

CHANNELS

OF COMMUNICATIONS

1985 JANUARY - FEBRUARY \$2.50

THE CRITICAL REVIEW
OF THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Who Are All Those People Out There?

**THE WORLD
ACCORDING TO NIELSEN**
BY JAMES TRAUB

**Network News
Found Not Guilty
Of Liberal Bias**

**10 Commandments of
The Electronic Church**

**The Man Who Built
Cable Empires**

**What Foreign TV News
Borrowed from the U.S.**

**Next Up: The
Super VCR**



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ISSUES & REPORTS

CROSSCURRENTS

Ideas and Observations _____ PAGE 4

LAW REVIEW

"How Much Media Clout for One Company?"
BY PHYLLIS JOFFE _____ PAGE 14

NEW TECH

"VCRs: You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet"
BY DAVID LACHENBRUCH _____ PAGE 16

QUO VIDEO

Short Takes on New Tech _____ PAGE 18

PUBLIC EYE

"We Have Seen the Shows and They Are Us"
BY LES BROWN _____ PAGE 21

COMMENT & CRITICISM

PROGRAM NOTES

"Goods and Services of the Rich and Famous"
BY MICHAEL POLLAN _____ PAGE 56

"Cosby's New Show: A Hit and a Myth"
BY BRIAN WINSTON _____ PAGE 62

ON AIR

"Ten Commandments of the Electronic Church"
BY ROBERT ABELMAN _____ PAGE 64

"Rules That Congress Dearly Loves"
BY STUART SUCHERMAN _____ PAGE 67

TV GUIDANCE

"TV Cuisine"
BY CHEF ALDO _____ PAGE 72

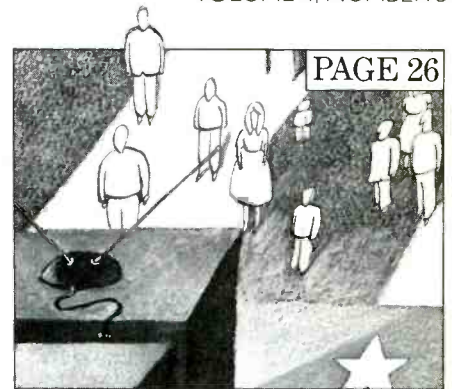
COVER ILLUSTRATION
BY RICHARD A. GOLDBERG

CARTOONS BY NURIT KARLIN

The World According to Nielsen

A comprehensive report on television viewing habits, and how they vary by sex, age, income, and other factors.

BY JAMES TRAUB



PAGE 26

Network News 15 Years After Agnew

A new study doesn't find the heavy liberal slant he saw, but confirms his charge of negativism.

BY MICHAEL J. ROBINSON AND MAURA E. CLANCEY



PAGE 34

Anchors Abroad

Foreign networks are doing news the American way, with "personality" newscasters instead of nameless readers.

BY BARBARA MATUSOW



PAGE 41

The Builder of Cable Empires

Top broker in the cable industry, Bill Daniels helped assemble most of the biggest chains.

BY RANDY WELCH

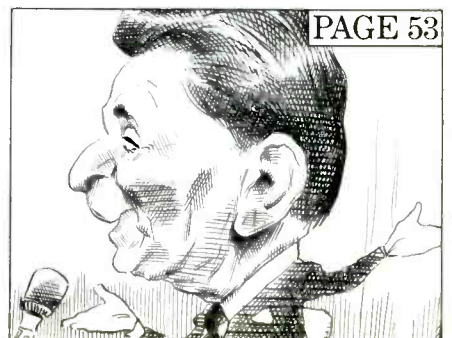


PAGE 45

The President, Biggest Hit of the TV Season

Heeere's Ronnie—a master of the intimate, low-key TV style that Walter Mondale never learned.

BY WILLIAM A. HENRY III



PAGE 53

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Have Transmitter, Will Travel

This Johnny Appleseed spreads video consciousness with ad-hoc TV stations.

EVERY COUPLE OF MONTHS, Charlie Callanan loads his portable television station into a panel truck and drives off to tiny rural fishing and farming communities in Newfoundland, Canada to set up what he calls his "traveling circus." In Admiral's Beach, Trinity, Witless Bay, and other villages, he and six assistants set up their equipment in the fire hall or schoolhouse and are ready—often within an hour after arrival—to broadcast events ranging from a senior citizens' Christmas party to an important local conference on land claims.

With residents behind the cameras as well as in front of them, Callanan's "road show" brings community television to people who have never experienced local broadcasts. Callanan, a professor at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland, works on "stretching" television, simultaneously teaching and learning what the medium is capable of. While normal television has a way of isolating its viewers, Callanan's brand of television tends to unite a community.

It was in 1979 that Callanan, a former Catholic priest, first turned on a mobile ad-hoc TV station in a tiny Newfoundland fishing village called Trinity Bay. Since then this 48-year-old Johnny Appleseed of broadcasting has temporarily set up shop in eight towns in this province of 370 communities. His equipment is modest: two cameras and two video-tape recorders, some prerecorded programs, a microphone, a 10-watt TV transmitter, and an antenna. The first time out, he strapped the antenna to the top of a church's flagpole, but he has since installed a \$200 telescoping antenna on the back of his truck. All he needs, he says, "is a place to plug in a wire for power." His signal usually radiates about 10 miles, although over stretches of water, which are common in Newfoundland, it can reach much further. He has gotten phone calls from residents of tiny islands off the Newfoundland coast who love his broadcasts. Callanan is careful to use channels



Charlie Callanan brings TV to the people using two cameras, two VCRs, a microphone, a 10-watt transmitter, an antenna, and "a place to plug in for power."



that won't interfere with other transmissions.

Callanan never stays in a town more than a few days. A three-day excursion costs \$7,000 to \$12,000 (most of it for travel and overtime costs), although the most recent site was "only a \$2 ferry ride away."

Callanan, whose funding comes from the media extension division of Memorial University, considers himself a community developer. "We provide the wherewithal, operate the station for a day, and then step back and let the townspeople take over." At one place in Labrador, the townspeople changed the date of their annual senior citizens' Christmas party so Callanan could tape it for broadcast.

And last February, in the tiny coastal fishing community of Winterton, Callanan scored what may have been his most dramatic achievement. He broadcast a fund-raiser for the local fire department—literally a bucket brigade—to help replace some equipment. The appeal

raised \$800. It also prompted residents to get behind a local merchant's plan to buy a satellite-receiving dish and wire the town for cable television. "Putting on the community channel, allowing the folks to see quality TV, was a great boost," says George Hiscock, a Winterton teacher.

For the price of a \$50 speaker-telephone he bought at Radio Shack, Callanan found he was able to add an interactive dimension to his ad-hoc broadcasts, with viewers phoning in and speaking on the air. "A local channel is like a mirror talking back. The phone is almost the heart of this," he says. "It brings everybody right in."

Callanan says the real accomplishment of his ad-hoc stations is "the raised consciousness" of some people. "For many it is the first time they've seen clear television pictures, and after that it's only a question of how you're gonna keep them down on the farm, because it heightens their taste for what is possible."

RICHARD BARBIERI

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Rush to Judgment

Hollywood lobbied against its own interests by opposing the 12-12-12 rule.

THERE WAS QUITE a stir in Hollywood last July when the Federal Communications Commission, hell-bent for deregulation, made a move to stretch the old 7-7-7 rule to 12-12-12. The numbers refer to how many AM, FM, and TV stations any single company may own. What alarmed the West Coast producers was the belief that the new policy would allow the television networks to expand their station holdings and gain even greater power in the program marketplace.

Jack Valenti, the film industry's chief lobbyist, immediately flew to Washington to put a stop to 12-12-12—at least as it would affect television—and he succeeded. The FCC did, last August, increase the numbers of AM and FM stations a company can own, but put the change for television on hold, pending further study. In December, the issue was resolved with a decision to limit ownership on the basis of population coverage, making it okay to own up to a dozen TV stations as long as their total coverage doesn't exceed 25 percent of U.S. households. This virtually freezes the networks right where they are, since the five stations that each owns bring them close to the limit.

Valenti and his Hollywood constituents are celebrating this as a victory, but in truth they needn't have bothered to lobby over the issue because the networks would have had trouble adding to their store of stations even if there were no restrictions on market coverage.

There is, of course, no question that the networks want to expand their station holdings and that they have the wealth to buy about as many properties as the FCC will allow. But it's not that simple. The networks can only be interested in buying stations in the top 20 markets—the largest population centers—because anything smaller wouldn't make economic sense for them. The network-owned stations operate under union contracts far costlier in their requirements than those of other broadcasters. A former NBC official points out that the network's Cleveland station struggles constantly for profitability under its union burdens, when under any other owner it would make a small fortune.

Consider that while the networks have been allowed to own seven stations almost from the beginning, all three have chosen to own only five. This is because, under FCC requirements, only five can be VHF stations; the other two would have to broadcast on UHF channels, which are harder to tune in and therefore generally less watched than VHF channels. So if the networks, with all their union baggage, don't find it feasible to own UHF outlets in the largest cities, they are just as likely to forego opportunities to acquire VHF stations in smaller cities like Charlotte, Topeka, and Bakersfield.

Well then, if there were a rule of 12 for television with no restriction on market coverage, why wouldn't the networks simply swoop down on the top 20 markets and buy up the full complement of stations allowed—seven more stations for each? They would if they could, but the fact is that most of the stations in those key markets are owned by large broadcast or newspaper interests eager to acquire more stations themselves. All appear to be in television for the long haul, and are more likely to bid *against* the networks for whatever few stations may be available than sell their own properties to them.

What Valenti deems a victory may actually be a loss. For if the intention was to restrict the networks' growth, the effect will be to limit the ability of independent groups to grow larger and stronger—groups such as Metromedia, Gannett, and Tribune, which are disposed to create ad hoc, or part-time, networks that sporadically give the major networks serious competition.

If these groups were to grow larger and stronger in the lesser population centers, and if from time to time they were to join forces, they might well open whole new avenues to big-time television, to the benefit of Hollywood and other producers.

The FCC, in its original proposal for 12-12-12, meant to unleash these ambitious groups as a force to lessen the networks' power. The Hollywood lobby, in a knee-jerk response to what seemed another break for the networks, may well have acted against its own best interests.

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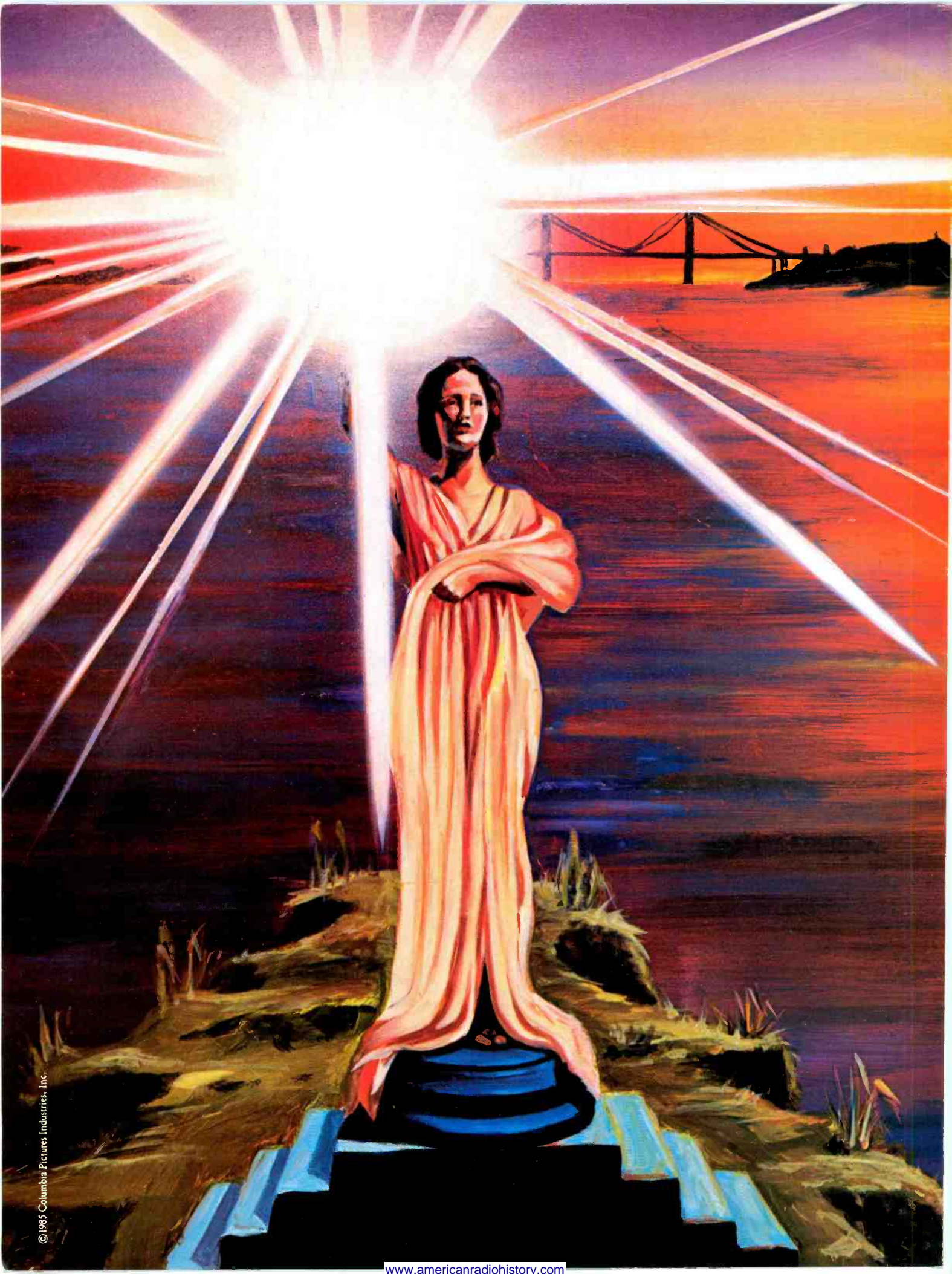
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When Congress Talks . . .

Public TV scrambles to resurrect Capitol Hill's favorite show.

REPRESENTATIVE Martin Frost gave a remarkably direct warning to public television at a House Rules Committee hearing last June. The word was out on Capitol Hill that public TV was going to cancel *The Lawmakers*, a weekly program covering Congress. The Texas congressman said that that would be "a terrible mistake," and wouldn't "enhance their cause in being able to seek additional funding from this body."

At the same hearing, Representative Gillis Long of Louisiana observed, "We are really upset about what they are doing to that program." Other legislators wrote letters supporting the series.

Despite those efforts by the program's most natural constituents, *The Lawmakers* ended its four-year run on PBS late last June. At the time, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting had three separate funding requests pending on Capitol Hill, covering the fiscal years 1984 through 1989. On July 26, the House Appropriations Committee cut \$12.5 million from one of them, the supplemental appropriation for public broadcasting.

If these events did have a cause-and-effect relationship (as one well-placed source believes), that would be a sensational denouement for a long-running conflict. But even if the funding cut last year was only coincidental, the conflict over *The Lawmakers* still provides an example of blatant congressional influence on the public television system. Last summer was not the first time congressmen had come to the defense of *The Lawmakers*.

In the fall of 1982, CPB, the nonprofit organization that divvies up federal funds earmarked for public broadcasting, decided not to continue its partial funding of the program. A few months later, no less a personage than the House Appropriations Committee chairman Jamie Whitten of Mississippi spoke in support of the program at another hearing. At the time, CPB was begging Congress to restore public broadcasting appropriations that the Reagan Administration had slashed. Subsequently CPB's Program Fund director Ron Hull changed his mind about *The Lawmakers* and approved a \$200,000 grant, which he said would be the program's last. Early in 1984, Hull ap-



Lawmakers host Paul Duke quizzes majority whip Tom Foley at the Capitol.

proved yet another grant of that size, but there wasn't enough corporate underwriting to complete the budget, and the series ended halfway through the year.

On July 27, the day after that \$12.5 million reduction of CPB funding, a group of regional public television officials announced they would raise funds for a program to replace *The Lawmakers*. And at this writing, CPB is offering up to \$1 million to match their funding for the proposed series, known jokingly as "Son of Lawmakers." (Actually, its working title is *Capitol Journal*, it would be hosted by Hodding Carter, and plans call for tough reporting.)

The Lawmakers case isn't one of outrageous partisan censorship—a threat that public television would be more likely to resist. After all, there's a strong argument to be made that PBS should give citizens

a close look at their elected Congress, especially since the popular news media usually ignore its substantive deliberations. That alone explains why congressmen would speak up for *The Lawmakers*, says Linda Wertheimer, one of the program's veteran reporters.

But the program's critics suspect a more cynical motive behind the actions of public television decision-makers: to appease Congress, not to illuminate its workings. John Wicklein, formerly Hull's associate director at the CPB Program Fund, thinks the series was "a puff piece to satisfy Congress and improve CPB's chances of getting its appropriation through."

That same willingness to please is evident when public broadcasters advise each other to start their own local versions of *The Lawmakers* about state or local government: The programs are cheap to produce (the governor works for free), and it's a great chance to cozy up to the spenders of tax money.

Last spring *The Lawmakers* drew only about one-sixth as many viewers as *Washington Week in Review*, and half of PBS stations weren't even carrying the show. "In the normal course of events, a program like that would die," says O. Leonard Press, director of the Kentucky public TV network. "But it was not permitted to die because Congress was concerned. The fearful thing is that they are now trying to resurrect a similar program, not because of a felt need, but because Congress wants it. Wrong motive." STEVE BEHRENS

Spreading the Word

The title of a new show belies Britain's prudish reputation.

ON TELEVISION the British give the lie to their reputation for Puritanism. When it comes to nudity, simulations of the sex act, and the use of expletives, the U.K.'s airwaves are far more liberated than ours. That appears to be the case when it comes to program titles, too. Channel 4, Britain's new commercial network whose mandate is to be unconventional, recently began airing late on Saturday nights a program of satirical sketches called *The Bullshitters*. The title got by the Independent Television Authority, which has the power of censorship over commercial TV there.

Word from England is that the profane title has provoked no public outcry.

There was, however, a murmur from T. Paine of Haverstock Hill, Hampstead. In the vox pop column of the *London Standard*, he wrote: "How can I persuade my children to acquire a richer vocabulary than four-letter words offer, when Channel 4 puts out a weekly series called *The Bullshitters*, whose title then appears in print in our newspapers on a weekly basis?"

Some may applaud this use of the colloquialism as a sign of television's growing maturity, while others may view it as a display of professional immaturity. In either case, it represents a landmark of sorts in the liberalization of a medium that not too long ago worked diligently at being inoffensive. L.B.

Moola Moola

Networks fiddle while college-football fans burn.

NOT EVERY football buff loves the court ruling that brought more college football games to television than ever before. The least happy are ticket-buying fans, for whom the Saturday football outings are linked with the quality of life.

With the games abundantly available this season, the broadcast and cable networks took to packaging them into Saturday double-headers. This meant that some teams had to change their normal starting times to get in on the TV loot. The burden of adjustment fell heaviest on the teams playing in the Central time zone, to the despair of football-loving Midwesterners.

For example there is the lament of Bill Kraus, a reader from Wisconsin. He writes:

"The football season was a time when

the state descended on the university, in Madison. Alums and fans drove in from hundreds of miles away, set up parking-lot lunches or, more often, patronized the pre-game festivities at local clubs and restaurants. After the game, many stayed the night in Madison.

"That way of life is changed now. The games start at 11:00, not 1:00 as always before, and all the logistics go awry. What the hell kind of social meal can one eat at 10 in the morning? What does someone do with the rest of the day when the main event ends at 2:00 or 2:30?"

"The fan's Saturday routine is screwed up. The suppliers of food, booze, and rooms are mostly just screwed. But the University of Wisconsin gets its \$400,000, or whatever, and ABC or CBS or MSG or ESPN gets its double-header. Phooey." L.B.

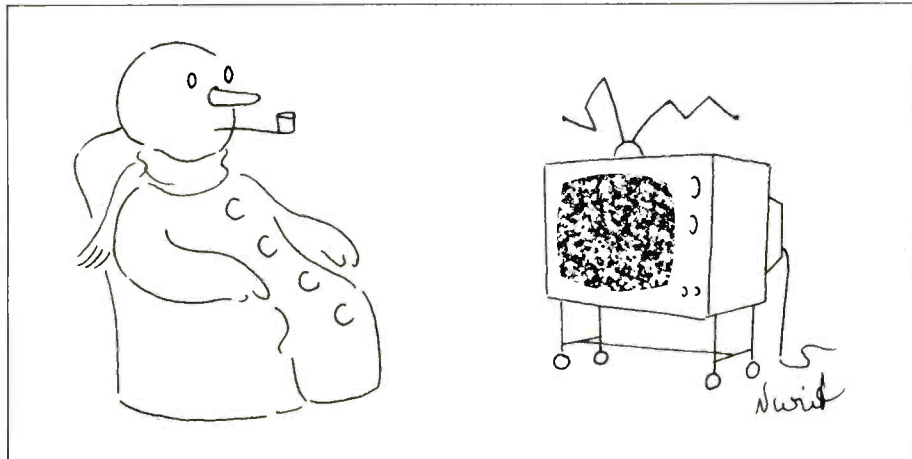
The Noise from Syracuse

Nuclear power dispute provokes rare Fairness Doctrine action.

IN 1982, the electric-utilities group building Nine Mile Point 2 outside Syracuse, New York placed \$500,000 worth of TV commercials on stations in five nearby cities. In one ad, a dejected-looking man leaves an employment office that has a sign in the window, "No Job Openings." In the background a voice announces, "New York state's economy is in trouble; 700,000 people are out of work." The next scene shows a factory worker

throwing a switch, and then various factory shots of people working. The voice continues, "Electricity is indispensable to industry and vital for jobs. The new Nine Mile Point nuclear energy plant . . . will provide needed electricity." The scene dissolves to the title, "Nine Mile Point. A sound investment."

It was the line, "a sound investment," that convinced the Federal Communications Commission to decide last October, by a four-to-one vote, that one station



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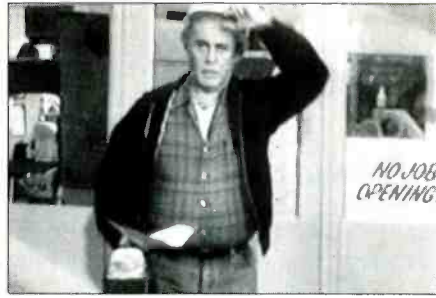
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had violated the Fairness Doctrine by running the ads "without presenting a contrasting viewpoint."

In its defense, the station, WTVH-TV in Syracuse, contended that the pro-nuclear-plant ads didn't address a "controversial issue of public importance"—a requisite for FCC action. But the FCC sided with the Syracuse Peace Council, the anti-nuclear group that had filed the complaint, saying the utility's commercials had "presented a one-sided viewpoint of the 'sound investment' issue."

At a time when prominent Congressmen and the FCC are proposing that the 35-year-old Fairness Doctrine be repealed, the WTVH ruling is especially notable. It was the only violation of the commission found in the 20 Fairness Doctrine cases it handled last year. (Staff attorneys resolved another 1,000 fairness complaints.) Moreover, it's the first time the FCC has reprimanded a broadcaster for violating the doctrine since 1979, and the first since Mark S. Fowler became



Pro-nuke ads said jobs were at stake.

commission chairman in 1981.

The Syracuse case also illustrates how the threat of enforcement can generate a fresh spirit of fairness in previously uncooperative broadcasters. WIXT-TV, another Syracuse station that ran the pro-nuclear-plant commercials, had also refused the Peace Council's requests for free air time, saying that it had given the issue balanced coverage on its news programs. But after the Peace Council filed

its complaint against WTVH, WIXT offered air time for response. Most stations "need a little nudge," says Andrew Schwartzman, executive director of a Washington, D.C.-based public-interest law firm called the Media Access Project and the attorney who filed the Peace Council's complaint.

Sometimes a little nudge goes a long way. Last fall the owners of Nine Mile Point 2 purchased another round of television commercials, some of them on WTVH. Even before the FCC's October ruling, the station's management had offered the Peace Council free response time. Now WTVH manager John DeRoche says that the issue had become important during the intervening 10 months, "and we wanted to fulfill our responsibility to air the other side." Schwartzman explains that broadcasters often gain a "greater awareness" of their responsibilities after exposure to, or a run-in with, Section 315 of the Communications Act.

R.B.

One Hour or Bust

It's not much of a choice for PBS stations that want less of MacNeil/Lehrer.

PUBLIC BROADCASTERS generally were proud to introduce the first hour-long, early-evening national newscast by expanding the half-hour *MacNeil/Lehrer* program in September 1983, and were mighty glad to have AT&T underwrite most of the additional cost.

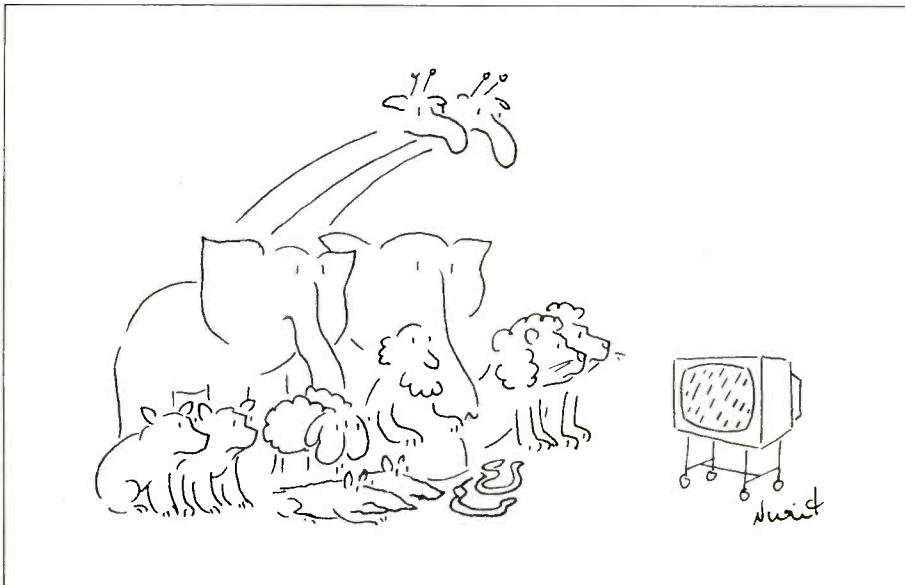
At renewal time a year later, however, the program seemed likely to retain its 60-minute length only at the combined insis-

tence of the acclaimed interviewing team, their producers, and AT&T. When station program managers, meeting in Seattle last November, were asked in a straw poll whether they'd prefer a 30-minute or 60-minute *MacNeil/Lehrer*, at least two-thirds raised their hands for the shorter version, according to officials present. But the producers, with AT&T's backing, refused to offer a half-hour show as an option.

Actually, the hour-long program had always been an all-or-nothing proposition. When Robert MacNeil and Jim Lehrer initially proposed it in October 1982, they said they had little interest in continuing at all in a half-hour format. So far most PBS stations have been willing to continue carrying the show and paying about 30 percent of its budget (while AT&T picks up about 50 percent, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting about 20 percent). But from the start, program managers from a number of local PBS stations have complained that there isn't enough viewer interest in the program's ultra-serious (others say bland and boring) approach to public affairs. Although air time was doubled, the number of viewers watching the show during an average week increased only 16 percent over the audience for the half-hour program.

Station programmers favoring a half-hour show apparently could make only a symbolic protest. In the first round of the stations' annual program-purchase balloting after the Seattle meeting, *MacNeil/Lehrer* came in abnormally low—nine notches below a how-to series on furniture building, *The Woodwright's Shop*. But there are more rounds to go, and only an unexpected rebellion early this year could derail the *NewsHour*.

S.B.



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How Much Media Clout for One Company?

by Phyllis Joffe

IN A LAST-MINUTE agreement between the House and the Senate in early October, Congress cleared the way for a controversial combination of local media: jointly owned newspapers and cable television systems. Such link-ups have raised concern for their potential to dominate local advertising as well as information.

The scene in October was a negotiating session between House and Senate aides on the Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984, a law better known for putting strict limits on municipal regulation of cable. When the bill emerged from negotiations, it also banned cross-ownership of cable systems and telephone companies serving the same areas (except in rural regions). It also banned cross-ownership of cable and broadcast stations in an area.

But in that negotiating session, Senate aides persuaded their House counterparts to drop a clause that would have outlawed cross-ownership of cable and daily newspapers serving the same area.

The new law places the matter under the jurisdiction of the Federal Communications Commission, thereby preventing states and cities from banning cable-newspaper cross-ownership from now on, even though it has been a topic of heated debate in several cities.

By its nature, the local cable system is almost always a monopoly. The same is increasingly true of the local daily newspaper (there are 1,711 dailies in the country, but only one per city in all but 53 cities). And where both the cable system and the daily are owned by the same company, fears of media monopoly are inflamed all the more.

A case in point is Hartford, Connecticut where the Times Mirror Company owns both the cable franchise and the *Hartford Courant*, the city's only daily. In 1980, the state ordered Times Mirror to sell one property or the other, and it finally prevailed in November, when the company agreed out of court to sell the cable system by September 1987.

Phyllis Joffe is a writer, television and radio producer, and journalism instructor living in New Britain, Connecticut.

The Hartford Courant

Times Mirror Agrees To Drop Cable Franchise

By CHRISTOPHER J. BOWMAN
Courant Staff Writer

Times Mirror Co. owner of The Courant, has agreed to relinquish ownership of its Hartford area cable television franchise, ending four years of legal battles with the state over ownership of the cable company.

State Attorney General Joseph I. Lieberman Thursday hailed the divestiture of Hartford CATV Inc. as an unprecedented First Amendment victory for the more than 88,000 cable subscribers in Hartford and five surrounding towns.

"To our knowledge there has never been another case in the country where a newspaper has agreed to divest itself of control of a cable television company," Lieberman said at a Capitol news conference where he announced the out-of-court settlement.

"It provides lasting free speech benefits to customers," he said. "If the dominant newspaper in a region also controls the cable television in that region, there is a danger that the marketplace of ideas may well be undercut or diminished."

Lieberman's office represented the state Department of Public Utility Control in its 1980 decision ordering Times Mirror to divest itself of either The Courant or its two cable franchises in Connecticut.

Under the agreement, Times Mirror must sell its 90 percent ownership in Hartford CATV by September 1987.

But the Los Angeles-based media conglomerate will be allowed to keep its ownership of Telesystems of Connecticut Inc., the cable television franchise serving about 14,200 subscribers in the Meriden area, a region where The Courant does not lead in circulation.

Times Mirror executives did not provide details on why the company has agreed to sell Hartford CATV after four years of litigation to retain it.

"They feel it's a good business decision and in the best interest of the community," he said.

See Times Mirror, Page 1

In the absence of any federal ban on cable-newspaper cross-ownership, the Connecticut Department of Public Utility Control (DPUC) had imposed its own order, and Times Mirror protested that cable ownership rules are the business of the FCC, not the state. For its part, the commission has declined to take action. Bob Ratcliffe of the FCC explains: "We don't believe there is a problem with excessive concentration of ownership of cable systems and newspapers."

Yet single companies own both cable systems and newspapers in Syracuse, New York (Newhouse); Toledo, Ohio (Block Publishers), and other cities. Cross-ownership has been opposed successfully in cities including Boston, Philadelphia, and Atlanta. The state of Minnesota, however, repealed its ban in 1981 on grounds that the income from a cable system could keep a community paper alive.

There has been a steady increase of newspapers' cable ownership. Of the 5,000 cable systems operating in 1983, 16 percent had ties with newspapers, up from 13 percent in 1980. (Often, however, the cable and newspaper properties are in

different cities.) Four of cable's 10 top multiple system operators are newspaper publishers.

The Hartford cross-ownership situation came as a surprise. When Times Mirror sought Connecticut's approval of two cable acquisitions in the Hartford area in 1978, it had not yet bought the *Courant*. But elsewhere in the country the conglomerate already owned cable franchises within markets served by its big dailies, and it also owned two other Connecticut newspapers. So the state's DPUC was cautious. The company assured the regulators that "the Connecticut markets . . . are not the targets for Times Mirror in television and/or newspapers." With some hesitation, the DPUC agreed to the cable acquisitions, warning the company that it was to disclose "any and all contemplated acquisitions of Connecticut media." A year later Times Mirror bought the *Courant*, and the DPUC, along with everyone else, learned about it from a *Courant* front-page story. The DPUC in 1980 ordered Times Mirror to drop either the *Courant* or the cable systems. The company sued, but the state's order was upheld last March by the state supreme court.

The possibility of interfering in the Connecticut case (then unresolved) was one of the issues that threatened to kill the entire cable act in Congress. Connecticut senators Christopher Dodd and Lowell Weicker pushed for an exemption to preserve the state's ban. "We made a hell of an issue of it," says attorney William Harsch, who represented a group of smaller newspapers allied with the state against Times Mirror. On the other side, the American Newspaper Publishers Association (ANPA) aligned itself with Times Mirror and lobbied vigorously. "We don't think there should be any restraint on what a newspaper can own and not own," says ANPA attorney Pamela Riley.

For cities concerned with cable-newspaper cross-ownership, the FCC now appears to offer the only recourse—and not an encouraging one, given the commission's view on the matter.

Connecticut's consumer counsel,

Barry Zitser, who initiated the petition against Times Mirror, says cross-ownership inhibits economic competition for advertising, and stifles local diversity of expression. "Cross-control provides very clear potential for abuse," according to Zitser.

The economic issue is clear-cut. Carter H. White, whose family has owned the *Record Journal* in Meriden, Connecticut for three generations, feared that Times Mirror could lure away future advertisers by offering discounts for advertising in both the *Courant* and on the cable systems it owns in Meriden and Hartford. Now Times Mirror has pledged not to do so, to White's relief, but the economic issue still pertains in other cross-ownership situations.

Cross-ownership can also have a negative impact on journalism and public service, according to James Bond, a former Atlanta city councilman who has carried his warnings to Connecticut and any other place where people will listen. Atlanta was the site of a bitter battle over what the U.S. Department of Justice called the "worst example of monopoly control of media in the United States." Citizen groups successfully petitioned the FCC in 1977 to force Cox Broadcasting to sell its cable system there on the grounds that Cox had a virtual monopoly over local news media. The Cox family at that point controlled the cable franchise, two daily newspapers, two radio stations, and Atlanta's biggest television station.

Bond told the Connecticut DPUC that Cox-owned media had failed to cover important cable issues and hearings, failed to cover local news that was adverse to Cox interests, and failed to develop cable, especially in black neighborhoods.

Sometimes the public can perceive ill effects of cross-ownership. In Hartford, subscribers attribute cable problems to an "I-don't-care" attitude on the part of Times Mirror. ("Why should they? They don't have to compete.") And *Courant* readers don't expect the paper to freely criticize Times Mirror's cable dealings.

Courant editorial-page editor John J. Zakarian said the parent company hasn't directly interfered with the paper's coverage of the cross-ownership case. But Zakarian set up his own guidelines. "It's not easy," he once explained. "We do not editorialize on the case itself. If we take Times Mirror's side, we will be self-serving; if we oppose it, we'll seem ludicrous."

Does Zakarian feel compromised as a journalist? "Yes. I would rather not have to face this issue. We are already in a position where the newspaper is criticized as being a monopoly. This really exacerbates it." ■

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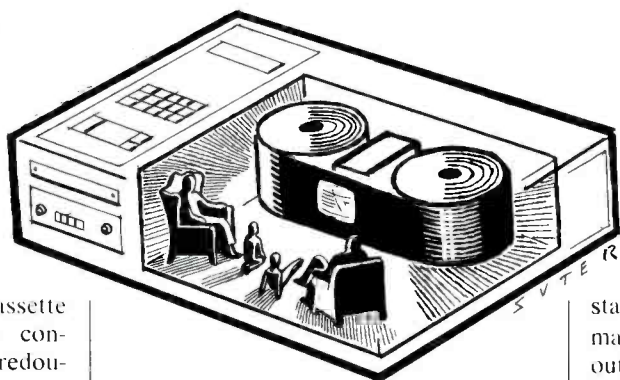
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J/F 85

VCRs: You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet



AS SALES of video-cassette recorders (VCRs) continue to double and redouble. I am often asked by my friends who earn their keep in the older visual media whether the phenomenon is for real, or whether the VCR is just a plaything of affluent hobbyists and first-on-the-block consumers—in short, “Isn’t the novelty going to wear off (wish, wish)?”

Generally, I am as skeptical as the next person: I don’t believe in teletext, I doubt DBS will ever make it, and deep down inside I don’t think we’ll see high-definition television (HDTV) broadcasting in this generation. But I know the VCR is as here-to-stay as color television sets, refrigerators, and washing machines.

With more than 15 million sold to date in this country—one in every five American homes has a VCR—the product has already outgrown the hobbyists and faddists as well as the next group to traditionally accept a new product, the “early adopters.” Now it is causing a stir among yet another group of buyers: the “early majority.” In terms of market penetration, the VCR has already achieved the popularity color television had in 1968, 15 years after it was first introduced. This genie is out of the bottle.

The question is not whether the VCR is here to stay but what it will do for an encore. The answer is: plenty. VCR manufacturers are already practicing the fine art of creative obsolescence. One of the innovations of 1984 was the “hi-fi” VCR, a video recorder with astoundingly good stereo sound—even better than the sound produced by most open-reel audio recorders. Within perhaps two years, we should see an even more impressive development—VCRs with video good enough to match their high-fidelity audio.

So good, in fact, that to the naked eye

by David Lachenbruch

the picture will nearly equal one produced in the studio using a broadcast video-tape recorder. Japanese manufacturers are now developing home-video recording systems that use broadcast technologies such as high-band color, and make the fullest use of new tape formulations to sharply increase resolution and picture sharpness and virtually eliminate snow. (Some of my friends in broadcasting will say this can’t be done, but they once dismissed the notion of home VCRs selling for less than \$1,000.) These new “super-VCRs” are expected to make their appearance at about the same time people begin buying television sets that can process the picture signal with computer-like digital circuitry. The combination of the two systems should produce stunning results, with picture detail giving the illusion of HDTV.

The new super-VCRs will almost certainly be compatible with today’s recorders—a super-VHS cassette will be playable on a standard machine, and a

standard VHS cassette on a super-VHS machine (in both cases, however, without the “super” results). The availability of the super-machines will set off the first major replacement cycle for VCRs—possibly even before half the country’s homes have them.

Meanwhile, another class of VCR is beginning to nudge its way into acceptance. One-piece camera-recorders (“camcorders”) are already on the market in three different formats—the new 8mm, Beta, and one that uses a small version of the VHS cassette called VHS-C. This year, which promises to be a big one for home-video “photography,” should see the introduction of more camcorders and at much lower prices. Although more models using the tiny 8mm cassette will be sold, new one-piece models using full-sized VHS cassettes could become available.

And if there’s any remaining doubt that the VCR is here to stay—the Koreans are coming! This is the year when Korean and Taiwanese manufacturers are at last free to export VCRs under the terms of their VHS licenses (from JVC) and their Beta licenses (from Sony). Remember, Korean manufacturers brought us 13-inch color-TV sets priced at \$139, and they don’t fool with stuff that doesn’t sell. In 1984, if you followed the cheap-and-dirty advertisements, you saw VCRs touted for as little as \$299. This year, get ready for high-quality Korean-made VCRs at street prices of just \$250, possibly dropping as low as \$199 in 1986. The Japanese are readying themselves not only with the super-VCRs at the high end of the price scale but also with some sharply competitive money-saving designs at the low end.

The VCR is already exhibiting all the characteristics of a mature consumer electronic product—soaring sales, cut-throat competition, and forced obsolescence. You can bet it will be around as long as television is.

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high-quality
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David Lachenbruch is editorial director of Television Digest.

David Suter

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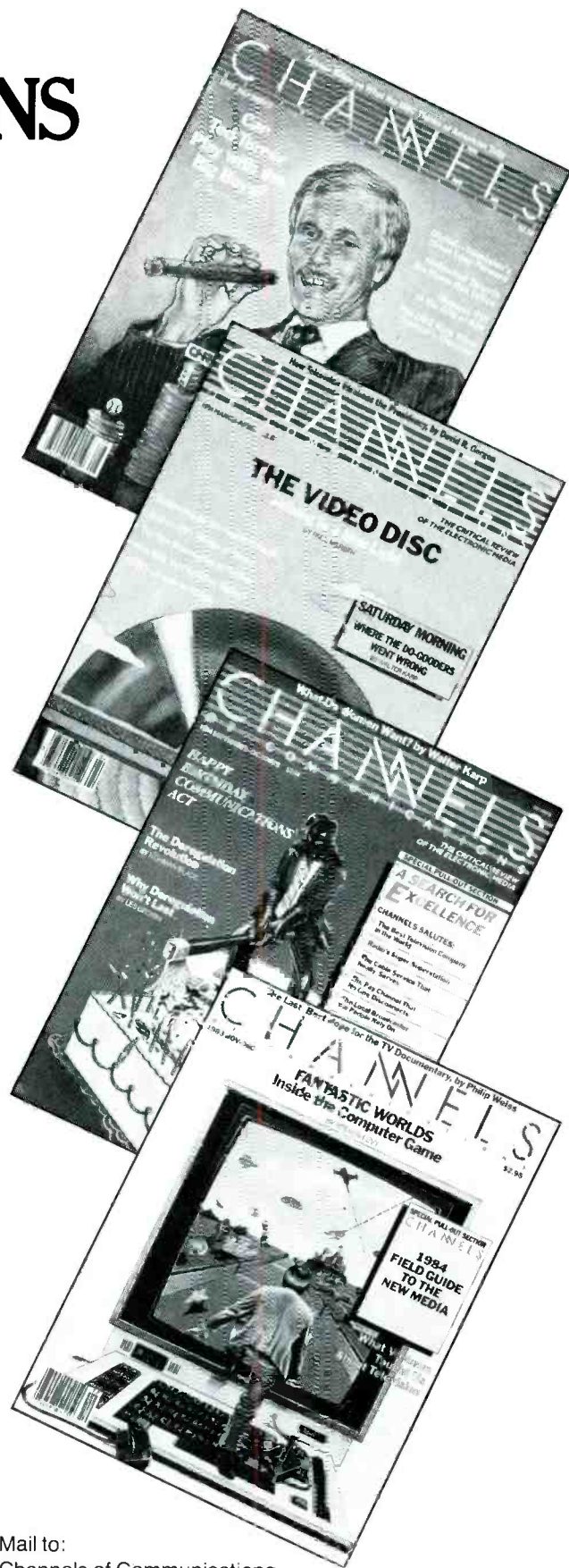
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QUOVIDEO

SHORT TAKES ON NEW TECH



Making tracks. Few things are as frustrating to record producers as trying to line up talent from different cities for a recording session. But Streeterville Studios in Chicago and NuJac Sound Recorders in Los Angeles think they have beat the problem with an uplink/downlink satellite service that transmits music being performed in several cities at once. The system permits recording of up to 24 tracks of vocals or instrumentals beamed from a number of studios.

Home delivery. A company in Redmond, Washington is sending computer software to personal-computer owners through the scrambled broadcasts of some 400 midwestern radio stations. Subscribers pay \$70 for a device that enters the program directly into their computers. The service, offered by Microperipheral Corp., is supported by advertisers, so the software is free to subscribers after the initial equipment purchase.

Vacant lots. Some 70 percent of the transponders on Canada's orbiting Anik satellites aren't being used, and approximately 40 percent of those on U.S. birds are idle, according to an independent study. Nevertheless, the launchings continue. The study estimates that, based on the launch schedule for the next few years, the North American transponder population will reach 1,000 by decade's end.

Pocketful of lies. A New York-based maker of security devices is selling lie detectors no bigger than pocket calculators. Hidden in, say, a jacket pocket, the device supposedly can detect the telltale stress in a liar's voice. The company claims to have sold some 1,200 units in its first year.

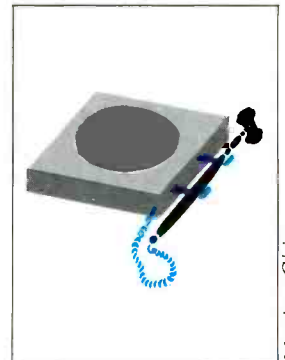


Great equalizer. Television tends to rob the rich and give to the poor, claims a study by the California Department of Education. The survey found that children in wealthy families are likely to hurt their academic standing by watching lots of television, while those in low-income homes may actually benefit from moderate viewing. The difference is that in affluent households, television diverts children from other nourishing media, such as magazines and books; but in poorer homes, where information may be scarce, television is better than nothing.

Machina non grata. Video-cassette recorders are frustrating the Malaysian government's efforts to create national unity in a multiracial country. Of the millions of VCR owners there, 75 percent are Chinese, and they seem to prefer watching videotaped cultural programs from their native land to watching the government's daily unity-promoting programs.

Optical automatons. Robots have been ridiculed for being clumsy. But the newest generation is behaving more gracefully because it has been given the gift of sight. Using technology called "machine vision," General Electric, Automatx Inc., and Sweden's ASEA are equipping robots with TV-camera "eyes" and computers that can interpret the data received. Manufacturers claim that vision-aided robots can judge spatial relationships, enabling them, for example, to pick up objects at random and lift boxes that are moving along a conveyor belt.

Trial by speakerphone. Telephone conferencing is speeding up the legal process in Los Angeles courts. Pretrial hearings between lawyers and judges often require only that the arguer be present—not the arguer. Attorneys are assigned a time to phone the court, and their remarks are then amplified over loudspeakers in the judge's chambers. Besides saving time, the new system could slash the legal fees for civil-court hearings.



Marian Chinn

OED on-line. A century after the *Oxford English Dictionary* first appeared, Oxford University Press has begun a \$10 million project to make the ultimate dictionary's 60 million words available to anyone with a personal computer. When operational in 1988, it will be the world's largest dictionary database.

Fighting cancer. A Swedish inventor has devised a video game based on the human body's fight against cancer. Players manipulate the usual space-warrior images, which in this case are headquartered in the thymus gland and shoot down cancer cells.

Housecleaning. The Space Shuttle's computers at California's Vandenberg Air Force Base are generating 6,600 pounds of paper every week—so much that the Air Force has to build a special document-destruction room. It will cost \$4.7 million to build the addition, where more than 250,000 pages of hard copy will be shredded weekly.

MARC SOLOMON AND LISA MOSS

FROM SUNRISE TO SUNSET.



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AROUND THE WORLD. AROUND THE CLOCK.

NBC NEWS



We Have Seen the Shows, and They Are Us

by Les Brown



A TAXI DRIVER, holding me captive for part of a recent afternoon, carried on about the things that insult his intelligence, one of which is the annual network hoopla for the new television season. He grumbled that there's never a new season, it's always the same, and who do the networks think they're kidding? I realized that I've heard a version of that complaint every season for the last 25 years, from all kinds of people, including TV critics and station managers.

Every new season seems only to bring more of the same—shameless knockoffs of the previous season's best hits. But if television is so unchanging from year to year, how does it happen—when we look back—that prime-time programming has been markedly different in every decade of the medium's existence?

Sixties television was as different from '70s television as '50s from '80s. The cabbie could tell you with certainty that *M*A*S*H* would have been out of its element in the 1960s and that Ed Sullivan and Donna Reed would have bombed in the '70s. If such classics as *I Love Lucy* and *Gunsmoke* had never existed and were being proposed for the first time this year, all three networks would be holding their noses.

Everything about commercial television seems to conspire against change. The networks, after all, have existed in the same form from the start. The same people who picked the programs in the last decade are, for the most part, selecting them today. Programs still come out of the same Hollywood studios that have supplied the networks since the '60s. And most of the producers, writers, and directors are people whose careers span one or two decades, if not as many as four. Most constant of all are the program genres and forms: basically half-hour sitcoms and one-hour action melodramas. We had private eyes in the '50s and still have them in the '80s.

And yet, we are not halfway through this decade and already can see that today's television is strikingly unlike that of the '70s in mood and spirit. Somewhere along the way a change subtly occurred.

Consider that Norman Lear, who had a string of hits in

the '70s unequalled by any producer ever in the medium, returned to television in 1984 after a few years' absence and came up empty with two series projects. His *a.k.a. Pablo* had a brief run on ABC and was cancelled for inadequate ratings; the second work was rejected in the pilot stage at NBC.

Lear had revolutionized television early in the last

**We were mistaken all
these years, thinking TV is
not about real life.**

decade by elevating the sitcom from the level of comic strip to that of Broadway comedy. His programs confronted moral and social issues and breached the long-standing taboos of broadcasting. *All in the Family*, which started Lear's string, was a watershed, and it remained the symbolic program of the '70s. Yet there is nothing of its kind on the networks today. Nor is there anything to match the broad-gauged satire of *Saturday Night Live* in its '70s incarnation, nor the pointed nuttiness of *Soap* and *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*. Television programs may be the creations of people, but at bottom they are creatures of their times.

That television should turn out to be different in tone and substance every 10 years is not an aberration of the medium; these differences correspond to the changing mood and spirit of America. Why this should happen every decade is puzzling. Perhaps the changes are simply dialectical swings. Whatever the answer, the fact is that the decades in 20th-century America define themselves so neatly in retrospect that we can capture their flavor in a single modifier. Before television, there were the Roaring '20s, the Woeful '30s, and the Patriotic '40s. Since

Keith Bendis



HOST: DICK CLARK

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THE NEW \$100,000 PYRAMID



TELEVISION

NATPE—FAIRMONT PENTHOUSE SUITE

television, the Rocking '50s, the Rebellious '60s, the Activist '70s, and now—what shall we call these times?—the Anxious '80s.

Of course in the world of fashion, change by the decade or even by the hour is the rule, if not the law. Think of saddle shoes and earth shoes, ponytails and bouffants, shifts and designer jeans. But the change from a decade whose beacon was *All in the Family* to one whose emblem is *Dynasty* is more than an issue of style. What have changed in the last five years are the concerns of television and the philosophical content of the programs. A period of social awareness and ideological conflict has given way to one of economic individualism.

Although television undoubtedly contributed to this shift in our national scheme of values, it did not create the change. The commercial television industry, in its headlong pursuit of hits for the sake of greater profits, doesn't care about conveying messages or remaking the world. Programs come into being only to win their time periods; if anyone is consciously trying to say anything it is only coincidental. Network programmers take their inspiration from the Nielsen ratings and other forms of audience research, basing their decisions on every index of popularity, since popularity is all. And in that haphazard way, television catches the mood and spirit of its times. So television reflects us, not because it strives to but because the ratings, alas, reflect us.

The Nielsen and Arbitron ratings are more than simple popularity polls for programs; they are, in spite of themselves, social and political barometers. When Richard Nixon campaigned for the Presidency in 1968 on the theme of law and order, his advantage over Hubert Humphrey was apparent in the Nielsen prime-time ratings: Most of the shows in the Top 10 that autumn were in the law-and-order genre (modern police and Old West sheriffs prevailing over the bad guys). Nixon's strategists may not have noticed it, but the ratings confirmed that their candidate was riding the tide of a national fantasy.

This past year, when a 1970s Democrat ran against a 1980s Republican, the Republican demolished the poor fellow, who was as much out of his time as *Storefront Lawyers* would be today. You had only to study the Niel-

sens. Walter Mondale's themes were scarcely reflected in television's most popular shows, while Ronald Reagan's were, literally, right on the money.

Today's ratings winners are not about people struggling to survive at the poverty line, or about a white coach of a black basketball team, or about Chicanos and Vietnamese trying to enter the mainstream of American life. The big hits are about glamorous, secure people guiding their own destinies, sometimes by force, and about the joys of having great wealth.

At least three of the leading shows today—*Dallas*, *Dynasty*, and *Falcon Crest*—are serials depicting the world of the ultra rich. Their popularity suggests that the Amer-

The change from *All in the Family's* decade to *Dynasty's* is more than a matter of style.

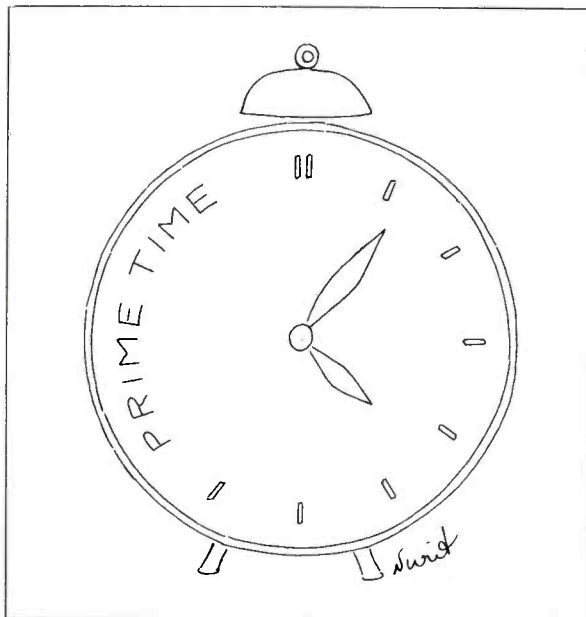
ican Dream has been upgraded from the sweet suburban comforts depicted in *Father Knows Best* (which many people have attained since the '50s and wonder why they're still not happy) to hard-core wealth and all its privileges, including the freedom to be nasty. As long as you're dreaming, why dream modestly?

The new American role models, as seen on television, are those who fend for themselves and go for everything they can get—like the ballplayers, rock artists, models, and newscasters.

Money is more than a preoccupation in the television of the '80s—it verges on an obsession, like violence and sexual titillation. In sportscasting, the new statistic getting almost as much attention as the traditional performance percentages is the size of the player's contract. Fundamentalists, who buy their own air time and thus lay claim to "electronic ministries," unabashedly mix money with religion in their efforts to raise millions by soliciting viewer contributions. A syndicated series, hitting its audience squarely with the blunt title *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, was an instant hit. And now there's a game show that lays greed right on the line, with a title that makes no bones about the premise, *Anything for Money*.

These delights are not merely idle pastimes on an idiot box, they are reflections of the American heart and mind at this time in history. We were mistaken about television all these years, thinking it was never about real life, because so much on the screen was patently artificial. But it turns out that television was really about us all along, playing back our fears and yearnings decade after decade. As a nation, we are what we watch.

If, by the people in those Nielsen polls, and if programs go on the air because of the polls, and if what succeeds according to those polls reflects what we are as a society, then it becomes important to ask ourselves: Do we like what we see in the television mirror? ■





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January 11-14, 1985

The World According to

WHO WATCHES TELEVISION—AND WHY

Viewing may vary by age, sex, region, and income, but within those categories the vast TV audience has surprisingly predictable habits.

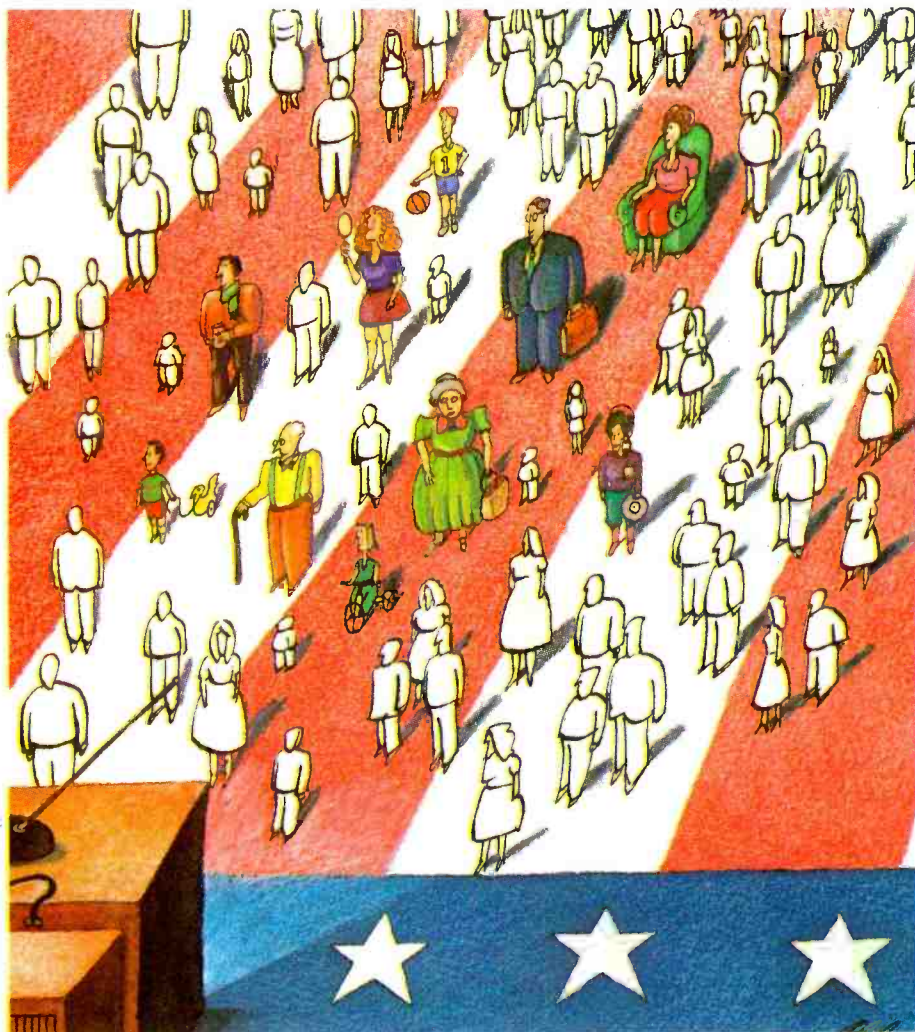
by James Traub

*Snobs do it, stars do it,
Even CEOs in their cars do it . . .*

WE ALL DO IT; we all watch TV. And we spend more time doing it than we do any other voluntary activity. The average American, when not at work or in the sack, is generally propped up in front of the set—more than four hours per day per man, woman, and child. Perhaps you're thinking that people like you, who read thoughtful magazines, drag the average way down. But before you congratulate yourself on your own cultural superiority, stop and tabulate those morning news shows you wake up to, those soaps you taped, that unusually sophisticated, totally out-of-the-ordinary cop show, those movies and sports events. Add up, don't they? Asked to name any group of Americans that does *not* do a significant amount of viewing, David Poltrack, head of audience research at CBS, pondered a long while before citing intellectuals, especially college professors—not a major demographic, as they say in the market research business.

We take the ubiquity of television for granted, and yet it seems striking that a citizenry as diverse as our own should be so universally entranced by a medium as narrow in its offerings as commercial television. Certainly television programming is less varied than the tastes of its viewers. Perhaps one can watch television without actually exercising much taste; viewers may not be entranced by the experience so much as soothed, or even anesthetized. Perhaps television has changed us, made us less diverse than we were, just as the sharing of a language creates a single culture.

When one begins reading the ratings numbers as closely as do researchers at



Richard A. Goldberg

Nielsen

the networks and advertising agencies, two contradictory phenomena emerge: how much viewing habits differ by age, sex, income, region, household size, and so on, and how little they differ at all. Women watch more television than men, and adults watch more than teens. In households with very low incomes the set is on during the day more often than it is in more prosperous homes. Lifestyle determines viewing habits.

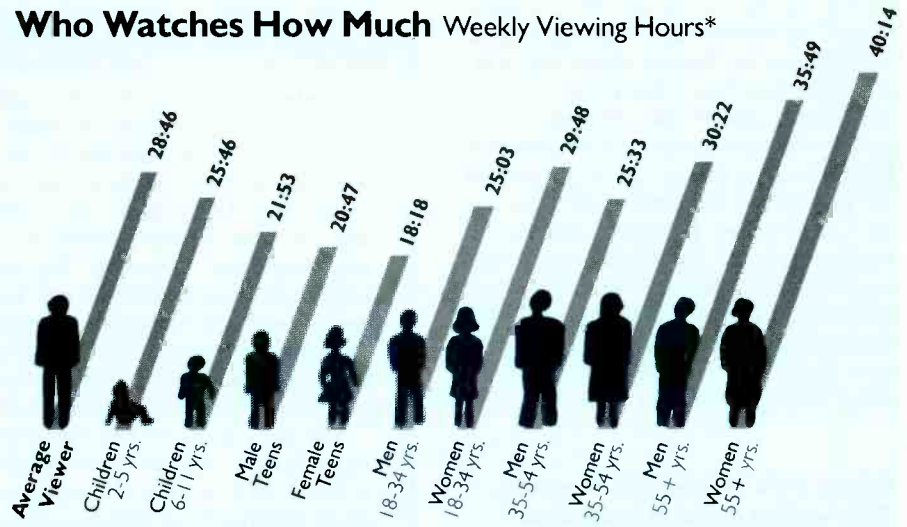
Yet since most lives progress through few major stages—growing up, finding your way, settling down, retiring—viewing habits change only at infrequent intervals. And since most network shows are broad-based in appeal, program preferences vary surprisingly little. The prime-time viewing choices of 30-year-old men, for example, closely resemble those of 50-year-old women. Prosperous households watch the same amount of television as working-class households. This universal but relatively undifferentiated appeal makes television, especially network television, a very powerful, but crude, advertising instrument.

Television viewing appears volatile only when one examines the programs rather than the viewers. Though the same number of viewers will show up at the same time each day, varying only slightly according to the day of the week, they won't necessarily watch the same show. Viewers are utterly predictable in their general habits, and totally fickle in their program choices.

While looking through the viewer profile that follows, it is important to keep in mind that the ratings and demographic information on which it is based are not scholarly tools but commercial products. The figures have been assembled from Nielsen reports as well as from conversations with admen and the networks' chief researchers. Nielsen data exist only because advertisers buy programs based on the size and composition, in age and sex, of the audiences they attract. Consumers who watch a lot of television but don't buy many consumer products—for example, little children or people over 65—aren't measured closely. And most of the statistics pertain to network viewing because that's where most of the advertising money goes.

Studying television numbers is a very dry and abstract business, though full of surprises. In order to attach these num-

Who Watches How Much Weekly Viewing Hours*



* Latest figures available: October 1984. Source: A. C. Nielsen Co.

bers to something familiar we will invent two families, the Modes and the Medians, who between them have at least one member in each of the age and sex categories that Nielsen records. Beyond their age and sex, the Modes have no demographic characteristics at all. They're very plain folk. They are: Michelle, age 2; Joshua, 7; Ross and Vicki, the twins, age 14; their parents, Patty and Jeff, childhood sweethearts, both 34, and Patty's parents, George, age 60, and Ruth, age undisclosed. The Medians, who live next door, include Reed and Carol, both 48, and their son Doug, 19. (Brother Gary is away at college.)

The Youngest Viewers Watch All They Can, When They're Home



Until she turned two, Michelle sucked her thumb and stared off into space. Advertisers had nothing to sell her, so Nielsen didn't measure her. Since her second birthday, television researchers have begun to recognize her as an individual person, but just barely. Of broadcast programs, few except *Sesame Street*, *Captain Kangaroo*, and *Mister Rogers* are intended especially for her. In fact she watches more television—nearly four hours a day—than she will at any time until she marries. During the day, from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M., she sits in the living room and chases motes of dust, only barely aware of shows mother Patty and Grandma Ruth watch so intently.

At around 3:30 Michelle's peaceful afternoon is ruined when seven-year-old

Joshua comes home from school and plants himself in front of the set. Joshua's parents, Patty and Jeff, often badger him about watching too much television, but in fact he watches less than either Michelle or they do—just over three hours per day. This is not because he's hunched over his homework, or because he's outside playing ring-a-levio. It's just that he's home fewer hours than Michelle and awake fewer hours than Patty and Jeff. He watches as much television as he can, just as they do.

He also watches whatever he can. "There's a limited window of time during which [a kid] can watch," says CBS's David Poltrack; so he can't be picky. Before he's packed off to school, and on weekend mornings, Joshua watches cartoons; when he comes home he likes to watch sitcoms. All viewers enjoy shows about people who are like themselves, except prettier or stronger or luckier; children especially prefer sitcoms with children in them, like NBC's *Different Strokes*. Looking around for an identity, Joshua naturally takes his cues from television. TV characters extend out of the screen and into his life—onto his t-shirts, towels, and breakfast cereal boxes. Among two- to 11-year-olds last year, NBC's *A Team* ranked second (behind CBS's *Dukes of Hazzard*); *Mr. T*, the cartoon based on the show, came in fifth (though so far this year it's dropped way behind the *Smurfs* cartoons), and *Mr. T* lunchboxes took the school cafeteria by storm.

When Joshua's older brother Ross was a little kid, he had a lot more influence on what the family watched than Joshua does. In those days, the family had only one TV set, so everyone watched together. It's an awful thought, but apparently they had to, back then. The first hour of prime time, 8 to 9 P.M., was

known in the trade as the "Family Hour." At that time Ross's parents would watch the twins' favorite show before ordering them to bed. That's why sitcoms, rather than shows like *Magnum, P.I.*, used to fill the schedule at 8:00. But now Joshua lives in one of the 55 percent of TV households that own more than one set. After dinner he scoots upstairs to watch reruns of old sitcoms in Ross's room. Marvin Mord, ABC's head researcher, declares definitively that the Family Hour is dead, and that networks now place less emphasis on programs with "kid appeal" at 8 or 8:30 P.M.

Teens, TV's Toughest Customers; They're Not Loyal to Programs



TEENS 12-17

By the time children reach high school, official wisdom goes, they start playing football or gossiping on the phone or doing whatever seems cool at the time, which is usually not watching television.

Ross and Vicki, the twins, consider Joshua's viewing habits incredibly stupid. But they watch almost the same amount of television as he does, Ross slightly more than Vicki. (Teenage girls watch less television than any other major demographic group—18 hours a week.) But the viewing habits of children aren't usually compared with those of adults, because they have their own set of programs and their own set of advertisers. Teenagers watch so-called adult programs—if you count, say, *A Team* as adult—but they watch significantly fewer of them than adults do. Thus, teens make up the most elusive part of the adult audience, and they will remain elusive for a good 10 years, until they turn down the stereo and make some babies.

Vicki and Ross have somewhat different tastes. Vicki watches soaps, Ross watches sports. Ross also watches *A Team*, along with other suitably macho prime-time series, including NBC's *Knight Rider*. Vicki watches warm-hearted sitcoms such as ABC's *Three's Company*. Teen-age girls used to love *Love Boat*, but this season, forget it. *Love Boat* suddenly overstayed its welcome. Vicki and Ross actually watch pretty much the same thing, though they'll never admit it. What they love, what they madly adore, are bloopers shows. Six of last year's eight top-ranked specials among teens were bloopers shows. Here were hour-long programs featuring adults,

A Day in the Life

Specialists usually bridle when asked to name a typical instance of whatever it is they study in minute detail. Not so television experts. To them every day looks remarkably like every other day—or at least every Tuesday resembles every other Tuesday. The same number of people watch every Tuesday at 9 A.M. or 9 P.M. Indeed, virtually the same number watch every weekday at the same hour. For most people, watching television is habitual.

The sun, according to researcher Jerry Jaffe, rises over televisionland at 7 A.M. At 6:30 total network ratings stand at only 4.9; by 7:00 the audience swells and becomes "bi-polar." Adults, primarily women 55 and older, watch the morning news. Meanwhile, kids are watching reruns, and preschoolers cartoons, on independent channels. Towards 9 A.M. the pool of viewers gets slightly older, poorer, and more female.

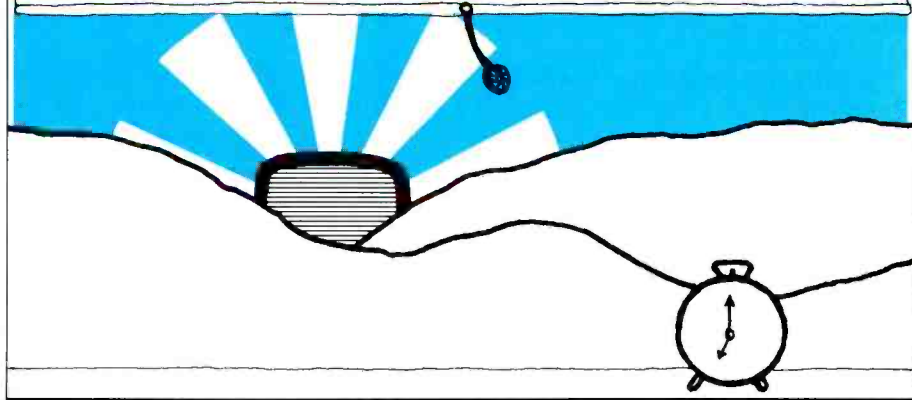
After 9:00 the preschoolers, many of them apparently packed off to day-care centers, diminish somewhat. Until 4 P.M. the audience will be largely female and old; almost all the men will be 55 and over. The number of women aged 35 to 54 who watch during the day has been decreasing in recent years, as more and more of them go off to work. Overall viewing levels rise slowly but steadily during these seven hours, from 20 percent of the homes with television to 30 percent.

At 3:30 school-age children and some working adults start coming home. The relative dominance of

households with an income under \$10,000 evaporates, and the audience becomes slightly more upscale. Between 4:00 and 6:00, viewing levels shoot up from 30 to 50 percent of TV homes. The audience becomes "dichotomous" again. Older women watch news and talk programs, while kids watch reruns. Between 6:00 and 8:00, younger adults, having finished dinner, swell the ranks of viewers; by 8:00, 60 percent of viewing households are tuned in.

The day is rolling towards its majestic, all-American crescendo. Between 8:30 and 9 P.M., 105 million Americans, or thereabouts, will be sitting before the set. (Of course that still leaves half the country doing something else.) Then at 9:00 the children go to bed. The old folks start going to bed. Teen-agers remain a low-level constant—10 percent of the audience from morning to night. By 10:30 two-thirds of the viewers are 18-to-54-year-olds.

By 11:00 most of the old people are gone, and many young people have come back from having a good time somewhere. Advertisers are very fond of the 11 P.M. to midnight time period. The audience is small, but all those waste demographics have been filtered out. At the same time, though, the networks are losing some of the audience to movies on independent channels and cable. The day finally shudders to a halt at 1 A.M., when audience levels have sunk to about 15 percent, right where they were at 7 A.M.



world-famous adults, making complete fools of themselves. It was like a teenage fantasy come to life. The bloopers show was probably the great programming innovation of 1983, although not the kind of development, perhaps, that would satisfy the networks' sterner critics.

Ross and Vicki are the networks' toughest customers. Making shows espe-

cially for them is suicidal, since, according to David Poltrack, no one watches teen shows except teens. Nevertheless, he said, CBS went ahead last fall with two new teen shows, *Dreams* and *Charles in Charge*. After five weeks, *Dreams* was pulled, having attracted no one except teens, and *Charles in Charge* was running only slightly better. Like most teenagers,

Ross and Vicki haven't yet developed the built-in loyalty to the networks that their parents have. They're finicky, which makes them relatively unsusceptible to the networks' "least objectionable programming" approach. Rather than watch a prime-time network show they don't like, they may switch to a rerun of an old sitcom on an independent channel or on cable. MTV has also made a small dent in the networks' teen-audience numbers, especially on Friday and Saturday nights. "If your target is teens," says Barry Kaplan, a vice president at the Ted Bates advertising firm, "network television is a waste."

Younger Men Are Least Likely to Make a Date with a TV Program



MEN 18-34

able income, a family of clamorous con-

During certain times of the year advertisers will pay the networks a quarter of a million dollars or more for the opportunity to talk to men like Jeff for 30 seconds. He's got it all: dispos-

sumers, and a renewed taste for television. What's more, Jeff represents the bulge of the post-World War II baby boom. There are 67 million 18-to-34-year-old viewers, half again more than in 1970. Michael Drexler, executive vice president of the Doyle Dane Bernbach advertising firm, points out that shows like NBC's *Hill Street Blues* and *Cheers*, which have been caviar to the young adult but dross to kids and oldsters, have a better chance of survival today than they would have had 10 years ago, simply because there are more young adults. Kids' shows, conversely, have fallen into perilous straits as the percentage of children in

Upscale, Downscale

If you really want to feel needed, if not by your loved ones then at least by television executives, you should strive to be an HoH POM. This is the abbreviation for an immensely desirable demographic category in which the "head of household" is a "professional, owner, or manager." Add the HoH POMs to the overlapping category of "\$20,000+ with Any Non-Adults," and you have the prized "Selected Upper Demographics." Programs that don't do terribly well with the whole audience can still survive if they "skew upscale," to use two of the most potent words in the ratings researcher's lexicon.

In the days when the networks controlled all the upper demographics, as well as the lower, nobody paid close attention to income figures. But now that independent channels, and especially pay cable, have been whittling away at the prosperous edges of the network audience, broadcasters are suddenly eager to prove their appeal to the people advertisers most want to reach—people with money.

Prosperous households, contrary to popular belief, watch only slightly less television than poor ones. Households with incomes of less than \$10,000 watch half again more weekday daytime television than HoH POMs, but the prime-time viewing of the two groups is virtually identical. Indeed, all five of Nielsen's income groups watch about the same amount of prime-time television. They do not, however, watch the same shows. Program tastes vary so much by income, in fact, that network television seems almost to have a class structure.

At the top of this order, though not quite alone, is a clutch of shows made by NBC. Last-ranked among the net-

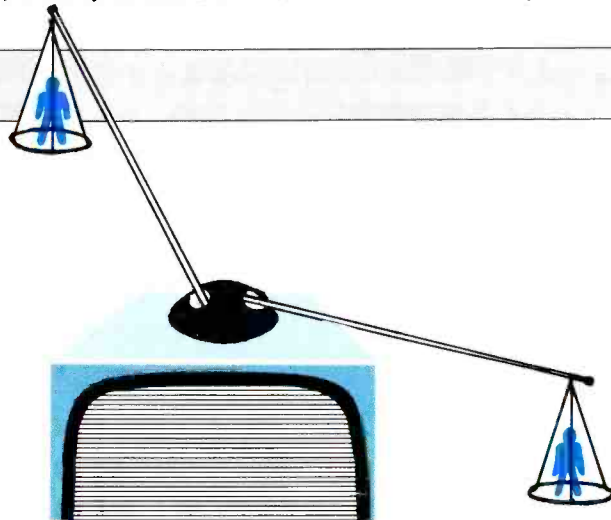
works in recent years, NBC has been pushing hardest to have ad agencies consider income figures seriously, since it has been determinedly wooing upscale viewers. In fact, the network has persuaded Nielsen to raise the uppermost category of the income scale from "\$30,000+" to "\$40,000+." The network's advocacy of income demographics gained momentum when *Hill Street Blues* initially failed in overall ratings while succeeding mightily with well-to-do young viewers. Instead of yanking the show, NBC called attention to its upscale audience. The same pattern exists today. *Hill Street's* ratings for April 1984, the most recent month for which Nielsen household data were available at press time, was a mediocre 11.6. In "less-than-\$10,000" households, it was 8.8. But in both upper-demographic categories it was almost double that figure. During the same period NBC's *Cheers* managed a 12.9 rating in poor households, but a 22.5 in \$20,000+ households with non-adults. *St. Elsewhere*, a *Hill Street* clone, performed poorly, but skewed equally well.

There are upper-middle-class shows and lower-middle-class shows—programs that do well with everyone,

but score heavily among those closer to the top or bottom. NBC would happily trade *Hill Street* and *Cheers* for CBS's *60 Minutes*, which appealed to upscale viewers and also did well in households earning \$10,000.

At the bottom of the ladder are shows that don't really appeal to anyone save the poor and, generally, kids—a sizeable if unprofitable group. These are the sorts of shows that critics of prime time identify as *m-TV*, shows that depend on death-defying stunts and non-stop aggression. CBS's *Dukes of Hazzard*, NBC's *Knight Rider*, and ABC's *Fall Guy* are examples of this genre: they hang on by sheer force of numbers.

Surprisingly, evening news programs do not skew particularly upscale, in part because their audience is long on older people, who tend to be less well-off. Sports programming, on the other hand, does skew upscale. The most popular major sport among upper-income households is tennis, followed by pro football, college football, and golf. Bowling, boxing, and baseball—except for the World Series—are pretty downscale, which is one reason you don't see the networks bidding feverishly to carry them.



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*Source: Opinion Research Corp.,
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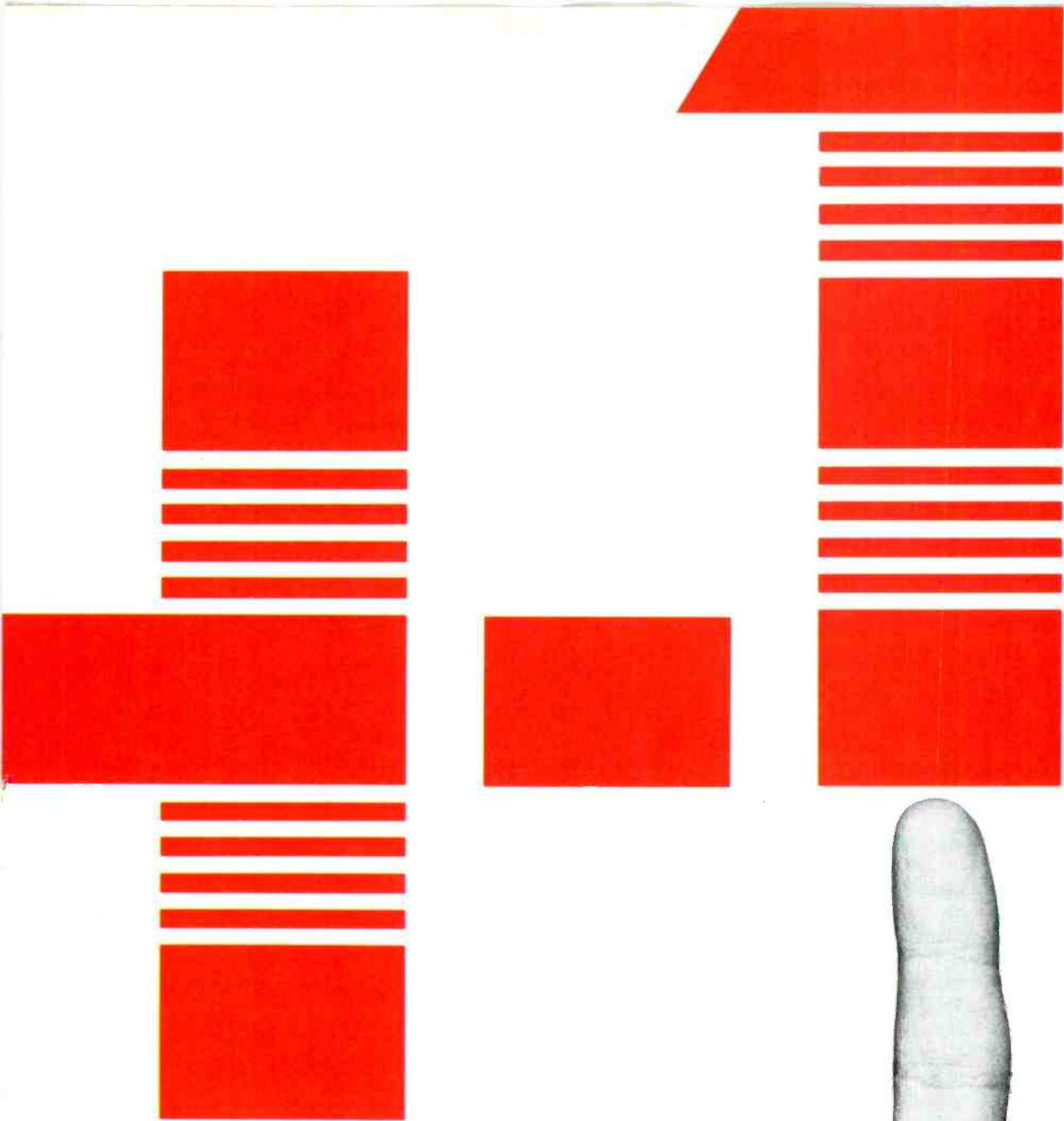
LINDA RONSTADT



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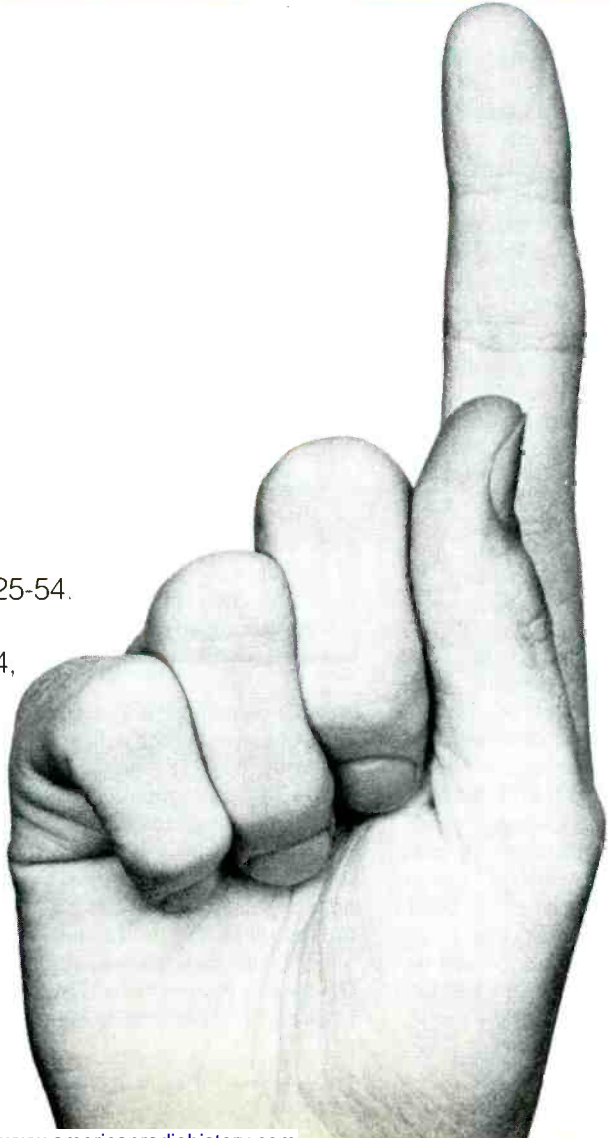


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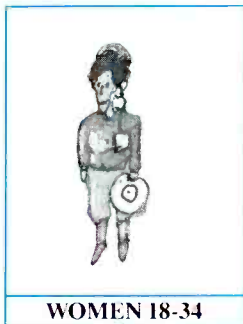
ANNE MURRAY

the audience has diminished.

From the point of view of the TV scholar, though, young adults make for a very untidy category. Jeff, at 34, has far more in common with 48-year-old Reed Median than with Reed's 19-year-old son, Doug. Doug lives at home, but he spends more time tinkering with his Kawasaki than sitting in the living room. Like 14-year-old Ross, Doug watches relatively little television, and he's not about to arrange his day around a show. He has money to spend, but he's definitely not in the market for a refrigerator-freezer. And Doug, as David Poltrack points out, is hardly comparable to someone like his older brother Gary, who lives in a college dorm. Gary lives about 100 yards from the nearest television and hardly watches at all; besides, he rarely buys anything but books, records, posters, and instant coffee. Eighteen- to 24-year-olds are thus a suspect category, increasingly so as people put off marriage. In the early 1970s, CBS convinced Nielsen to begin measuring 25- to 54-year-olds as well as 18-to-49s, thus making the adult audience older and filtering out all those undependable and underfinanced 18-to-24s. Not coincidentally, CBS has always had the oldest audience of the three networks, and has not done well with young adults.

The birth of the twins brought Jeff's very brief footloose period to an end when he was only 20. With a heavy sigh he hung up his bowling shoes and his dancing shoes, and turned into a homebody. Now he can be found in front of the set most any evening. Jeff does most of his viewing during prime time and weekend afternoons. In both cases his tastes run to action and, if at all possible, violence. NBC's *Remington Steele*, *Hill Street Blues*, and other shoot-'em-up programs stay on the air because Jeff watches them, not Ross. The same is true for football, which completely dominates the daytime weekend ratings for young men during the fall.

Young Homemakers Watch a Lot and Buy Most of the Products

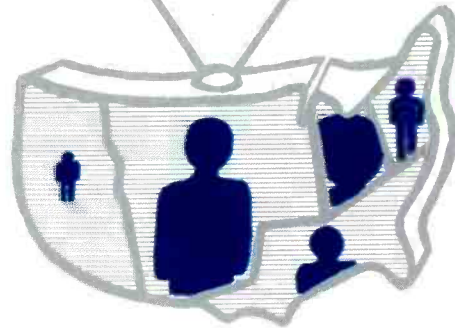


WOMEN 18-34

Patty is the queen of network television. Women have traditionally done 60 percent of the viewing, and although young women watch less than older ones, they buy more. Most

things sold on television, as Barry Kaplan points out, are packaged goods—tooth-

TV Hits You Where You Live



Folks in what Nielsen calls the East Central region, centered around Ohio, watch almost 20 percent more television than viewers in the lowest-viewing Pacific region. The South, the West Central (concentrated in the northern Plains States), and the Northeast come in second through fourth. It seems only fitting, at least symbolically, that a medium aiming for the demographic and aesthetic middle should succeed most in the geographic center.

There are also some quite tangible explanations for television's popularity in the heartland. Prime-time and news programs air an hour earlier in the Central time zone than they do elsewhere, so relatively fewer viewers are dropping off towards the end of prime time. And there's not that much to do in the small towns of mid-America, at least in the view of the New Yorkers who analyze ratings. People in the South and the West also watch less television because they stay outside later, basking or barbecuing. On the other hand, NBC's Jerry Jaffe, who appears to be one of the world's foremost authorities on bedtime variables, says that viewing on the West Coast peaks early, at 8:30 P.M., and that people start going to bed soon thereafter.

Actually, television officials are less concerned with where you live than with what size county you live in. They want to get the highest possible

ratings in "A" or "B" counties, which are located, respectively, in one of the 25 biggest cities and in metropolitan areas with populations of 150,000 or more. Big cities can be mined for Yuppies (young urban professionals), while in the suburbs Yumpies (young upwardly mobile professionals) are ripe for the picking. The viewing habits of these two groups are quite similar, and are practically indistinguishable from those of affluent people generally.

"C" and "D" counties, made up of small cities, towns, and rural areas, appear to be desperately short of youth, mobility, and professionalism. Very few shows that are highly popular in these areas have an upscale profile. Viewers there who watch television in relatively large amounts prefer *Dukes of Hazzard* to *Hill Street Blues*, and boxing and auto racing to pro football and golf.

Viewers in these areas also watch CBS more, while in urban areas ABC has a larger following. This distinction dates to the earliest days of television, when CBS landed the Channel 2 position in many of the largest markets. Since the signal at the low end of the dial can be beamed further, CBS was able to penetrate more deeply into the countryside. The persistence of a non-urban audience profile, despite CBS's efforts to change it, is testimony to the network loyalty, or perhaps the inertia, of the average viewer.

paste or panty hose or prepared foods, the sorts of items women with young children generally buy. It's no coincidence that most TV ads portray young women squeezing paper towels or feeding puppies.

Thus when the networks were talking up their schedules for the 1984-85 season they emphasized the feminine appeal of many of the new shows, such as ABC's *Glitter* and *Paper Dolls*. NBC, which had been eager to point to its high-quality de-

mographics in the absence of a large audience, makes this quite explicit. "We used to sell households," says Jerry Jaffe, head of NBC's audience research. "Now we mostly sell young women, and throw in the households."

Patty loves the soaps, day and night. The soaps to her have the magnetic attraction that ballgames have for Jeff, or bloopers for Vicki. Patty has to be even more loyal to her favorite than they are, since

(Continued on page 70)

GRANADA TELEVISION OF ENGLAND

‘The best television company in the world’ – *Channels*, Sept/Oct 1984

some facts...

Granada Television

- is the oldest British Independent Television company: it has held its contract without interruption since it first went on the air in May 1956
- broadcasts the world’s longest-running television drama serial (*Coronation Street* – first transmitted December 1960)
- broadcast Britain’s first-ever television play made on film (*The Mosedale Horseshoe*) in 1971
- broadcasts the world’s longest-running weekly press review (*What the Papers Say* – first transmitted November 1956)
- broadcasts the world’s longest continuously-running general-knowledge quiz (*University Challenge* – first transmitted September 1962)
- won the first-ever International Emmy for Drama (*War and Peace*, 1963)
- won the most recent International Emmy for Drama (*The Jewel in the Crown*, 1984)
- broadcast the first interactive programmes on British television (*Granada Reports*, May 1982)
- broadcast the first-ever live television coverage of a British election campaign (Rochdale by-election, 1958)
- pioneered the broadcasting in Britain of the party political conferences and the conference of the Trades Union Congress (1962)

some awards...

Granada programmes have won every major award open to television both in the UK and overseas, including:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1958 Guild of Television Producers and Directors – Drama Award (<i>Death of a Salesman, Mary Broome</i> and others) | 1973 Television Critics’ Award – Best Drama Series (<i>Country Matters</i>) |
| 1959 Venice Film Festival – Children’s Film Series Award (<i>Animal Story: Table Manners</i>) | 1974 American Film Festival – Blue Ribbon, International Relations (<i>World in Action: A Day in the Life of Kevin Donellan</i>) |
| 1960 Guild of Television Producers and Directors – Drama Award (<i>Maupassant, The Victorians</i>) | 1975 Broadcasting Press Guild – Best Single Play (<i>The Nearly Man</i>) |
| 1961 Venice Film Festival – Special Prize (<i>The Boer War</i>) | 1976 International Film and Television Festival of New York – Gold Medal (<i>Disappearing World: the Kirghiz of Afghanistan</i>) |
| 1963 International Emmy for Drama (<i>War and Peace</i>) | 1977 International Emmy for Television Fiction (<i>Laurence Olivier Presents: The Collection</i>) |
| 1964 Guild of Television Producers and Directors – Award for Factual Production (<i>World in Action</i>) | 1978 British Institute of Management – Blue Circle Award (<i>WIA: Nuts and Bolts of the Economy – Made in Korea</i>) |
| 1965 Prix Italia – Premier Award (<i>Wedding on Saturday</i>) | 1979 Royal Television Society – Best Documentary Series (<i>The State of the Nation – the Bounds of Freedom</i>) |
| 1966 Leipzig Film Festival – Best Documentary (<i>Getting on a Little</i>) | 1980 Monte Carlo Television Festival – International Critics’ Prize (<i>World in Action: South Africa’s Bombshell</i>) |
| 1967 Logie Award, Australia (<i>Coronation Street</i>) | 1981 British Academy of Film and Television Arts – Special Television Prize (<i>Coronation Street</i>) |
| 1968 Cracow International Short Film Festival (<i>World in Action: The End of a Revolution</i>) | 1982 International Film and Television Festival of New York – Grand Award (<i>Brideshead Revisited</i> – which also took seven awards from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts in 1982) |
| 1969 Monte Carlo Festival – Golden Nymph for Actor of the Year (Freddie Jones in <i>The Caesars</i>) | 1982 International Emmy Award for Performing Arts (<i>A Lot of Happiness</i>) |
| 1970 Melbourne Film Festival – Special Television Prize (<i>Cities at War: Leningrad</i>) | 1983 International Emmy for Drama (<i>Laurence Olivier’s King Lear</i>) |
| 1971 Chicago International Film Festival – Silver Hugo (<i>The Magic Ball</i>) | 1984 International Emmy for Drama (<i>The Jewel in the Crown</i>) |
| 1972 British Society of Film and Television Arts – Best Children’s Programme (<i>The Intruder</i>) | |



GRANADA TELEVISION

Granada is represented internationally by Granada Television International Limited
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Network News, 15 Years After Agnew

A new study doesn't find the heavy liberal slant the former vice president once complained about, but it does confirm his charge of rampant negativism.

by Michael J. Robinson and Maura E. Clancey

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO Vice President Spiro Agnew introduced some of the most memorable phrases ever hurled at journalism, or at the network news. Reporters were not only "effete snobs" but also "hopeless hypochondriacs of history" and "nattering nabobs of negativism."

In the early 1970s right-wingers also began backing up their complaints about the networks' bias with quantitative research. Media critic Edith Efron concluded that network coverage of Vietnam, civil rights, and the Humphrey and Nixon campaigns was "biased in favor of the liberal, Democratic, left axis of opinion." Rock-ribbed professor Ernest Lefever analyzed defense-related *CBS Evening News* coverage in 1972 and 1973, and said it was slanted in favor of liberalism and detente with the Soviets.

More recently, the politically non-aligned social scientists Stanley Rothman and Robert Lichter reinforced the conservative case against the network news with an eye-opening series of articles profiling the people who report the news. Rothman and Lichter found, for exam-

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ple, that more than 80 percent of the network news corps eligible to vote in 1972 pulled the lever for George McGovern; that a clear majority of network newspeople classify themselves as liberal, and that more than half say they don't believe in God. Their findings were so dramatic that Katharine Graham, queen mother of *The Washington Post*, came away saying that perhaps "Spiro Agnew had something with all that media-conspiracy business."

Ronald Reagan's landslide reelection, however, has complicated any simple complaints about liberal media bias. Some critics might say he won 49 states in spite of network hostility; others might conclude that television's superficial, picture-oriented coverage fit perfectly with his masterful media management.

Whatever the networks' impact, they ought to be judged by what they actually reported. Are Agnew's complaints about liberal bias valid today? Since 1979, the Media Analysis Project at George Washington University has been examining nightly news programs for evidence of bias. In 1980, we analyzed CBS coverage of the Presidential campaigns. In 1984, we did the same thing with all three networks. And in between, we surveyed network "soft news"—feature reports and commentaries on public-policy issues during 100 days early in 1983.

In all three studies we found that most right-wing allegations about the network news just don't hold up. Ideological bias

is one of those mistakes that the network news doesn't make. In the 1980 primaries CBS treated "liberal" Ted Kennedy worse than it treated "middle-of-the-roader" Jimmy Carter, and in the general-election campaign CBS treated Carter worse than Reagan.

Our findings on coverage of last year's Reagan-Mondale contest indicate that Reagan got worse press than Mondale, but in the 625 campaign pieces appearing on the network news between Labor Day and Election Day we found issue bias in only 17 stories—3 percent of the networks' campaign reports that were examined. Among those 17, 10 leaned to the left and seven to the right, but overall the biased pieces were so few in number and the bias so weak in implication that real issue bias hardly existed at all.

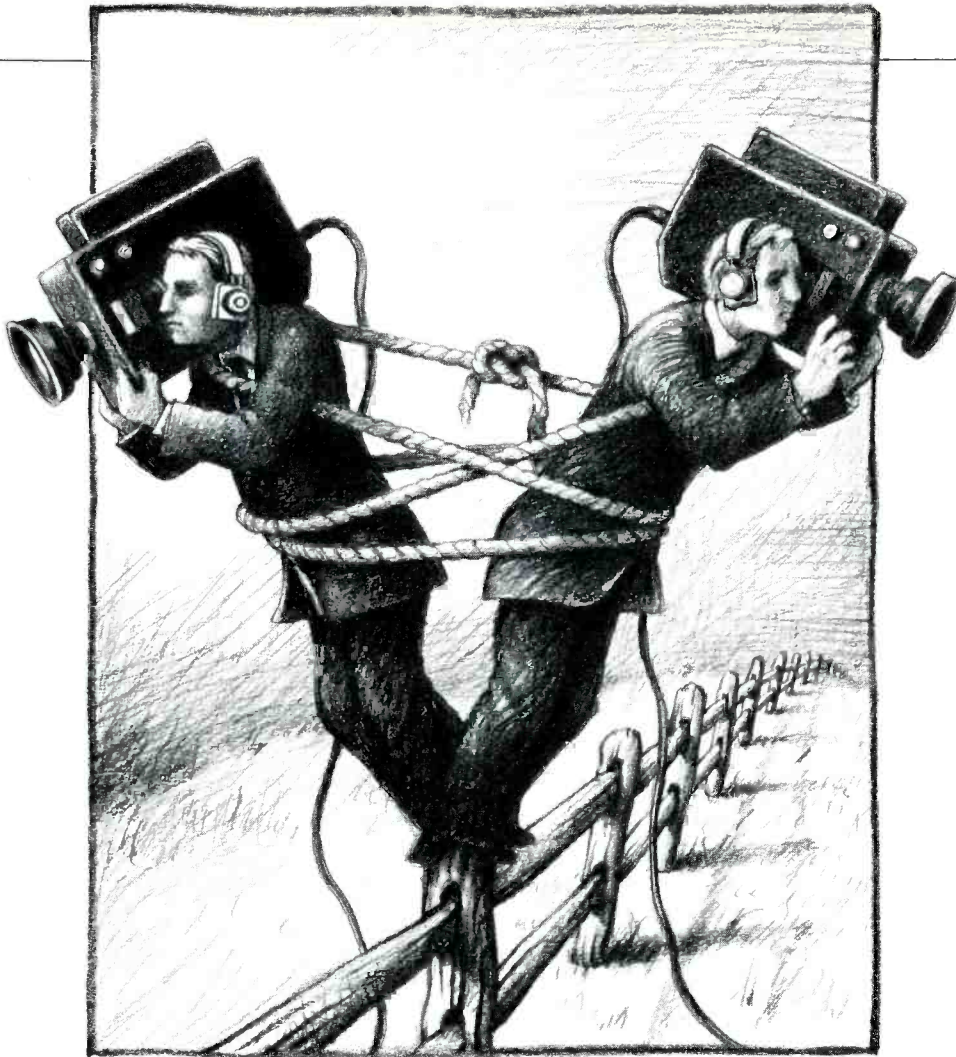
Campaign coverage, however, can't be used to judge the networks' business-as-usual performance. To do that in our 100-day study, we looked where ideological bias would most likely be—in the "soft" feature reports and commentaries that are allowed by journalistic tradition to display some opinion. The stories we examined also came from the period when liberal bias would be predictable—early in 1983, when the public's approval of Reagan and his economic policies had reached its lowest ebb in the polls.

We looked for evidence to support or quash what has developed as the standard three-part indictment of network newspeople and their news: first, that they are too *liberal*; second, that they are too *arrogant*, or "imperial," and third, that they are too *negative*, snide, and cynical. As for the newspeople, we're willing to concede (for the sake of argument) their liberalism, their negativism, and maybe even their arrogance. But as for the most serious charges—that the evening news itself reflects a liberal bias and arrogance—the evidence is too weak to convict the accused.

Checking Twice for Bias

We looked for bias in two ways. First, we examined the words of the reports for "bias per se." Then we looked again for a more subtle form of bias in the news organizations' selection of topics—"bias by agenda."

Network correspondents seldom overtly express political bias. More often it surfaces in their implications. In a two-part feature in February 1983, Dan Rather began by observing that in the Soviet Union war is "by design, an obses-



sion,” and correspondent Don McNeill concluded the same series by asserting that the Russians’ “morbid indulgence in the memory of war and suffering . . . is one of the greatest dilemmas of the nuclear age.” Both comments may be truisms, but they clearly imply a conservative viewpoint on U.S.-Soviet relations.

We checked newscast tapes for implicative statements concerning policy issues, and found first that many don’t lend themselves to classification along the traditional left/right spectrum of U.S. politics. For example, correspondents generally expressed muted joy about the chaos and backbiting among OPEC nations over fluctuating oil prices in winter 1983. Bias there was, but not left/right coloring. We classified those pieces as ambiguous. But on most issues—acid rain, prayer in public schools, support for Nicaraguan

contras, and the MX missile—there are clear positions left and right, and reports about them can be judged accordingly.

On those fundamental issues that divide liberals and conservatives in the 1980s, the network news contains no consistent left-wing bias of any significance. Of the feature reports and commentaries on national news during the first four months of 1983, 77 percent either gave nearly equal time and treatment to both sides or were ideologically neutral. We classified only 13 percent of the reports as liberal per se, and 10 percent as conservative. But the major finding here was that eight out of 10 “soft” policy-oriented pieces were essentially unbiased, left or right.

We thought the abortion issue would be a perfect trap to snare network bias. Lichter and Rothman found that 90 per-

cent of network newsmen are “pro-choice,” liberal on abortion. But in 1983 the networks did a marvelous job of avoiding that trap. For example, it’s almost impossible to imagine a more balanced or less partisan report than the one filed by ABC’s John Martin on January 21, the eve of the 10th anniversary of the Supreme Court’s legalization of abortion:

“It was part of a movement, women wanted the right to decide whether to abort . . . or to bear a child,” Martin reported. “But other women had doubts—the feeling that the fetus was alive—too human to abort. . . . By 1972, 17 states had legalized abortion. Then the Supreme Court ruled that the constitutional right of privacy is broad enough to encompass a woman’s decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy, in effect, legalizing abortion. For many, the decision was a welcome victory. . . . But for others it was a defeat for morality.”

Unexpectedly, conservative and hawkish pieces were actually more subjective and harder-hitting than the ones we classified as liberal or dovish. Consider David Brinkley’s commentary on Muammar el-Qaddafi, the Libyan dictator, which ended, “We have often heard reports that Egypt would invade Libya and dispose of Qaddafi using American weapons. Those of us who think it would be a good idea wonder what they’re waiting for.” Still, Brinkley’s jingoist outburst is very much the exception, not because it’s so hard-line but because it’s neither neutral nor ambiguous.

Throughout, bias per se is scarce, but there’s still the possibility of bias by agenda, in the selection of topics a newscast covers or ignores. We checked for this kind of bias in each report by asking ourselves whether its issue is one that President Reagan likes to discuss, such as crime in the streets, or one that a Walter Mondale prefers, such as the plight of the unemployed.

Once again, wholesale bias in favor of the liberal agenda just doesn’t exist on the evening news. Frankly we expected to find more. But as it happened, liberal news topics—the recession, “the new poor,” apartheid, Salvadoran death squads—accounted for only 26 percent of air time. And conservative topics—such as unwarranted government regulation and Soviet repression—accounted for only 21 percent of air time.

Admittedly, the networks’ agenda is clearly liberal when they address domestic issues. The instances of liberal bias

Roger Roth

**We found that eight out of 10
policy-oriented features lacked
partisan bias.**

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In the 'bad guy/good guy' test, the bad outnumbered the good four to one. The worst guy was the Soviet Union.

outnumber the conservative 36 percent to 22 percent on the evening news. But their single most-discussed domestic issue was crime in the streets. Moreover, the domestic imbalance coexists with an imbalance in foreign news agendas that lean to the right, 18 percent to 14 percent. Overseas stories are dominated by negative reports on Marxist countries, featuring Soviet repression, corruption, and inefficiency.

On the Scent of Arrogance

If the right and the left agree on anything about network news, it's the arrogance of television newscasters and newscasts. We measured two different aspects of arrogance, or "media imperialism": stridency and judgmentalism. What we termed a "strident" piece ignores or belittles the opposing view, while a "nonstrident" piece suggests

there is more than one legitimate position to take. By this measure, more than 99 percent of the feature reports and 80 percent of the commentaries were not strident. When four out of five network commentators stop short of belittling their opponents on an issue, it's hard to convict them of arrogance.

Using the other measure of arrogance, we found that 92 percent of the features were *nonjudgmental*: The newscaster almost never said explicitly which way a public policy ought to go. In fact, correspondents' conclusions often sound like the all-purpose innocuous tag-line used by newscaster Roland Hedley, of the comic strip *Doonesbury*, "Only time will tell."

Positively Negativist

Significantly, it was neither political bias nor arrogance that Spiro Agnew emphasized when he went public with his

attack on the network news. Whether through accident or acumen, Agnew actually got it right: His major complaint was that the networks had become "nattering nabobs of negativism."

And so it is with today's network news—a constant cacophony of carping and criticism. Sentence by sentence we noted whether the news implied something negative or positive about the world that is related to public policy. Again, most of the statements were merely descriptive and thus neutral. Still, among those that carry a negative or positive message, the ratio of bad to good news was precisely 20 to one. In 100 days, we counted only 47 of those positive statements by correspondents.

We found the same negative tendencies using what we call the good-guy, bad-guy test. When an official or organization was being clearly blamed for a policy problem, we attached the label, "the bad guy." When somebody was being credited for solving or avoiding a problem, he was "the good guy." In all, we found four times as many bad guys as good guys. The worst guy was the Soviet Union and its leadership. Next worst was Reagan and his administration.

Journalists might explain such negativity by saying that it accurately describes the state of the world—bad. But even on topics where good news was available, coverage was decidedly downbeat. The best example is the economic recovery that began during the period we studied: Unemployment fell a full percentage point, inflation stayed low, and interest rates held steady. But that was not how the networks played the recovery. The ratio of bad-news to good-news features and commentaries was more than four to one. For example, in a lead-in to an economics story in February 1983, Dan Rather downplayed the recovery: "While President Reagan was in St. Louis today speaking of an America on the mend, there was another America not far off—an America of 12 million unemployed where the wounds are too fresh and painful to mend."

Two weeks later, Rather was at it again in another lead-in: "At his news conference . . . President Reagan said the recovery is beginning. Recovery may indeed be just around the corner. . . . Tonight we look at some people for whom 'just around the corner' isn't close enough."

There's a real question as to whether Rather's lead-ins were biased leftward, but there is no question whatever as to their mood—negative, in spite of the

How the Study Was Done

Researchers in the Media Analysis Project at George Washington University examined more than 200 network news features—85,000 words, enough to fill a medium-sized book. They were aired on the evening news programs of the three major networks during the first 100 days of 1983.

Funding for the study was provided by the John and Mary Markle Foundation, of New York.

Included in the study were feature reports (of two-and-a-half minutes or longer) and commentaries that touched directly on domestic policy, the Reagan presidency, political scandals, and international affairs. *Excluded* were pieces about the campaign, about social life and values, about personalities, and about the policy-making process per se (except

those linked directly to policy disputes).

Also included in the survey were commentaries from ABC's *This Week with David Brinkley* because at the time the network didn't include commentaries on its nightly show.

Any attempt to measure news bias has the problem of defining standards of bias, liberalism, and conservatism. In this study, two of the three major members of the research team considered themselves conservative, Republican, or Reaganite—anything but secular humanist. Yet, despite our personal ideologies, all those who did the screening and scoring of news reports had little trouble agreeing more than 90 percent of the time as to whether a report showed liberal or conservative bias. M.J.R./M.E.C.

good news.

In a separate study, the Institute for Applied Economics found that although 95 percent of the nation's economic indicators were *positive* during the last half of 1983, 86 percent of the soft economic news pieces on the network news were negative. We found the same thing during the first half of the year. But the down-beat approach doesn't reveal partisan bias—just negativity of the same kind that colored the news of Carter's economic program three years before.

TO JUDGE WHAT network news is and isn't, consider the kinds of imbalance we found. The number of reports showing bias per se was so small, and the left/right political balance so close, that liberal views have a net advantage of only three percentage points. Comparing air time devoted to items on the liberal and conservative agendas, the liberals again have an advantage, but it's just five points. However, comparing the numbers of bad-news and good-news statements yields a net advantage of 90 points for the critical.

Some media critics consider negativism the most serious bias in broadcast journalism. Adam Clymer of *The New*

The most intriguing question raised by the study may be why network news is as politically balanced as it is.

York Times believes that negativism denies the network news its credentials as serious journalism. Ben Wattenberg goes even further in his new book, *The Good News Is the Bad News Is Wrong*, arguing that network negativism is the major element feeding our collective doubts about the state of the nation. Once we would have agreed with Wattenberg, but now we think the bad-news bias is no big problem. After all, if Americans could feel as optimistic last Election Day, as they apparently did, despite eight million unemployed, despite a very dicey situation in Central America, despite real interest rates approaching 10 percent, and despite a frosty relationship between the world's two nuclear giants, they apparently can handle the negative-news spin from the

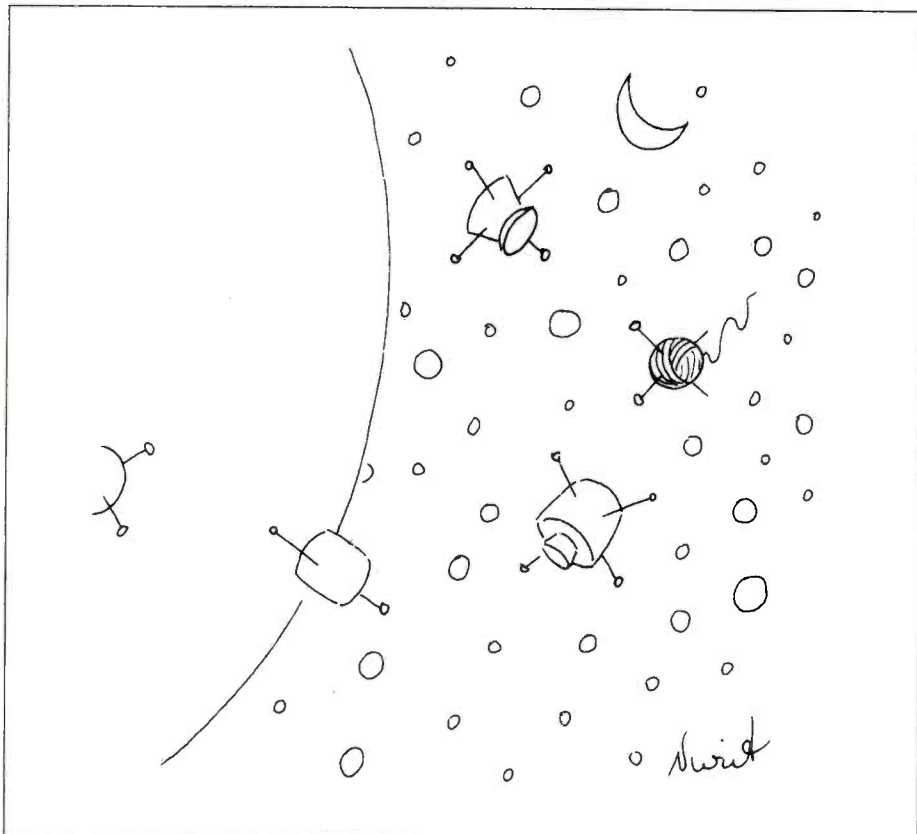
networks.

The most intriguing question raised by our findings may well be why network news is as politically balanced as it is. One might also ask why the media elite—so secular, so trendy, so bicoastal in their personal values—dress so conservatively, more like the nation's banking elite. In fact, they follow journalistic codes for about the same reasons they follow dress codes. They know that issue bias on the air is about as acceptable as punk hair styles.

Network newsmen may talk liberal, but that reflects an easy-listening liberalism that's far less leftist than surveys indicate. In private conversation, national correspondents express their liberal values more as catechism than belief. As close witnesses of the self-serving folly common in politics, few of them really expect big government to make the world right. Sensing, as they do, the public apathy and ignorance about politics, correspondents rarely consider the common man a good bet to build a better society. And earning, as they do, salaries in the nation's top 1 percent, network newsmen regard wholesale redistribution of wealth as less than an immediate necessity.

In the end, the only clear network bias seems to be toward bad news. That's consistent with the age-old journalistic penchant for comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. The comfort of great power tends to spoil your image on the evening news, whether you're left-wing or right. Andropov or Reagan, big government or big business.

Judging by what we found, a liberal is at least as likely to be frustrated with day-to-day network journalism as a conservative. (And any real leftist detests the network news.) If liberals and Democrats had to rely on what political bias actually exists in the news media, liberalism would probably be in the same sad shape it's in today. ■





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ANCHORS ABROAD

by Barbara Matusow



Foreign networks are doing news the American way, with 'personality' newscasters instead of nameless readers.

ON QUEEN ELIZABETH'S birthday in the summer of 1983, Alastair Burnet, the distinguished anchorman of British commercial television, was knighted, a highly unusual honor for a TV newsmen in that country. In France, anchorwoman Christine Ockrent gets only slightly less ink than those perennial tabloid favorites, Princess Caroline and Brigitte Bardot. Viewers in other Western countries, once accustomed to bland, quasi-anonymous newscasters, are now watching news "personalities" whose prominence would have been frowned on a decade or so ago. "We are learning from the Americans that personality plays a role," says Fritz Pleitgen, Washington bureau chief of ARD, one of Germany's two main networks. "We have found that it helps attract viewers. Ten years ago, reporters didn't even do stand-ups. Now they're practically mandatory."

Barbara Matusow, a Washington journalist, is author of The Evening Stars: The Making of the Network News Anchor.

The reason for the changes is, in a word, competition. Many European systems that originally enjoyed government-granted monopolies have been losing their audiences to more recently established commercial networks. The Japanese state system, NHK, was losing viewers to the four competing commercial networks until it fought back by Americanizing its newscasts—speeding up the pace, introducing electronic graphics, and expanding the roles of its reporters. Now the nine o'clock news anchor, a former Washington correspondent named Taro Kimura, gets mobbed whenever he appears publicly in Tokyo. His attractive young co-anchor, Midori Miazaki, also has a large following.

When radio broadcasting got underway some 60 years ago, officials deliberately played down the news reader. The preferred type was an anchor or announcer instructed to recite the news in a detached, dignified manner. "The early impulse was the anonymous voice," explains Peter Foges, former head of New York television production for the BBC, the network many foreign systems emu-

lated. The fact that the reader was not a journalist signaled that he was not involved in the preparation of the news; he was merely a mouthpiece. "It was the organization, not the individual, that had the authority," says Foges. Not until World War II, in fact, did the BBC allow its radio news readers' names to be used, to prevent the dissemination of German propaganda through bogus news bulletins read anonymously. Even in the United States, early radio news readers and announcers were known only by call letters ("AJN," for example, was WJZ's Milton Cross), until listeners demanded to know their identities, ending the short-lived practice. After British television began, it was several years before the news readers' faces were even shown on the screen; until then a disembodied voice read the headlines, which were embellished with still pictures. Every country outside the United States subscribed to the same basic philosophy: The news itself, not the person who delivered it, was supposed to be paramount. The governments were very much on guard against the possibility that a popular anchor

Rosalind Ivens

could develop his own power base or impose his own views on the news.

In contrast, the American media quickly learned to exalt the news personality. Not only has the anchor evolved as the pivotal figure in the newscast, but the audience has also been encouraged to believe he is personally responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the material he presents. That is why CBS takes out full-page newspaper ads proclaiming, "Dan Rather. He gives it to you straight." ABC counters by emphasizing Peter Jennings's "unique" perspective, while NBC extols Tom Brokaw's versatility

teur described the way he "carried the burden of all the distress, loneliness, and violence [of the world], grimacing painfully over all the international tensions and unemployment." Steadily, his influence mounted. The day after he told viewers to lower their thermostats to save energy, utility companies noted a sharp drop in the use of gas and electricity.

Unlike the BBC, which is only state-chartered and so at least partially insulated from government interference, French television is state-run—its top officials are government appointees. But

To juice up its news ratings, Japan's NHK adopted U.S. techniques; now its anchors get mobbed when they make public appearances.



and experience. With advertisers' dollars as incentive, the evening news shows have become battlegrounds for prestige.

While European viewers were almost certainly as susceptible to the lure of personality as American audiences, their state-run and/or state-financed monopolies could afford to ignore the public's wishes so long as competition did not exist. In the last decade, however, foreign TV managers became intrigued by the great success of American network anchors, especially Walter Cronkite. Inevitably there were imitators abroad. The most blatant case took place in France in the mid-'70s, after the government split its existing monopoly into three separate but competing networks. Officials of Télévision Française 1 actually embarked on a kind of reconnaissance mission to the United States, checking into a New York hotel for several days to watch the evening news and try to fathom the secret of Cronkite's appeal. Back in France, they thought they found their answer in a former actor and radio station executive named Roger Gicquel, who had no previous television experience. He became an immediate hit, outdrawing his nearest rival by two to one. But exactly what the government had hoped to avoid became a reality: Gicquel began injecting his own opinions into the news, which he delivered in an increasingly melodramatic fashion. Dubbing him the "Christ of the eight o'clock news," *Le Nouvel Observa-*

even that didn't stop Gicquel from twitting the government or speaking out on such controversial matters as capital punishment. Not surprisingly, critics began comparing him with Howard Beale, the demented and increasingly messianic anchorman in the movie *Network*. One incident in particular aroused widespread condemnation. The story concerned the brutal murder of a young boy by a seemingly respectable middle-class man. In essence, Gicquel said that if such a man could commit so heinous a crime, no one was safe. "La France a peur"—France is afraid—he intoned darkly. The newspapers lashed out at him, calling his performance both ridiculous and inflammatory. After the Socialist victory in 1981, Gicquel was fired, along with all of the top executives of French television and many prominent journalists. But by then he had stepped beyond the bounds of propriety so often that his dismissal was considered inevitable anyway.

The Gicquel example is an extreme one; anchors throughout the Western world generally try to be objective. But French television was not the only system to get more than it bargained for when it tried to inject a little more personality into the news. The BBC was stunned by the reaction to Angela Rippon, an attractive 30-year-old journalist hired in 1975, a time of sagging ratings for the network. The first woman to be given a prominent role on national news in Brit-

ain, Rippon created a sensation. The magazines and newspapers couldn't get enough of her; her legs, unseen behind her desk, were the topic of speculation across the land. BBC newscast ratings soared. But "Aunty," as the British network is affectionately called, was ambivalent about the success of its premier attraction. "They were absolutely terrified that I would become a star," Rippon says. "They'd never had any before, except perhaps for Richard Dimbleby [the BBC's man for many years at elections, coronations, and other state events, who died in 1965], but he was more of an authoritative, respected person. He wasn't really a star."

The BBC has always had fewer qualms about spotlighting commentators like Dimbleby; his successor, Sir Robin Day, is also famous. But it treats news readers differently. "Their attitude is that news is such a serious subject," says Rippon, "that they don't want viewers writing in about how somebody's hair looked."

In spite of Rippon's immense popularity, the news division made no effort to stop her when she cut back on news reading to spend more time on documentaries—an attitude that would be incomprehensible to American television executives. "I think [the BBC] was just as glad when I stopped reading the news altogether," she says. Rippon finally left the BBC in 1981 for a bigger salary at ITN, Britain's commercial network, where she helped inaugurate *TV-AM*, one of two new "breakfast programs." A cross between the *Today* and *Tonight* shows, *TV-AM* was a spectacular flop, attracting barely half as many viewers as the BBC's less-ballyhooed, better-produced entry. In the shake-up that ensued, Rippon left Britain to try her luck in America—clearly a more congenial locale for a star journalist. She currently covers the arts and entertainment scene for Boston's WNEV-TV.

Since the Rippon affair, the BBC has been careful not to nurture any more superstars, maintaining instead a pool of news readers who are rotated throughout the schedule. "It took me a long time to figure out who their main people were," says Joe Angotti, NBC's bureau chief in London. "At nine o'clock, an announcer says, 'Now it's time for the BBC news with Sue Lawlor.' But she doesn't say her name and they don't use any visual identification. Also, they rotate their people on a very irregular basis. Clearly, the BBC is trying to build audience habit based not on people but on the content of the program."

But for all its efforts to the contrary, the BBC cannot negate television's power to make an attractive person fasci-

Josh Brown

nating to the public. Its anchors are far more visible than they used to be. More is written about them in the press, and their salaries have increased, along with their popularity, to the point that they now have agents—still a rarity in most other countries. In part, the BBC itself has unintentionally fostered the anchor-as-star phenomenon by phasing out its announcers and replacing them with journalists.

If the BBC is still reluctant to create stars, other systems, such as Canada's CBC, are shedding their reservations rapidly. "At one time in the '60s, everybody on the CBC looked like an Air Canada pilot," says Desmond Smith, a senior producer on the CBC national news. "They were all very neat, with well-trimmed sideburns and little mustaches. And they all had wonderful baritone voices. But the era of the dapper reader is coming to an end. Knowlton Nash [anchor of the nightly CBC news] and Peter Mansbridge [the weekend anchor] are of the new breed—both are highly skilled journalists. Mansbridge is a total TV man. He knows how to make all the right moves. Like Rather, he's deeply involved in the story; he gets on the phone to talk to the correspondents, or to check out a lead. With the technology we have today—live satellite interviews and so forth—it makes sense to have your anchor involved."

Mike Shea, the CBC Washington bureau chief, agrees. "We are teaching our announcers how to write, how to chase down stories, how to check out facts, and so on. The younger ones want to do it; the older ones are content just to read."

But phasing out the old-style news readers can be a delicate matter, especially if they are extremely popular. One



C. FISTER

Critics began to compare the French anchorman to the messianic newscaster Howard Beale in the movie, *Network*.

such is Germany's Karl-Heinz Koepcke, an aging announcer who reads the news in a stiff, formal manner but is nonetheless a beloved public figure. It would be perilous indeed to remove him, but when he retires, it's thought likely that his replacement will be a journalist. "We are coming to the American system," says ARD's Fritz Pleitgen. "I think the news would be less antiseptic if it were read by a journalist. Koepcke reads it like an actor, which he was. The journalists who have seen the American system think we ought to use journalists to read the news, too."

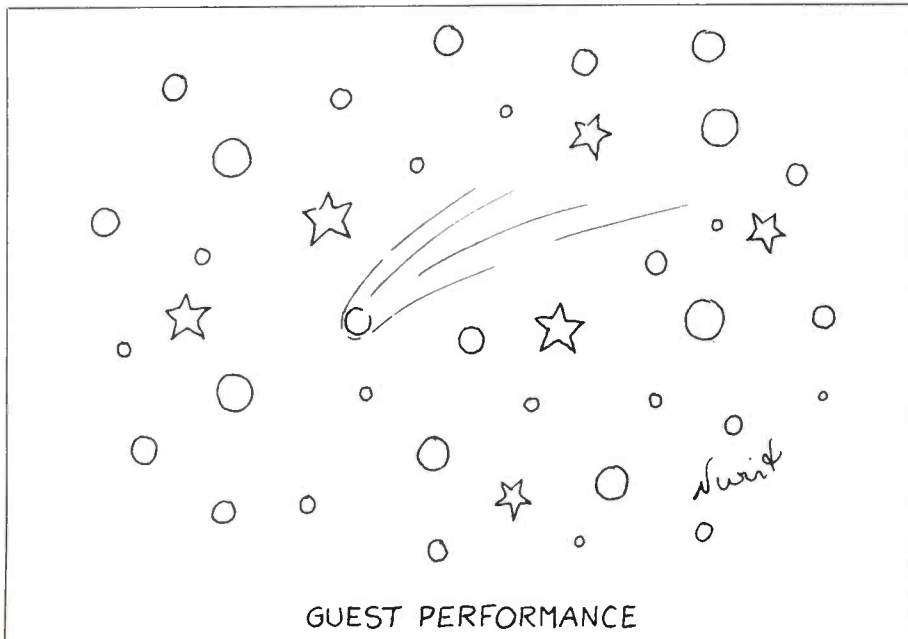
The one huge disparity between American anchors and their foreign counterparts is in the matter of salaries. Multi-million-dollar contracts are unheard of in other countries. Perhaps the highest-paid anchor outside the United States is Lloyd Robertson, the anchor of Canada's commercial network, CTV, who is reported to earn \$200,000 a year. Salaries in the \$50,000-to-\$60,000 range are much more typical, while pay scales set by the government can be even lower. France's

Christine Ockrent, one of the most popular anchors in all Europe, earns only \$45,000 a year. Says CBC's Mike Shea, "When I read about the salaries your anchors draw, it shocks me. The idea of local anchors being paid \$400,000 a year! Why, we could run a newsroom for a whole year on that."

There are also differences in editorial input and control. European anchors are generally less powerful than Rather, Brokaw, and Jennings, who have immense influence over what is covered in the evening news, how it's covered, and who covers it. Ockrent may come closest in terms of clout, since she functions as her program's executive producer as well as its anchor. American networks assume they can always find a competent producer, but star-caliber anchors are well-nigh irreplaceable. Europeans disagree. "For us, it's the producer who's indispensable," says Vernon Mann, ITN's bureau chief in Washington. "You can always find somebody else to read the news."

For all their growing prominence, European anchors are still basically working stiff; they are not a privileged group of millionaires treated at times with more deference than the leaders of their countries, to say nothing of being paid 10 times as much. There was a telling incident last February in New Hampshire. When Dan Rather was having lunch with then-Presidential candidate Alan Cranston, a CBS aide approached the table and said, "I'm sorry, Senator, but Mr. Rather only has time for one more question."

Could such a bizarre, topsy-turvy situation arise in Europe, Japan, or elsewhere? Not so long as news in other countries remains relatively unimportant commercially. The star system has flourished here because news became a big-time commodity, shaped to suit the tastes and preferences of the mass audience. But foreign observers of our personality-crazed system should be warned lest the same phenomenon start growing in their own back yards. After all, the seeds have already been planted. ■



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Bill Daniels

T HE BUILDER OF CABLE EMPIRES

by Randy Welch

SOMEDAY THE MASTERS of television will look back on Bill Daniels and chuckle fondly. Every industry has its early buckaroos — the barnstormers who began airlines, the wildcatters who struck oil. Cable television is still living in the era of its founders, so an occasional riverboat gambler can be found even today in its higher ranks.

Still up there, for example, is Daniels, a pioneer cable operator who is today the industry's biggest deal-maker. Once a Golden Gloves boxing champ, he later served as a pilot and shot down 11 enemy aircraft in World War II. Divorced four times, he likes expressing his admiration for young women. Tanned, craggy-faced, and stocky at 5'6³/₄", he still moves with a boxer's quickness. And he loves to slap \$100 tips into the hands of startled waiters and bellhops.

Randy Welch lives in Denver and writes frequently about business and the media.

In 1980, Daniels sold some of his cable systems for \$100 million, making a personal profit of \$40 million and distributing another \$13 million among his employees. Since then, he has rebuilt his cable holdings to 29 systems, with interests in several cable program services.

But he is most prominent as a big-time deal-maker. When the owners of Satellite News Channel wanted to sell out to their bitter rival, Ted Turner, last year, they told Daniels he was the only man who could bring off the deal. That made him proud. So he did it.

Daniels has helped assemble eight of the country's 10 largest multiple system operators (MSOs). Last year his firm brokered deals totaling \$676 million, in the continuing buy-out, merge-'em, shake-up process that is gradually consolidating the cable business, placing it in fewer and fewer corporate hands. Within 10 years, he predicts, the 25 largest MSOs will own 80 to 90 percent of the cable systems in the country. The prospect of ca-

Top broker in the cable industry, he helped assemble most of the biggest chains.

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• Cox Broadcasting, Number Four. Daniels helped persuade Jim Cox and J. Leonard Reinsch to invest in cable, and sold them their first systems.

• Warner Amex, Number Five. Daniels interested C.A. Sammons in the cable business and helped him invest \$6 million in it. Later the systems were merged into Warner Communications.

• Storer Broadcasting, Number Six. Daniels sold Storer its first systems. In turn, George Storer Sr. sold Daniels his first Lear jet.

• Viacom, Number Nine. Daniels urged CBS to get into cable in the mid-1950s, and he later sold the company a system. The CBS holdings became Viacom when the FCC ordered the networks out of cable ownership.

• United Cable, Number Ten. Daniels

Rampart Programming Services, which distributes the Playboy Channel ("growing like hell," he claims) and the cultural channel Bravo. He's also a partner in Box Seat, a planned regional sports channel in Southern California. Daniels's latest venture is franchising a nationwide chain of retail stores to sell home-video equipment and tapes, pocket pagers, personal computers, and software.

When ABC and Group W decided that their jointly owned Satellite News Channel was losing too much money, they asked Daniels to act as an intermediary between them and the logical buyer, Ted Turner, owner of the rival Cable News Network. The market wasn't big enough for two such cable services, but feelings were so bitter between the two camps that it was unlikely Turner would sit

Daniels is the very model of the modern tycoon where equipment is concerned. Visitors to his ultra-modern Denver office building are greeted by a receptionist on a video screen. In his board room, eight TV screens can be summoned to rise eerily from the center of a conference table. In the early 1960s, he had the first Lear jet based in Denver, and used it to beat his competition to sellers and buyers of cable systems in out-of-the-way cities around the country. (Today the jet is gone, Daniels says, because cable has changed. Now that the industry's focus is on the bigger cities, he can get there on scheduled airlines.)

According to Daniels's acquaintances, it's axiomatic that whenever he gets into a business outside the cable industry, he

ble dominated by corporate giants doesn't bother him in the slightest. "We need them. The demand for capital is so great . . . and they're the only ones with the capital to build [systems in] bigger markets."

Daniels himself shepherded cable's transformation from a small-time business owned by local businessmen to a megabucks gamble dominated by corporate kingpins. Observers of the cable industry are unanimous in the view that Daniels's major contribution was the introduction of well bankrolled investors.

Now his peers in the industry are muttering about being usurped by the phone companies and the networks. Great, says Daniels. Bring 'em on. "I could care less if the phone companies come in," he said in his Denver office. "Their

**'Bill would
gamble his
business five times
a day if he could,'
a friend observes.**

ance business, has run for senator and governor in New Mexico, and now chairs a \$700-million banking company there.

Bill, the more pugnacious and conserv-

himself, he was tamed by military school, where he played on the starting team in three sports, and was the undefeated Golden Gloves middleweight champion of New Mexico. He trained to be a Navy pilot, graduated two weeks after Pearl Harbor, and flew in North Africa and the Pacific, winning medals and surviving despite heavy losses in his squadron. After a war, Daniels says, "you come out dead serious, and all of your silly days are behind you."

After duty in the Korean War, a stint with the Blue Angels precision-flying team, and a rocky period in the insurance business with brother Jack, Daniels set out for Casper, Wyoming to start his own business. While driving between Wyoming and New Mexico in 1952, he stopped at Murnhy's Restaurant in Den-

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gets his head—or some other part of his anatomy—handed to him on a platter. In 1974, he spent \$425,000 on an unsuccessful bid for the Republican gubernatorial nomination in Colorado. And in sports, he lost \$300,000 backing boxer Ron Lyle's heavyweight match with Muhammad Ali, as well as \$200,000 sponsoring a car in the Indianapolis 500.

He lost a lot more buying the Utah Stars of the now-defunct American Basketball Association. He says that when the team won the ABA championship, set attendance records, and still lost \$400,000 in the 1970-'71 season, "I knew there was a problem." And then, immediately after winning the championship, coach Bill Sharman broke his contract to sign with the Los Angeles Lakers. Daniels is still bitter: "I don't even know if I'd take a phone call from Bill Sharman." Later, a planned sale of the club failed, and Daniels had to declare the franchise bankrupt in 1975. "I cried like a baby the night I had to fold the club. All my life I'd said I would never declare bankruptcy, but I didn't have a choice." The club's failure cost him \$5 million.

Since then, however, business has gone so well that in 1980 he returned to Utah, contacted 3,000 former season-ticket holders, and reimbursed them, with interest. That cost him \$750,000 but,

The night Daniels first saw TV in 1952 is now part of the lore of cable.

he says, "in terms of ego and pride, it was the high point of my life, without question. It had never been done before in the sports business. We couldn't find about 15 percent of the people, so we donated the extra money to the Utah Symphony." And even in sports, Daniels's fortunes have improved. He founded the Los Angeles Express as part of the United States Football League in 1983, and sold it in January 1984 at a \$4 million profit.

At age 64, Daniels says he's slowing his pace somewhat. He insists that Box Seat, the sports channel, is his last big project. "I have no ambition beyond that. Occasional challenges come along, like the Ted Turner deal—I couldn't wait to get

into that. And I help my young guys with their deals. But I don't have the drive I used to have." He plans to leave his company to employees when he dies, and expects that brokering will still be brisk. The broadcast television industry is twice as old as cable, he points out, and more money changed hands for broadcast stations last year than ever before.

He has great expectations for cable's non-entertainment services, even though they are starting slowly. The next "big, big market," he believes, will be cable delivery of computer software. Advertising on cable channels will be bigger than imagined, he says, because of cable's ability to reach narrow audiences. Daniels predicts that MSOs will soon start getting together to produce their own programming, and that after they finish their massive building programs, customer service and marketing will improve.

And how would Daniels measure his own contribution? How has the industry been changed by his 30-plus years of labor? How has society changed?

Nuts to that.

"Employees working for companies I've started from scratch total, we guess, about 40,000," he says. "Forty thousands jobs is happiness for 100,000 people. More jobs, and a lot of entertainment for a lot of people." ■

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ears than Walter Mondale
would have been.**



by William A. Henry III

I WROTE IT OFF as typical public lunacy when I read similar scrawled complaints, on men's room walls in two far-flung states, to the effect that Walter Mondale should not be elected President because he has "hooded eyes, like a snake." I only laughed when my mother, a lifelong liberal Democrat and no fool, told me that she too hesitated to vote for Mondale because of his serpent-like eyelids. But then, during the final televised campaign debate, I found myself listening to the Minnesotan's droning whine and writing down the question, "Can I stand four years of this voice?"

It has been said by practically every commentator, from Theodore White in *Time* magazine to John Chancellor on NBC, that Ronald Reagan won in significant measure because he is a more appealing presence on television than anyone who has ever run against him. More than a few pundits, not all of them Democrats and not all of them employed by print media, have suggested that it is dangerous to have voters beguiled by a master of television. Even Reagan's media-bestowed sobriquet, the Great Communicator, carries undertones of skepti-

William A. Henry III is an associate editor of Time magazine. His book, Visions of America, will be published this year.

cism. Reagan suffers from a version of the mistrust that plagues excessively good-looking men.

Yet in fact voters may be making a sensible judgment, not only for themselves but for their country, in preferring leaders who are adept at using television. On purely personal grounds of comfort, citizens are entitled to ask for chief executives who are easy on the eyes—and ears, for TV is often more of an aural medium than a visual one. Presidents are, after all, the most nearly inescapable TV presences. They are seen every day on every channel. They are parodied more frequently than Mr. T., interviewed more often than Joan Collins. A viewer with a phobic distaste for Johnny Carson or Dan Rather or one of the other ubiquitous, almost institutional TV personalities can all but count on avoiding the object of detestation by steering clear of certain shows, certain times of day. But a President is everywhere, like the Cheshire Cat's Jimmy-Carteresque grin, glimmering even when the substance behind it has long gone. If a political leader is unimpressive on the box, by mere repetition he may become actively irritating. And that is more than an annoyance to the public: A chief of state whose mannerisms peeve the citizenry may be all but unable to rally them, except in the direst crisis. In a representative democracy, the

essential requirement of a leader is to seem an effective surrogate for the common man. Thus, he must be at least nearly as likeable as the common man considers himself.

There is some evidence, albeit incomplete, that the Republican triumph was an ideological as well as personal victory for Reagan. Still, the fluidity of public opinion, as measured by polls, suggests that televised events and the candidates' manners swayed much of the electorate. If the ups and downs of their popularity were less extreme than in some previous elections, perhaps the reason is that no single moment was as influential as the sight of right-wing Republicans snarling at Nelson Rockefeller (and, by extension, the American mainstream) in 1964, or the images of protestors and Chicago police beating each other up outside the Democratic convention hall in 1968. No "sound bite" this time had quite the pith and consequence of Carter's "I'll never lie to you" in 1976, or Reagan's "There you go again" and "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" in 1980.

The value of televised commercials may never have been more in doubt than in 1984, when Gary Hart, at or near the peak of his popularity, spent millions of dollars on television in the New York primary, only to finish barely ahead of Jesse Jackson, whose TV budget was zero. But

Michael Witte

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the impact of TV debates, in shaping the primaries as well as the general election campaign, has never been so universally acknowledged, and participation by front-runners has never been so nearly obligatory. Indeed, the only thing that put the final outcome even remotely in doubt was Reagan's befuddled, often incoherent, performance, especially in the eye-opening first debate. And the only time that Mondale was ever less than gallant in defeat was in his lament, a few days after the election, that he had never warmed to

A professional charmer, Reagan may be the most likeable man in public life.

television, nor TV to him.

It is not quite true that Mondale never made peace with television. Twice, in the New York primary debate and in his first debate with Reagan, he managed to achieve a persona: the middle-class family man, metaphorically sitting at the kitchen table and talking common sense. On those occasions, although he wore his customary "full Norwegian"—dark suit, white shirt, muted tie—he sounded as though he was holding forth in rolled-up shirtsleeves. He projected an identity that people could relate to and that befitted his (admittedly ill-articulated) campaign themes of fairness, moderation, and the preservation of egalitarian, pluralist New Deal traditions.

Mondale sounded at those times as though he were conducting politics "retail," in the lingo of the trade—that is, person to person. He seemed to come through the picture tube and have conversations with individual voters. But most of the time he seemed to be politicking "wholesale," in the 19th-century fashion of preaching to large crowds of the already-converted.

That was, after all, the way he did campaign in the past. He was appointed state attorney general and senator before ever facing elections for those posts, was nominated vice president, and thus had never faced a serious threat from an opponent whom he personally had to beat. TV cameras did not intrude much in his senatorial campaigns—local news was not yet a major force—and cameras are barred from the Senate. Except for his surprisingly easy 1976 debate with Republican vice-

presidential nominee Robert Dole (who behaved so harshly that Mondale did not have to do anything much to win), he had never faced prolonged broadcast scrutiny. Perhaps the closest Mondale had come was in his acceptance speech at the 1980 convention, which was overshadowed—even as it was taking place—by the dance of death between Carter and Edward Kennedy, who with mock benignity agreed to bestow his blessing on the ticket. To people inside the hall, Mondale's 1980 speech seemed his finest pub-



lic moment up to that time. It was a barn-burner in the style of Hubert Humphrey, aimed at raising the spirits of the party faithful assembled in New York. But Mondale failed to grasp that the people arrayed before him, however numerous and yearning they seemed, were not his real audience. The true crowd was watching television, and on that medium Mondale sounded reedy, shrill, self-righteous, and formulaic. He did not attempt to persuade. He merely asserted, as though every moral issue were beyond dispute.

For the 1984 campaign, Mondale learned to speak in plain language—to avoid the typical error of Washington veterans, intoning incomprehensively in the jargon of the place. He learned, although incompletely, to mute his tone and to try to reach the dubious, the uncommitted. On the big occasions, he responded with professional skill. His most acute and widely celebrated thrust was his derisive question to Gary Hart, the proponent of New Ideas: "Where's the beef?" Mondale made that crack on the Sunday night before Super Tuesday, the one-day welter of primaries that he had to survive, and he was speaking in a debate in Georgia, the one state he most needed to carry. He was tough, almost relentless, when he had Hart on the run in New York, then conciliatory when he believed (mistakenly, as it turned out) he would win the nomination by carrying Pennsylvania.

Mondale's acceptance speech was an apt blend of principle, strategy (notably the thrust on taxes and spending, which nearly panicked the Reagan White House into admitting the necessity of a tax in-

crease and, therefore, the significance of the federal budget deficit), and introspection. He grasped that the public views a man differently once he has been formally nominated for President, and wants to know, above all, who he is. And he told us, like Richard Nixon recalling the sound of trains at night, although none of what he said was as vivid or revealing.

In his first debate with Reagan, Mondale remembered that his focus should be on the viewers. But in the second, which killed whatever small chance he had of an upset, he slipped back into fencing with Reagan; he did not appear to think of the waiting world beyond the performance hall. And in shaping the commercials that were supposed to convey him to the electorate, Mondale perhaps inadvertently confirmed the critical assessment of him: that he sees people, not as individuals, but as part of interest groups, that he seeks to reach them not as inspired loyal Americans but in self-serving coalitions. Mondale rarely if ever spoke directly to the camera, rarely addressed the viewer of a commercial as an individual. Instead, he was seen on film, speaking to crowds about their collective interests and his hopes for their future as a class.

Compounding these problems was Mondale's personal style. Even in a plaid shirt in a canoe, he did not ever seem to be a comfortable man. He did not convey the ease that inspires confidence in a commander. He seemed beset by doubts, or at least overly conscious of his limits, and of the broader fact of the limits to what any man, no matter how gifted, can do. Despite his posture as the voice of the working people, he was conspicuously smart and educated, analytic rather than anecdotal in his reasoning, corporate in bearing. Unrehearsed, he portrayed life in statistics, charts, and ideas, the way intellectuals do, and not in terms of happenstance and fate. He never showed the eagerness of a successful TV performer to win the affection of his audience.

Reagan, by contrast, may be the most likeable man in American public life. He has blended innate charm with half a century of practice at winning friends and influencing people as a way of making a living. His Hollywood persona was based on geniality more than heft. When he ran for governor of California in 1966, one oldtime studio head demurred, "No, Jimmy Stewart for governor. Reagan for best friend."

Despite his wealth, accrued chiefly through the accident of the phenomenal inflation in Southern California real estate, Reagan has the common touch. Both he and Mondale are products of small-town America. But if Mondale was always the preacher's son, Reagan was

equally obviously the kind-hearted, well-mannered jock who believes as an article of faith that Saturday's football game is the most important event in the universe.

On television, Reagan remains what he was so successfully for *GE Theater* and *Death Valley Days*—a host. He is the emcee of the federal government, introducing it, speaking for it, pointing up its virtues, and then getting out of the way of the show. He attempts to persuade, not through facts but through mood. He may cite statistics, but he seems to sense truth in the same way he conveys it, emotionally, through jokes and stories, myths and metaphors. His style of language and argument is perfectly suited to addressing the individual viewers; he carries on a conversation, or at his most formal spins a yarn. He may, on occasion, address a large crowd in tub-thumping fashion. But decades of performing for the camera, of imagining a full theater as he acted in an empty studio, seemingly have enabled him to maintain unbroken concentration on the true audience, far away.

Reagan is not always more adept than Mondale at remembering the vast unaffiliated middle, at speaking to the undecided rather than the zealous. His 1984 acceptance speech was the equivalent of a Las Vegas night club act for an audience of far-right activists. He had no theme, no overarching shape to his speech. He strung together a series of one-liners, many of which veered toward the McCarthyite excess of portraying his opponents as enemies of the American people. The great set-pieces of American political life, the acceptance speeches and debates and a handful of other events, offer leaders the rare opportunity to get their messages through, virtually unfiltered, to the people. In such moments, no network dares to cut away to a "stand-up" with a

For all his trying, Mondale lacked the ease that inspires confidence.

reporter giving his or her own observation. A true master of television must above all exploit these opportunities. To the extent (and it is probably considerable) that the nation views Reagan as its surrogate grandfather, he must be more careful than he was in his acceptance to seem warm and embracing, not cranky, inflexible, rambling, or any of the other attributes that in the elderly are associated with senility.

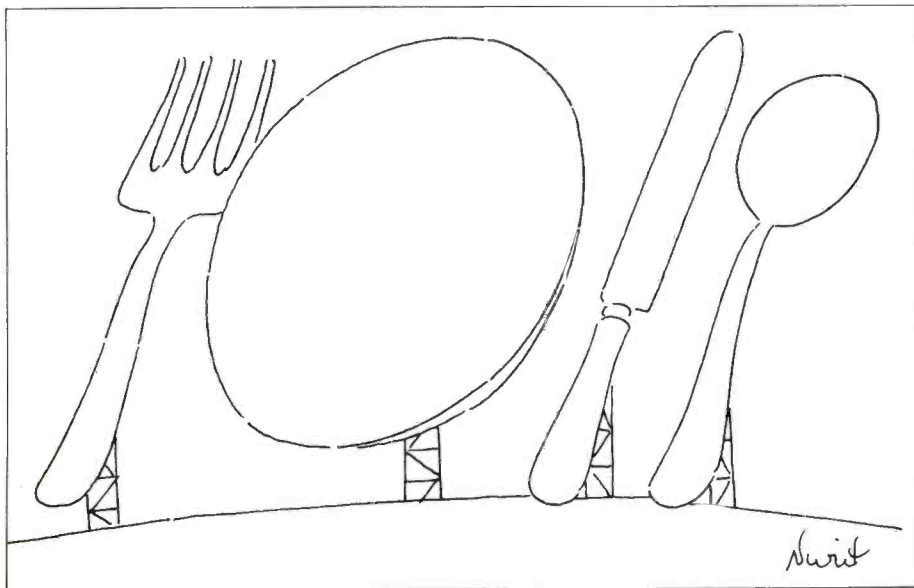
Perhaps Reagan's high point in 1984 was another set-piece, a month later—an address to the United Nations in which he outlined a foreign policy consisting of the traditional bipartisan commitment to fostering democracies, preserving human rights, and containing communism. Speaking directly to Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, who was in the hall, he urged a renewed effort toward arms control. Anyone who saw that speech would have been unable to understand how Reagan could be so fuddled and ineffectual in his debate against Mondale just a couple of weeks later—unless he realized that at the U.N. Reagan had a TelePrompTer. Reagan's gift in contending with television is that he reads with greater comprehension and sincerity than any anchorman now working. To avoid



seeming combative, cameramen and commentators do not point up his reliance on the TelePrompTer. Thus, like Walter Cronkite, Reagan is able to inspire trust by seeming to speak, with mellifluous clarity, from the heart.

Reagan is adroit at dealing with television even when he is not in control of events. As a stump speaker or at a news conference, he phrases his thoughts almost instinctively so they can become a "sound bite," the crisp few words that by their color and brevity can defeat any elaborate, footnoted argument made by the other side. He handles pageantry with aplomb but no pomp, and greets the endless variations on ribbon-cutting with something that looks very much like fun. Thus he enables TV news crews to get appealing pictures to go with his words.

In all these varied performances, Reagan excels the way American actors excel over the British: He always seems natural. In the end, though, a politician, like a poem, must not seem but be. The camera is a sort of searchlight, a moral X-ray, spying the truth. And maybe the most attractive thing about Reagan as a television performer is that he believes he is better when rendered unvarnished than when sold through any marketing ploy. In the early stages of his 1980 campaign, his commercials featured tanks rolling through Red Square; in 1984, they featured the dawn of a new day in America, full of happy children, and adults with new jobs. But as both campaigns wore on, Reagan took back control from the ad men. While Carter was being glimpsed from a reverent distance, working late and alone, and while Mondale was invoking the self-interest of crowds, Reagan had himself at a desk, talking. Just talking. The effect was unimpeded by his turkey neck and wobbling head, Reagan's own equivalents of hooded eyes and whining voice, because he was not being viewed objectively. He had revived the oldest process of winning and sustaining leadership. He was nurturing the sense of a subjective, personal relationship between himself and the people he led, not as a nation but one by one by one. ■



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and Savannah Waring Walker*

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Goods and Services of the Rich and Famous

by Michael Pollan

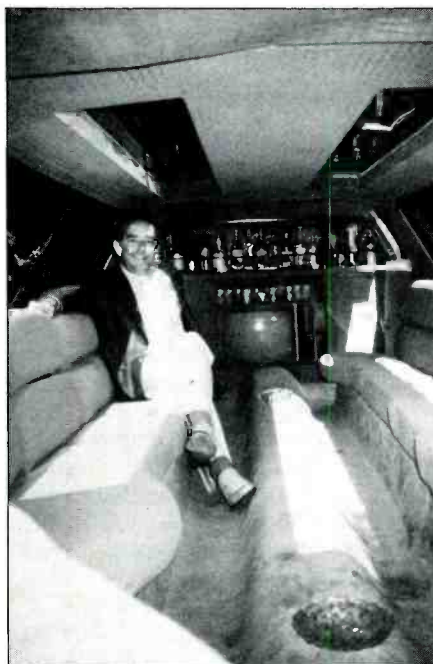
"Whoever has the most things when he dies, wins." —Anon.

TELEVISION is particularly good at reducing the trends of the time to absurdities. Take the oft-noted fascination with rich people that has occupied prime time the past few years. *Dallas*, the first show to cater to this appetite, was soon followed by *Hart to Hart*, *Dynasty*, and most recently, *Paper Dolls*. And then came glossy "infotainment" about rich people: *Entertainment Tonight* and the *Barbara Walters Specials*. Whether dressed up as melodrama or as news, all these programs admitted us to the sanctuaries of wealth, where we could observe close up the manners, habits, and habitats of newly rich Americans.

But it seems that, on television, it's never enough merely to borrow from a winning formula, to spin out endless variations on a theme. There's a premium on intensifying it, distilling it until nothing remains but the underlying obsession. As its wonderfully "high-concept" title makes clear, *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* performs exactly this function, distilling the genre to such a rich essence you would think it indigestible. Evidently it isn't, though, because *Lifestyles* has emerged as one of the most successful first-run programs in syndication, and as many as three *Lifestyles* clones are reportedly in development.

Lifestyles is *Dynasty* without the plot, the *Barbara Walters Specials* without the confessions, *Entertainment Tonight* without the news angles. *Lifestyles* is brutally minimalist in its portraiture of the rich and famous, dispensing with all but the essentials: the rich, the famous, their stuff. Indeed, even the rich and fa-

Michael Pollan, a contributing editor of *Channels*, is executive editor of *Harper's Magazine*.



Robin Leach, the host, is neither blow-dried nor bland. He writes his own material, and does it with style.

mous themselves get short shrift, the better to zero right in on the stuff. Who needs Cher when we can roam on our own through her \$6.4 million Egyptian-style palace? There are her closets, lined with pairs of shoes numbering in the hundreds, her gymnasium and jacuzzi, the swimming pool, even a baby pyramid in the boudoir.

Sometimes *Lifestyles* takes us to visit homes owned by no one especially famous. The show recently visited some unnamed advertising executive's \$3.5 million Marblehead, Massachusetts mansion, even though no one was home. Of the 10 or so segments that make up each hour, at least two can be expected to star strictly stuff: Tiffany diamonds, Mediterranean yachts, champagne and caviar, Bentleys, and the London tailor, Turn-

bull & Asser. With the possible exception of *Wild Kingdom*, no television show devotes as much time and attention to the non-human.

No doubt this flagrant commodity-fetishism makes *Lifestyles* a cozy environment for advertising, but it doesn't make for the liveliest viewing. Commodities, whatever their fantasy associations, just kind of sit there, and long stretches of *Lifestyles* have the pacing and appeal of an industrial film. It's hard to believe that a show called *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* could be dull but, alas, it frequently is.

Not that the show doesn't try hard. The hour is shot through with peppy canned music and *Entertainment Tonight*-style graphics—lots of careening trapezoids with celebrity faces in them. And Robin Leach, our host, clearly gives it his best, jetting us across the world each week, worming his way into exclusive living rooms, and writing his tabloid heart out. Leach, who is the program's producer as well, is an English veteran of the Rupert Murdoch newspapers and of *Entertainment Tonight*. With his rumpled, ill-fitting suits and twangy accent, he is television's downscale Alistair Cooke.

Yet Leach is several cuts above the typical television host. He is neither blow-dried nor bland. He writes his own material and does it with style, translating the tabloid's overheated clichés to the small screen. The show calls itself a "V.I.P. ticket to the 22-carat core of success" that gives us an opportunity to "join the jet set, where fortune is the final frontier." Of perfumier Jean-Paul Guerlain: "On his nose alone rests the fate of his empire." Leach keeps the phrases coming: "sartorial splendor," "meteoric rise to the top," "sad personal tragedy," and, again and again and again, "the best that money can buy."

Leach's gossip column in Murdoch's tabloid, *The Star*, bills him as "the reporter celebrities love," and on *Life-*

styles you can see why. Leach—his real name, not the clever pen-name you might have guessed—pliantly portrays celebrities in exactly the light they choose. “Liberace,” he once asked the pianist, “are you a gentle man living in a crazy world?”

Sycophant he may be, but Leach definitely knows what he’s doing and who’s watching. He recently explained his philosophy of celebrity interviewing thus: “I have a sign above my desk that says, NO MORE ‘I WANT TO STRETCH.’ That’s the phrase used by every starlet on *Three’s Company* when she means she wants to expand her career, do Shakespeare. Look, the guys who make the beer or put doors on cars every four seconds—they don’t relate to ‘I want to stretch.’ What are they gonna do—put *bumpers* on tomorrow?”

What they do relate to, according to *Lifestyles*, are extravagant fantasies of success. Beautiful homes. State-of-the-art appliances. Consumption on the grand scale. This is why *Lifestyles* so blithely lumps together the rich and the famous. The show hasn’t the least interest in people who are in any other way special—the brilliant entrepreneur or the gifted actress. In fact, *Lifestyles* always emphasizes the common bonds between its audience and its stars. So instead of

**The message is
that the rich
are no different
from you and me.
They just have
more stuff.**

starlet-talk about artistic “stretching” or tycoon-talk about better mousetraps, we get Robert Vaughn extolling the pleasures of fatherhood and Jennifer O’Neill (and dozens of others) gushing about the virtues of hearth and home. No parties, no geniuses, no affairs, no cocaine—just middle-class satisfactions enjoyed in million-dollar splendor.

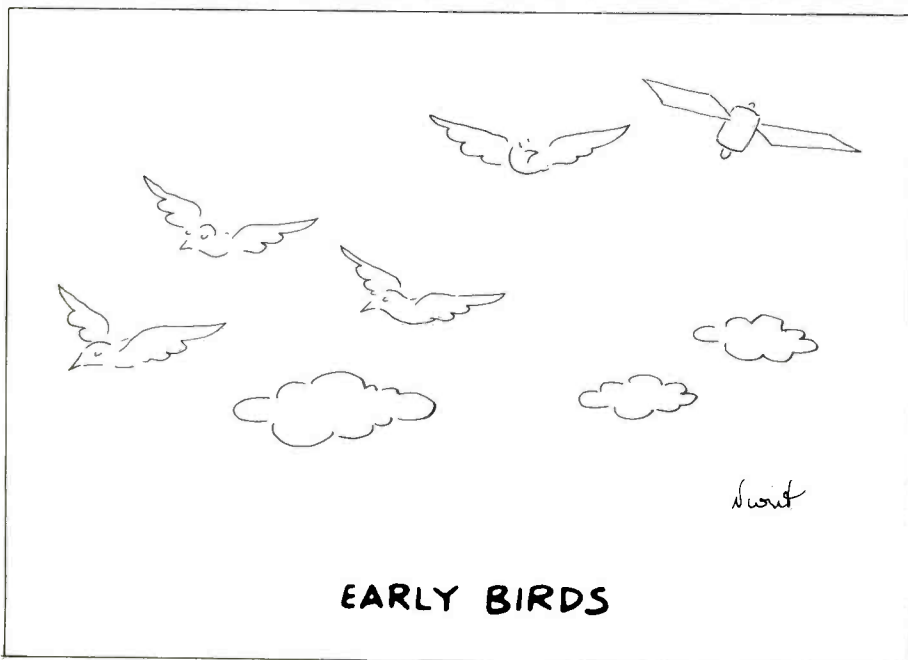
So the rich are no different from you and me—they just have more stuff. This seems to be *Lifestyles*’ main message, and the fact that it has found such wide

acceptance suggests that the television audience’s view of wealth has changed sharply since the rich first came to prime time. *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, and even the *Barbara Walters Specials* have always taken a far more ambivalent view of wealth and fame. The tycoons of *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, and many of the celebrities interviewed by Barbara Walters, come off as having paid a stiff moral price for their success. We at home could congratulate ourselves on *not* being like these people.

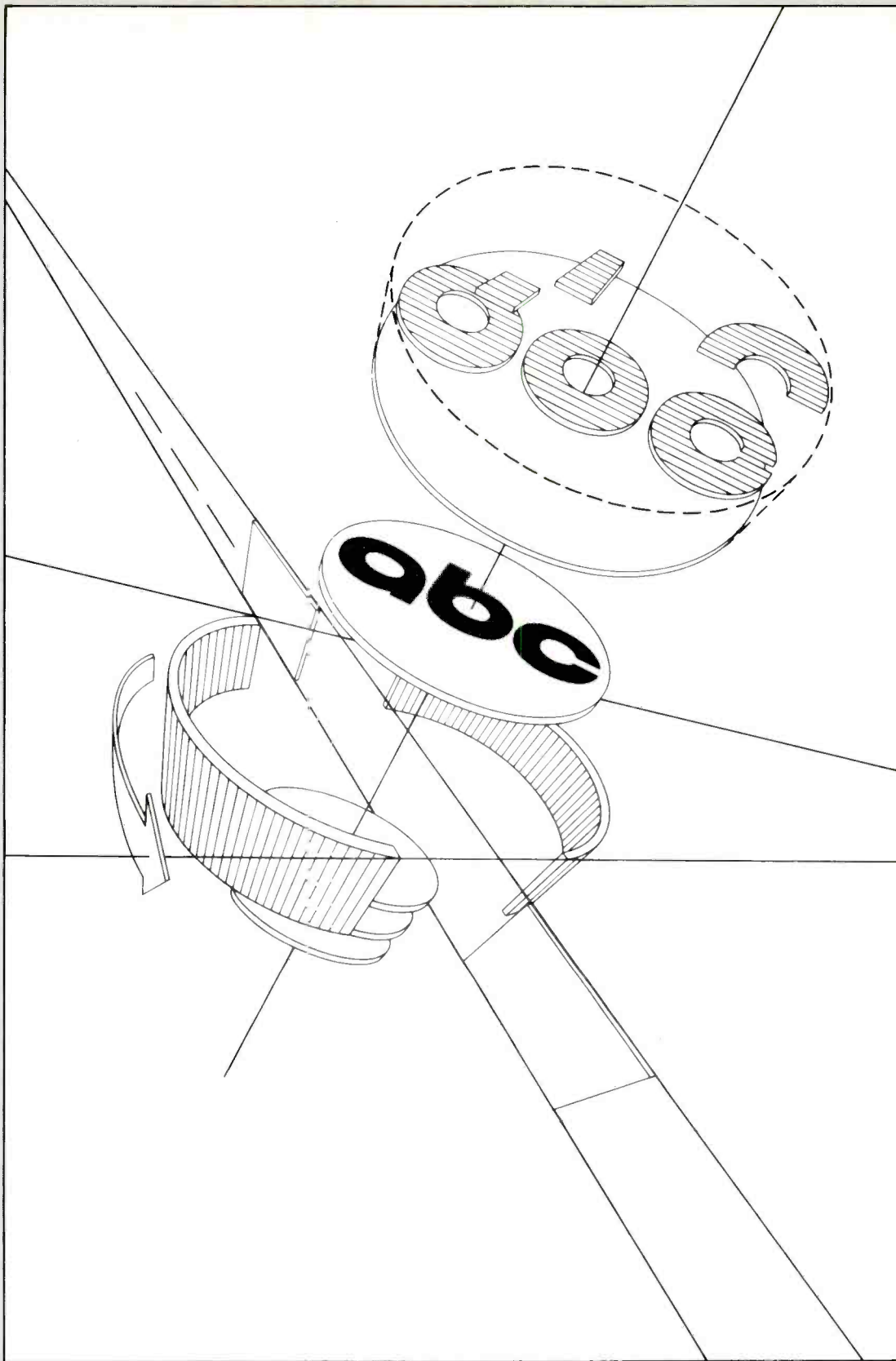
Blake Carrington’s evolution since *Dynasty*’s debut sums up the change: He went from ruthless oil baron to dignified patriarch in just four years. The early Blake would have been out of place on *Lifestyles*; today he would be a perfect guest. What accounts for this? Blake and most of the other prime-time plutocrats began their careers in an already distant time, when a new President was widely resented for favoring the rich at the expense of ordinary people during hard times. Since then, however, many of us seem to have been persuaded that the well-being of the rich does trickle down, that a rising economic tide lifts dinghies and yachts alike, that Blake Carrington and viewers like ourselves move in the same “opportunity society.” All that separates us is our “lifestyles.” A word Leach and his associates did not settle on by chance. For, unlike life, lifestyle is what you pick and choose. When your ship comes in, you too can get one of these lifestyles; in the meantime, why begrudge the guy who happened to get his first?

For now at least, not only is it okay to be rich, but there is no taboo against speaking frankly about your fortune and consuming it openly, even on television. Would Robert Vaughn, just two years ago, have matter-of-factly told Robin Leach that “I got into the seven figures during the *U.N.C.L.E.* years, and I’ve been in and out of them ever since.”

The problem is that when you take away the taboos and moral ambiguities all that’s left to distinguish the rich and famous is their stuff. The remarkable achievement of *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* has been to make wealth and fame appear utterly benign—and boring.



EARLY BIRDS



We're With You

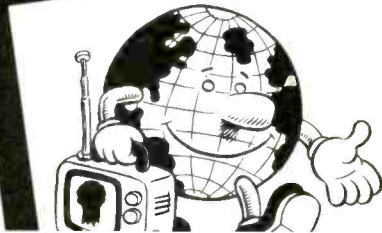


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84



IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF FILM
THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

**DAILY SCREENINGS
AND
3 NEWS-MAKING SYMPOSIA**
(IN THE ROY AND NIUTA TITUS THEATER 2)

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 16/12:15-1:30 PM
"Co-Productions: A New Genre?"

MODERATOR: Mr. John Eger, Senior Vice President, CBS Broadcast Group
Worldwide Entertainment

PANELISTS: • Jane Deknatel, President, Film Plus International
• Renato Pachetti, President, RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana
• Philippe De Chaisemartin, Director of Co-Production, Gaumont

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 19/12:15-1:30 PM
"How To Make An International Television Deal"
(An Improvisational Drama)

CAST: • Phil Corvo, Executive Director, NATPE International
• Jean-Noël Dibie, Director of Foreign Affairs, SFP (Paris)
• Guy Mazzeo, Executive Vice President, Blair Entertainment
• Shelby Larsen, Executive Vice President, Carousel Productions
• Carrie Hunter, Director, Banff Television Festival

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 20/12:15-1:30 PM
"The Emerging Market In Children's Programming"

MODERATOR: Lee Polk, Executive Producer, "Wonderworks"
PANELISTS: • Gerry Layborne
Vice President of Acquisition and Scheduling, Nickelodeon
• Nada Harcourt, Executive in Charge of Independent Productions,
Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
• Ursula von Zallinger, Organizer
Prix Jeunesse Television Festival (Munich)
• Squire D. Rushnell, Vice President of Long Range Planning
& of Children's Programming, ABC Television Network

These Symposia are made possible by grants from NATPE International, SFM Media Corporation
and Eastman Kodak Company.

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The Festival's 60-page Playbill describing each of the programs
is FREE and available at the screenings and Symposia.



84 FRIDAY, NOV. 16

PM 2:00 I AM A HOTEL	CANADA
2:30 ADVENTURES OF A PHOTOGRAPHER	ITALY
3:32 RAW WAR	FINLAND
4:07 VILLAGE AT THE BORDER	AUSTRIA

84 SATURDAY, NOV. 17
Special Event—
FESTIVAL FOR CHILDREN



AM 10:30 STRANGE REWARD	VIETNAM
10:40 PLUNCT, PLACT, ZOOM!	BRAZIL
11:24 THE DOOR OPENS	DENMARK
11:48 THE NIGHTINGALE	THE NETHERLANDS
PM 12:26 CURIOSITY SHOW	AUSTRALIA
12:56 WORLD OF NUMBERS	JAPAN
1:13 MUSICOMICOLOR	BELGIUM
1:42 NO MORE PRANKS	SWEDEN
ALFIE ATKINS	

Thanks...

...to all of our friends
for your generous and
enthusiastic support
which helped make this
our most successful
festival!

84 MONDAY, NOV. 19

PM 2:00 THE LIGHT IN THE FIELDS AND THE MOUNTAINS	JAPAN
3:19 ALL GOD'S CHILDREN	THE NETHERLANDS
3:45 ONE MORE DAY	JAPAN
4:33 THE NIGERIAN EXODUS	U.K.
4:42 TRANSEXUALS MY BODY MY SELF	FRANCE
5:43 THE AGE OF IRDN—PART III	FINLAND

84 TUESDAY, NOV. 20

PM 2:00 1984 INTERNATIONAL EMMY AWARD WINNERS (TO BE ANNOUNCED)

Note: All programs will be presented in English or subtitled.

NYWTF COLLEGE TOUR

Following their presentation at the Museum of Modern Art, a selection of these programs will tour 9 major college campuses around the country—to be supplemented and highlighted by 2 additional Festival selections from the U.S. ("The Ghost Writer") and the U.S.S.R. ("The Merry Go Round").

Cosby's New Show: A Hit and a Myth

by Brian Winston

IN THE BEGINNING—that is, in the 1950-51 television season—Eddie Anderson played Jack Benny's valet Rochester, and Ethel Waters was the maid Beulah. And now, half a lifetime later, Bill Cosby is Dr. Cliff Huxtable, nobody's servant but rather the very model of the affluent American, and the central figure in this season's only certifiable smash so far, *The Cosby Show*.

The television industry takes pride in the progress this represents. Blacks and people of other minorities are scattered liberally through all types of programs, playing all types of parts, even villains. But even today, the most representation minorities get on the small screen is either stereotypical or fantastically untypical.

Cosby's new show concerns an upper-middle-class couple with a horde of cute kids. The opening episode found dad making a ceremony of laying to rest the toddler's dead goldfish. Later in the episode, dad wondered whether the \$245 spent on a clarinet was wasted, since the 10-year-old, having demanded it, didn't care to practice. What makes all this unusual for television is the presence of an entire nuclear family, and a black one at that. In other words, with *Cosby*, blacks get their own *Father Knows Best*, the prototype that ended its original run 21 years ago.

NBC put *Cosby* up against CBS's top-ranking *Magnum, P.I.* and, after initially winning handsomely, it settled down to a weekly ratings draw, more or less—in a season when sitcoms have fallen from public favor, and series generally have to be rescued at the brink if they are to survive and become popular. *Cosby* deserves to be a hit, largely because the comedian's genius demands more extensive

Brian Winston, chairman of New York University's Department of Cinema Studies, is writing what he describes as a revisionist history of communications technologies. Misunderstanding Media.



With *The Cosby Show*, blacks get their own *Father Knows Best*, 21 years after the prototype left the air.

exposure than it gets selling Coke and whatever, or hosting that enlivening Saturday-morning cartoon series, *Fat Albert*, the only example of kidvid to suggest a human mind at work. Cosby is a mannered and masterly performer at the peak of his considerable powers, and the show is a pleasure to watch.

It requires only a few sentences to fill in the span between Rochester and Cosby's Dr. Huxtable. There was *Amos 'n' Andy*, withdrawn in 1953 because of black objections to its stereotyping. It was the first and last series with an all-black regular cast until *Sanford and Son*. The first black to have regular work in a non-comedy, prime-time series was Cicely Tyson, in an afro, as a secretary in the trailblazing 1963-64 series *East Side/West Side*, which starred George C. Scott. In Cosby's own breakthrough role, in *I Spy*, he played an educated and effective hero, the first of his color in a prime-time drama. The show ran from 1965 to 1968. Then *Julia*, a widowed nurse played by Diahann Carroll, re-

placed Cosby, as if the schedule could stand no more than one non-stereotyped black person at a time. The most interesting thing about *Julia* was the casting, which specialized in actors of such ambiguous racial appearance that viewers kept wondering if they were indeed black.

In the 1970s, as Norman Lear set about breaking down as many of television's taboos as he could, it was no surprise that he produced two shows featuring blacks, *Sanford and Son* and *The Jeffersons*. At that time, race was still an issue to be tackled.

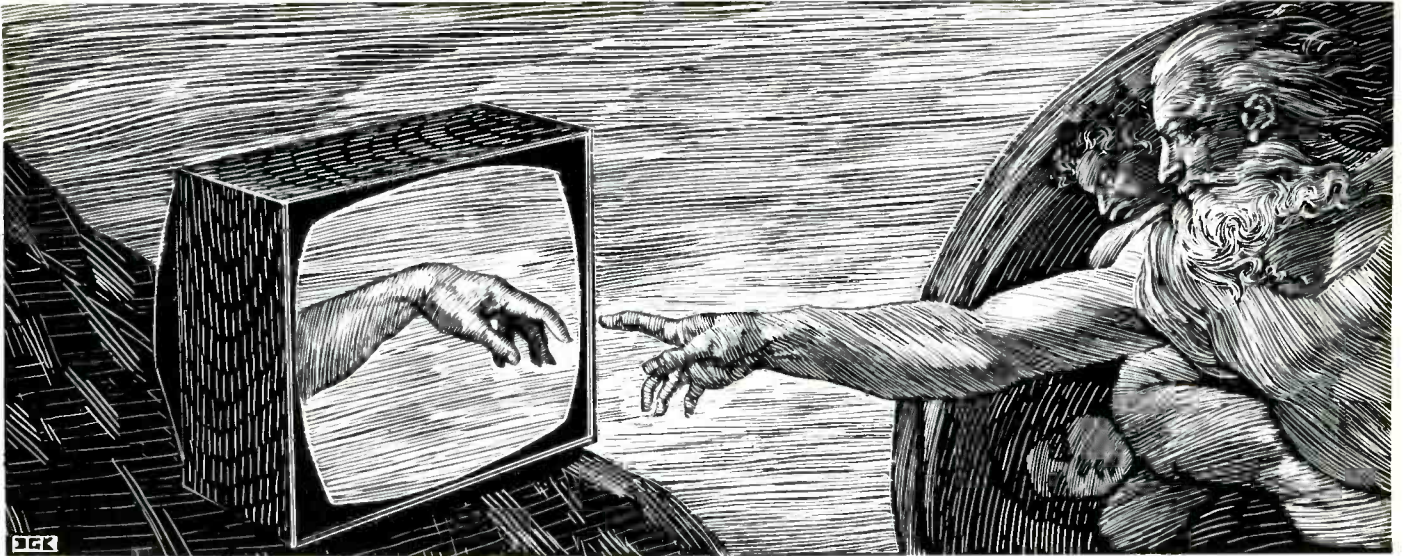
Then, the apogee: *Roots*, in January 1977. The breathtaking scheduling ploy that had the mini-series running eight consecutive nights was rumored to be ABC's somewhat unsubtle attempt to be done with it as quickly as possible. Whatever ABC's intentions, the show got an unexpected boost from the weather—and as deep snow blanketed the nation an all-time hit was made. Television allowed American blacks a history.

Nowadays, there is no shortage of black faces on the air. We have fantasy programs in which whites magically acquire precocious black children. And we have more realistic programs, such as *Hill Street Blues*, with black cops—and black crooks as well.

There is a double bind in this for all of us, black and white. Television normally deals in stereotypes and melodramatics. It tends to trash virtually everything it touches. Would any member of a still-hard-pressed minority want his history subjected to this treatment? In a society where power remains unequally distributed, how valuable or fair is it to have an equal distribution of ethnic jokes? Is it better that *The Cosby Show*, in redressing some of the damage done by a long line of stereotypes, creates a spurious picture of black privilege? Or is the nitty-gritty "realism" of *Hill Street Blues* preferable? I suspect *Cosby* is the less baleful, but this remains a vexed question. ■

Ten Commandments of the Electronic Church

by Robert Abelman



Two social scientists who explored the field bring forth a new set of laws for television evangelists.

IN THE BEGINNING, Vladimir Zworykin and other engineers created television. Now television was unformed and void of programming; it was a resource untapped by the powers that be. And Bishop Fulton J. Sheen said, "Let there be religious fare so to spread the word of God to the multitudes." And he went on television as he did on radio before it. And millions of viewers saw the image and thought it was good. And other religious leaders from other denominations said, "Let us explore this medium so to give our message to the masses." And so they did, and thought it good.

And the broadcasters said, "Let us give free airtime to religious organizations in the public's interest, but only in

Robert Abelman is a communications professor at Cleveland State University; he and Kimberly Neuendorf conducted the research reported here for UNDA-USA, a Catholic communications organization.

accordance with their prevalence in the land—three parts Protestant, two parts Catholic, and one part Jewish." And it was so. And television brought forth tent revivals, fire-and-brimstone sermons, and solemn services on weekend early mornings and late evenings. But as television's popularity grew and secular programming flourished, religious fare took to the background, unable to compete with the appeal and budgets of network shows.

And a resurrection of the electronic church did occur, the result of the miracle of satellite communication and cable technology. And the availability of religious fare did grow a hundredfold and spread across the land to the north and south, east and west. And the face of religious fare did change accordingly to compete with secular programming for the attention of the masses. And religious leaders who once praised the medium now question its utility and wonder if it has not changed the face of religion as well. And the nonbelievers who once

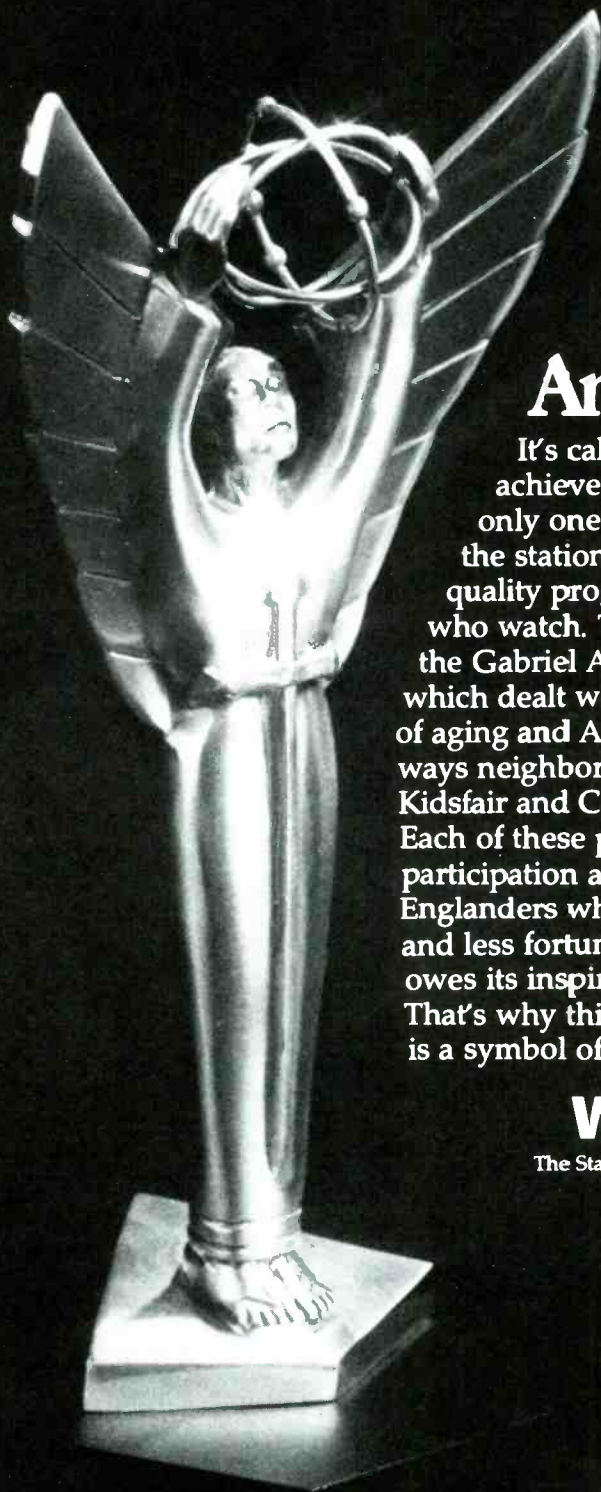
laughed and thought religious television folly now reflect and are humbled by its presence and power. And social critics sit and wonder if religious fare has not fallen to temptation by providing a collection plate for the millions or a forum for the chosen few of politics.

To seek the answers, two social scientists did journey to the electronic church and from it did bring forth 10 commandments that reflect the world of religion on television:

**I.
THOU SHALT MAKE UNTO THEE A
SECULAR IMAGE.**

Religious television programming is no longer limited to simple preaching and revival shows. Like its secular counterpart, religious TV is comprised of just about every popular programming format, including talk shows (*700 Club*), game shows (*Bible Bowl*), children's shows (*Davey & Goliath*), soap operas (*Another Life*), news-magazine shows (*Reel to Real*), and music/variety shows (*PTL Club*).

David G. Klein



An Honor For Us All

It's called the Gabriel Award for outstanding achievement. Once each year, it's presented to only one television station in the nation . . .

the station which demonstrates consistently high quality programming, serving the needs of those who watch. This year, WBZ-TV4 was honored with the Gabriel Award for programs and campaigns which dealt with topics ranging from the problems of aging and Alzheimer's disease, to the special ways neighbors help neighbors, to our annual Kidsfair and Children's Hospital Fund drive. Each of these projects owes its success to the participation and tireless generosity of New Englanders who care deeply about the needy and less fortunate. Each of these programs owes its inspiration to you.

That's why this year's Gabriel Award is a symbol of pride for us all.

WBZ-TV 4

The Station New England Turns To



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Place
To Be**

**NATPE
Fairmont Hotel
23rd Floor
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**II.
THOU SHALT BE LIKE BISHOP
FULTON SHEEN BEFORE THEE.**

Eve may have come before Adam in the land of Eden, but the pioneers of the world of religious TV were men. Today, men continue to dominate religious programming, outnumbering women three to one. In addition, nonwhites constitute only 14 percent of the total religious television population. When women and ethnic minorities are presented, they are typically in subservient or minor roles as opposed to leadership roles or positions of authority and control. Regarding contemporary televangelists, very little has changed since Bishop Sheen took to the screen—televangelists are overwhelmingly male and white.

**III.
THOU SHALT NOT BEAR WITNESS
TO ANY DENOMINATION.**

The vast majority of nationally distributed religious programs do not specify an association with or financial support from any particular denomination. Nonetheless, these programs are highly consistent in their fundamentalist approach to Christianity and typically feature pentecostals and charismatics in evangelistic roles. The 3:2:1 ratio of denominational representation on television, as established by broadcasters during the birth of the medium, is no longer a reality. Together, Protestant and Catholic programs outnumber those representing all other religions by approximately 50 to 1.

**IV.
REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY, BUT
WEEKDAYS CAN BE JUST AS HOLY.**

As a result of satellite communication, cable technology, and prospering religious TV networks, (e.g., PTL, CBN), many programs are received in all parts of the country, seven days a week, from early morning to late night. The myth that religious television is broadcast solely on Sunday mornings is just that—a myth. Religious programming is the fastest growing genre in American television.

**V.
IGNORE THY GRANDMOTHER AND
THY GRANDFATHER.**

The elderly are highly underrepresented on nationally distributed religious television, comprising only 5 percent of all persons appearing in these programs but constituting 13 percent of the American population. In addition, they are typically reduced to minor roles when they do appear. Based on these portrayals, religious programming suggests that the elderly do not serve as leaders in the church, are not

prevalent or respected members of religious communities, and have no place in today's family life.

**VI.
THOU SHALT NOT STEAL, BUT DO-
NATIONS ARE GLADLY ACCEPTED.**

A viewer of religious fare can expect to be solicited for an average of \$189.52 an hour for donations and \$8.95 every five minutes for purchasable items. Consequently, a viewer watching only two hours of religious television a day will be solicited for a minimum average of \$138,350 in the course of a year. The most frequently stated reason for requests for money was the need to pay for domestic educational activities, which included keeping the TV program on the air. Although figures reflecting how much money is actually collected through on-the-air solicitations are not readily available, the increasing frequency of these high-budget programs is testimony to the success of these appeals. As a result . . .

**VII.
THOU SHALT NOT BITE THE HAND
THAT FEEDS YOU.**

The function, content, and impact of the broadcast media is one of the most referred-to social topics in religious programming, second only to death and dying. The role of the mass media in this country has been bitterly criticized by various religious organizations and leaders. Within the confines of religious television programming, however, the mass media are referred to in either neutral or positive terms.

**VIII.
THOU SHALT DISCUSS ADULTERY,
BUT NOT POLITICS.**

Criticism of the electronic church itself has arisen, focusing primarily on the notion that it strays into the political arena. The most visible and vocal debate about the political ramifications of religious fare has been between TV producer-writer Norman Lear and Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell, himself a televangelist. Criticism of this nature is unfounded, however, for although highly conservative in its political stance, religious programming is rarely political in content. For the most part, it concerns itself with issues of religious and social import, presenting God or the church as the primary solution to the world's problems.

**IX.
THOU SHALT COVET THY COMPETI-
TION'S AUDIENCE.**

The majority of religious programs are neither geared toward an exclusively "born again" audience nor an audience

exclusively composed of candidates for conversion. Rather, these programs assume the same programming strategy as that employed by secular programming—gearing themselves to the lowest common denominator. Furthermore, in order to appeal to the greatest possible home viewership, no specific audience (i.e., shut-ins, non-believers, Catholics) is ever identified in religious programs. Consequently, these programs are aimed at the same general audience that NBC, CBS, and ABC seek.

**X.
THY MEDIUM IS THY MESSAGE.**

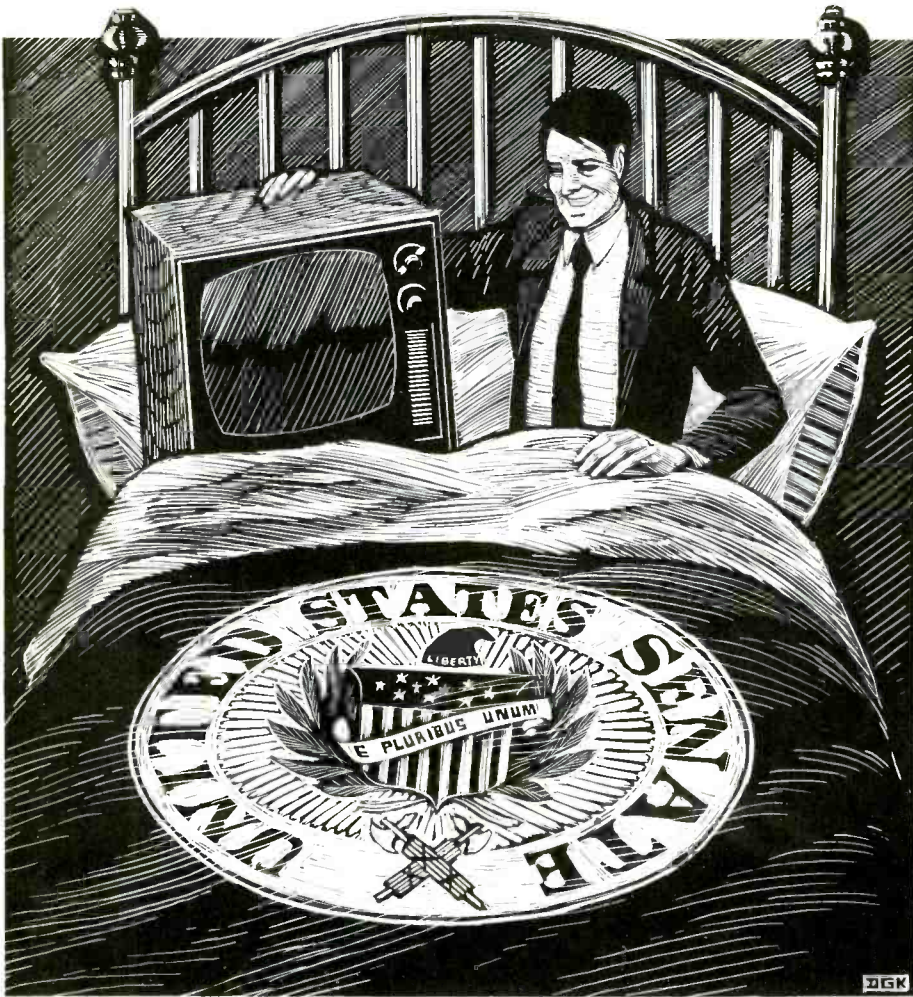
Television is the ultimate pulpit. Because television reaches nearly 100 percent of American households, it can bring religion to those who would not ordinarily have access to it and to those who would not normally seek it out in their community. The Reverend Billy Graham hinted at the potential of television when he suggested that he could "preach to millions more than Christ did in His entire lifetime." Today, around 14 million Americans watch some form of religious programming every week. In addition, every month another television station devotes itself primarily to religious content. In June 1984, yet another religious cable network, the American Christian Television System, began operation, thereby furthering the electronic church's ability to deliver the flock.

Poet T.S. Eliot's observation that "television is a medium whereby millions of people can listen to the same joke and still remain lonesome" has some relevance to religious programming. Television has depersonalized the religious experience by substituting a two-dimensional figure on a 19-inch screen for the local preacher, and by replacing the congregation's social interaction with the isolation of one's own apartment or hotel room. The community involvement that revolves around Sunday morning or Saturday evening services has been removed. Furthermore, one's "personal relationship with God," as it is often referred to in religious fare, has become a media event shared by millions. There is nothing personal about watching television.

And God created Man in His own image, Man created television in his, and television tried to reflect God in all his glory. But the limitations of Man and the limitations of the medium brought forth a portrait of God and His Word and that was more Man and medium than glory. And is it good?

Rules that Congress Dearly Loves

by Stuart Sucherman



Why should politicians, of all the groups in our society, be singled out for a TV subsidy?

FROM THE EARLIEST DAYS of broadcast legislation, Congress has imposed regulations and restrictions on the political uses of television and radio. While the most widely discussed political broadcasting concept is

Stuart Sucherman is executive director of the Media and Society Seminars at Columbia University.

the Equal Time Rule, there are also a number of lesser-known provisions that have an even more profound effect on the broadcast industry. Two of these provisions, known as "Reasonable Access" and "Lowest Unit Rate," were established in the 1970s and seem designed to subsidize and aid politicians, especially those running for federal office.

Whatever their merit, the rules have been draped in a strange obscurity. While

there is public debate about Equal Time, and the Federal Communications Commission has tried to be flexible in enforcing the law, there has been practically no public debate on Reasonable Access and Lowest Unit Rate, and the commission has enforced their provisions rigidly.

After television established itself as a major factor in the political process, legislators and public-interest groups became concerned that the rising cost of campaigning could pervert the electoral system. In 1972 Congress passed the Federal Election Campaign Act, amending it two years later. The main purpose of this act was to require detailed financial reporting and to place limits on contributions and expenditures in federal election campaigns. Often referred to as "The Incumbent Relief Act," this so-called reform package had tucked away in its recesses the two concepts of Reasonable Access and Lowest Unit Rate.

The Reasonable Access provision sounds, well—reasonable. Before it came along, the FCC was already authorized to revoke a broadcaster's license for a number of misdeeds, including lying in an application or failing to operate as promised. In 1972, the Reasonable Access amendment added another reason: "willful or repeated failure" to allow reasonable access or to permit purchase of reasonable amounts of time on a broadcast station by a "candidate for federal elective office on behalf of his candidacy [emphasis added]."

Note two interesting aspects of this provision. The penalty, revocation of license, is extraordinarily severe. Broadcasters who own properties worth millions of dollars and who have practically a license to print money are not going to fool around with any provision that has lurking behind it the supreme penalty of license revocation. Second, notice the class of political candidates eligible for the largesse provided by this section. Only candidates running for federal office are covered. Governors, state legislators, city councilmen, sheriffs, and others must shift for themselves.

David G. Klein

What, one could legitimately inquire, was the public dialogue about the wisdom and merit of such a seemingly self-serving piece of legislation? The answer is that there was none. The legislative history concerning this provision is practically non-existent. The Reasonable Access amendment was introduced at a time when Congressional subcommittees could change a bill behind closed doors without a public record. The story (confirmed by a number of Congressional sources) goes that Senator James B. Pearson, Kansas Republican, was turned down by a small radio station when he asked to buy some time during a reelection bid. In retaliation, he demanded during the mark-up of the 1972 Federal Election Campaign Act that a provision be added to revoke a broadcaster's license if he refused to sell time. Senator John Pastore of Rhode Island, then chairman of the communications subcommittee, complied with Pearson's request in order to maintain bipartisan support of the reform package. No hearing, no discussion, no debate.

It's not all that clear what constitutes reasonable access. In the field of communications law, Congress generally passes broad, ambiguous legislation, and then turns it over to the FCC to interpret and administer. It is an axiom in Washington that the commission, although appointed by the President, is a handmaiden of Congress. Having the FCC, which reports to Congress, enforce a provision that directly affects the media lifeline of Congress naturally results in strict enforcement of that provision. In practical terms, Reasonable Access has come to mean that a candidate has the right to buy time on a broadcast facility but is not entitled to free time. The law, in other words, favors candidates with money.

All this leads to the second part of the Congressional one-two punch, Lowest Unit Rate. The 1972 Election Campaign Act imposed a statutory regulation on the amount that can be charged a political candidate for broadcast advertising. The act stipulated that if a candidate for political office bought time within 45 days of a primary or 60 days of a general election, the broadcaster could only charge the candidate the "lowest unit rate" it charged to any other purchaser of advertising.

On first hearing, this provision sounds reasonable and simple. If a TV station charges \$10,000 for a single prime-time

Congress imposed the restrictions with barely a whimper from free-speech enthusiasts.

60-second spot, but reduces the rate to \$7,500 for commercial advertisers who buy at least 100 spots, the station can charge a candidate only \$7,500, even if he buys only one prime-time spot. The problem with the provision is that the selling of broadcast time is a complex business. There are rates for fixed-position spots, preemptible spots, run-of-the-schedule spots, special-discount-package spots. There are circles within circles. Some broadcasters charge lower rates to preferred customers. Charges vary depending on how preemptible a spot is.

The administration of all this is a dream come true for lawyers and accountants. Larger broadcast institutions merely hire more professional help. At smaller institutions, coping with it all is a nightmare. There is ample evidence that some broadcasters "clean up" their rate card before the pre-election period by dumping most of the more attractive bargain discounts. There are also indications that some broadcasters make illegal deals with advertisers to charge higher rates during an election period, and then make up the difference at a later date.

Beyond the convoluted determinations of just what the Lowest Unit Rate provision means lurks a more fundamental question. Of all the groups in our society, why should politicians be singled out for a massive subsidy from the broadcast industry? Proponents of Lowest Unit Rate argue that this provision increases understanding of complex public-policy issues. Yet it's just as likely to encourage politicians to package themselves and their ideas into 15-, 30-, and 60-second spots, thereby not only confusing potential voters but demeaning the level of public dialogue.

In addition, why are broadcasters singled out? It is surprising that they seldom

complain about what is, after all, a discriminatory and massive intrusion into their operations. After all, there are no Reasonable Access or Lowest Unit Rate provisions applicable to newspapers, magazines, or billboards. (Although there was some discussion during the debates over the passage of the 1972 act about applying these concepts to the print media, the idea was ultimately dropped because of serious Constitutional questions.) The fact that Congress could impose these restrictions on broadcasters with barely a whimper from First Amendment enthusiasts further illustrates the low status of the broadcast industry in free-expression matters.

Even if one takes the position that the demands of Reasonable Access fall within the broadcasters' obligation to operate in the public interest, questions remain. Why not eliminate the inequities? If Reasonable Access is an appropriate public-policy goal, make it a concept that applies to all politicians, not merely ones campaigning for federal office. If Lowest Unit Rate increases access for political ideas and enhances public debate, make it applicable to all politicians, including those from the fringe of the political spectrum, who are rarely seen on television. But the odds are that all such proposals will fall on deaf ears in Congress.

The relationship between the broadcast industry and Congress has been described as a "two-way umbilical cord." Broadcasters control the lifeline of most politicians (their ability to reach their constituents), and politicians control the mechanism that regulates the broadcasters (the Federal Communications Act and the FCC). The commission's main role is to see that the umbilical cord remains intact and to regulate the relationship between the two parties. But in the area of political broadcasting there is no doubt about who's boss.

Any change in these regulations can originate only in Congress. Since all the political broadcasting provisions—i.e., Equal Time, Reasonable Access, and Lowest Unit Rate—are bonanzas for politicians in general and federal politicians in particular, it is unlikely that they will be altered in the near future. In spite of minor protests from some quarters and attempts at reform from Senator Robert Packwood of Oregon, Congress would defy all the basic laws of human nature and politics if it removed these self-serving provisions. ■

NIELSEN'S WORLD

(Continued from page 32)

each episode of a soap is another chapter in a never-ending story. Weekdays, the Top 10 daytime shows among young women are invariably soap operas, with only a game show or two added to the mix. During prime time Patty watches the nighttime soaps, known officially as "general drama" shows. The fabulous success of CBS's *Dallas* among women (as well as older men) was possibly the single greatest programming discovery of recent years. *Dallas*'s successors, principally ABC's *Dynasty* and CBS's *Falcon Crest*, have done almost as well. As of last November, *Dynasty* and *Dallas* were rated first and second among young women. Patty started working part-time a few years ago, putting Michelle in day care (thus cutting down on the 2-to-5-year-old daytime audience). "Younger women," says Marvin Mord, "used to stay home and watch daytime serials. Now many of them are working." Patty watches the same soaps as ever, but now she's parked in front of the set only three afternoons a week. But she's prevailed on her friend Dorothy Median, who owns a

video-cassette recorder, to tape the shows the other two days. The VCR has become, in no small part, a device for taping soap operas, which constitute seven of the 10 most frequently taped shows, according to Paul Lindstrom, a Nielsen researcher.

Only a Change in Lifestyle May Alter Their Viewing Habits



MEN AND WOMEN 35-54

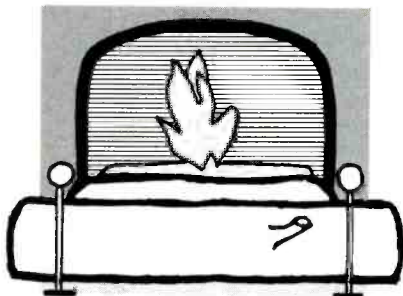
Reed Median's viewing habits at age 48 are scarcely different from Jeff Mode's at 34. Reed watches more than Jeff does during prime time, and less during the day. The difference between

Dorothy Median and Patty Mode is only slightly greater. Dorothy no longer has any young children to keep her at home, so she spends less time in front of the set during the day than Patty. On the other

hand she leads an even more settled and sedentary life, so she watches slightly more in the evenings and on weekends, and 10 percent more overall.

It seems odd that viewing habits should change so little over time. So much else changes—tastes, opinions, expectations, and, of course, consumption patterns. It also strains credulity that people shaped by such different forces should behave so similarly. Reed and Dorothy grew up just after World War II. Patty and Jeff grew up in the late '50s and early '60s. And yet the difference between the two experiences is too fine to be reflected in viewing habits. Very few programs are calibrated so precisely. This is especially true in prime time, when most programs are cast so broadly that men and women are watching the same thing. At one point early this season the 10 top-ranked shows among women 25 to 54 and men 18 to 34 were the same, though in slightly different order. Most viewers, it seems, change their viewing habits not when they change their tastes but only when they move on to the next grand stage of life; and, as NBC's Jerry Jaffe points out, the lifestyle of the average person, as distinguished from his tastes, does not change that radically through the 30s and 40s.

Foul-Weather Friends



One of the most powerful confirmations that TV viewing is not so much a form of entertainment as an immutable national habit is the almost vegetable growth and decline of its audiences across the seasons. No force less fundamental and organic than the weather can affect these figures. Every year, viewership increases by a fixed sum as the weather grows cooler, and then wanes just as predictably when it turns warm. Peak-hour viewing in February is always about 40 percent higher than in July. Changes in the programming itself have virtually no effect on this cycle. Every once in a while a new network president has tried to air new shows rather than reruns in the summer, hoping that viewers can be lured back to

the set; every time, it turns out they can't.

The networks schedule reruns as meticulously as regular shows. According to CBS's David Poltrack, shows that had low ratings during the year often do better than those that had better ratings, since fewer people have already seen the former. During the late '60s and early '70s, CBS's detective show *Mannix* used to fare only moderately well during the season, but it would clean up in the summer. Reruns of action/adventure series and sitcoms usually do well in the summer. Serial dramas and mini-series, which require the viewer to return every week, do less well.

The daytime audience is as large in the summer as it is during the rest of the year. The networks put on sitcom reruns, knowing that school-age children will be watching. By late afternoon, viewing levels are once again lower than they are during the rest of the year, and they drop increasingly until everyone gets back home around 10 P.M. NBC's Jerry Jaffe points out that the most popular shows during the fall and winter start at 8:00 or 9:00 in the evening; during the summer they normally start at 10:00.

Older Men Are in the Living Room More, but They Get Tired Early



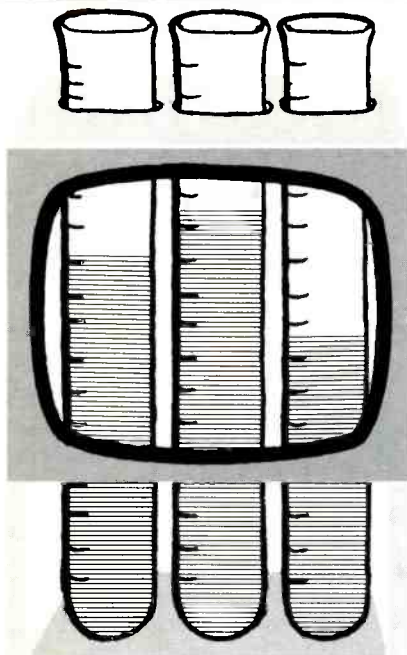
MEN 55 +

A difference in viewing patterns that looks huge to a professional student of the numbers or to an advertiser may not appear quite so vast to the layperson. Older people, we're

told, watch far more television than younger ones, and yet George watches roughly an hour more television per day than Jeff or Reed. George hasn't retired yet, but he's cut back on his work hours. Generally he's home by 4:30 or 5:00, and he's taken to keeping Ruth company during the local news. George is suddenly in the living room a lot more than he used to be. On the other hand, he gets tired earlier than he used to. Oldsters of both sexes make up a smaller part of the audience at 11 P.M. than at 8:00. "What happens over the course of an evening," says Jerry Jaffe, "is that older people are going to bed continually, while children go to bed all at once."

Over the years George's tastes have grown oddly similar to Ruth's. He still likes sports (though now he prefers golf to football), but he can no longer watch without flinching those death 'n' destruction

Beyond Nielsen



The ratings system has worked very well for those who buy and sell the numbers. But as market research has grown far more sophisticated, and as the computer has made new forms of measurement possible, the sanctity of the traditional measurements of viewers and viewing has been called into question. At least three new kinds of measurement have become available in the last few years.

Television Audience Assessment Inc. of Cambridge, Massachusetts has developed what it calls "qualitative ratings." These measure, not the number and characteristics of viewers, but how they feel about programs. Traditional ratings, the group argues, do not distinguish between one viewer watching a program raptly and another using its light to illuminate the room while chatting on the phone. Its own tests found that high-rated shows did not necessarily involve their viewers. *Hill Street Blues* involved its audience more deeply than the more popular *Dynasty* and *Magnum, P.I.*, which still scored better than average in the "appeal index" and the "impact index." And viewers who are not deeply involved, investigators found, *do not stay in the room during commercials!* This could be major-breakthrough material if advertisers decide to take qualitative ratings seriously, which, at least in the near term, seems unlikely.

Cluster, or "prism," analysis, while

new to television, is an accepted tool in market research as well as in that subsidiary field still known, atavistically, as politics. Cluster analysis classifies people by the kind of neighborhood they live in (every zip code in America gets sorted into one of about 50 socio-economic categories). Political campaign professionals use cluster analysis to target mailings to sympathetic voters, and advertisers use it to identify their customers. For TV researchers it has the advantage of grouping together such related variables as income, family size, and region. Thus, in the Yuppie cluster—"urban, upscale, professionals, few children"—*Hill Street Blues* and *Cheers* surge into the Top 10, and in the "average-income, blue-collar, rural-areas" group, *Knots Landing* and *Dukes of Hazzard* make a rare Top-10 appearance. Still, it's worth noting that the variation among clusters is less striking than the consistency.

The most avant-garde, New Age, think-tank-approved form of measurement is called VALS, for "values, attitudes, lifestyles." The premise here is that Americans can be divided into nine personality types, and that these types correspond to different consumption patterns. On the bottom of the VALS chart are "Survivors" and "Sustainers." Members of the vast middle are known as "Belongers." On top are "Achievers" and the "Socially Conscious."

"Belongers watch anything," says David Poltrack, who is trying very hard to convince advertisers of the validity of VALS. Belongers, after all, are the kind of people who do whatever is popular. According to CBS's study of the VALS types, "Experientials"—the sort who eat whole grains, go on canoe trips, and talk about "the quality of life"—watch the least television. They watch *60 Minutes*, but not the *CBS Evening News*; they're very big on *Love Boat*. "Survivors," defined loosely as the working poor, love *Cheers* and used to love *CHiPs*, but scarcely watch *Hill Street Blues*, which is tough to figure. But then again, so is the rest of it. VALS is still young, and may yet prove to be an extremely powerful tool. On the other hand it may prove to be a mock-science like phrenology, one of those fads that speak to something deep in the culture and thus flourish briefly before being laughed out of school.

shows like *A Team* and ABC's *Hardcastle & McCormick*. Nowadays he sits around with Ruth to watch the likes of *Dallas*, *Love Boat*, and CBS's *Dukes of Hazzard*. Perhaps he's surrendering his own fantasies for his wife's.

Older Women Put in Hours in Front of the TV Set



It's a good thing that Ruth's family treats her more kindly than television executives do. Women like Ruth put in almost six hours a day in front of the set—an hour and a half more than the national average. Women over 65 watch even more than that, though they tend to drop out earlier in prime time. Except for late at night and weekend mornings, older women are always watching in large numbers.

In exchange for their loyalty, television gives them the back of its hand. Ruth, like little Michelle, watches programs intended for someone else. Of all the new shows this year, probably the only one aimed specifically at older people is CBS's *Murder, She Wrote*, a series starring Angela Lansbury (and doing quite well among older viewers). Older people are considered to have so much brand loyalty, and so little interest in rampant consumerism, that many advertisers consider them "waste audience." CBS is trying to persuade ad agencies otherwise, an effort that seems motivated by something more than dispassionate research. So far, no dice. And yet television is so powerful a medium that advertisers willingly pay to reach viewers they don't care about (children and older men and women) in order to also reach those they want (younger men and women).

Ruth and George and their peers are just about the only people in America interested in news. As of last November, for example, *60 Minutes* ranked 61st with teens, 39th with 18-to-24s, and 21st with 18-to-49s. But it ranked second with those 50 and over, which was enough to make it 5th overall. The old folks were even more lonely in their patronage of the evening news shows, which finish practically in a tie for last place among everyone save the over-55s. A good deal of PBS programming lives and dies with oldsters. Two-thirds of the viewers of the *MacNeill/Lehrer NewsHour* are 50 or above. Let us, then, take a moment to praise the likes of Ruth and George, who actually watch the virtuous programming everyone else ignores. ■

TV Cuisine

Set-side Sustenance from Chef Aldo, the Station-Break Gourmet

Serious Couch Potatoes (that "clite group who like nothing better than to vegetate in front of the tube, recumbent, all eyes") prize their toaster ovens almost as much as they do their television sets. The following excerpt from The Official Couch Potato Handbook, written by Jack Mingo and illustrated by Robert Armstrong, includes recipes that provide nutrients from the five major food groups (sugar, salt, grease, carbohydrates, and alcohol) and can be prepared without leaving your couch.

IT WAS NOT until the 1950s, and the dual development of the Swanson TV Dinner and the Munsey Toaster Oven, that modern TV cuisine became a possibility, and the American family began its shift from the traditional kitchen to the hub of the modern household, the viewing module. Great innovations followed: Frozen foods of all kinds, Cheez Whiz, Kool-Aid, Jiffy Pop, and Kellogg's Pop Tarts were but a few of the culinary milestones in the Couch Potato "nouvelle cuisine." This was the era of the great media chefs, Chef Milani and the great Boy-ar-dec, who blazed the trail, and in whose footsteps I humbly follow.

TV cuisine is quick and convenient. You don't have to

leave your set at all, and your preparation time is as brief as a commercial. It's quiet —no noisy pots, pans, and silverware to disturb fellow viewers. It's high in calories and carbohydrates for stamina. There's usually nothing to clean up and, best of all, it's delicious!

Every viewing module requires only a few basic tools and condiments. These include: toaster oven; refrigerator; can opener; scissors; *TV Guide* (tells you what's on, doubles as an oven mitt); salt, pepper, spices; aerosol cheese food or Cheez Whiz; squeeze Parkay Margarine; squeeze Hershey's Chocolate; squeeze ketchup, mustard, and lemon juice. (Squeeze food products are among the greatest byproducts of the space program. They have become so important in my TV recipes that I call the art of cooking with them "squeezeine.")

Now we're ready to cook, so let's try some appetizing, TV-tested recipes.

Swiss Toast

1 loaf generic white bread
Squeeze Parkay Margarine
Squeeze Hershey's Chocolate

Saturate bread slices with margarine. Cover heavily with chocolate and pop into toaster oven for three to five minutes, or until chocolate is runny.

Quesadilla Mole (Mexican Chocolate Sandwich)

1 package corn tortillas
Chocolate candy bars



The candy bars used in this recipe are a matter of personal choice, but I recommend the Three Musketeers

bar. The light whipped center responds nicely to the toaster oven, and the result is a delicious soufflé analogue.

Slice candy bars lengthwise into two or three strips. Place them on a tortilla and place in toaster oven set at 350 degrees. Bake until melted.

Remove from heat. Roll up. Onions and salsa may be added according to taste. Serve on paper towel, napkin, or page of an old *TV Guide*.

Little Chocolate Doughnuts

1 box Cheerios
1 8-oz. bag chocolate chips

Pour a single layer of Cheerios on an old pie tin or toaster-oven pan. Carefully place a chocolate chip upside down in the hole of each Cheerio. Pop into toaster oven and melt lightly.

"Tube" Steak Pâté (This is the award-winning recipe in the 1982 Chef Aldo International Couch Potato Bake-Off, submitted by Ric Lawson from northern California. I highly recommend it for its near-European sensibility.)

1 Oscar Mayer hot dog
2 green olives, pimentos left in Mayonnaise
Saltine crackers

Rev blender up to full speed and drop in hot dog. Add relish and olives and let blend at high speed for one-and-a-half 30-second commercials.

Spread the saltine crackers generously with mayonnaise. Spread pâté on crackers and add pepper to taste. Makes eight servings.

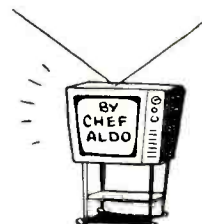
Many Couch Potatoes have power tools that they never use, almost all of which, with a little imagination, can be adapted for food preparation. A jigsaw is great for slicing and dicing. A good belt sander will peel potatoes in a jiffy. And a butane torch is perfect for those Pop Tarts flambé. Here is one of my favorite power-tool recipes:

Cheese Chocdog

1 package hot dogs
1 loaf generic white bread
1 can aerosol cheese product
Squeeze Hershey's Chocolate
Electric drill with 1/4 in. bit
Safety lenses

Put on safety lenses. Hold unopened package of hot dogs with ends pointing towards you. Leaving ends exposed, wrap several layers of old *TV Guides* around package (for safety). Using slow speed, drill each dog lengthwise. Open package. Fill cavities with aerosol cheese product.

Place hot dog on slice of white bread. Pinch bread into a trough around the hot dog and squirt liberally with chocolate syrup. Pop into toaster oven for 10 to 12 minutes, or until cheese is runny.



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