people and the candidate's representatives were skittish. CBS president Frank Stanton had supervised the design of the set himself, and sent the chairs from his own office to be part of it. Taking a last look at the finished product at noon that day, he decided the background was busy, and joined the stagehands in cutting and gluing a scrim to cover it. Later, during the program, Stanton left the viewing room that had been set aside for the top broadcasting officials and went to visit the control room. He wanted to know what was on all the cameras, not just what the director had chosen to put on the air.

Kennedy and Nixon arrived separately, Nixon early and nervous, before 7:30 for an 8:30 program; Kennedy a little later and very cool. Each of them stood before the cameras for a few minutes while his technical advisers and studio personnel fiddled with the lighting. Representatives of both men talked out one last time, in great

detail, what they expected producer-director Don Hewitt to do with the cameras. In other studios, 380 newspapermen settled down on folding chairs, waiting to get the news at exactly the same instant that seventy million Americans would see it happening in their living rooms.

Kennedy began that evening on the wrong end of the odds, widely regarded as too young and inexperienced to make a safe President. When the television cameras flicked off, he looked like a winner. At least, so he thought, both at the time and later, and I agreed. After an election which was decided by a fraction of a per cent of the vote, Elmo Roper asked a sample of voters why they voted as they did. Six per cent said the televised debates had determined their vote, and more than three-quarters of those had voted for Kennedy. The absentee ballots from overseas, from people who had not seen the debates, were strongly for Nixon.

Had Kennedy lived, there would unquestionably have been debates in 1964, even though his brother Robert was said to be wary of the idea. Kennedy had publicly committed himself to debate any challenger the Republicans might choose. He was proud of his ability to handle himself in a debate, to handle television for his own purposes.

Indeed, it can be argued that television was the most important single tactical factor in Kennedy's drive to the Presidency. He got his first significant national attention in the 1956 convention, when Adlai Stevenson left the nomination for Vice President to an open vote of the

delegates. Stevenson wanted to contrast a “free” Democratic convention with a “controlled” Republican convention so that a huge television audience could see the difference. As the almost-candidate for Vice President, Kennedy became a national figure.

Another key moment, it seems to me, was the news conference he held at a time of maximum strain, shortly before the 1960 convention, to reply to President Truman’s bitter opposition to his candidacy. The news conference was carried nationally by NBC and CBS—not because we “had to do so to balance Truman’s television time, as Robert Kennedy told me in a sharp telephone call from Los Angeles—but because we thought we should. It was news. Lyndon Baines Johnson, incidentally, was given air time to match the Truman and Kennedy appearances and used the occasion for the formal announcement of his candidacy.

After the convention, the Kennedy forces used television extensively and adroitly. They had the money to buy a lot of time and they did—in minutes, five-minute spots, half-hour and hour broadcasts. One of the most significant of Kennedy’s televised appearances was before the Protestant ministers in Houston. Portions of the tapes of that confrontation were used as paid advertisements over and over again in the closing weeks of the campaign. But nothing the candidate did on his own behalf equaled the impact of the televised debates.

Many people were unhappy about the form of the debates, which relied heavily on panels of newsmen ask-

ing questions. The second debate, with nothing but such questions-and-answers, and which we produced at our NBC studios in Washington, was referred to even by the candidates' representatives as a "Meet-the-Press-type program."

I agree that the panel presentation was an imperfect way to organize a debate between candidates. Some unfortunate things were said and some glib, too-brief answers given to difficult questions. But it is easier to denounce this format than to think up a better one. As to the value of the debates as a whole, I think the last word was said by political scientist Stanley Kelley in an article in the *Duke Law Review*:

"Critics," Kelley wrote, "seem not to have compared what Nixon and Kennedy said in the debates and what they said (or was said in their behalf) in speeches, spot announcements, five-minute trailers, leaflets, pamphlets, and billboards. In their joint appearances, Kennedy and Nixon frequently acknowledged agreement, rarely attributed false positions to each other, exposed quite clearly their differences on a number of significant issues, challenged each other, and responded to each other's challenges. This kind of behavior is not typical of campaigners, and it was not typical of Nixon and Kennedy when they made their appeals for support in other ways."

When televised political debates are resumed, as I am sure they will be, I hope the candidates will aim for something more along classical lines—or like Senate de-

bates, in which the speaker may yield to questions from his antagonist. But we at the networks are not likely to make the final decisions. We can suggest how the encounters can be made sharper and more informative, but (as they did in 1960) the candidates' representatives will probably negotiate the big questions themselves, with television people serving occasionally as mediators. Not the least of Nixon's disadvantages in 1960 was the fact that he was represented in these negotiations by a Maine lawyer, who was lost in journalism and television.

#### THE ORIGINAL OLD MASTER

Adapting the arts of broadcasting to his own capabilities is today the highest skill of a politician. Roosevelt, of course, was the first master of it, and he was good from the beginning. As a candidate for the Democratic nomination in 1932, he used radio to speak for "the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid." Accepting the nomination, in a broadcast address, he launched the term "New Deal." But his special talent lay in using broadcasting to take a President's message directly to the people. His timing was miraculous, his voice commanding, and he never lost his audience.

Only eight days after his inauguration, Roosevelt went on the air with his first "fireside chat," and established a new technique in American political life. "I want to talk for a few minutes," he began, "with the people of the United States, about banking—with the comparatively few who understand the mechanisms of banking but more particularly with the overwhelming majority who

use the banks for the making of deposits and the drawing of checks. I want to tell you what has been done in the last few days, why it was done, and what the next steps are going to be.” Nobody could improve on that. Most listeners of that time now think they remember many “fireside chats.” In fact, he used this weapon sparingly.

With Kennedy, broadcasting came into its own as a means of frequent, systematic communication from the President to the people. Despite the fears of his staff, Kennedy allowed (and enjoyed) live broadcasting of his press conferences. In 1961 he permitted an extraordinary year-end interview by three broadcast reporters to be taped at the White House. Once he used broadcasting to rally the nation in time of crisis, when he announced the blockade of Cuba. Once he combined the power of his office with the power of broadcasting to denounce the steel industry, and United States Steel in particular, for increasing the price of steel. I called Roger Blough, U.S. Steel chairman, to offer him time to reply. He accepted, but he was no match for the President.

Kennedy was immensely conscious of the significance of television. Whenever he appeared on the screen, he wanted to know what his ratings were. He worried about timing his appearances, and those of his family. After Mrs. Kennedy’s televised tour of the White House, he called me at my office, and we had a long discussion about whether Mrs. Kennedy was in danger of “over-exposure” on television. He decided that she was.

If possible, President Johnson is even more concerned

about ratings. I have no doubt that Johnson flew to the convention to announce his selection of Hubert Humphrey as his running mate because of his feeling that this dramatic gesture would lift a lagging audience.

During the early months of his Presidency, Johnson limited his television appearances, apparently wishing to avoid direct comparison with his predecessor. But he knows more about broadcasting than any previous President. His family owned radio and television stations for some years. And with the passage of time, he has increasingly found his own ways to use television. His decision to deliver his State of the Union message at night, to catch the prime-time audience, reflects a professional's appreciation of the medium.

Television multiplies the advantages of an incumbent President. During his term of office he becomes not only a household name, but an immensely familiar face and figure. Thus television increases the distance a challenger must make up during the few months of the campaign. Many of the same benefits accrue to incumbents in lesser offices, if their actions make news, and if their views are significant enough to earn them guest appearances on network discussion and interview programs.

“On politicians,” said David Brinkley, “the impact of television is profound. This aspect of it is somewhat regrettable—they think of television more as a medium of exposure for themselves than as a way of covering the news.”

But politicians rarely try to deflect a story. If they're

in a hole, almost anything they do will dig them in deeper. Brinkley can recall from twenty years in Washington only two occasions when he heard negative reactions from an elected official (he often gets thank-you notes): One involved Senator Strom Thurmond and a race question; the other was a protest from Representative H. R. Gross of Iowa, himself a former radio commentator. When the House was asked to approve some extraordinary expenses in connection with the Kennedy funeral, Gross questioned the need for spending tax dollars on an Eternal Flame. It was the sort of news gem that sparkles for Brinkley, and he mentioned it that evening. Iowa newspaper editorials promptly assailed Gross, and constituents wrote angry letters asking what sort of man he could be to worry about a nickel's worth of gas at a time of national mourning. Gross was sufficiently upset to complain to Brinkley, who quite properly told the audience of his complaint—thereby, in effect, repeating the story.

#### AIR TIME BY THE MINUTE

Broadcasters most often come under pressure from politicians in connection with the “equal time” provision of Section 315 of the Communications Act. This section of the law demands that if we sell time to one of the candidates, we must stand prepared to sell the same amount of time—in a comparable time period, at the same price—to all his rivals. And if we give time to one we must comply with requests for the same treatment from every other legally qualified candidate for the office.

At one point, the FCC interpreted this section so strictly that it required Chicago stations to give broadcast time to an obscure, self-appointed campaigner named Lar “America First” Daly, who said he was running for Mayor. The incumbent, Richard Dailey, had been shown on a news program greeting the President of Argentina on his state visit to the city. The FCC ruled that Lar Daly was entitled to equal time, to “reply.” In 1959, Congress rewrote the section to eliminate such absurdity, freeing regularly scheduled news and interview programs from the Section 315 straitjacket. But the rest remained the same.

Only once have broadcasters been freed from “equal time” requirements—for Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates in the 1960 election. In that campaign, counting the debates (but *not* counting the news and interview programs), NBC alone put the major candidates on the air for ten and a half hours, at no expense to themselves; and they could have had more time if they had wanted it. Had Section 315 been in effect, we could not have done this because it would have laid us open to claims by the nine minority party candidates for some ninety hours of time.

The day after the 1960 election, the equal-time provision came back to life. In the expectation that it would be lifted again, we planned a 1964 series, “The Campaign and the Candidates,” similar to one we had done in 1960, which probed the backgrounds of the candidates and presented them discussing the issues. When Congress

failed to act on Section 315, we had to do the series without the candidates. As a result, the voting public was less thoroughly informed than it could have been, and the campaign cost the political parties more. Though the '64 election was much less closely contested than '60, the parties spent half again as much to buy television time—almost \$1.5 million on NBC alone.

With 315 at full strength, candidates have to pay for just about everything they get outside of regular news coverage. Nearly all the political advertising is done in October and the first week in November, and from August until a few days before election the advertising agencies that represent the parties jockey, feint, and maneuver. They can buy whatever minutes no regular advertiser has bought (though we try to shift political ads to the end of programs to avoid mixing entertainment and politics). And our policy permits candidates to “preempt” regular programs. Here, however, their costs rise dramatically, because they must pay not only the network-time charges but also the production costs of the preempted programs. For programs already filmed, such as the Jack Benny program, these costs may run as high as \$80,000; for a live program, such as “That Was The Week That Was,” which can be halted before some of the biggest production bills are incurred, the price is much lower.

During October 1964, aficionados of “TW3” saw little of their favorite show, which was displaced on three Tuesdays out of four. (It would have disappeared on the

fourth, except that the Democrats had bought a minute in the fourth week, and would not give up their minute to let the Republicans take the entire half-hour again.) Incidentally, it was during this month that “Peyton Place,” running opposite “TW3” on ABC, acquired its huge audience.

### RIPPING UP THE SCHEDULE

Throughout the six weeks before a Presidential election, a network keeps ripping up its schedule. In theory a political party is bound to respect an order for broadcast time, just as an advertiser is—but in fact we have almost no recourse against a sudden cancellation. A full, paid political program is usually live or supplied at the last minute. If the party cancels, we have no effective contract to enforce and nothing to put on the air.

We are in the middle, too, on the question of what the parties broadcast. Section 315 forbids us to censor the candidate himself in any way (and for this reason the Supreme Court has held that we cannot be sued for what he says, even if it’s clearly libelous). In the interest of free political discussion, we do not censor political ads, either, though we do look at them for libel. Our position is that voters will punish bad taste or extravagant claims in a political ad, and that the parties have the right to hang themselves.

Though many of our affiliates were concerned about it, we carried unchanged the Democratic commercial about the little girl with the daisies and the atom bomb. We also were prepared to carry the celebrated “Mothers

for Moral America” half-hour in support of Barry Goldwater, though here we did demand a few brief deletions of visual material, including the topless bathing suit, a strip-tease scene, and a magazine cover with the title “Jazz Me, Baby!” I was sufficiently concerned about this appallingly tasteless production to make certain that then Republican national chairman, Dean Burch, was personally aware that we would not accept these scenes. I hoped this would prompt him and Senator Goldwater to take a look at the film, which I was pretty sure they hadn’t seen. They did look and ordered it withdrawn.

Much expense and nonsense result from Section 315 and its restrictions on straightforward network coverage of what is, every four years, the nation’s biggest news story. Proposals to amend 315 are thick as flies. The most recent include a suggestion from Newton N. Minow, former Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, that the “equal time” requirements be wiped out completely and that the networks, in return, be required to give the Democratic and Republican National Committees four hours of free time each in the month before election and lesser proportions to minor parties. Another, more complicated suggestion from E. William Henry, the current FCC Chairman, would retain the essence of Section 315 by requiring that for each half-hour purchased by one candidate an additional half-hour be given free to split among him and his real rivals. Most broadcasters simply want the equal-time provision repealed.

At bottom, the dispute between the networks and the politicians is that the networks want to do a journalistic job on elections, while the politicians want to use a mass medium as though they were coming into town and making a speech. They don't want the news department to control the show. Yet nobody would dream of forbidding newspapers to cover campaigns as they cover other stories, or of insisting that the papers turn over equal chunks of their front pages to the candidates to use as they please.

Networks are entitled to the same freedom the newspapers have. As NBC Chairman Robert W. Sarnoff wrote in reply to the Minow proposal, we have earned this freedom and should not have to trade for it: "The experience of 1960, when broadcasters were for the first time permitted freedom in coverage of a Presidential campaign, stands as convincing evidence of what broadcasters can and will do in this area of their responsibility when they are left alone to do it."

The politicians' insistence on "equal time" in elections is a tribute to television's political power. Its impact upon our operations is severe when Section 315 applies but, except in the months just preceding an election, we don't have to worry about it. More constant, and ultimately more dangerous, is the FCC's self-asserted power to determine under the so-called "fairness doctrine" whether or not we are presenting a balanced coverage of controversial issues in the news.

The legal basis for the FCC's authority are more than

a little shaky. The Commission has no direct power over networks, but the five television stations we own are the most profitable part of the company. The licenses for these stations, and for all our independently owned affiliates, come up for renewal every three years, and in theory the Commission could put us out of the station business—which is vital for a network company.

This situation is ready-made for what someone once called “regulation by lifted eyebrow.” When the FCC receives a complaint that a public-affairs show was “unfair,” and asks us to justify ourselves, we hop to it. On several occasions—most notably with relation to the programs about the welfare battle in Newburgh, New York, and the scandals in highway construction—the FCC has plodded through claim and counterclaim. Usually we hear nothing. But in the Newburgh controversy the Commission took the unusual step of announcing that our program had been an impartial, conscientious, and responsible effort. This would be more gratifying if the implications were not so disturbing.

### A RASH OF TUNNELS

Any journalistic enterprise worthy of attention will sometimes fall afoul of governmental wishes. NBC's worst encounter with the government came over “The Tunnel,” a complete film report on the digging of a passage, under the Wall, from West Berlin to East Berlin, and the escape of fifty-nine East Germans from the communist prison. This program had its beginnings in May 1962 in a visit by three West German engineering students to

Piers Anderton, then our West Berlin correspondent, and Gary Stindt, our manager of news film. The students said they were building a tunnel, and wanted to sell NBC the right to film their work and the escape when the project was completed. They asked \$20,000. Anderton and Stindt investigated, and assured themselves of the good faith and capabilities of their contacts and of the fact that the tunnel would be built whether or not NBC purchased the rights to film it. A deal was then made for \$12,500, and an NBC cameraman joined the crew in the tunnel.

There was a rash of tunnels in West Berlin that summer. CBS made a similar deal, with less reliable people than the ones who had come to us. Their tunnel was compromised in August, and among those who found out about it was Anderton, who happened to be on the scene when the West Berlin police came visiting. As a result, our News Division in New York received a visit from a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, warning us that the tunnel we were filming (he thought) had been discovered by the East Germans, and further work on it would be dangerous. The CBS tunnel was blocked off by West Berlin police. The tunnel we were filming proceeded in satisfactory secrecy, was completed on September 14, and became the avenue of escape for the largest single group of refugees since the Wall had gone up.

We thereupon announced that we would show our film on television, and hell broke loose. The State Department let us know that it firmly disapproved of our ac-

tions. The pressure was unremitting for a month. Words like “gravest consequences” were uttered. Nevertheless, after looking at the edited film and talking with our people in West Berlin, we were entirely certain that our showing the film would not endanger those who built the tunnel, those who escaped through it, or the families they left in East Berlin. We were sure it would not compromise American relations with West Germany. We told the State Department of our conclusions, and on October 19, press officer Lincoln White told reporters:

When apprised of the Department’s view that involvement of American television personnel in clandestine tunnel operations was both dangerous and irresponsible, the Columbia Broadcasting System promptly and laudably withdrew from a tunnel project. This was greatly appreciated.

NBC was made equally aware of the Department’s view that such involvement was risky, irresponsible, undesirable, and not in the best interests of the United States. NBC chose to continue with its tunnel project....

While White was speaking, and resting his case largely upon reported German opposition to the program, Lester Bernstein, who was then an NBC vice president, was in Berlin to meet with German officials. They had been led to believe—I imagine on the basis of information from Washington—that the program would endanger people still in East Germany whose relatives were shown escaping. When Bernstein demonstrated that all identities had been carefully concealed, the Germans

withdrew their opposition.

In a statement issued the day after White's remarks, the Berlin Senate announced an opinion that showing the film would be "in the interest of Berlin." Unfortunately, the higher levels of the State Department had been unbelievably timid and remarkably ignorant of what was really happening in Berlin.

We had scheduled the program for October 31, which turned out to be the week of the Cuban crisis. Because of the tense international situation, and because of the general misunderstanding that had been fostered, we postponed it. When the tension eased, we showed it.

I consider "The Tunnel" to be one of the great achievements of broadcasting journalism, and it had one of the highest ratings ever recorded by a public-affairs program. Eventually, at least one branch of the United States government agreed: the U. S. Information Agency edited our hour-long program down to half an hour, and distributed prints overseas.

I believe it's also significant to broadcast journalism that the Gulf Oil Corporation, a big name in an industry with government involvements of its own, never wavered in its commitment to sponsor the program.

#### **THE COMMISSION "INQUIRES"**

I must say that the FCC's record over the years is such that at no time during our struggle did I fear the State Department would influence the Commission. Yet, surely, that might have happened. If the State Department officially felt that NBC was acting against "the best

interests of the United States,” it could easily occur to the FCC that our stations in carrying the program were failing to act “in the public interest,” as their licenses required.

Under this blanket provision, the FCC has in fact moved to influence programming. In the Eisenhower days, Chairman John Doerfer called Frank Stanton, ABC president Leonard Goldenson, and me to Washington for a private meeting. In effect, he instructed us to arrange among ourselves for each network to devote a different hour of prime evening time each week to a public-affairs program. Our automatic reaction to this strongly lifted eyebrow as a statement of our belief that the antitrust laws would not permit our collusion in this manner. Chairman Doerfer then took from his desk a letter from the Justice Department, explicitly granting permission for us to work together toward this end. NBC already had a one-hour public-affairs program in the evening schedule. We probably would have had one in the next season, too, but Doerfer’s meeting made it a certainty.

Chairman Minow, with his “vast wasteland” speech and his pressure for better children’s programs, was also effective in influencing program plans. There are more subtle elements of influence, too. For example, the Commission has repeatedly and pointedly inquired in connection with renewal applications for station licenses as to the amount of local, live, non-news, non-weather programming presented between six and eleven at night.

Broadcasters get the hint.

The intrusion of governmental taste seems to me completely undesirable. No Chairman of a Commission has felt more strongly than I do about the need for large-scale network presentation of public-affairs programs. I agree, too, that programming for children leaves much to be desired, though it is very difficult to find something better that children will watch. But these matters are scarcely within the true competence of an appointed government bureau. And the pressure for live local programming, however nobly meant, contradicts the fundamental nature of modern broadcasting. "I wonder," Judge Henry Friendly of the U.S. Court of Appeals wrote recently, "whether the Commission is really wise enough to determine that live telecasts—of local cooking lessons, for example—so much stressed in the decisions, are always 'better' than a tape of Shakespeare's Histories." They may not even be "better" than routine filmed comedy.

To date, in invoking its "fairness doctrine," the FCC has been consistently on the side of the angels, doing so only in cases where reasonable men would have to agree that the stations involved had behaved badly. Even without action from the Commission, KTTV in Los Angeles should have granted time for reply to a commentator who said in 1962 that Governor Brown "is one of the greatest ignoramuses on communism that ever lived or he is soft on it"; and WALG in Albany, Georgia, should have allowed a Negro spokesman to answer its recent

editorial statement that “Awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., makes about as much sense as selecting John F. Dillinger to guard the United States Treasury or bringing Nero back to life to assist Smokey Bear.” But the remedy of FCC intervention *could* be worse than the disease—at any rate, that is the theory of the First Amendment of the Constitution.

Under a different political climate, FCC “fairness” rulings and renewal hearings might work hardship and encroach on civil liberties. We have seen the Commission, in license hearings, encourage specific types of religious programming in ways that one of the Commissioners, Lee Loevinger, regards as clearly unconstitutional. The Commission is an independent regulatory body, but it necessarily adapts itself to the political tone in Washington. During the Roosevelt days, an applicant for a license who owned a newspaper got a demerit for being a publisher; during the Eisenhower days, it didn’t much matter.

The television set in the average American home stays on six hours a day, and what happens on that screen can influence the nation’s attitudes and beliefs. In America, by and large, private ownership feeds back what is already there, which is surely the most democratic procedure. In France, I believe, a political tranquilizing has been accomplished by the government’s adroit manipulation of its broadcasting monopoly. The danger of governmental powers should not be measured by their

routine exercise; the question is, what can the government do in a crisis? Broadcasters argue that under present laws, it can do too much.

All interactions of modern government and modern communications raise extremely complicated questions, to which honest men will give different answers. I do not doubt that some broadcasters would to some degree abuse their freedom. But in any industry as dependent as broadcasting is on public support, the majority must respond quickly (and if anything too strongly) to public sentiment, while a strong-willed minority can still go its own way. We follow this procedure in other areas of American life—why not in broadcasting, too?

---

## PART III

---

**F**OR THIS," said Frank McGee, soberly addressing the camera, "we shall take the next three hours." The "this" was the story of the Negro American's fight for equality, and we called it, "The American Revolution of '63." It ran through the entire nighttime schedule of the NBC network on Labor Day of that year, taking twice as much time as any planned public-affairs program had ever occupied before. For three hours – with that combination of history, reportage, and discussion which is television's contribution to the roster of living art forms—a team of nearly two hundred television journalists and technicians spread out for the nation the biggest continuing story of our times.

This program was mine as an idea and it had the enthusiastic agreement of Bob Sarnoff, NBC chairman. Only the top management of a broadcasting company could even think of taking a whole night out of a commercial schedule. (When I called the key people of the television network to my office and told them what we were going to do, they turned white as a Klansman's sheet. They have

profit goals to meet; they knew how this program would swing their figures—and they couldn't be entirely sure I'd remember it on the day the figures appeared.) I made the decision—or, to be more accurate, the thought struck me—over a weekend in the country in late July. During the next ten days, I dictated three rather detailed memos on what I thought should be in the program. Looking them over now, I notice that the last, sent off just before I left for Rome, ends with the lines, “If I get any other ideas, I'll cable you collect.” It is amusing to me, and in an odd way a source of pride, that in putting together their superb program the producers used almost none of my specific suggestions.

Eleven million American homes watched some part of this program, most of them for an hour and a half or more. The program came at the end of a summer of broadcast reports on riots in Birmingham, cattle prods in Louisiana, demonstrators chained to construction cranes in Brooklyn, some two hundred thousand sober citizens marching on Washington, a Governor's confrontation with the head of his own state national guard in a futile effort to keep a university lily-white, a President's desperate concern. Watching “The American Revolution of '63,” many people sensed for the first time the depth and continuity of what had previously seemed a spasmodic and puzzling protest. The program was an event in itself, and I think it may have helped in establishing the national consensus which expressed itself in the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

We at NBC, of course, were not promoting any legisla-

tion, or arguing one side or the other of a case. Our cameras recorded statements by Georgia's Senator Richard Russell and Mississippi's Senator James Eastland as well as by the Reverend Martin Luther King and the aggressive Negro lawyer Paul Zuber.

We didn't spare NBC itself. We showed Negro pickets marching outside our own studio entrance to demand jobs in television, and we carried a comment by Herbert Hill of the NAACP that television people were "frightened little men" on the race issue. (When our producers saw this interview, Robert Northshield, a big man with big shoulders, accepted Hill's opinion: "That's right," he said, and pointed at the short Chet Hagan; "he's little and I'm frightened.")

In this program, too, for the first time, a Negro—Robert Teague—went on camera as a network correspondent covering a story. One of his assignments was to give the background of a demonstration at a construction site in Elizabeth, New Jersey, Teague, who had never marched in a picket line before, did so now as a reporter, and told what it felt like to be a Negro in a race protest. To his surprise and that of the producers, he found it one of the great experiences of his life. His first text was so emotional that Northshield and Hagan, with immense embarrassment, had to ask him to rewrite it; then he got it right.

#### A WINDOW FOR NONREADERS

Many Southerners believe rather resentfully that television has *created* the civil-rights movement. David

Brinkley, from another point of view, believes broadcast coverage was crucial. “These same things had been happening for years,” Brinkley says, “certainly since the Supreme Court decisions of ’54. But until the last few years there wasn’t any national television news of any importance. I think television has made a great difference to the Negroes themselves. They look at news a great deal because they are in it.”

Waiting outside the American home, in the days before television, was a human fact that seldom had entered there: the Negro citizen, who was not welcomed as a guest, a colleague, an acquaintance. Television put Negro Americans into the living rooms of tens of millions of white Americans, for the first time.

On the one hand, people saw the very American attitudes and the dignity of the Negroes who came before the television cameras to speak for their people. On the other hand, they saw the agony of a little colored girl walking to school through a line of very ordinary-looking American housewives, who spat at her. They saw, too, the occasional violence of the Negro reaction when expectation was disappointed. None of this was staged; it was real—but it was a reality which Americans had never before been forced to live with.

On the day when those of us who have given our lives to the medium are called to account for our time, the heaviest weight on our side of the balance will be this expansion of reality for tens of millions of people. Today many people of relatively little formal education, who

read slowly and without pleasure, have met with and probably understood more of the world around them than any but a handful of sophisticated and curious minds understood fifty years ago. They have watched the British bury the greatest of their modern heroes; seen a Russian Premier bang his shoe on the table at the UN; looked on while South American students threw tomatoes at a Vice President of the United States; visited classic and modern Greece; observed the savagery of guerrilla warfare in Vietnam, Yemen, the Congo, Algeria. New Englanders have seen for themselves how Mexican braceros live in California's Imperial Valley; people on the banks of Puget Sound have been plunged into the caldron of a Harlem riot.

Almost nobody (except network news officials) has seen all of this; some people have seen little of it. Even so, Huntley-Brinkley and Cronkite between them, over the course of a month, reach more than half of all American households; and the average television documentary (or "actuality," as we call it at NBC) is seen by 11½ million people.

#### WHO WATCHES THE NEWS?

Lots of Americans don't like news programs at all. When a special news show preempts the time of a popular evening program, our huge telephone switchboard in the RCA building lights up all over with people calling in to complain, and the stations themselves get literally thousands of protests. We even had complaints election night, from people who were furious that their regular Tuesday-even-

ning favorites had been pushed off the air by the returns.

Contrary to general belief, however, the viewers who watch news and public-affairs shows are not heavily concentrated in an upper crust of education and income. Gary Steiner's study, *The People Look at Television*, produced statistics indicating that people who never finished high school watch *more* news and public-affairs programs (as well as more entertainment shows) than high-school and college graduates do. Normally, a news special will attract one-half to three-quarters of the audience that watched the entertainment show in this time slot the week before. But the fact that a given program may be on in "only" five million homes does not mean that its effects are small.

For a television audience is not a placid lake but a rushing river, constantly joined by tributaries and spilling off into backwaters. If an "average audience" for a news program is five million homes, the total audience for some part of the program is quite likely to be near seven. This is why we constantly flash cards on the screen to identify a speaker (we had seven people doing nothing but lettering cards during last year's political conventions), and why almost every news special strikes the highly attentive viewer as a little repetitious. Few phrases in broadcasting have greater antiquity or more logical use than "for the benefit of those who tuned in late."

Admittedly, there are occasions when people who know a subject well will regard television's treatment of it as old-hat or superficial. (There are also occasions

when they will regard a newspaper's coverage as fearfully inaccurate.) Sometimes these objections are valid. It is important to us that the correspondent on the screen write his own script, and the general-news reporter may not know enough to prepare a penetrating script on a specialized subject, even after the experts have tried to help him. We are trying to increase the number of our specialized correspondents, with regular beats which they know well.

Even then, we are not likely to please the members of the audience most thoroughly informed on the subject. A program about the flight from the family farm probably won't contain any information that is "news" to professors of agriculture, or even to those who read farm magazines—though a lot of it might be fresh to equally intelligent viewers who might know all about urban renewal. The justification of the public-affairs special is the important story, interestingly and accurately told—not novelty or profundity of analysis.

All our audiences come together for the live telecast of an event—the countdown for the rocket, the political conventions, the Senate hearing, the Inauguration, the World Series. Such coverage can draw an enormous community, more than half the adult population of the country, all watching television at once. It is, of course, what the medium was made for.

#### **WHERE TV FAILS**

But in some areas of American life, television has been relatively ineffective. We have been unable, for example,

to find a way to present significant criticism of the arts—though we come close with Aline Saarinen’s fascinating commentaries on the visual arts on “Today” and “Sunday.” At a time of rising crime rates (and increasing public concern about them), we have never worked out satisfactory coverage of the crime story, locally or nationally. We haven’t even tried to cover the news of television itself, or to prepare special programs explaining what goes on in the world of newspapers and magazines. And we’ve failed to adapt our medium to stories of business, the economy, the financial market.

“We get along well today with the politicians and the academicians,” Chet Huntley says, “but many of the big industrialists still hold us suspect. They haven’t learned how to be comfortable with the medium. It leads to unfortunate misunderstandings and breakdowns in communications.”

In one area television has failed through no fault of its own: government. Television cameras are barred from the sessions of both Houses of Congress, most state legislatures, the federal and nearly all the state courts.

Consequently, under the present rules television effectively covers only one of our three branches of government, the President and the Executive Department. Because people never see Congress at work, except for occasional televising of hearings, they may well conclude that the Presidency is the “modern” branch of government, Congress the old-fashioned, rule-encumbered, obstructionist one. Because people do not observe the

Supreme Court Justices hearing arguments and handing down opinions, they are at the mercy of harried editors whose headlines may distort complicated and carefully thought-out decisions on the meaning of the Constitution –in questions like the separation of Church and State and the meaning of the guarantees of liberty contained in the Bill of Rights. People discussing what the Supreme Court has or has not done would inevitably be far better informed if at least some in the group had heard the delivery of the opinion itself. Admittedly, it is the written opinion and not its oral pronouncement that has the force of law, but the Justices of the Court are not careless in their choice of what they wish to emphasize when they summarize their reasoning for the benefit of the handful of observers in the courtroom itself.

Television’s exclusion from trial courts may have even more damaging, if more subtle effects. John Daly, who was in charge of News at ABC when I was president there, put the case recently in an article in the *American Bar Association Journal*: “The American citizen, as jurymen, witness or principal, is nervous and confused in court. He is nervous because he is in strange, unfamiliar surroundings....I submit that an educated public is the surest guarantee against violence to the administration of justice, particularly in the area of conflict between a free press and a fair trial.”

#### A NEW DIMENSION IS POSSIBLE

The broadcaster’s position is simple: if a proceeding is supposed to be public, and newspaper reporters are ad-

mitted, television cameras should be admitted, too. There are no technical obstacles these days. At a conference of the New York State Trial Judges last fall, CBS President Frank Stanton demonstrated a wireless television camera smaller than a lunch pail, which can be operated easily by one man and which gives perfectly good pictures in normal lighting.

Nor would we be venturing, really, into the realm of the untried. United Nations General Assembly and Security Council sessions are regularly televised, to the enlightenment rather than the confusion of the public. Television coverage has been introduced to the State Courts of Texas, Oklahoma, and Colorado—without, in my opinion, distracting the participants or altering their behavior.

A common objection to televising legislative proceedings and trials is that the participants would misbehave. To the extent that the objection is valid, it ignores the fact that both legislators and lawyers misbehave now; the worst that could happen would be a slight change in the degree of misbehavior. Anyone who has worked around the Capitol knows the difference between a Congressional hearing at which reporters are in attendance and a hearing where the Congressmen and the witnesses are alone in the room. Politicians have timed their best bits for 10:30 A.M. and the afternoon papers ever since the days of E. W. Scripps. And the histrionic lawyer surely would not work his wiles any more flamboyantly on the television camera than he does on the jury.

The Warren Commission's wholly justified condemnation of the monkey house in Dallas when Lee Harvey Oswald was killed dealt with a situation where newspaper reporters outnumbered television men by at least six to one; the results might not have been different if television had never been invented. Some situations are inevitably abused; but, as the lawyers' aphorism has it, hard cases make bad law. There have been instances in which newspapermen and television correspondents have prejudiced a defendant's chance for a fair trial. In one horrendous example, a reporter for a New York City television station ran up to two boys who had just been booked for the robbery-murder of an old lady and, with hundreds of thousands of people watching, demanded to know why they'd done it.

Normally, however, the people responsible for damaging pretrial publicity are the prosecuting attorneys and the police. It is neither practical nor wholly honest to hold the newspapers or television stations responsible for the transgressions of the DA and the cop. If anything, widespread camera coverage of such behavior would diminish its incidence by turning the public stomach.

I am convinced that within a few years television cameras will have access to the legislatures and the courts, adding a new dimension to what the medium can do, a new element to the citizen's understanding of his society. Indeed, I believe that as our techniques improve we shall cover increasingly wide areas of the world's reality. The "stationary satellites" will make possible instantaneous

transmission from anywhere in the world. (This would nullify, among other rules, Frankel's Law of Overseas Coverage, named after Eliot Frankel, European producer for Huntley-Brinkley: "If the weather is worth covering, you can't fly out the film.") The proportion of TV time devoted to reality will then increase; the entertainment shows will expand with foreign talent. And the public will learn, as we already have rather painfully learned, that the amount of talent available for creating quality entertainment is always limited—but the real world is inexhaustible.

---

### HARPER'S NOTES ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Since July 1958, when Robert E. Kintner became president of NBC, leadership in news broadcasting has been a major goal of the network. Mr. Kintner was Washington correspondent of the New York "Herald Tribune" and author, with Joseph Alsop, of "Men Around the President" and "Washington White Paper." After war service, he joined ABC and was its president 1949-56.*





