

The Pow of the Press, by Don Hewitt

CDC 00415

# CHANNELS

O F C O M M U N I C A T I O N S

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## Is the White House Running the FCC—and Is It Legal?

BY LES BROWN

American TV Tightens Its Grip on the World

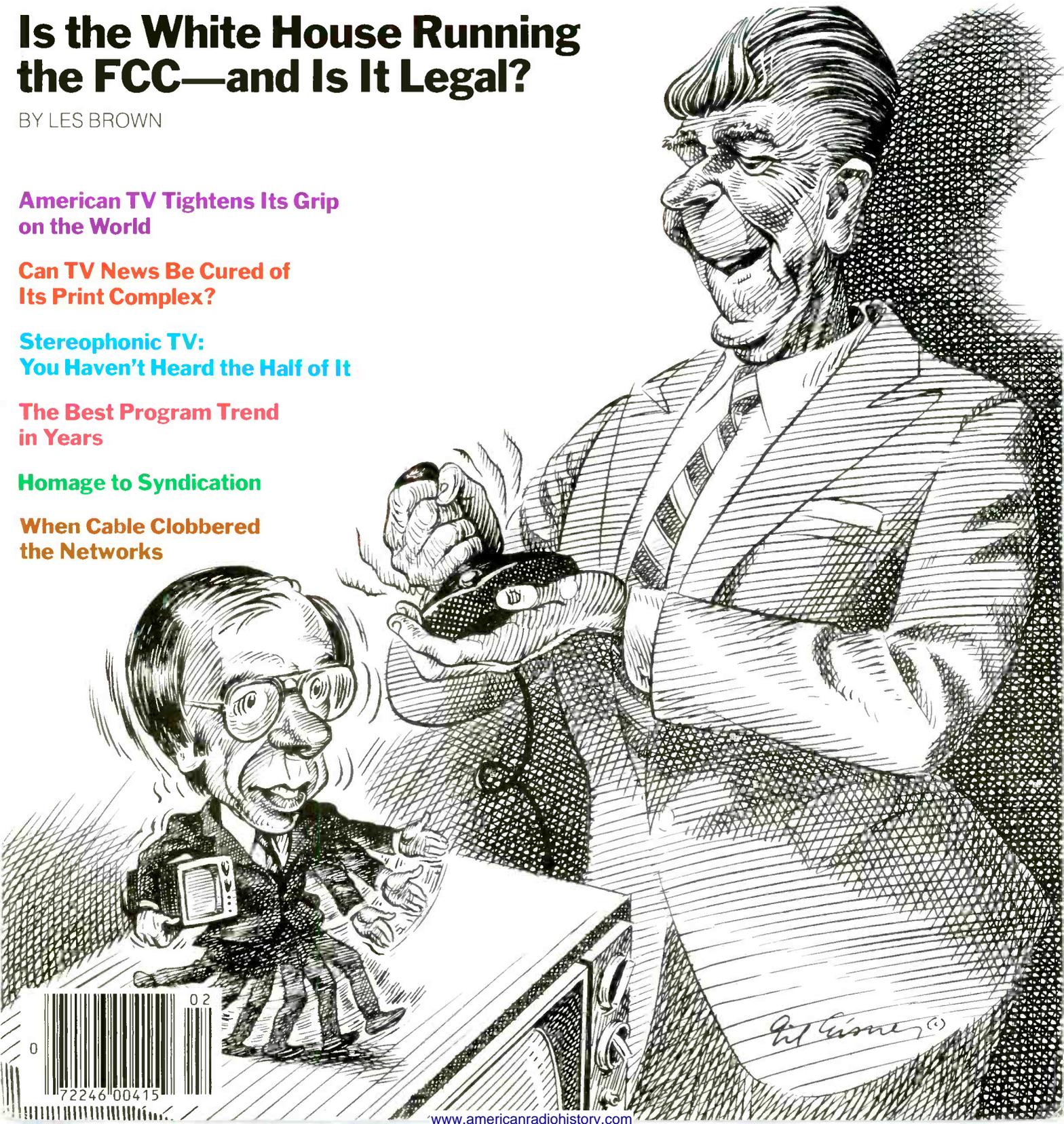
Can TV News Be Cured of Its Print Complex?

Stereophonic TV: You Haven't Heard the Half of It

The Best Program Trend in Years

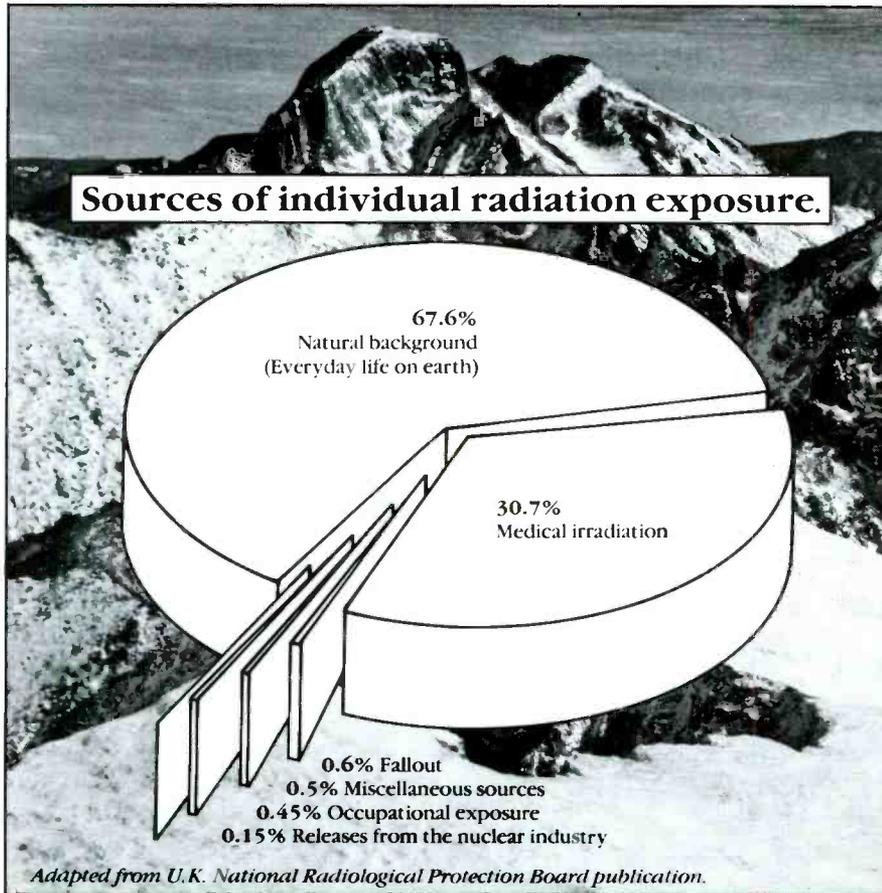
Homage to Syndication

When Cable Clobbered the Networks



# RADIATION

## Facing fears with facts



medical diagnosis and therapy; the mining of minerals; the construction of buildings and other structures; consumer products such as smoke detectors and luminous-dial watches; fallout from past testing of nuclear weapons; and the use of various fuels to generate energy (coal, geothermal steam, natural gas, and uranium).

### How is radiation measured?

A *rem* is a unit of measurement of radiation's biological effects on living tissue. A *millirem* (mrem) is 1/1000 of a rem. Radiation exposure is usually discussed in millirem because the amounts involved are very small.

A U.S. resident receives an estimated average total of around 200 millirem of radiation exposure each year. The pie chart on the left shows where this radiation comes from.

Source	Exposure
Natural	135.2 mrem
Medical	61.4 mrem
Fallout	1.2 mrem
Miscellaneous (consumer products, etc.)	1.0 mrem
Occupational	0.9 mrem
Nuclear energy industry	0.3 mrem
	200.0 mrem

Of course, these are averages. The exposure varies for each individual depending on many factors. Living at high elevations results in greater exposure from cosmic rays than living at sea level (250 mrem in Colorado compared with 120 mrem in Florida). Crews of high-altitude commercial jet airliners can get an extra 300-400 mrem from cosmic rays and the sun.

### Are these ordinary levels of radiation harmful?

To cause any detectable effect, a person's yearly dose of radiation would have to be in excess of 10,000 millirem.

**E**ach of us is exposed to radiation every day. Where does this radiation come from? How does it affect our bodies? How much of it comes from nuclear plants? A better understanding of the facts can help distinguish valid concerns from needless fears.

### What is radiation?

Radiation consists of particles or rays emitted from an atom. It may occur spontaneously, from the progressively decaying atoms of a radioactive element. Or it can be induced by man: particle accelerators can bombard stable atoms, converting them into unstable radioactive isotopes; and by setting off a chain reaction in uranium, atoms can be split (fission). The fission chain reaction is the process a nuclear reactor

uses to generate heat from steam and electricity.

After more than 80 years of intensive study, radiation is the most scientifically understood, easily detected, precisely measured, effectively controlled and strictly regulated of all environmental agents.

### How are people exposed to radiation?

People are exposed to radiation every day, primarily from natural sources and, to a lesser degree, from man-made sources.

*Natural sources* include: cosmic rays from outer space; the sun; the earth's crust; the air; food; water; even substances within our own bodies.

*Man-made sources* include: X-rays and radioactive materials used in

There is overwhelming agreement within the national and international scientific communities that a yearly dose within the normal average range of around 200 millirem would have negligible effects on the human body. Based on estimates by the National Academy of Sciences\*, the normal radiation levels that all humans are exposed to would cause no more than 1 percent of all the cases of cancer and genetic defects.

### Who determines "safe" levels of radiation?

The International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP), formed in 1928, is an independent nongovernmental expert body established to recommend the maximum radiation doses to which people could be safely exposed. Its recommendations have been universally accepted for the last 50 years by both national and international bodies responsible for radiation protection.

### Are people exposed to higher levels of radiation in the area around a nuclear plant?

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), has said that "Emissions from nuclear power plants average an annual exposure of only a fraction of a millirem per person. The average annual exposure of people living within a 50-mile radius of nuclear stations is less than a millirem."

Even the American Cancer Society in its "Background Paper on Radiation and Cancer" (November 1980) reports that the "scientific knowledge we have indicates that there have been no cancer deaths related to the release of nuclear radiation either in or outside of U.S. nuclear power plants."

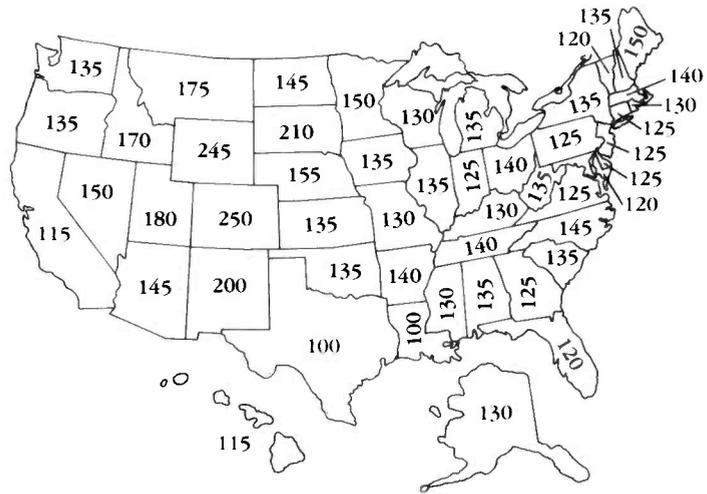
### How much radiation were people exposed to from the accident at Three Mile Island?

To quote the Kemeny Commission\*\* Report: "The maximum estimated radiation dose received by any one

\* From The National Academy of Sciences Committee on the Biological Effects of Ionizing Radiation

\*\* Dr. John G. Kemeny was appointed by President Carter in April 1979 to head the investigatory President's Commission on the Accident at Three Mile Island. Dr. Kemeny was then President of Dartmouth College.

## Average natural radiation background by state.



Natural background radiation differs considerably from state to state due to elevation and the radioactive elements present in the soil. If a resident of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, moved to Denver, Colorado, the additional radiation he would be exposed to **each year** would be far more than the maximum amount any individual could possibly have received during the entire Three Mile Island accident.

individual in the off-site general population during the accident was 70 mrem." The report further states that the exposure received by the general population is so small as to have no health, developmental or genetic effects.

If a resident of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, moved to Denver, Colorado, he would be exposed to more additional radiation in one year *from natural sources* than anyone could have received during the Three Mile Island accident.

In over a quarter century of commercial nuclear power plant operations, Three Mile Island is by far the most serious event to occur. But the "defense in depth" safety system effectively controlled and contained the accident.

### Who we are and why we are presenting these facts

We are the U.S. Committee for Energy Awareness, a private organization of electric utilities, construction companies, equipment manufacturers, and energy users. Most of our members participate in the electricity industry and believe that nuclear energy will continue to

play an important role in America's electrical future. We believe that radiation is a much-misunderstood subject, often misrepresented in the nuclear debate. We want to provide factual information so that people can make informed decisions about energy issues.

The material presented here deals with the safety of nuclear power plants. In the future, we will deal with occupational hazards involved with the mining and manufacture of nuclear fuels.

For free booklets on the electrical future of America and the energy sources that will help fuel it, just fill out this coupon and send it to:

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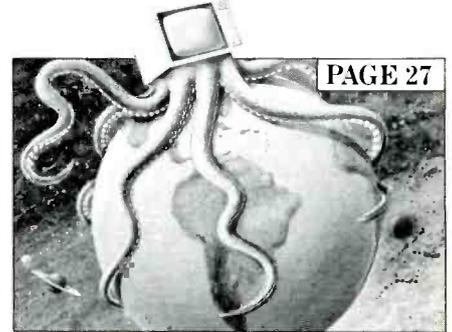
COVER ILLUSTRATION BY GIL EISNER

CARTOONS BY CHARLES BARSOTTI

## American TV Tightens Its Grip on the World

U.S. dominance of the program  
market extends beyond the  
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BY PETER CARANICAS

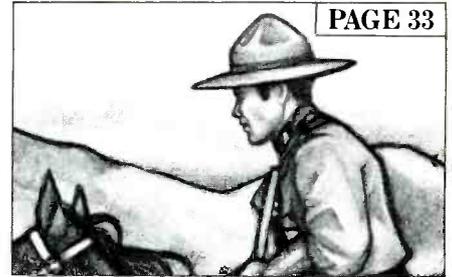


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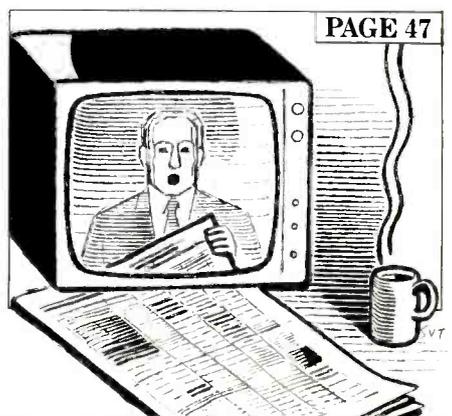


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TV is breaking more stories,  
but its dependency on the  
morning papers persists.

BY MICHAEL MASSING



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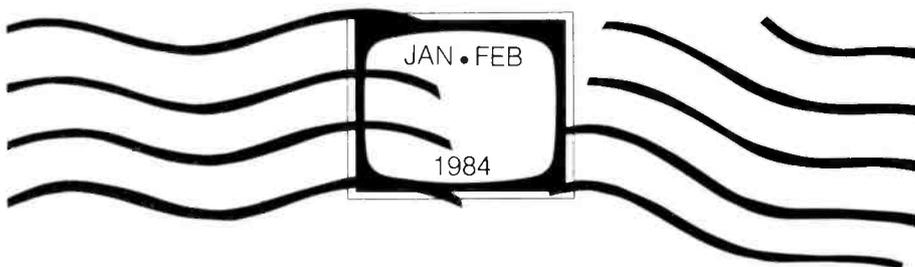
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**Wirth Attention**

THANK YOU for James Traub's article highlighting Congressman Wirth's role as a Horatio at the national telecommunications-policy bridge ["Rep. Timothy Wirth Holds Back the Tide," Sept/Oct]. It is a shame that a public servant of Wirth's stature and quality must spend all his time battling policy pygmies in both Senate and House. How much more he might accomplish were he to receive a public mandate to renew a larger debate.

Unfortunately, that mandate may be doomed by the very thing Wirth has been battling for so many years—concentration in the communications industry and consequent cross-ownership of the media. No one hears about national telecommunications policy, because those with the resources to distribute this information have an interest in whittling away at Wirth and his efforts to build policy on more than corporate pleadings.

But the decentralization of at least one communications monopoly, AT&T, may take some of the heat off Wirth and turn it on state-level policy-makers. One hopes progressive elements in Congress, including Wirth, will seize on this opportunity to build new political alliances supportive of democratic national and state communications policies.

ROBERT JACOBSON  
Consultant  
California State Assembly Committee  
on Utilities and Commerce  
Sacramento, California

AS I WAS READING the article on Wirth, I was bothered by a statement that I repeatedly encounter even among "liberals" who favor limited deregulation.

The article says Wirth has suggested "that radio can be partially deregulated, possibly even to the extent of dropping such 'content' regulations as the Fairness Doctrine and Equal Time Rule, since competition now exists in all but small markets."

But a large number of Americans across the country live in small markets. Market forces might be a more efficient "regula-

tor" of citizen interest in large markets—but they ignore the interests of citizens in America's many small towns.

HERBERT J. ROTFELD  
University Park, Pennsylvania

**The ABCs of News**

IN HIS ARTICLE ["Supernews," Sept./Oct.], Robert Friedman claims that ABC's heavy investment in covering the Pope's trip to Poland "almost surely skewed its news judgment," prompting *World News Tonight* to lead with the Pope story—instead of giving priority to a Supreme Court ruling or the space shuttle.

He also says "the pageantry of the Pope's farewell clearly made for better pictures than the Supreme Court's edict."

Friedman's claims are both gratuitous and false. The Pope's trip was the obvious and correct lead story that day. Period.

TOM GOODMAN  
ABC News  
New York City

**One from the Heart**

JULIE TALEN'S article, "Death in Prime Time" [On Air, Sept/Oct], makes some observations about television that are not new but are given new meaning in the context of personal loss.

This piece was well-chosen; it injects a human and heartfelt note in an area too often crowded with social, political, and technical commentary.

I applaud her honesty for removing the impersonal mask of the reporter. This story was one from the heart.

ROBERT TREUBER  
New York City

**Correction**

In the list of acknowledgments for the 1984 *Field Guide to the Electronic Media* (November/December), *Channels* neglected to give credit where it was due. All the full-page charts, as well as the half-page AT&T chart, were created by design director Marian Chin.

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# CROSS CURRENTS

## Clip Service

The Brazilian television news correspondent introduces herself on camera, from a busy New York street, before launching into a fast-paced two-minute story about the booming credit-card racket in the United States. What none of her São Paulo viewers back home knows is that the entire segment, minus the introduction and ending, is a U.S. government production.

It's part of Satellite File, a free video news service put out by the U.S. Information Agency. The service provides daily half-hour packages of six to 10 news stories to 275 stations in 80 countries via satellite, cassette, and embassy pouch.

The news package is varied. Top-of-the-line items are likely to feature interviews with high U.S. officials on "hot" subjects, such as the Soviet downing of a Korean passenger plane. Cultural, sports, and entertainment items back up the lead story. A recent show included pieces on doll collecting, neon art, and New York's South Street Seaport. Another staple is the latest news in science and medicine—everything from laser fingerprinting techniques to improvements in mammography.

How the items are used when they arrive in African, Latin American, and European studios is also varied. Some com-

mercial or state television services use the entire news story as transmitted. Others just lift a few images to fill out their own reporting. And still others try to make the material look like their own by using USIA's "Chromakey" techniques to insert their personnel into the images.

While Italian viewers watch Satellite File clips on their nightly news, people in the Middle East can see them on closed-circuit television in their hotel rooms. USIA officials are particularly happy about getting their clips on prime-time broadcasts in such places as Yugoslavia, where the signal "bleeds" across borders.

The style of Satellite File mimics that of network news documentary—authoritative yet entertaining. The stories don't just look like American commercial television—sometimes they *are* commercial television. USIA's own production facilities are small; the Washington, D.C. office has only two minicams. So the USIA both commissions stories and buys them already produced from local television stations around the country, paying an average of \$200 a clip. The total budget for Satellite File is \$7,000 a week.

Will this just-like-commercial-news service compete with genuine commercial television's international sales? Richard Levy, assistant to USIA TV and

Film Service director Alvin Snyder, doesn't think so. "We're small potatoes in this racket," he says, "and we can't compete with the core offerings of outfits like UPI-TN and Visnews, which are selling hard news." He waves a cable just in from Swaziland, requesting broadcast television programming. "How much do you think Swaziland can pay?" he asks. "We're not taking anyone's business away. In fact, we may be fostering quality and making [less developed countries] into a market for the future."

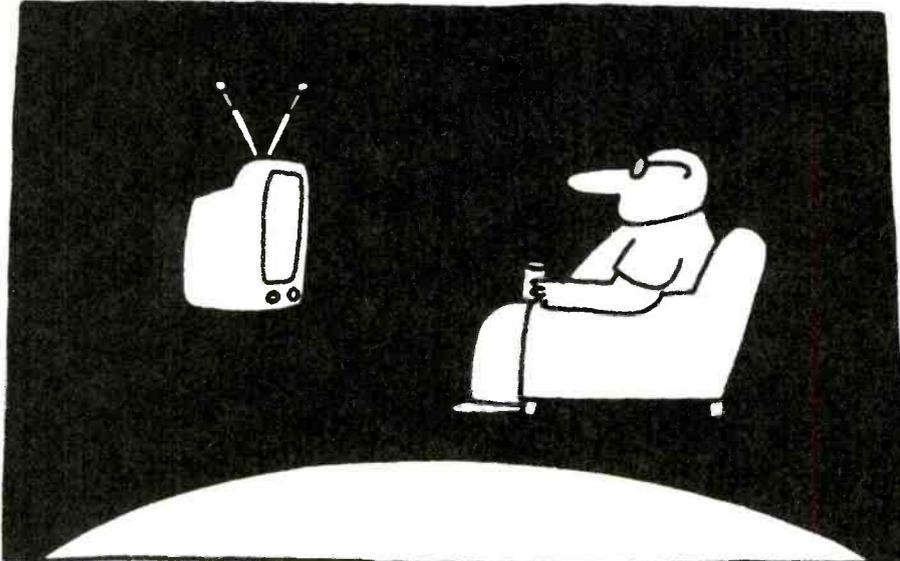
Ed Helfer, vice president for marketing in the Visnews American subsidiary, Viscom, agrees that Satellite File poses no competitive threat. "But I've been impressed by what I've seen. USIA is really putting on the gas, trying to modernize."

Indeed, Satellite File is one example of what's been happening at USIA since the appointment of the ex-Hollywood producer and friend of President Reagan, director Charles Z. Wick, who has encouraged the government information service to use the best commercial entertainment and marketing techniques to sell America's image abroad. "That's been particularly important in television," says Richard Levy, "where, unlike the Voice of America, we depend on other people's delivery systems. We have to compete for attention with everything else that's available." Levy should know how to handle the challenge: His background is in international marketing for Paramount and Embassy Pictures. Likewise, his boss, Alvin Snyder, has plenty of private-sector experience in major-market broadcast news production and management.

The TV and Film Service is so far the only branch of USIA to have its own marketing division, which arranged, among other things, Satellite File's debut at the huge international television market (MIP) at Cannes in 1983. There are even trade ads for the TV and Film Service in *Variety* magazine.

But for all its high profile at the sales end, Satellite File has a low, often invisible, profile at the distribution end. Subscribing stations almost never acknowledge it in the credits. "We're happy that way," says Levy. USIA, after all, is trying to sell a positive image of America without making it look like propaganda. But no matter what it is called, Satellite File still contains a message. "One of the

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most important parts of this package is the science and medicine news," Levy says. "It shows that we don't just use our technology to make weapons. And that's the most popular part of the show everywhere it goes. When we run a medical item, the interviewed doctors get calls from all over the world."

PAT AUFDERHEIDE

## Underdeveloped

**Ursula von Zallenger, visiting from Munich, stopped by one day to discuss children's television.** She is the program officer for the Prix Jeunesse, an international festival convening every two years to recognize excellence in programs for young people and to promote improved standards in this sphere. The festival is held under the auspices of the European Broadcasting Union and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.

When asked whether third world countries regularly participate in the festival, she replied: "It depends on what you mean. In the area of children's television, if you can forgive me, we consider the United States the third world." L.B.

## Mind's Eye Over Matter

**Subliminal stimulation, the psychological "behavior modification" technique that achieved fleeting notoriety 25 years ago when advertisers first tested it on unsuspecting moviegoers, is staging something of a comeback.**

This time, however, its leading exponents believe Americans are now ready to zap their own psyches in order to induce therapeutic behavior changes. According to the two companies now marketing subliminal video messages, suggestions embedded in television programming can help viewers lose weight, stop smoking, control stress, improve job performance, and even master sports.

Late last fall, Stimutech Inc. of East Lansing, Michigan, introduced Expando-Vision, a computer-based system that allows individuals to receive subliminal stimulation while watching regular television programming. An "electronic interface device" (EID), costing \$89.95, is the heart of the system, hooking up the TV set and the home computer. It interrupts the television signal every two-and-a-half

minutes and flashes a pre-programmed message onto the screen for a 30th of a second—assertedly too fast for the eye, but not the mind's eye, to record.

Stimutech has eight Expando-Vision software programs to go with its equipment. Each sells for \$39.95 and contains a series of simple, declarative statements which, if one chooses, can be made visible by the flip of a switch on the EID. The weight-control cartridge, for instance, flashes: "I see me thin," "I am secure," "I see me trim," "I am attractive," "I see me slim," "I am acceptable."

Meanwhile, another company has come up with what it considers a pathway to the unconscious. Environmental Video, known for its "video wallpaper"—pre-recorded cassettes featuring nothing but tranquilizing shots of scenic locales—is now selling two of those tapes with subliminal audio messages added—one on weight control and the other on stress control. As company president James R. Spencer explains, "We find [Stimutech's visual] exposures are discernible to the eye. So what we do is use an audio track" on both video tapes. However, Environmental is experimenting with faint superimpositions of suggestive messages over the images.

"We don't feel the video tape alone is sufficient to overcome a problem such as overeating, alcohol abuse, or stress," Spencer admits. So the company throws in a separate subliminal audio tape for good measure. (Such audio tapes have been on the market for years.) The package sells for \$69.95.

Before you write out your check, though, it's fair to ask whether these subliminal products work. Neither Stimutech nor Environmental Video has offered any research showing that the video messages perform as claimed. Stimutech advisor Dr. Wallace LaBenne cites a number of studies said to prove the efficacy of subliminal techniques in modifying behavior. But other experts have disputed the validity of this evidence.

If we assume for a moment that subliminal persuasion is effective, we open a whole different can of worms. For instance, what is to prevent unscrupulous operators from manufacturing subliminal programs to control behavior in prisons, mental hospitals, and nursing homes?

We can take some comfort from LaBenne's assertion that "the subconscious mind is certainly not going to do anything that's against its own morality, propriety, and decency." But neither the Federal Communications nor the Federal Trade Commission has any explicit policy reg-

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ulating private abuses of subliminal communication. These video devices could truly slip the American public a Mickey Finn, something that should give us pause in this Orwellian year.

MEL FRIEDMAN

## Computer U.

**Even as they infiltrate so many aspects of our lives, computers are fostering a climate of intimidation and confusion.**

To the uninitiated, the very idea of having to master this new instrument can be frightening, and for those who already own computers, instructions on the use of new software are often bewildering.

Now comes help from an unlikely quarter—television, the original “user-friendly” medium. Public television has undertaken the task of demystifying the computer and helping Americans move gently into the new age. In the process, however, public television has created its own climate of confusion: There will be not one but *two* new series on computers starting in January.

At least 10 stations will offer a 12-week TVOntario course called the Academy on Computers, which is based on a half-hour series, *Bits and Bytes*. But at about the same time, PBS is starting a 26-week series of half-hour programs entitled *The New Literacy: An Introduction to Computers*, produced by the Southern California Consortium under a \$1.2 million Annenberg grant for educational TV.

Both “tele-courses” have essentially the same aim: to promote the idea that literacy in a modern world involves the ability not only to read printed matter but to use and understand computers. Both can be taken for college credit, offering such course materials as textbooks and

guides. The Academy also offers a software program. Along with computer instruction by Canadian actors Luba Goy and Billy Van, the Academy’s *Bits and Bytes* includes segments on computer music, graphics, and games. The other series has the participation of such authorities as Issac Asimov, Michael Crichton, and Tracy Kidder.

Deciding which series to choose is as perplexing as deciding which home computer to buy. *Bits and Bytes* has these advantages: It is 14 episodes shorter and has already been successful in Canada. But *The New Literacy* provides an intensive overview of the conceptual uses and societal implications of computers.

Either way, this coming-together of television and computers may alleviate some of the strain facing consumers in a technologically inclined society. L.M.

## From the Eye of the Storm

**It’s a great premise for a new series: an American TV station run by born-again Christians on the Lebanon-Israel border.** One George Otis of High Adventure Ministries Inc. founded the station in February 1981, naming it the “Star of Hope” (call letters: HOPE). But Otis couldn’t make the venture pay, so he donated it, lock, stock, and assets worth roughly \$1.5 million to Pat Robertson’s CBN (formerly Christian Broadcasting Network). Along with the rest of Robertson’s communications entities—the highly successful ad-supported CBN with its 22.2 million subscribers, production studios in Virginia Beach, and the syndicated Christian TV talk show *The 700 Club*—the new station would be non-profit. The formal transfer took place, appropriately enough, in the 1982 Passover and Easter season. They renamed it Middle East Television—MET.

MET is probably the only thing besides oxygen that simultaneously reaches Moslems, Jews, and Christians, from northern Israel through Lebanon to parts of Jordan, from the Sea of Galilee to the Golan Heights, from Beirut to Tel Aviv, from the remnants of the PLO, in short, to the Israeli Army. Being a Christian broadcaster in a place where the very word “Christian” carries such a powerful charge can be dangerous. Early last spring, a bomb exploded just outside the van that used to house the MET facilities—which was in an area controlled by

the private army of Major General Saad Hadad—and knocked it off the air. The bomb, it was determined, had been placed in a Mercedes with Lebanese plates, and no one knew if it was actually intended for the station. At any rate, MET was soon back on the air.

What do you do with a station like this if you’re a Christian broadcaster bent on sending some kind of message out to the world? After all, this is the same territory where Western missionaries have long toiled to claim a few souls from Mohammed. Pat Robertson, however, isn’t quite as evangelical as he’s made out to be. Like any good broadcaster, the last thing he wants is to offend *anyone* in his market.

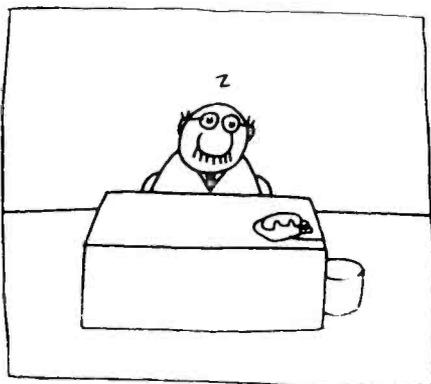
So MET metes out Andy Griffith reruns. “No evangelizing—nothing overt,” one CBN spokesman described it. Just old series like *Laredo* and *I Spy*, cartoons based on Bible stories, *The 700 Club*, movies like *The Bells of St. Mary’s*, and CBN’s own Christian soap opera, *Another Life*, the only MET program to be dubbed into Arabic. Exactly how many TV sets are in the area, or who’s even watching, CBN isn’t quite sure. Nevertheless, the station’s broadcast day has increased over the year, from 5 hours to 11, under the guidance of CBN programming vice president Tim Robertson (Pat’s son), who will decide what to add to the lineup.

For example, Robertson is struggling to put together a MET local nightly news program, which in this particular turf is akin to making hurricane measurements in the eye of the hurricane. The show now on the drawing board will contain an Arabic-language half-hour whose Hebrew footage will have Arabic subtitles, a Hebrew-language half-hour whose Arabic footage will have Hebrew subtitles, and talking heads in English, with Arabic and Hebrew subtitles. Says Robertson, “We don’t want anyone to feel left out.”

But MET’s greatest contribution to this war-torn land debuted last spring: NBA basketball. Robertson imported a condensed version of CBS’s basketball broadcasts, which began airing in May. The game, Robertson claims, is one of Lebanon’s favorite sports.

MET’s location, just inside Lebanon, is called “the good fence,” because Lebanese and Israeli workers walk freely back and forth across the border to work each day. A good fence, in a sense, is what CBN wants MET to be—a force for peace, in the form of powerful escapism.

JULIE TALEN



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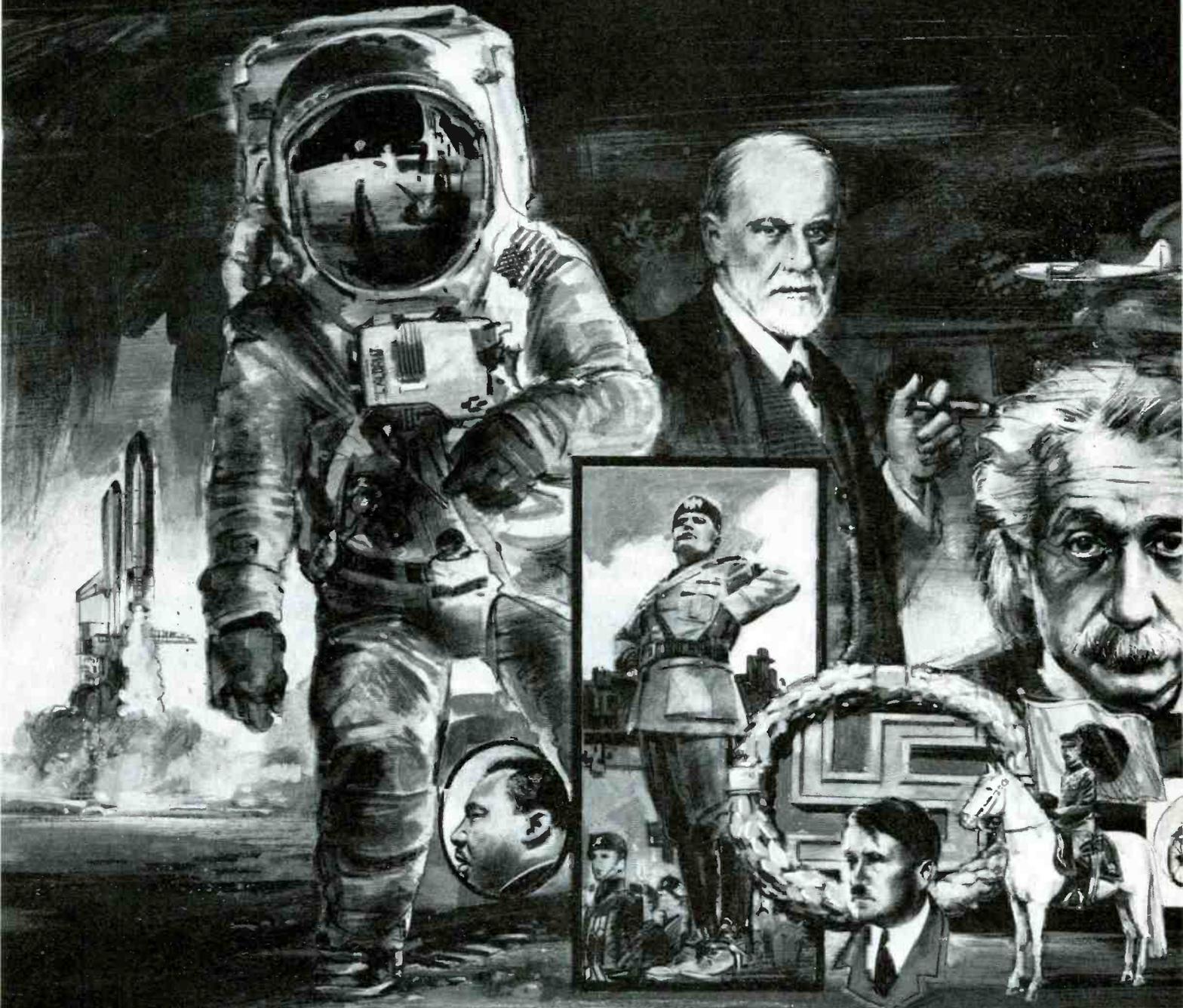
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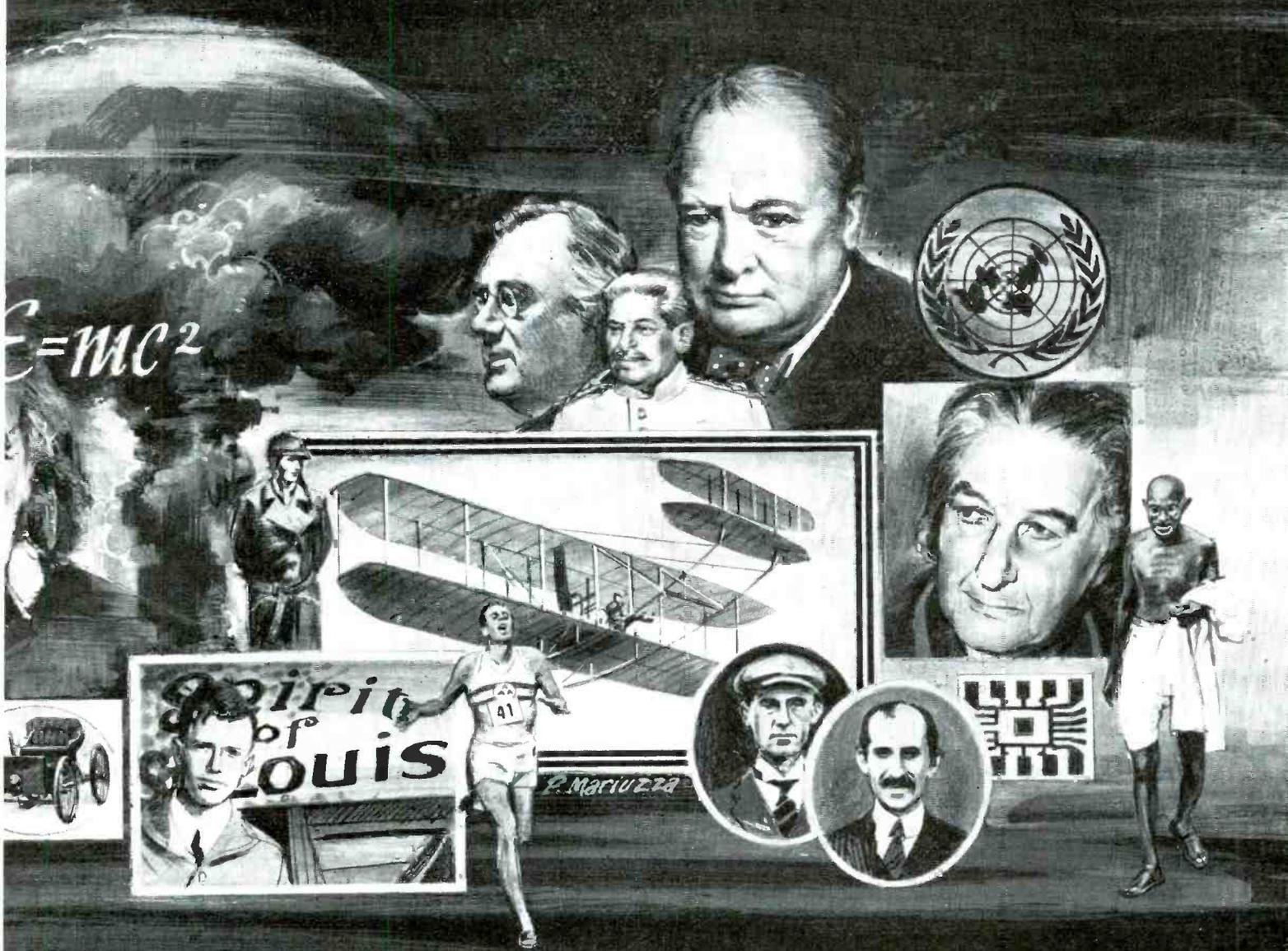
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# Homage to Syndication

by David Marc

**T**he blockbuster mini-series—*Roots*, *Shogun*, *Holocaust*, *The Winds of War*, *The Thorn Birds*, and their kind—are hyped with great fanfare by the networks. In their moment, they break viewing records, get immense press coverage, and become part of the life of the nation. Yet, typically, they are forgotten in a matter of weeks. Like Roman candles, the mini-series spend themselves in a single burst; rarely do they light up the Nielsens the second time around. Television has its block-

busters, but it is not by nature a blockbuster medium.

Long after these epic sagas are locked away in the climate-controlled vaults of some archive, Lucy, Granny, Beaver, Opie, Ralph Kramden, Joe Friday, Gilligan, Thelma Lou, Eliot Ness, Maynard G. Krebs, Starsky, Kojak, the Fonz, and Hawkeye will continue to inhabit the American antenascapade like a glowing procession of spirits. They are in syndication, and syndication is bigger than blockbuster.

To the lifelong viewer, syndication is the constancy of television, its museum. To the producing companies and the people who qualify for residuals, it is a fountain of riches. For the programs themselves, it is eternal life. TV critics don't write much about syndication; to them it is the repository of used-up network merchandise. They miss the meaning, and so with little fanfare or ceremony the series that are destined never to die pass from the spotlight of prime time to take their places in telementhology.

Some six years after *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* kept millions at home on Saturday nights, it has become a nightly accompaniment to Soup-for-One to a nation of non-swinging singles. Somewhere else on the dial, John Travolta is working cheap on *Welcome Back, Kotter*; Shirley is still friends with Laverne in Milwaukee; Barney Fife has moved to Raleigh; Gomer has joined the Marines, and Ralph is threatening to send Alice to the moon. The program trends of the '50s, '60s, and '70s meld into a cosmos: The California patio of Burns and Allen coexists with the New Frontier suburban living room of Rob and Laura Petrie, the '70s working-class parlor of Edith and Archie Bunker, and the '80s playpen of *Three's Company*.

Time is out of joint in syndication. The Brady Bunch might well be celebrating Christmas on an August afternoon. The Korean War is likely to continue until World War III, even as Sergeant Bilko remains at peace, and the Rat Patrol continues the push against Rommel.

Syndication puts excitement in motel life for the traveler. *The Twilight Zone* could well be hammocked between *Green Acres* and *The Carol Burnett Show*. You can tell what kind of city you're in by the local stations' syndicated offerings. Have you ever been in a market where *The Big Valley* is on every day?

Of course, these reruns are not only from the networks. *The Adventures of Superman*, starring George Reeves, is probably the greatest non-network hit in television history. It was in production from 1952 to 1957 and is still playing in reruns. The show was so popular that it became the first ever to be presented on a major network—ABC—after an initial run in syndication. Not many years ago, the highest-paid performer in television was Mike Douglas, a syndicated talk-show host without a single network television credit. And when the networks turned down *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* as too venturesome in 1975, Norman Lear syndicated the program directly to stations. In 1982, the reruns appeared twice-weekly on *The CBS Late Movie*.

What makes a syndication hit—or what the industry calls an "evergreen"? Many network successes have wilted in syndication—*The Fugitive* is one—and some network flops, such as *Star Trek*, have thrived as reruns. There are no formulas, although the industry's conventional wisdom holds that one kind of show—the variety show—has no after-life in syndication. It's not that variety

David Marc teaches American Civilization at Brown University. His book, *Demographic Vistas: Television in American Culture (Univ. of Penn.)* will be published this year.



**A museum of memories:** (left to right) *I Love Lucy*, *M\*A\*S\*H*, *The Carol Burnett Show*, *Leave It to Beaver*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *The Honeymooners*, *Star Trek*, *Superman*, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*.

has become unpopular with viewers, but that it has become unpopular with the networks and producers.

But there are exceptions to this rule: *The Lawrence Welk Show* and *Hee Haw* have continued successfully in new production for syndication well after the networks dropped them. And a few network variety classics, such as the original *Saturday Night Live* and *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In*, have successfully been edited down for rerun syndication.

Syndication is where new networks will be born: Already we have Operation Prime Time, Mobil Showcase Network, SFM Holiday Network, and Independent Network News. It is where old forms are kept alive—for example, the exercise show, from Jack La Lanne's to Richard Simmons's—and where new trends begin, as with Group W's *PM Magazine*.

Syndication's time-travel through old television series is in some ways a richer trip than that afforded by any of the networks' historical mini-series. And it is comforting that future generations of Americans are likely to grow up knowing who Eddie Haskell, Jethro Bodine, and Hawkeye Pierce are—and what they represent as American types. ■

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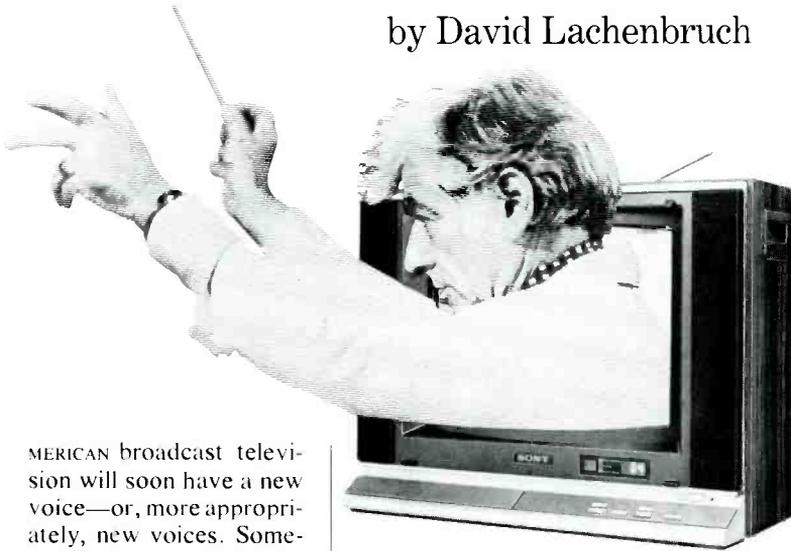
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JFH

# Stereophonic TV: You Haven't Heard the Half of It

by David Lachenbruch



**A**MERICAN broadcast television will soon have a new voice—or, more appropriately, new voices. Sometime this year, the Federal Communications Commission is expected to adopt rules permitting multichannel TV sound.

Although dual-channel sound is now offered in Japan and Germany, the American system will be considerably more advanced. In the two existing systems, a station can broadcast either stereophonic sound or a second, alternate soundtrack, but not both. The American system will provide a full stereo service along with a second, completely independent soundtrack.

The stereophonic-sound channel will be compatible with existing non-stereo television sets. Those equipped to receive stereophonic sound should get an audio signal at least comparable to that provided by FM stereo radio. And because a special “companding” system (similar to the Dolby system used in tape recorders) will be used, TV stereo sound shouldn't suffer from the long-distance reception problem of FM stereo—caused by the stereo signal's failure to carry as far as the monophonic signal.

In addition to the stereo system, stations will be able to add a “separate audio program” channel, which could be used to broadcast the sound portion in a second language, provide descriptions of the on-screen action for the blind or, in the case of educational or instructional television, supply commentary at a more advanced or more elementary level than that on the main sound channel.

*David Lachenbruch is editorial director of Television Digest.*

More than stereo, it is the separate audio program channel that intrigues the television networks. The Spanish-speaking audience, for example, is almost completely lost to the Big Three. ABC's research has determined that if it can capture 20 percent of the audience now watching the Spanish International Network, it will gain 1.6 rating points in Miami, 0.8 in Los Angeles, and 0.4 in New York. The networks are already experimentally dubbing Spanish-language soundtracks onto some of their shows.

PBS, which presents more music than the other networks, is expected to take the lead in stereocasting musical events. So far WTTW-TV, the PBS outlet in Chicago, is the only station in the country broadcasting all of its programming in stereo. In Japan, it was found that stereophonic sound gave sports broadcasting a new dimension of audio realism by separating crowd noises from commentary. Sports events in the United States are considered likely to follow the Japanese lead into stereo.

Television-set manufacturers are preparing to offer stereo sets as soon as the FCC gives its go-ahead. Most top-of-the-line TV sets are already offered with stereo sound systems, and new circuitry to decode the multichannel sound signals could be added quickly.

Set-top converters for stereo could arrive even before complete stereo TV sets. These will probably be completely separate sound receivers, designed to direct the audio either to extra speakers placed on each side of the TV set or to existing home stereo systems.

The FCC's multichannel-sound proposal, following its current deregulation philosophy, permits broadcasters to use any transmission system that meets a broad set of technical limits. This could result in the simultaneous use of several incompatible transmission systems. The futility of the commission's *laissez faire* approach became apparent when it permitted broadcasters to use any of five mutually incompatible systems for AM stereo. That decision was made almost two years ago and is generally considered the reason for AM stereo's lack of success to date.

If the FCC won't set a standard, the industry is determined to do so. A top-level committee of engineers from broadcast stations and equipment manufacturing companies, under the aegis of the Electronic Industries Association, recently concluded exhaustive tests of the three proposed multichannel TV sound systems with the aim of recommending a single system. While there is strong evidence that some FCC commissioners will push for a single standard to avoid a repetition of the AM stereo fiasco, the system endorsed by the EIA committee will probably become the accepted standard for multichannel transmissions regardless of the FCC's action.

No silver lining is without its dark cloud, which in the case of multichannel sound is its effect on cable television. Tests have shown that many cable systems will be unable to pass the broadcast stereophonic sound on to their viewers. Even worse, in some cases even the monophonic sound could be distorted, and the stereo signals from one channel could jam programs on adjacent channels. If that weren't enough bad news for the cable operators, they also found that a multichannel-sound signal on any cable channel could disable some pay-TV decoder boxes, whether or not the picture being decoded has stereo sound.

This discovery has resulted in a massive march back to the drawing board by cable TV equipment manufacturers—but it's possible that the 40 percent of the population subscribing to the deluxe service of cable could be the last to benefit from the new deluxe television audio system. ■

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# THE FIRST AMENDMENT

## V.

# UNION POLITICAL SPENDING

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**T**he First Amendment was written nearly 200 years ago to protect the right of all Americans to freely express their own opinions—and the right not to support opinions with which they disagree.

But despite the First Amendment, one group in America has the power to force men and women to financially support political causes and candidates they oppose—or lose their jobs. That group is organized labor.

Federal labor law as well as some state laws permit unions and employers to require working Americans to pay union dues as a condition of employment, regardless of whether or not they want to join or support a union. As a result, the AFL-CIO and member unions collect more than \$3.5 billion per year—\$10 million a day—in compulsory dues.

This massive amount of union treasury money, often called “soft money,” cannot be used for direct cash contributions to candidates for federal office. But federal election law permits the use of “soft money” for a host of union activities for candidates, political parties, referendums and ideological causes.

And spend it the unions do. Political historian Theodore White called the AFL-CIO political effort in 1968

“unprecedented in American history.” It included, for example, the registration of 4.6 million voters, the printing and distribution of 115 million pamphlets and leaflets, telephone banks in 638 localities, 72,225 house-to-house canvassers, and nearly 100,000 volunteers on election day.

Labor columnist Victor Riesel estimates that the cost of organized labor’s unreported “in-kind” political activities in 1976 was over \$100 million. Allowing for inflation and the dramatic increase in union political action, that figure could top \$150 million in 1984.

In response, more and more union members are speaking out against the flagrant abuse of their First Amendment rights, looking to the nation’s courts for help.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that the use of compulsory union dues for political, ideological and other non-collective bargaining activities is unconstitutional, violating employees’ First Amendment rights. But some courts have strayed badly in their interpretation of the legal precedents.

This fall, the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation will seek from the Supreme Court a strict definition of collective bargaining and a uniform remedy to protect the

constitutional rights of American workers against the use of their compulsory dues for union political spending. (**Ellis/Fails v. Brotherhood of Railway, Airline and Steamship Clerks**)

The issue is clear, the abuse widespread. Rank and file workers, especially those who choose not to become union members, have little or no say as to which candidates and causes their money is used to support.

As a federal appeals court has stated, this wholesale violation of employees’ First Amendment rights damages workers twice: They are forced to “contribute” to political candidates they oppose, and their ability to finance candidates they do support is thereby severely diminished.

Nearly 200 years ago, Thomas Jefferson wrote: “To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, is sinful and tyrannical.”

Unhappily, such tyranny prevails in America today in the form of union political spending financed by compulsory union dues. This tyranny can only be eliminated by the combined action of an informed press, an aroused citizenry and a responsible judiciary.

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**I**f you would like further information about this fundamental abuse of the First Amendment, please write us for a copy of our pamphlet, “The First Amendment vs. Union Political

Spending: A 26-Year Legal Battle for Employees’ Political Freedom”, and more information about the landmark case, **Ellis/Fails v. BRAC**. Or call Joanna Boyce at 800-336-3600

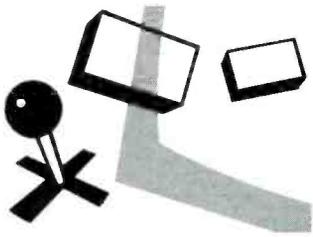
**National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation**  
Dept. CC  
8001 Braddock Road  
Springfield, VA 22160

## Short Takes on New Tech

### Video Games: A Library Opens Its Doors

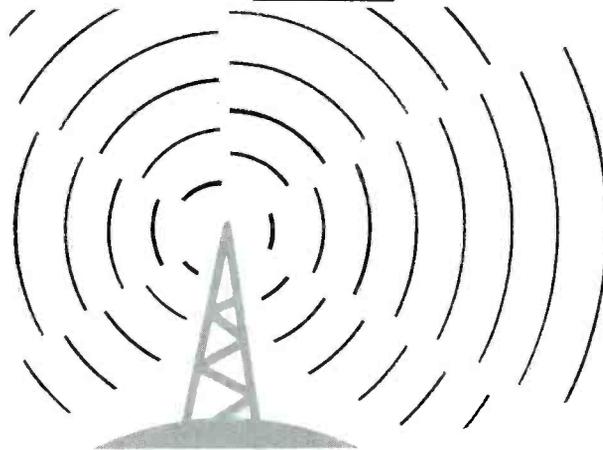
**M**OST troubling to the home video-game industry, some say, are bored players. When played too often, even the most challenging game can become redundant and ineffective. Control Video Corporation, a new company in Virginia, has devised a service that addresses this problem.

GameLine, which CVC launched last April, is the first home video-game library. For \$59, subscribers purchase control boxes resembling home computers, which link their TV sets to the library's 75



games. Subscribers enter the system by calling a toll-free number and telling GameLine's computer in Virginia which game they want to play. Each call costs \$1 and provides 10 to 12 "plays," which can last a total time of 40 minutes, CVC's Stuart Segal says, "even if you get blown away."

The majority of GameLine's subscribers are "in their 20s and reluctant to go into a video store and be seen buying Pac-Man," according to Segal. Thus, the service can provide the truest test of a game's appeal—the number of times it is played, rather than the number of copies it sells. Ironically, one of the most popular games in November was Frankenstein's Monster, by DataAge, a software company that went out of business last fall.



### Radio: Subcarriers Revived

**I**N 1955 the FCC gave FM stations permission to broadcast over their subcarrier channels (SCAs). These are second channels traveling in tandem with main ones, created by splitting the station's signal. The few stations that have used their SCAs have broadcast reading services for sight-impaired people, foreign-language programs, and background music services such as Muzak.

But a recent change in FCC regulation has increased stations' interest. SCAs are no longer restricted to carrying "broadcast-like" programs. They can compete for any number of personal communications services, including

paging and personal data- and voice-information services.

Seventy-seven percent of the National Radio Broadcasters Association's members now plan to make use of their SCAs, according to a recent survey. The channels have "become a new profit-center opportunity."

Mutual Broadcasting System plans to use SCAs to deliver MultiComm, an audio- and data-transmission service, to subscribers—initially a network of salespeople at Amway, Mutual's parent company. And Reach Inc., a company formed last February, has signed more than 100 stations as affiliates in what will be a nationwide personal paging service.

### Videotex: Mall Shoppers Line Up

**T**HE shopping mall, which has drawn shoppers away from the old-fashioned Main Street, is now beckoning them into the high-tech age. Consumers in Dallas and San Antonio recently joined the ranks of "electronic shoppers" when several malls in those cities installed customized videotex terminals.

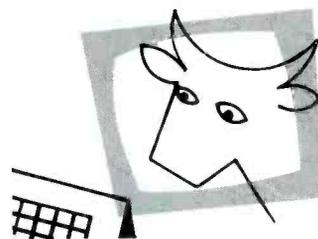
San Antonio's Windsor Park and Ingram Park Malls have been equipped, through a joint venture of Harte-Hanks Communications and Melvin Simon & Associates, with several "touch-screen" terminals, in booths also containing automatic teller machines. Cash is thus at the shoppers' fingertips along with information on how and where to spend it.

The terminals in Dallas's Prestonwood Town Centre, installed by Insource Corporation, provide similar information, including schedules for events occurring in the mall. Apparently shoppers approve: During the October opening, they waited two and three deep in line to get at the terminals.

### Home Computers: Arriving on the Farm

**I**NSTEAD of gathering at the local feed store in the time-honored tradition, the modern farmer is likely to hang out with his personal computer. A market research report by Frost & Sullivan Inc. asserts that many farmers already use computers for basic accounting chores, and that wider proliferation merely awaits the right software.

According to the report, the software most successful with farmers will provide down-to-earth information on dairy,



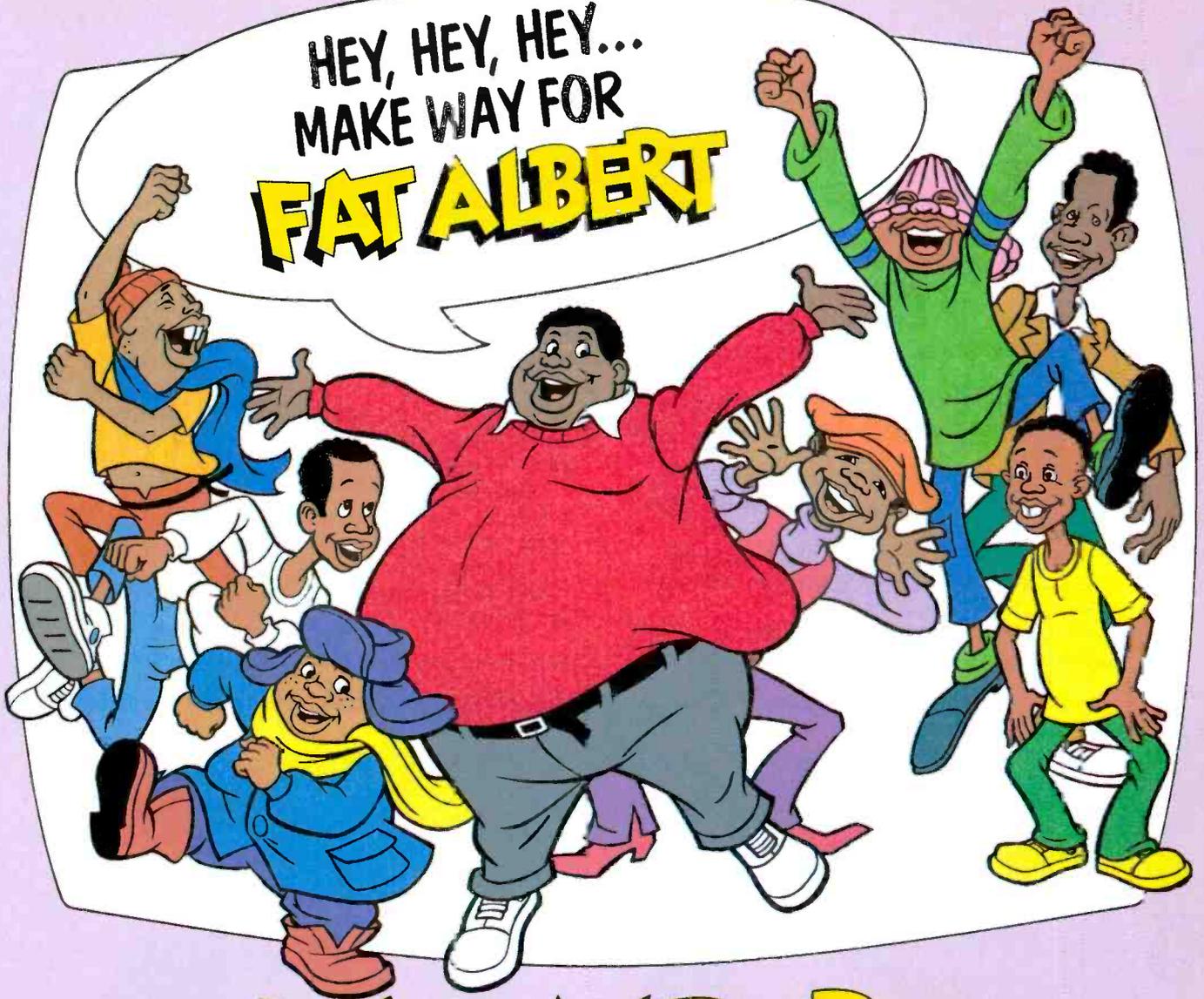
cattle, poultry, and swine production, and on corn, wheat, and other crops.

Meanwhile, a videotex service called Grassroots California will also be moving into the farmers' market this year.

Created by Times Mirror's Videotex America, McClatchy Newspapers, and TBC Inc., the service is purportedly anticipated with enthusiasm by some 400 farmers in the San Joaquin Valley, who recently responded to a feasibility study. The information most of them hope to receive: local weather reports, news, stock and commodity prices, and chemical, seed, and livestock data. All Grassroots subscribers will eventually be able to do their shopping and banking by screen as well.

Anders Wenngren

HEY, HEY, HEY...  
MAKE WAY FOR  
**FAT ALBERT**



# FAT ALBERT

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For 11 years, Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids has rated No. 1 in its time period on the network.\*

Now for the first time, TV's most acclaimed animated series will be available to local stations.

Created by and featuring Bill Cosby, it's "proof positive that high entertainment, educational and social values can be commercial," "perhaps the best cartoon program on television, and the most thoughtfully presented." (TV Guide)



Filmation is producing 50 new half-hours to go with 40 of the best episodes from its CBS run. The result: 90 top quality shows, exclusive to syndication, for daily stripping beginning in September 1984.

Very funny. Very warm. Very much a winner.

Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids will make your station THE station for children's programming in your market. And earn you the thanks of the kids, their parents - and advertisers as well.

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\* N11 1972-1983 \*\* TV Guide: "How The Experts Rate Saturday and Sunday Morning," August 9, 1980 \*\*\* TV Guide: "Keep An Eye On Fat Albert," December 12, 1981 ©1983 Wm. H. Cosby Jr./Filmation

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We sell the program's national availabilities, competing for network budgets.

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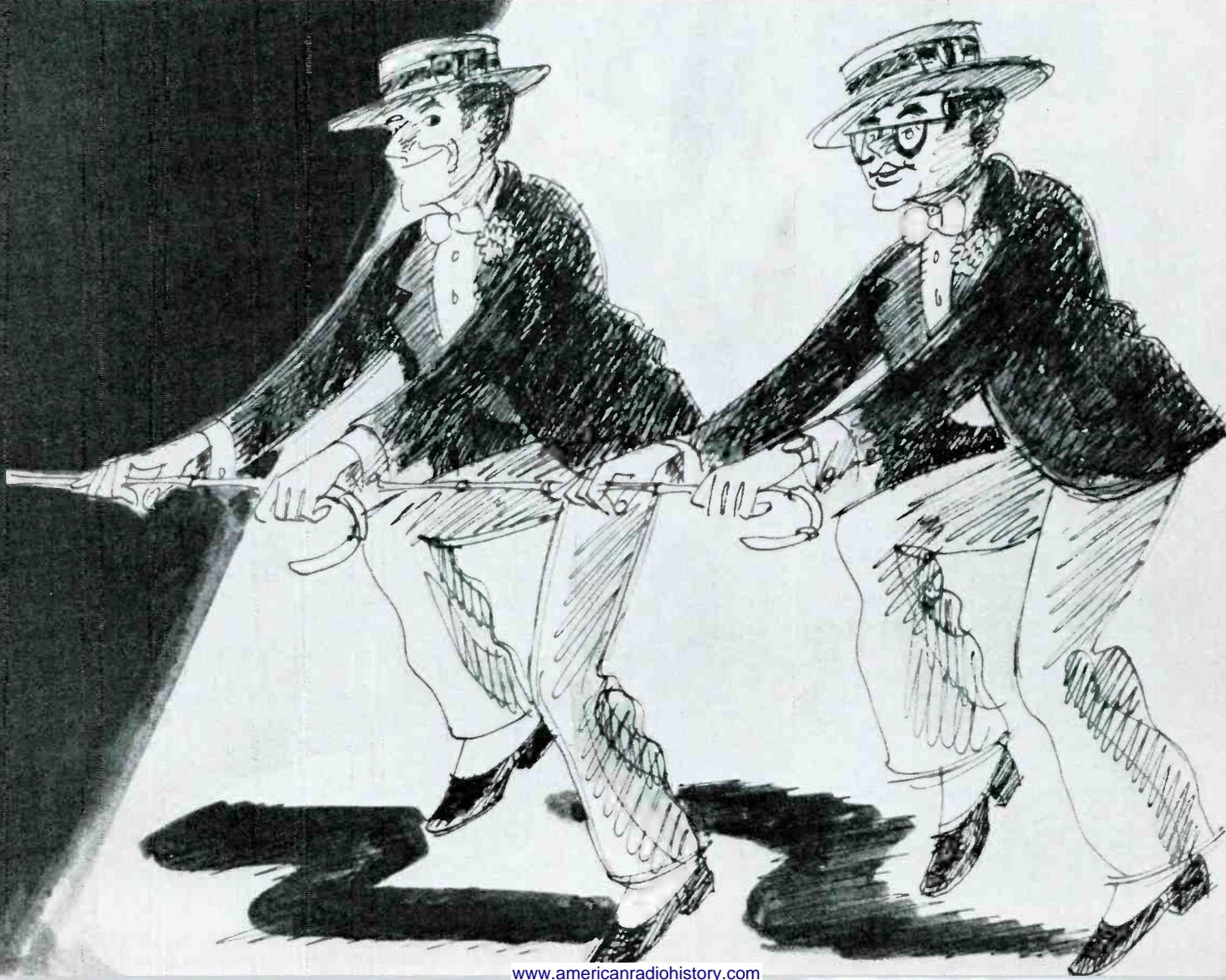
They know we depend on them. And they know they can depend on us.

And that's what profitable partnerships are all about.



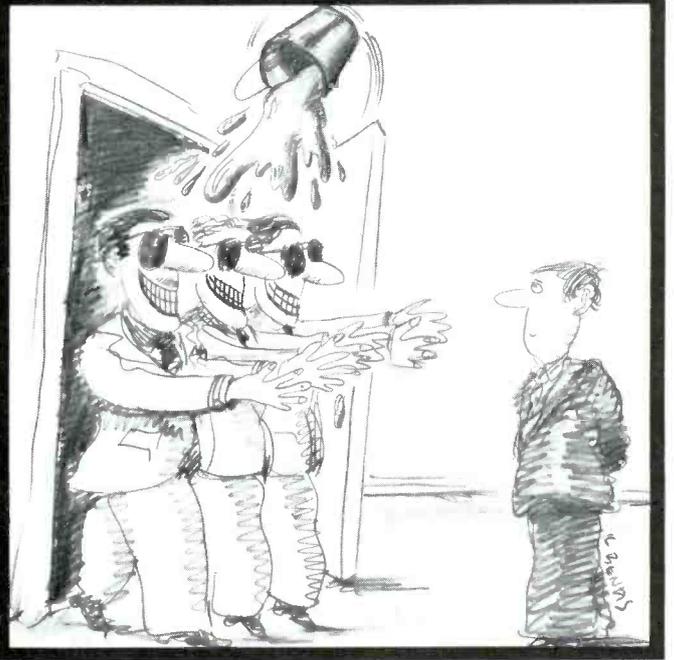
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# When Cable Clobbered the Networks

by Les Brown



**W**HEN THREE OF THE FLASHIEST and the best-promoted cable networks collapsed and died last year, losing among them close to \$150 million, a new chapter opened in the melodramatic history of cable television. Financial people have taken to calling it “the great cable shakeout.” In their view, the death of these cable networks is just part of the natural evolutionary process of business. What is happening, they explain, is that consumer choice is thinning the ranks of an overcrowded field, and when market forces have done their work, only the fittest among the program services will survive.

But in reality this shakeout is not as Darwinian as it seems. The three big cable networks that went under were victims of industry politics rather than market forces. It wasn't the public that sank these ventures, but rather the operators of cable systems, and they did it on purpose—although not conspiratorially.

The first to go under was CBS Cable, a cultural service; next, The Entertainment Channel, a pay service; then the Satellite News Channel, an all-news service. You don't have to look too closely to notice that all three big losers were owned by the parent companies of the major broadcast networks. And you don't have to reach far into the past to recall that ABC, CBS, and NBC were among cable's most ferocious enemies, both in Washington and on the propaganda front. The networks lobbied and pamphleteered with all their might to keep cable under the heavily restrictive federal regulations that stemmed its growth.

When the regulations were finally lifted, cable became a booming industry, and everyone, including the networks, wanted in. Cable's veterans of those bitter wars found themselves with an opportunity to settle an old score. So in a certain sense, the shakeout was started by the cable industry itself and was probably more an act of revenge than the natural winnowing process of business.

In retrospect, it was stupid of the television networks to think they could march in on an industry they had fought so aggressively for years and expect to be received with a grateful embrace. But then, they come from an environment where money talks all the time—where it is possible to humiliate someone one day and buy back his affections the next with a juicy deal, or where an affiliate station will sever a 40-year relationship with a network for a chance to make a bigger buck with a competitor.

The bottom-line morality governing commercial television does not nurture such abstract values as kinship and loyalty, which apparently still have some currency in cable. The networks badly misjudged their old enemy.

We will never know whether enough customers in cable homes across America would have been willing to pay \$10 a month for The Entertainment Channel, with its offerings of Broadway and BBC fare, to make it succeed. Not many private citizens were

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**The “cable shakeout” is not as Darwinian as it seems. The networks were victims of industry politics.**

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able to participate in this referendum, because few cable systems carried the service. Only the naive would consider the channel's rejection by the other operators strictly a business judgment. The channel was half-owned by RCA, parent of NBC, and headed by Arthur R. Taylor, who had led the broadcast industry's most effective lobbying campaign against cable less than a decade ago, while he was president of CBS Inc.

CBS Cable, at its demise, claimed entree to about 5 million cable homes, which means that almost six times that number couldn't receive the service because most cable operators weren't offering it. Some cable executives made no secret of their resentment towards CBS and made it clear that they would not give over their channels to help CBS establish a beachhead in cable.

Beating CBS and RCA was easy enough for the cable operators because it didn't cost them any money. Beating ABC and its partner in the Satellite News Channel, Group W (another of the great powers in broadcasting), was harder because money became, in this instance, the test of loyalty. The Satellite News

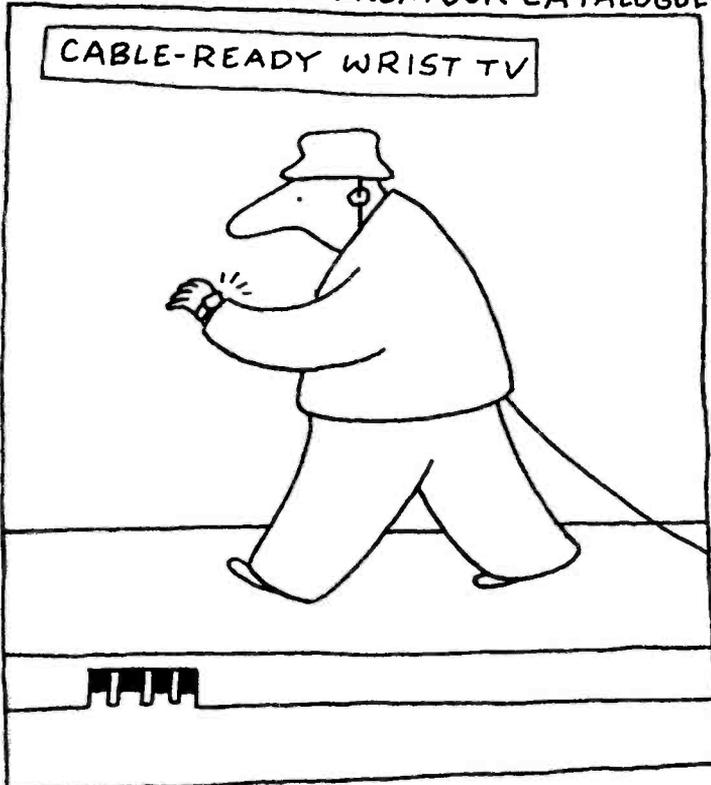
Keith Bendis

Channel had entered the cable market as the direct competitor to Ted Turner's Cable News Network. Turner, of course, was the cable industry's own superstar and its leading promoter. He was charging cable operators 15 cents a subscriber per month for CNN, and in some cases a nickel more. The competitive ploy of ABC and Group W was to offer their news channel free; in fact, they even paid some cable systems for access. In commercial television, that would have been the ball game. But in a remarkable display of loyalty to one of their own, most cable operators elected to stay with Turner even at the cost of larger profits. The Satellite News Channel had a more graceful demise than the other two: It was bought out by Turner for \$25 million.

Alone among the networks now, ABC remains in cable programming through its partnerships with Hearst, in the ARTS and Daytime services. But its news channel flopped in quite the same way as the CBS and RCA services, and for essentially the same reason: The cable pioneers wanted it to lose. The networks' services folded ostensibly because they didn't attract enough audience, but the real and terminal problem was that they were prevented from reaching a sufficient audience. Cable demonstrated what power is all about in the electronic media—control over access.

The great cable shakeout, then, has really been the great network shakeout. And while observers in the financial community count the falling-away of these glamorous program services as a loss for cable, the loss is quietly being celebrated by many in the cable industry as a victory of sorts. The victory may prove pyrrhic, however. With the networks all but dealt out of the cable picture, they are free to become cable's enemy again. They may put their power and resources behind the emerging technologies that threaten to compete with cable. In any case, the next battles are likely to occur in the marketplace, instead of Congress. ■

AVAILABLE ONLY FROM OUR CATALOGUE



## A Vote for Independently Produced Programs

EVER SINCE I became a cable subscriber I've lived as a zapper—one who hits the buttons every few moments to switch channels, thereby watching nothing on television but rather everything at once. So it was probably fitting that I was forced a few months ago to watch programs in their entirety, some 100 hours' worth over a period of six days and nights. This may sound like one of those cruel and inhuman sentences by a hanging judge in criminal court, but in fact it came from my voluntary enlistment as one of five jurors for Canada's Banff International Television Festival.

The five of us had prepared for the worst, but when the judging was over we made two important discoveries. The first was that the experience, though grueling, was surprisingly pleasurable. We had to think about that one. How does a human being subject himself to so much television and not feel like wilted cabbage? The answer, we decided, is that we weren't watching television; we were watching programs, and there's a difference.

The second discovery came when we studied the list of winners to see if by chance they had something in common. In fact, they did. Virtually all the winning programs—whether from Britain, Australia, the United States, Canada, France, or Sweden—were independently produced, although televised by major broadcast organizations. What they had that most of the losers didn't was the mark of genuine authorship. They were honest works for television, not craftily manufactured with a view to gaining the largest possible audience.

Afterwards I realized that what I zap at home is mainly institutional television, those commercial concoctions so predictable and earthbound that it's possible to derive the full essence of a show from a scene or two. Institutional television is eminently zappable, because it tends to find its inspiration in audience research. But a program that represents the honest vision of a real person is worth one's time, even if it should fall short of being a world-class production.

Every one of the new television technologies conspires to claim some of the viewing time in millions of households. But in the end the technological development with the most revolutionary impact on the old system may not be one of the high-tech delivery systems but a relatively humble device for changing channels at home, the remote-control console. This is where zapping begins. There is no predicting where the menace will lead, but the advertising industry is already aware that, of the legions of zappers out there, many practice the art primarily to avoid commercials. If zapping should become epidemic, it could undermine the economic system of broadcasting and cause a real crisis.

At Banff I found my own antidote to zapping in genuine hand-crafted programs. Of course I'm just a sample of one. But a year ago, when I took up zapping, I thought I was the only zapper in America. L.B.



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# LONELY KIDS NOT ALONE ANY MORE

Eight-year-old Kim is alone at home after school each day, and sometimes she is afraid. Now Kim and others like her have a special number they can phone for comfort and help. No longer are fear, loneliness and boredom their only companions.

Kim's calls are answered by an adult volunteer for the 5 Alive Contact-a-Friend hotline in Oklahoma City. 5 Alive, Gannett station

KOCO-TV, started the service in cooperation with McDonald's and the Contact volunteer agency.

Kim is one of an estimated six million children across the USA, who come home to an empty house because their parents are at work and cannot find or afford day care. The children are called "latchkey kids" because many carry their door keys on strings around their necks.

Kim and thousands like her in Oklahoma learned of 5 Alive Contact-a-Friend from KOCO-TV, which has begun a year-round program to publicize the public service. From McDonald's, they or their parents obtained stickers to remind them of the telephone number to call.

When a child phones, he or she is answered by a trained, sympathetic adult who can help combat

loneliness, depression, fears of the dark or storms, and can advise on simple first aid, how to cope with a stranger at the door, or how to call the police, ambulance or fire department.

Comforting latchkey kids is just part of the public service commitment of KOCO-TV. For Gannett members from Boston to Binghamton, Hattiesburg to Honolulu, Tarrytown to Tampa, helping neighbors help neighbors is part of the day's work.



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# AMERICAN TV TIGHTENS ITS GRIP ON THE WORLD



**U.S. program exports are now a half-billion-dollar business, giving new meaning to the term “Ugly American.”**

by Peter Caranicas

NO SOONER had President Reagan alighted from Air Force One in Tokyo last November than he began to advocate an improved balance of trade between Japan and the United States. Seeking, as al-

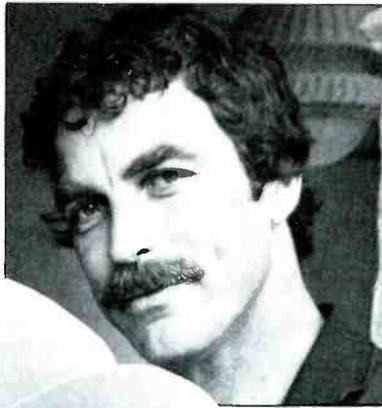
*Peter Caranicas is a cable consultant and former editor of View magazine.*

ways, instant illustrations for abstract notions, American television reporters covering the trip were quick to point out that all the video gear brought along by U.S. crews was of Japanese manufacture.

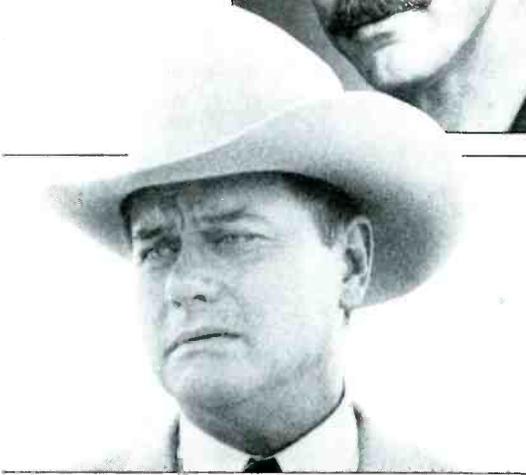
Yet the same newsmen who reported on the President's visit to Japan, filling their broadcasts with dire warnings about

the Japanese invasion of the American economy, never mentioned that, when they were finally able to relax in their hotel rooms in the evenings, they could turn on their television sets and watch such familiar programs as *Dallas* or *Dynasty*. It may not even have occurred to them that those shows represented an even

Rafal Olbinski



**Exports:** *Dallas*, *Magnum, P.I.*, *Dynasty*, *Kojak*, *The Winds of War*,



cial and television producers are increasingly frustrated by the American stranglehold on the international market. Not only do their countries import more television than they want (thus hindering the growth of their domestic industries), they export even less than they'd like (both to America, which steadfastly resists "foreign" programming, and to other foreign markets, which consistently prefer American products). American television, in short, doesn't just have a sizable piece of the action in world television, it *is* the action.

The dollar figures, though significant, don't accurately reflect the total impact of American television exports, for in providing foreign systems with some of their most popular programs, they inevitably have a strong cultural influence. In many countries, the term "Ugly American" now refers more to our media than to our business, military, or diplomatic representatives.

more striking example of an imbalance of trade—for of course almost no Japanese programming ever appears on American television, and thus every dollar paid for American exports amounts to a net American gain. When it comes to television programs, trade is a one-way street.

U.S. programs—from early sitcoms such as *I Love Lucy*, through family westerns such as *Bonanza*, up to recent mini-series such as *The Winds of War*—have consistently been among the most popular television attractions in all countries where they have aired. No other nation has even come remotely close to the United States—either in number of hours or the dollar value of those hours—in selling television abroad. But that's just part of the story, for America not only leads the world in television program exports, it is such a self-sufficient market that it *imports* less than any major country in the world, with the exception of the People's Republic of China.

The dollar value of U.S. program exports is hard to pinpoint because American television has no central organization monitoring overall business activity. The individual companies competing to sell U.S. programs abroad—MCA, Viacom, Paramount, MGM/UA, Embassy, and a host of others—prefer to keep the terms of their deals to themselves. One estimate by an industry organization puts the total value of American television program sales at a whopping \$2.8 billion a year—approximately 20 percent of that amount coming from foreign markets.

With the imbalance of television trade thus reaching as high as half a billion dollars annually, foreign government offi-

drama, the United States has excelled in musical comedies and motion pictures. So as TV-set ownership reached the multiple millions in the '50s, American producers drew on their historical ability to create mass-appeal entertainment, which is now finding mass audiences in foreign nations as well.

A related factor helping to account for the worldwide popularity of American television is its emphasis on production values. Drawing upon revenues derived from a vast and wealthy domestic market of what are now more than 80 million television homes, U.S. program suppliers spare no expense in making series and TV movies look as opulent as possible. Companies such as Lorimar (*Dallas*) and MCA (*Magnum, P.I.*) spend hundreds of thousands of dollars per episode on multiple cameras, a plethora of extras, exotic locations, and the like. Thousands more are spent in post-production on sound sweetening, musical scores, rapid and sophisticated editing, lively openings, and computer graphics.

In addition to its opulence, U.S. programming is characterized by fast action and built-in suspense, designed to rivet viewers' attention. The reason for this emphasis, of course, is that American programmers work in an extremely competitive environment, where fickle viewers can often choose among more than a dozen channels.

Yet another reason for the popularity of American television abroad is that its most popular programs, unlike those in other countries, are produced by the same companies that make the motion pictures—Warner Bros., Paramount, Columbia, Twentieth Century-Fox, Universal, and so on. This means that the film industry's talent—writers, musicians, producers, directors and, most of all, stars—is involved in a medium that in most other countries is still considered

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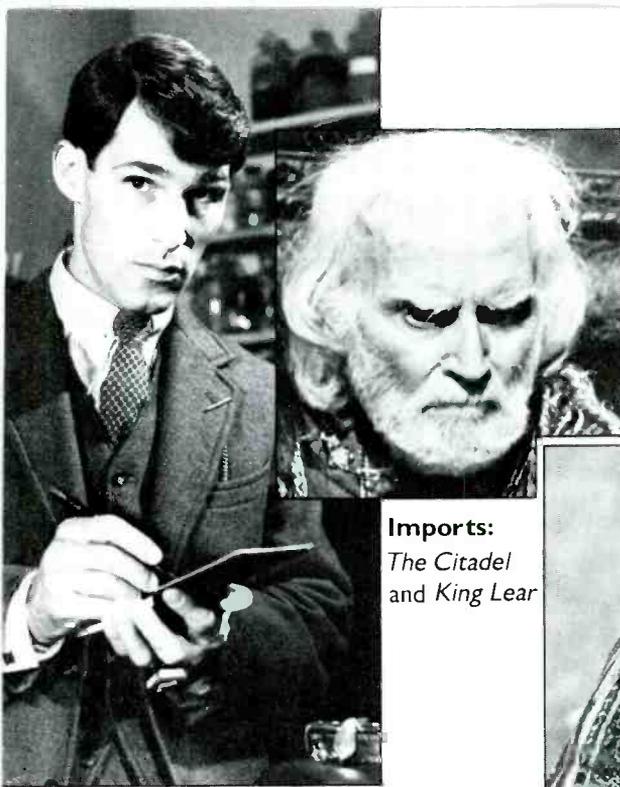
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## Many countries are trying to stem the tide of imports by adopting quotas for foreign fare.

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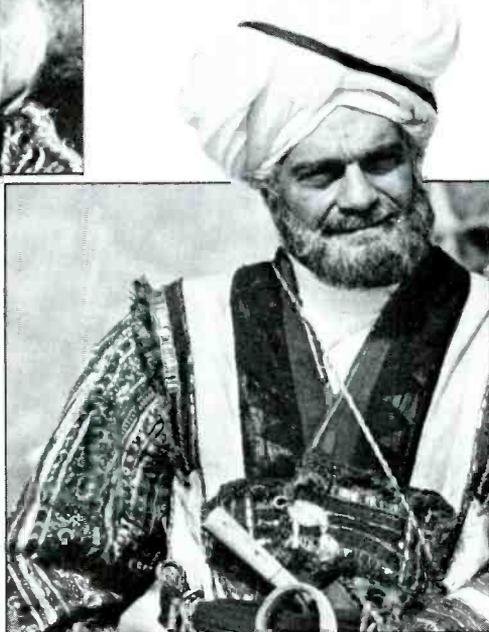
Several factors explain the high demand for U.S. programming abroad. American media have always been characterized by the desire to reach the largest possible audience. This goal is rooted in America's deeply entrenched democratic ideals, as well as in its tradition of entrepreneurship in the entertainment field. It's no accident that while France's most notable fine-arts achievements have been in opera and Britain's in



**Imports:**  
*The Citadel*  
and *King Lear*

**International co-productions:**

*The Far Pavilions*  
and *Marco Polo*



the enemy of film.

The unique structure of the U.S. television industry encourages ancillary program sales. Profits are derived not from the network airings but from subsequent sales in the rerun syndication market—and foreign sales amount to the icing on the cake. “Italy can’t duplicate the *A-Team*,” declares Norman Horowitz, a program marketer. “And why should they? For \$30,000, we can sell them an episode that cost us nearly a half million to produce.”

No one has compiled figures for foreign programs bought by American television, but those who try to sell such programs here admit the numbers are very small. Wynn Nathan, president of Lionhart Television International, estimates the ratio of U.S. program exports to imports is “anywhere from 20-to-one to 50-to-one” in dollar value.

The reasons the United States does not import more foreign shows correlate to the reasons U.S. exports are so successful. The high production values and rapid pacing of American television have spoiled its viewers. Furthermore, American programmers maintain, audiences here are accustomed to 30 years of domestic programs and will not accept dubbing or subtitling of foreign-language shows, even though both practices are commonplace in most other countries. American viewers won’t even tolerate British accents, program buyers are convinced. The only non-upscale British series to have succeeded in U.S. commercial television is *Benny Hill*, and it did so purely on the strength of its visual humor, according to David Fox, who sold the program for D.L. Taffner Syndication. Fox recalls: “Commercial stations didn’t

want to risk important time periods for a non-American show. I told buyers I’d screen it for them without the soundtrack, and if they laughed they had to buy it. Many did.”

The greatest single obstacle to the entry of foreign programs into the United States, however, is the entrenched American deity known as “ratings.” American networks and stations alike are con-

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## The American style and language even pervade the new foreign co-productions for the world market.

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stantly looking over their shoulders to be sure their competitors aren’t garnering a larger proportion of the audience. Such an environment is hardly conducive to the kind of risk-taking that the scheduling of foreign programs would entail. “It’s not that foreign programming isn’t good,” says Roger Offenbach, general manager of KMTV in Omaha, Nebraska, “but we always have to ask ourselves, ‘will it play in Omaha?’”

During its speculative burst in 1980 and ’81, cable television seemed to offer some hope for foreign programming in America. Most notably, CBS Cable, under the stewardship of programmers Jack Willis and Regina Dantas, acquired about 40 percent of its schedule from Europe, presenting such highbrow fare as *Ludwig van Beethoven*, an 11-hour series from Germany hosted by Leonard Bernstein, and middlebrow fare such as the British series *Napoleon in Love*. But the cable program services couldn’t muster up enough viewers or advertisers. CBS Cable, the first major casualty, folded in September 1982. Within months it was followed by The Entertainment Channel, the RCA-Rockefeller Center joint venture that relied partly on BBC programs. Finally, TeleFrance, an importer of French programs, collapsed just a few months ago. Still alive are Hearst/ABC’s ARTS, which inherited The Entertainment Channel’s BBC series, and Rainbow Programming Service’s Bravo, which continues to present some European performing-arts programs.

But while some hope that more foreign programming may one day enter the United States, their numbers are outweighed by those who fear that America’s robust export business will meet increasing resistance abroad. While the appeal of American programs to audiences in other countries remains strong, official policymakers in many nations are trying to curtail the number of programs their television systems buy, even imposing specific quotas on the number of “foreign” programs that can be telecast. Complex quota systems, for instance, limit the number of foreign hours that can be presented by commercial broadcasters to 40 percent in Canada and Australia, and to 14 percent in Britain.

There are several reasons for this trend. First, U.S. shows fill time that would otherwise be taken by locally produced programs, and most countries want to encourage their own teleproduction industries, to boost not only their economies but their prestige. So far the

results have not been encouraging. Britain, for instance, last year started its Channel 4 with a mandate to purchase programs from independent British producers. But to date the new channel has not found a significant audience and has been trying to call attention to itself by buying vintage American series.

Second, American programs have always been condemned in some quarters abroad for their materialistic values and their emphasis on sex and violence.

And third, in many countries, both in the industrial and developing worlds, U.S. programming, through its depiction of American lifestyles, is thought to stimulate demand for American goods.

But perhaps the greatest impact on the flow of American programming around the world will be exerted by a recently developed contractual device—the international co-production, derived, ironically, from the world of motion pictures. Television companies in most major countries now realize that the most effective way to compete with American programming is to imitate it. Program executives whose domestic markets are too small to support series with American production values have worked at forming temporary alliances with two or more other countries to finance otherwise prohibitively expensive programs.

In the typical international co-production, each backing organization gets to distribute the program in its own country, and the heaviest backer usually retains international rights. For instance, Antenne 2, one of France's three national networks, is now co-producing a \$4 million, 26-part documentary about the human body called *The Body Machine* with Goldcrest, the independent British production company. Antenne 2 will receive rights to distribute the series in all French-speaking territories, as well as a percentage of Goldcrest's profits; Goldcrest has rights in all other territories.

Co-productions often involve American companies, as in the case of *The Far Pavilions*, a joint endeavor of Home Box Office and Goldcrest. HBO has exclusive U.S. pay-TV rights to the series, and Goldcrest retains most other world rights.

International co-productions provide many advantages for the partners. First, they spread the risk of expensive projects over two or more companies. They also facilitate access to remote locations: The *Marco Polo* mini-series, much of it shot in China, was formed as a U.S.-Italian-Chinese co-production. As a rule, co-productions star at least one well-known international figure. Each *Body Machine* episode, for instance, is introduced by heart surgeon Christiaan Barnard. Most important, such ventures are vehicles for

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## Resentment of the U.S. is heightened by American television's rejection of foreign programs.

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vaulting over the national quota systems because they are not usually considered "foreign" by the countries of the partner companies. International co-productions thus work two ways: They increase the ability of foreign companies to penetrate the American market, and they enable U.S. production organizations to circumvent national quota rules.

Co-productions have one more key characteristic: Their soundtracks are designed to be universally acceptable. In practical terms—since all countries except the U.S. tolerate dubbing or subtitles—this means that at least one version of all co-productions must be narrated or produced in English—and American English at that. The impact of this requirement on productions shot in non-English-speaking countries is remarkable. Perhaps the most striking example is *Friday*, a co-production of two French companies, the national network TFI and the Société Française de Production. This five-hour mini-series based on *Robinson Crusoe* and starring Michael York is being produced in English as well as French—proof that even the French have accepted English as the *lingua franca* of international television.

All these factors taken together—English language, international stars, fast pacing, lavish production values, exotic locations—form the new "international style" of television, a development that some observers feel will accomplish for video programming in the 1980s what the international style of architecture of the 1920s did for modern buildings: create a common visual language that can be readily understood across many cultures.

If this happens, American-made programming will be subjected to the same pressures of international competition that have plagued American auto-making. Speaking before an industry gathering last October, Julius Barnathan, president of ABC broadcast operations and engineering, observed: "If Japan, Germany, and England develop writers, directors, and producers acceptable to the

American public, production will leave Hollywood, just the way it left Detroit."

Barnathan's remarks were part of a speech to producers meant as a warning that production costs were getting out of hand. He advised them to look to cheaper ways of making shows, on tape rather than on film. But if Barnathan's prediction comes true, if international co-production becomes the primary vehicle for creating television in the future, then the entire world will move a step closer to having one language. While the United States may then lose its predominant role in production, it will have the satisfaction of knowing that worldwide entertainment is being modeled on the American brand of television. And even if future international productions are no longer American, they will continue to reflect the adoption of American values—production aesthetics, lifestyles, escapist dreams, and worldly ambitions—by television viewers the world over.

But international co-production is only the most immediately visible of several possible scenarios, particularly with the advent of such revolutionary new technologies as home video, cable, and DBS. These will dramatically expand the demand for product both in the domestic and international markets, but it remains uncertain whether this will mean an even greater Americanization of world television, or an opportunity for such nations as England, France, Italy, and Japan to capture their share of the market. On the one hand American television producers, with their financial resources, technological expertise, and promotional know-how, may quickly move in and seize control of the vast new domestic and international market. On the other hand the new markets, with their cheaper facilities, smaller audiences, and more diverse tastes, may provide the perfect opportunity for more flexible independent and foreign producers to compete successfully with the bottom-line boys.

While the world television market is, in fact, presently dominated by American products—while other nations are resentful not only of U.S. exploitation of their home markets, but of their inability to crack the international market themselves—the crucial question of the next decade will be whether the new technologies exacerbate this trend or mitigate it. Are we likely to enter the global village at last, driving home in our Volkswagens or Datsuns or Chevrolets, turning on our Panasonics or Philips or RCAs, and switching to the BBC or Kabuki theater or *Three's Company*? Or will we find the brave new world of 1994 even more committed than the present one to those twin deities of American television—Nielsen and the dollar? ■

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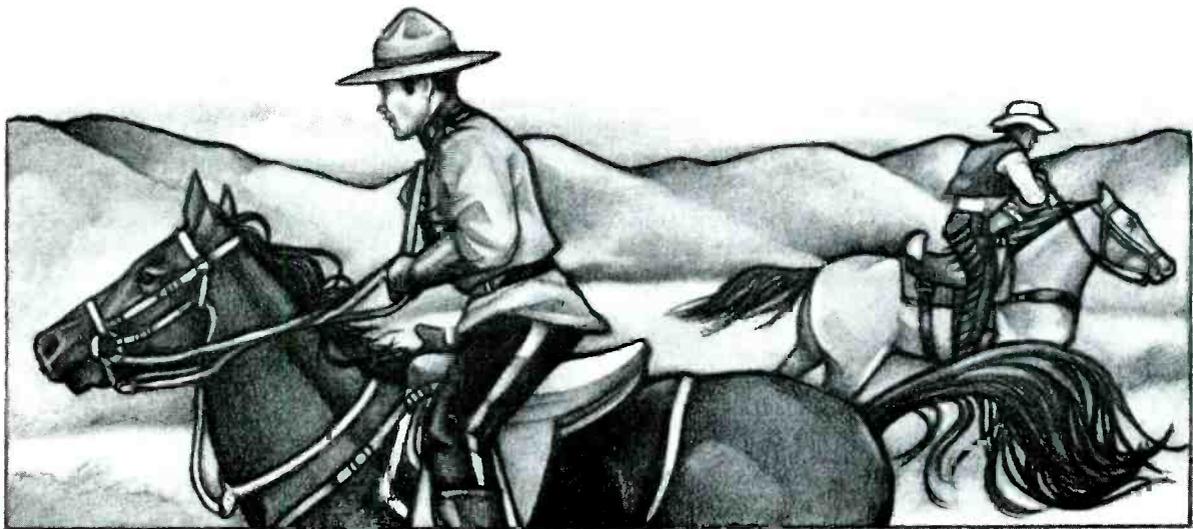
Every country wanted him-  
But none would claim him

# Reilly: Ace of Spies

Chermayeff & Geismar



# Where Canada and the U.S. Part Company



**Differences in media policy are widening our northern border.**

**L**AST SPRING one of Canada's two national pay-television programmers, First Choice, announced that it would collaborate with Playboy Enterprises to produce \$30 million worth of "adult" programming in Canada, to be shown late at night on the First Choice channel. Then the sky fell. Within 48 hours a national demonstration was planned. Thousands of people, from British Columbia to Newfoundland, marched in protest. More than 400 gathered on Ottawa's Parliament Hill, in bitterly cold weather. The Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) correspondence secretariat was buried in an avalanche of more than 7,000 letters and petitions.

This public outburst revealed much about Canada. So-called "adult" programming has been available in the United States for some time. In that fabled land of plenty, there are at least three national "adult" services on cable—as

*John Meisel is former chairman of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission.*

by John Meisel

well, I am told, as more raunchy fare on subscription television (STV) and multi-point distribution (MDS) systems in various metropolitan areas. Yet I cannot recall hearing of any American protest comparable to the uprising in Canada. Playboy executives were stunned enough by the response that they agreed not to organize a promotion campaign.

What was telling about the outcry was the eminently Canadian assumption that broadcasting—even the medium of pay television—is a matter of collective concern. Those who objected to the proposed programming on moral grounds were not for a moment satisfied with the option of not buying the offending service. Television programming is more to them than simply a consumer item. This episode illustrates the fundamental differences between the two countries in broadcast regulation.

It is easy to overlook many differences when we review our similarities in language, political traditions, work habits, and economic structure. Our interrelat-

edness in the communications field is vividly symbolized by the arrangements approved a year ago for two American pay-television services to use a Canadian broadcasting satellite, and by the American space shuttle's launching of a Canadian satellite. Moreover, for a considerable time our traditions in broadcast regulation followed a similar evolution: The judgments of the Federal Communications Commission and the CRTC revealed a common concern for public-service standards, in promoting the free expression of differing views, maintaining programming balance and variety, and limiting the amount of commercial advertising.

The two countries' regulation policies have diverged sharply in recent years. In the United States, regulation is being dismantled in favor of market forces. In a *New York Times* op-ed article, FCC chairman Mark Fowler listed the restrictions he would like to see removed: the Fairness Doctrine, ascertainment requirements, guidelines to ensure provision of news and public-affairs programming, and restrictions on the resale of broadcast stations. He supported his po-

Linda Y. Miyamoto

sition in *U.S. News & World Report*: "In broadcasting, consumers, through the marketplace, subject the broadcaster every hour to a national plebiscite. When you turn that dial, advertisers and broadcasters get the message. Those programs that most people want to watch will be supported by advertising, those they don't want to watch will generally not be."

Many vigorous arguments have been made for turning more of the decision-making over to the open market. It has been suggested that technological developments have so multiplied the channels for public communication that there is no longer any basis for regarding the use of broadcast frequencies as a public trust, subject to requirements of public service. Market forces will eliminate the danger of state intervention in the broadcast media, meet the needs of democracy, and give consumers what they want.

I question the assumption that free markets lead inevitably to unrestricted choice. We have all seen how heavily financed advertising campaigns can influence consumer preferences. The market may be an appropriate mechanism for the allocation of luxuries and resources in ample supply. But in a society in which individuals are seen to have an intrinsic worth, markets alone cannot be allowed to determine every value.

Can we really expect broadcasters to address the needs and tastes of minority audiences rather than compete for domination of the mass audience? Genuine program choices are not made by viewers in a free market, but by network executives responding to advertising strategies. As history has shown, these people

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## Reliance on market forces would devastate Canada's TV industry.

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are cautious, imitative, and unwilling to select stereotype-free programs. The market mechanism, so deft at incorporating technological innovation, will undoubtedly prove less receptive to political and social innovation.

Whatever the merits of the arguments about broadcast regulation, they are unlikely to lead to similar resolutions in Canada and the United States. For one thing, Canadians do not seem to have developed the Americans' finely honed suspicion of government. For decades, social scientists have found the reasons for this difference a titillating subject of speculation. Why did the forces of law and order—personified in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police—play such a prominent role in the settlement of the Canadian West, while the settlement of the American frontier was much more free-wheeling? Why does Canada's constitution speak of "peace, order, and good government" while America's reveres "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happi-

ness"? Why do Canadian responses to surveys consistently reveal higher levels of trust and confidence in government? A variety of explanations have been suggested: the absence of a revolutionary past; the dispersion of our small population over vast distances; a sensitivity to society as community.

Canadian attitudes bespeak more than an absence of distrust. Canadians have used the state as an instrument for common purposes much more often than Americans have. Heavy government involvement in the building of railways was in large part prompted by the need of a vast, sparsely settled country for an effective transportation system. Similarly, broadcasting and telecommunications are considered vitally important in forging and maintaining links among the country's various regions and groups.

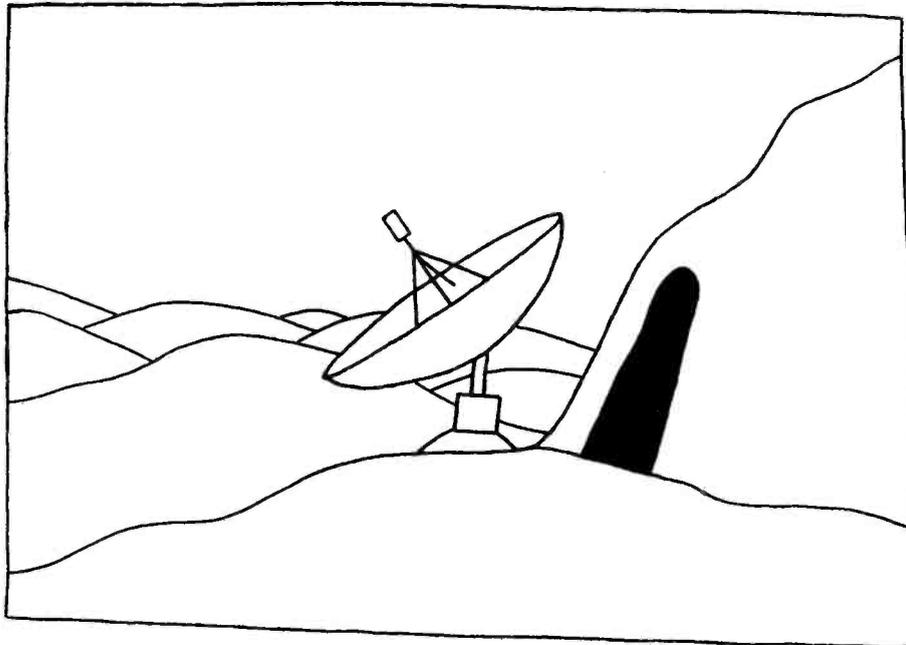
It may turn out that market forces bring about desired changes in the broadcast media. But it is inconceivable that market forces could address the central concern of Canadian broadcast regulation—the need to promote a Canadian presence on the airwaves.

The American market is big and strong enough to support an indigenous, unthreatened broadcasting system. But if we want to have Canadian voices on the airwaves, we cannot rely on market forces. They pull in entirely the wrong direction: Canadian broadcasters can purchase expensively produced American programs for a fraction of the cost of creating a comparable original program. And they can frequently derive higher advertising revenues from showing these tried-and-true American products. Even more strongly put, exclusively economic considerations could dictate our virtually total reliance on U.S. entertainment programming.

There is no doubt that the technological environment is changing rapidly in Canada as well as in the United States. Neither is there any doubt that regulation comes at the price of some flexibility, innovation, and simplicity. The CRTC is attempting to reduce the regulatory load on its broadcast licensees. It is also trying, in the context of its pay-TV licensing decision, to build in some of the business incentives associated with a free-market system.

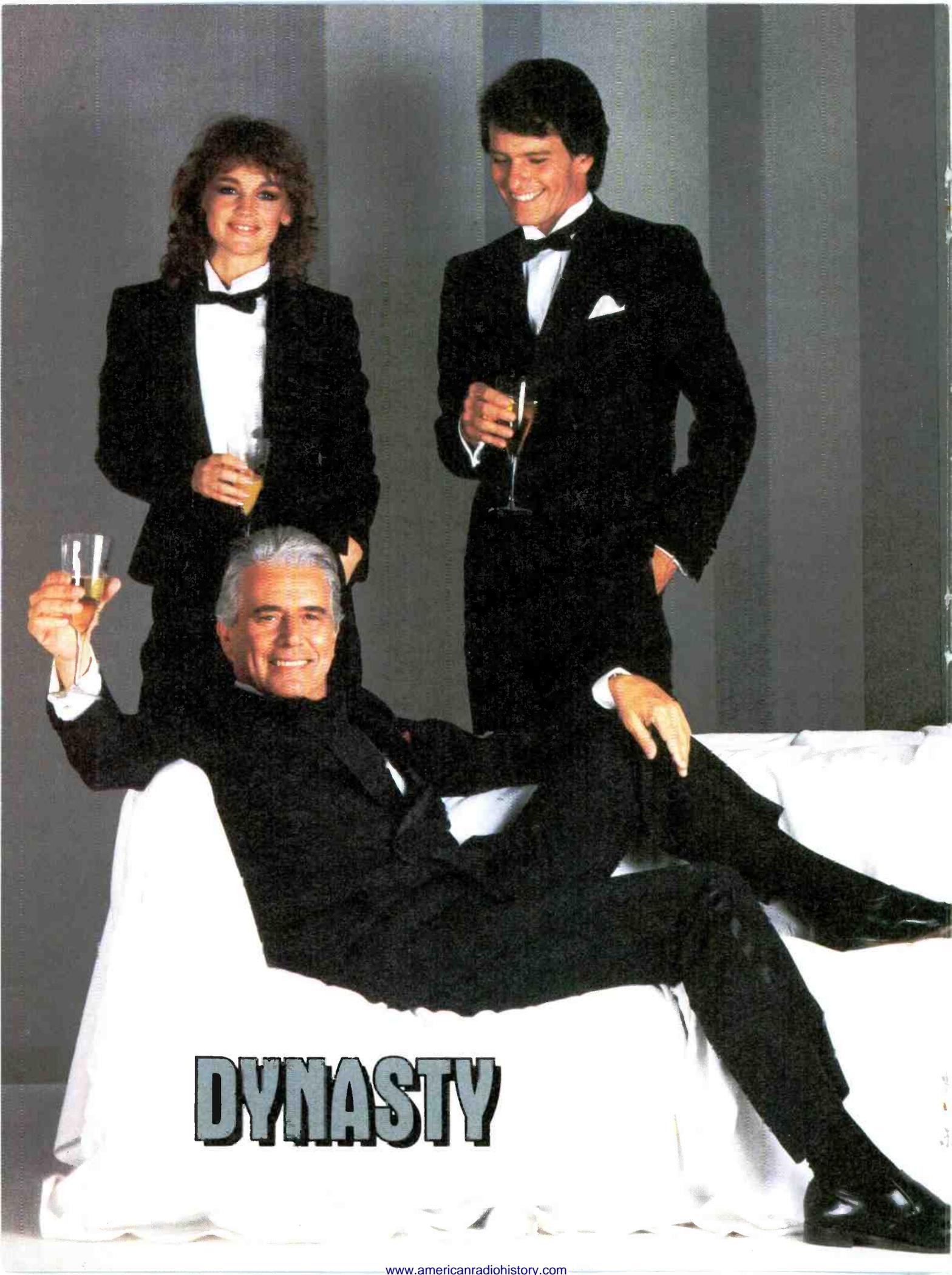
But as long as Canada aspires to maintain its political and cultural distinctiveness, and as long as it continues to see TV broadcasting as an integral part of this effort, the Canadian government will continue to regulate broadcast content. Canada may not wish to be known as the mouse that roared, but with all the thunderous trumpeting of the American elephant, we like to hear ourselves squeak. ■

### OUTLAW HIDEOUT

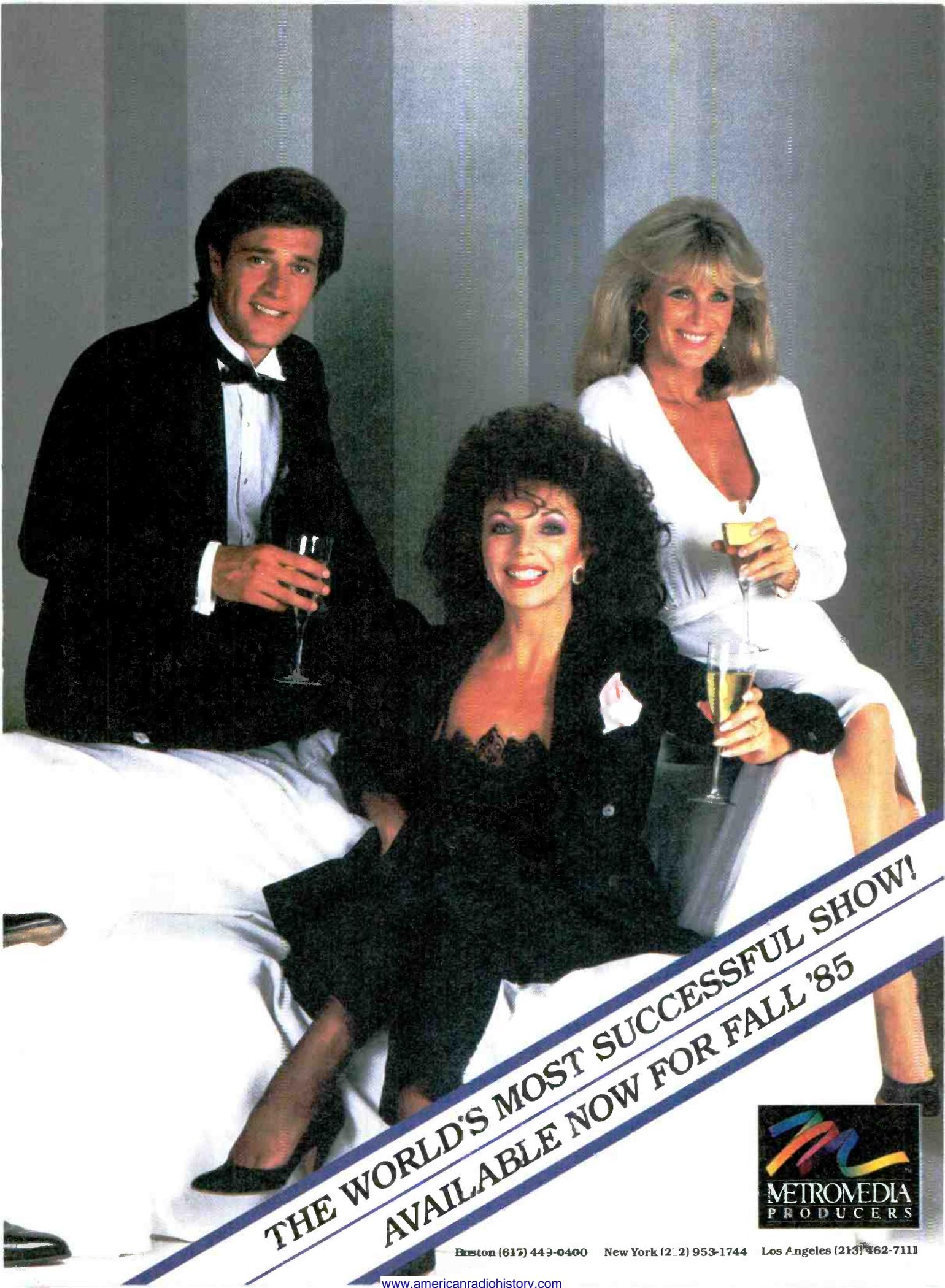


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# WHO'S REALLY RUNNING THE FCC

## —and Is It Legal?

by Les Brown

**The President's actions in behalf of Hollywood could be a tar pit of improper influence and *ex parte* contact.**

**O**n a visit to the West Coast last spring, I was chatting with a big-time television producer when his secretary interrupted to say she had gotten the White House on the phone—not the President, but a chief aide. The producer let me overhear his end of the conversation: He said he wished the President to be told, with some urgency, that his personal intervention was needed in the financial-interest and syndication matter. "There's a lot at stake. It's terribly important to our industry."

The Hollywood production industry was in deep gloom at the time. The Federal Communications Commission was proposing to scuttle a rule it had adopted in 1970 that barred the networks from negotiating a financial interest in the programs they bought for broadcast, or from engaging in the domestic syndication of programs. This prohibition favored the producers because it threw all the syndication money their way. But now the FCC, with the concurrence of the Justice and Commerce Departments, decided the prohibition was no longer necessary. Deregulation being the order of the day, the rule would go.

"The President's our ace card," the producer said when he hung up the phone. "Ronald Reagan came out of this industry. We can still stop this thing."

I expressed serious doubt that the President of the United States would want to get involved in such a parochial business matter, especially since it was he who had tacitly ordered the deregulation of broadcasting. "Do you really think the President is going to let only one rule stand at the FCC—the rule that protects your in-

dustry—when all others are repealed?"

The producer replied that if he hadn't thought so, he wouldn't have placed the call.

Well, he was right and I simple-minded. The President did intervene in this parochial business matter, not once but twice. The first time, last September, he called FCC chairman Mark Fowler into the Oval Office, ostensibly to receive a briefing on the issue. No President in memory had ever done that before on a broadcast matter. Then, in November, as the voting deadline approached at the FCC, Reagan issued a letter through his counsellor, Edwin Meese III, recommending a Congressionally mandated two-year moratorium on the financial-interest question in order to allow further study. Although the letter was addressed to California Senator Pete Wilson, an ardent supporter of the Hollywood position, it had the force of a public proclamation, because it was immediately made public. A week or so later, Fowler decided to put off for six months the final vote on the repeal proposal. He said he did this to give the two parties time to hammer out their own compromise—which meant that repeal of the rule had effectively died as a regulatory matter.

Before Reagan entered the picture, the financial-interest rule proceedings were nothing more than a well-publicized jousting match between television lobbyists in New York and Hollywood. The whole issue centered on which part of the television industry would get more of the big money. Senator Larry Pressler of South Dakota summarized it nicely as a "lobbying battle of the Guccis versus the wing tips."

But although the issue was almost to-



tally devoid of social consequence or public-interest value, it captured the fancy of the daily press for its strong dramatic element—a battle of tycoons, the networks versus the studios—and for the big names involved: Charlton Heston, Mary Tyler Moore, Grant Tinker, Norman Lear, Lee Rich, and others, along with Congressmen working in behalf of one or the other side. One might have thought, from all the coverage, that the financial-interest debate somehow held implications for the future of the republic.

Yet it was fortuitous that the press was on top of this inconsequential story, because with Reagan's entry it became consequential. The President may wish now that he hadn't played the hometown hero so well. He has, for one thing, left himself open to the charge of practicing cronyism—setting different rules for special friends than for everyone else. He may find it difficult to defend his deregulation initiatives, now that everyone knows they are not administered even-handedly.

Was this only cronyism by assumption, or can the case truly be made? A *New York Times* editorial last November documented a compelling case by listing the dates on which the President called meetings on the FCC rule, and pointing them



appropriate for a President to take sides in matters involving the structure of an industry and how the profits should flow. Since the financial-interest issue was wholly lacking in any redeeming public-interest content, the intervention of the White House seems entirely out of line.

But the largest question of all—because it could be quicksand—is whether the President behaved improperly, or even illegally, in his dealings with the FCC. Did Reagan attempt to exert control over a government agency that is not under his statutory jurisdiction?

If there is confusion about the FCC in the public mind, it comes from the fact that the President appoints its chairman and nominates the other members (subject to Senate confirmation) when vacancies occur. But that's where the President's contact with the commission ends. It is not an agency under his control. The FCC is one of several independent, expert government agencies required to act upon their own deliberations, regardless of the expressed wishes of Congress or the White House. Like any other citizen, the President may express an opinion on some matter before the commission, but the normal procedure for doing this is to have a department that speaks for the Administration, such as Justice or Commerce, file formal comments in accordance with the commission's agenda. The FCC reports directly to Congress for oversight, but the White House must be held at a distance lest it develop that the

one-man commission. And the FCC does, at times, seem to be operating as an arm of the White House, as when it banned ham radio contact with Grenada during the invasion. But seeming to be is no violation of the law.

Things grow a bit suspicious, however, when a President calls a loyalist FCC chairman to his chambers to discuss an issue currently before the commission, in which the President has at least a sentimental interest. The unprecedented meeting—the first, by the way, between Reagan and Fowler—was termed a briefing session for the President, but no one can be absolutely sure it wasn't a briefing session for the FCC chairman. Can a minor bureaucrat who adores his President ignore the signals, spoken or unspoken, his leader is sending? There is, of course, no public record of what transpired. The meeting, on its face, comes dangerously close to being an *ex parte* contact—an improper attempt to influence the commission on one of its proceedings, outside the normal adjudicatory processes.

Since it can be assumed there are no White House tapes or other tangible evidence that might prove misconduct, we have only the official word on what happened. Predictably, nothing will come of a House of Representatives investigation into the matter, since it is dependent on testimony from the White House and FCC staff members. We may as well assume the best: These are not stupid men. The odds favor no impropriety.

Still, even the appearance of *ex parte* contact damages trust in government. Beyond that, President Reagan has effectively emasculated the FCC by treating its chairman as a toady, and by undercutting the commission in instructing the Commerce and Justice Departments to alter their positions, which had buttressed Fowler's. Ever the loyalist, Fowler contributed to the emasculation by softening his own position in granting the President's wish for a delay on the financial-interest proposal—limiting the length of that delay in order to salvage the appearance (or alibi) of having acted independently. The worst damage of all is that Mark Fowler didn't bend over backwards to preserve the integrity of his agency.

Since the FCC is thoroughly under Fowler's dominance, and since he has made it clear that he is personally in the President's thrall, the commission is in effect yielding its authority to the White House. The President has his hand on the controls and may, if he chooses, unofficially assume charge of broadcast regulation in the United States. That frightening prospect is, strangely, the result of a meaningless game of hardball between the Guccis and the wing tips. ■

Gil Eisner

## Reagan effectively emasculated the FCC by treating its chairman as a toady.

against the global and domestic crises that should reasonably have held a higher White House priority on those dates. There were Nicaragua, Lebanon, Grenada, and Yuri Andropov to worry about, but the President wanted to talk about the financial-interest rule.

Reagan's defenders may argue that he genuinely believes the issue needs more study, but that would contradict the conclusions reached by two departments of the executive branch that are thought to be experts on the subject, Justice and Commerce. It also prompts the question of how much study is enough, because the FCC's Network Inquiry, which had recommended repeal of the rule, was begun in the Carter Administration. On what basis does the President call for more study? Over what sticking points?

A second question raised by Reagan's involvement in the affair is whether it is

President himself regulates broadcasting.

Upon his election, Reagan appointed an ardent loyalist, Mark Fowler, to head the FCC, thus ensuring that the Administration's philosophy was strongly voiced at the agency. Fair enough; it happens with nearly every administration. The chairman has the power to set the commission's agenda and to strike bargains with the other members, but his vote is only one of five.

From the moment he took office, Fowler proclaimed himself a devout Reaganite and made it clear that he would execute, to the extent possible, an implicit mandate from the President to "unregulate" broadcasting. The present commission has so many Reagan appointees and/or sympathizers (the newest one, Dennis Patrick, comes straight from the White House staff) that Fowler is in full control and therefore seems to be a

# THE BATTLE OF THE NETWORK RERUN\$



## THE LEGEND OF FIN-SYN\*

\*THE FINANCIAL INTEREST & SYNDICATION RULE OF THE F.C.C.

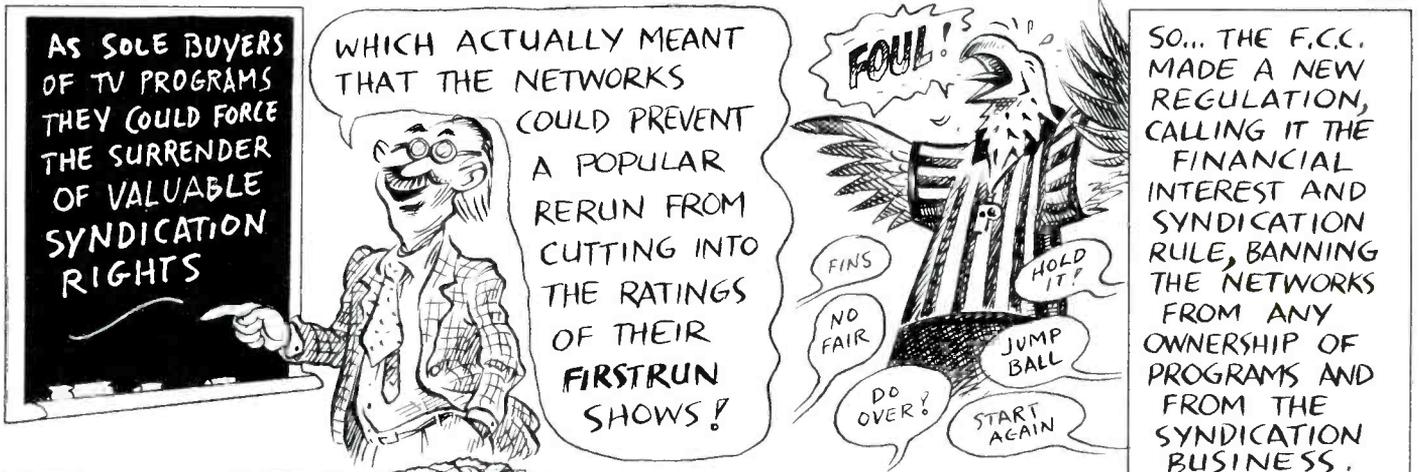
By Gilmer

© 1983

IN 1970...



... THE F.C.C. SAID THE NETWORKS WERE BEHAVING SUSPICIOUSLY LIKE MONOPOLIES!



THE PROGRAMS DIDN'T GET MUCH BETTER, BUT THE RERUNS WENT ON AIR SOONER.

UH OH - NOT AGAIN

THEN A VOICE SAID,

"GET GOV'T. OFF OF BUSINESS'S BACK!"

WHO SAID THAT?

ENTER MARK FOWLER, A MAN WITH A MISSION.

"DEREGULATE EVERYTHING. LET THE MARKETPLACE DECIDE."

UNDER REAGAN FOUR DIFFERENT GOV'T AGENCIES SAID NO TO FIN-SYN. AMONG THEM WERE JUSTICE AND COMMERCE.

THE STUDIOS AND INDEPENDENT STATIONS PANICKED!

OH NO!

OH YES!

AND IN RESPONSE WAS BORN THE COMMITTEE FOR PRUDENT DEREGULATION, WHOSE SOLE PURPOSE WAS THE PRESERVATION OF FIN-SYN.

"THE RETENTION OF THESE MODEST AND SENSIBLE REGULATIONS IS VITAL IF THE NATION'S TELEVISION VIEWERS ARE TO ENJOY A DIVERSE AND COMPETITIVE MARKETPLACE."

THE NETWORKS SAID THAT FIN-SYN WAS OBSOLETE — THERE WAS NOW PLENTY OF COMPETITION. HOW COULD THEY COMPETE WITH HBO WHEN FIN-SYN TIED THEIR HANDS?

IS THIS COMPETITION REAL? GRANT TINKER SEEMS TO BE OF TWO MINDS...

"WE'RE GOING TO DO ABSOLUTELY ABOUT AS WELL IN 1990 AS WE DO NOW AND IT'S GOING TO BE A DYNAMITE BUSINESS."

INVESTORS' MEETING



"FREE TELEVISION IS FACING THE GREATEST CHALLENGE IN ITS MANY YEARS OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO AMERICAN CULTURE AND SOCIETY."

THE F.C.C.

"Anti-competitive is an ugly word, but there is no other way to describe Hollywood's grip on the production of television entertainment programs."

"Networks will encourage the development of small producers... The rules advantage the large suppliers who can sustain risk (that is don't need 'financial interest' better than small producers."

"The rules have reduced the diversity of programming."

"The rules 'have helped a few small production companies to become well-established and successful because they were able to translate initial network success into substantial returns in syndication and subsidiary markets.'"

"Consider the new fields which independent producers have been able to open up, now that their creative independence has been enhanced by the rules: children's programming, minority-oriented comedies and dramas, comedy and dramatic series tackling real-life issues..."

"This rule is pro-competitive, and the... alternative is anti-competitive."

THE ARGUMENTS WERE BEWILDERINGLY SIMILAR

**BOTH SIDES HIRED EXPERTS ON THE PUBLIC INTEREST.**

"Hispanic viewers... will be increasingly deprived of quality programming if the current syndication rules continue to undermine the networks' ability to negotiate for major programming purchases."

"Hispanic viewers are entitled to diverse and varied viewing fare... Not until there is real competition in the video market... would it be appropriate for the Commission to consider revoking these important public-interest regulations."

NATIONAL COALITION OF HISPANIC MENTAL HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ORGANIZATION

HISPANIC-TELECOMMUNICATIONS NETWORK

**THE F.C.C. TRIED TO SATISFY BOTH SIDES WITH A COMPROMISE.**

O.K. YOU CAN HAVE ALL THE FINANCIAL INTEREST YOU WANT, YOU CAN MAKE MONEY OFF SYNDICATION, BUT YOU CAN'T DO THE SYNDICATING YOURSELF!

HOW THE WEST WAS ONE

HOLLYWOOD FOUND THIS IMPRUDENT AND CALLED ON AN OLD FRIEND.

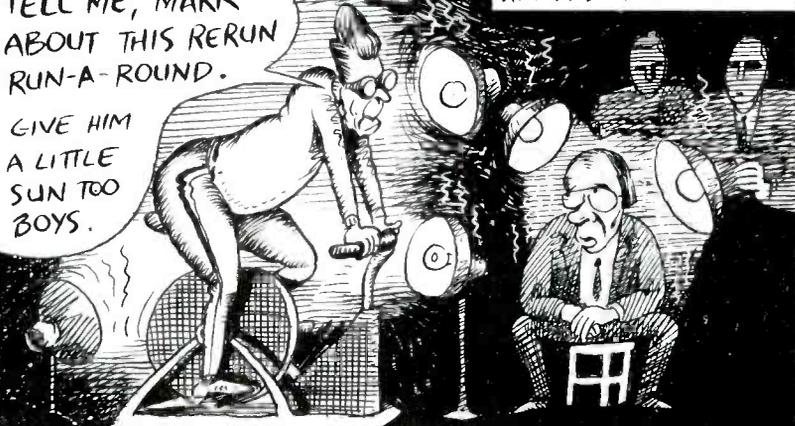
HEY! RON! THEY'RE PICKIN' ON US!



TELL ME, MARK ABOUT THIS RERUN RUN-A-ROUND.

GIVE HIM A LITTLE SUN TOO BOYS.

ARTIST'S SPECULATION



**MEANWHILE ON CAPITOL HILL**

WE HAVEN'T ENOUGH INFO TO MAKE A GOOD DECISION YET.

WE'VE GOT TO TABLE IT FOR A WHILE

WHO GETS THE PROVOLONE ON WHOLE WHEAT?

WHAT'S PROVOLONE?

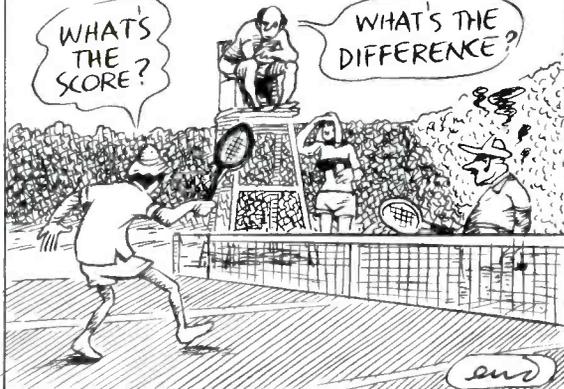


IN TRUE LAISSEZ-FAIRE SPIRIT, THE FCC. LEFT IT TO THE STUDIOS AND THE NETWORKS TO WRITE THEIR OWN ENDING.

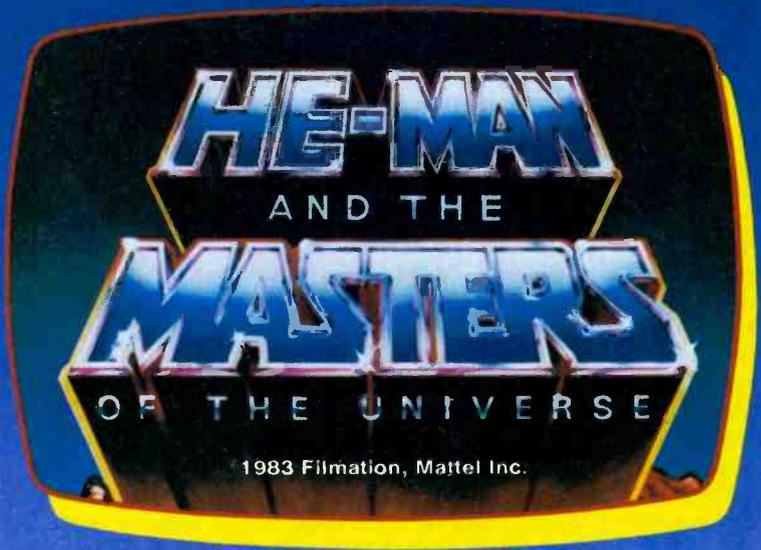
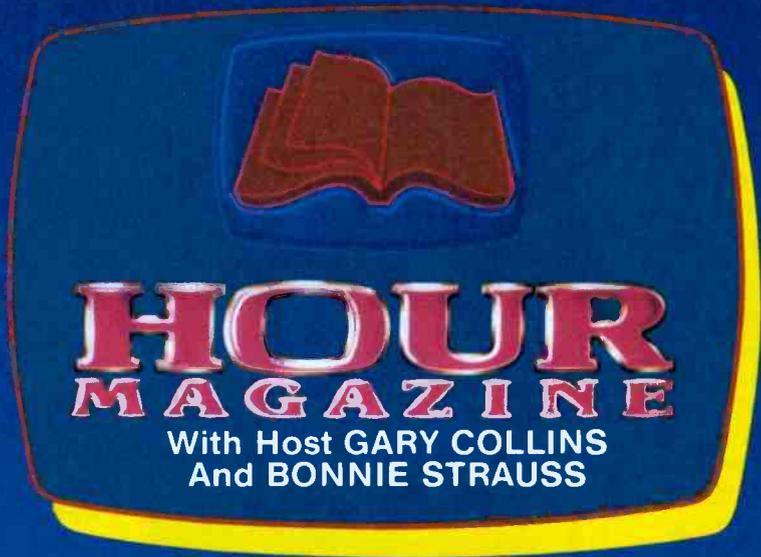
AND SO AS THE SUN SLOWLY SINKS OVER THE BIG AVOCADO...

WHAT'S THE SCORE?

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?



END



**AND MORE TO COME,  
AT NATPE 1984, FROM**



**GROUP W  
PRODUCTIONS**

WESTINGHOUSE BROADCASTING AND CABLE, INC.  
70 UNIVERSAL CITY PLAZA, UNIVERSAL CITY, CA 91608, (213) 760-8800  
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# Cable's Power Blocs

The MSOs maintain a low profile, but they can make or break any satellite network.

by Jane Hall

**E**NTERTAINMENT reigns in a town where avenues are named after the likes of Wayne Newton, but the 1982 convention of the National Cable Television Association had a floor-show atmosphere that exceeded its Las Vegas setting. Cable networks outdid each other in throwing parties for their affiliates—and potential affiliates—among the cable-system operators around the country. The classiest party of them all was given by CBS Cable, the cultural network. CBS created a tent-filled “oasis in the desert,” with sword-swallowers, veiled dancers, and a sheik’s spread of Middle Eastern food. There were so many crashers at the party that guests joked that the chef was currying the live chickens and goats on the grounds.

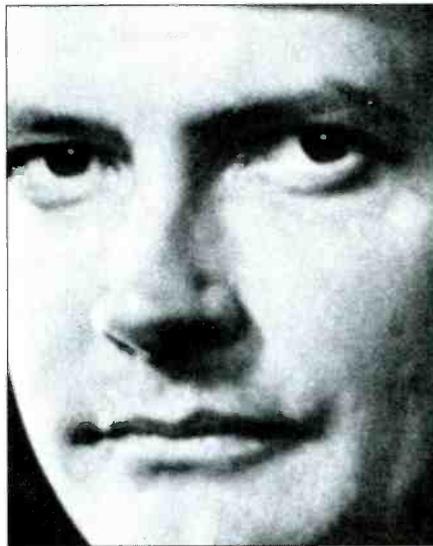
Four months later, CBS Cable was dead. CBS pulled the plug on its critically acclaimed cable network after losing some \$30 million in less than one year of operation. Since then, there have been other casualties in an accelerating “shakeout” among cable networks.

Why have so many mighty corporations stubbed their toes in cable? The fault lies not so much in their programming as in their failure to win the approval of a handful of decision-makers in the cable industry. Little-known outside the cable business, these executives control what cable-television viewers may see.

The failure of CBS Cable was foretold at the Las Vegas convention. Many years before, CBS (under the leadership of Arthur Taylor, who later became president of The Entertainment Channel) had lobbied hard on Capitol Hill against the growing cable industry. Now that the broadcast networks had decided cable was a hot investment, several cable-system operators at CBS’s convention-hall “oasis” confessed to a certain perverse pleasure in enjoying the lavish hospitality

*Jane Hall is an associate editor of People magazine.*

of an enemy whose tuxedos fit the company’s image as the “Tiffany of networks” but seemed an affront to the polyester style of cable operators. “The cable industry is not enthralled by black-tie parties where reception lines turn their



*John Malone may be the most powerful man in cable.*

backs on guys in dark suits,” says cable operator John Malone.

With a doctorate in operations research and other degrees from Yale, Johns Hopkins, and New York University, John Malone is the proud descendant of the businessmen who founded the cable industry 30 years ago, when coaxial cable was found to be a means of improving television reception in rural areas. At age 42, Malone is president of Tele-Communications Inc., the largest cable company in the United States. Malone’s systems never offered CBS Cable; offending him cost CBS a potential audience of 2.5 million subscribers.

TCI is a multiple-system operator (MSO). There are 4,500 local cable systems in this country, but most are owned by one or another major MSO. In recent years, TCI has zealously bought up nu-

merous local systems around the country and operates them from the company’s Denver headquarters. Today TCI operates cable systems in 45 states; its influence stretches from Lebanon, New Hampshire, to Berkeley, California.

John Malone recently took the logical step for capitalizing on the size of his company. He decided that instead of letting each individual TCI system determine its own national programming, the headquarters should program them all uniformly. This means that subscribers in Lebanon are offered the same cable channels as those in Berkeley. The plan has made Malone the most powerful executive in cable today, for any satellite-delivered program service that gets a slot on the TCI roster is automatically guaranteed a potential audience of 2.5 million, while any new cable network that is excluded might as well kiss its satellite goodbye.

The TCI tier is but the most sophisticated sign of the power of cable operators. TCI is followed in size by Time Inc.’s ATC, with two million subscribers. Group W Cable has 1.8 million subscribers; Warner Cable and Cox Cable, one million each. These top five MSOs serve eight million subscribers—one-third of the total cable market of 27 million. The top 10 MSOs together control one-half of the total market. As happened in broadcasting when local television stations came under the ownership of corporations that operated them from distant headquarters, cable has become an industry dominated by a few MSOs, most of which can be expected to follow TCI’s lead in centralizing the program decisions. This practice would undermine the local character of cable.

By being carried on the first TCI systems to receive the new tier, the Disney Channel was guaranteed at least 200,000 potential subscribers when it began. In contrast, The Entertainment Channel, with scant distribution among the major cable operators, had so few subscribers (30,000) for its pay-TV programming that

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wags commented it would be more economical to bring all of the subscribers to New York to see one of the network's Broadway plays.

TCI is the first MSO to program system-wide. But Warner Cable, Cox Cable, and other operators regularly make agreements to carry a cable network on a significant number of their systems. Although one or two operators cannot make or break a channel, the fact remains that agreements with even a partial list of systems controlled by a large MSO have enormous importance. As a cable-network executive observes, aside from the guarantee of exposure, "having the big MSOs on your side gives legitimacy to your network."

Like department-store chains in retailing, the major operators derive advantages from the number of outlets they represent. Virtually every cable network contributes money for marketing support to cable systems that carry their channel. In addition, ad-supported program services that charge cable operators a few cents for each viewer give volume discounts. The big MSO, as a result, pays a cheaper per-subscriber fee than a small cable operator. These arrangements are perfectly legal, but they clearly tilt the power toward the big operators.

In recent years, the competition for slots on cable systems has become so fierce that, instead of charging the operator, some new services have been paying him outright for carrying the service. Group W Satellite Communications, which created the Nashville Network, paid operators carrying it up to \$1.25 per subscriber in marketing support, plus a bonus for signing on at launch. When Ted Turner's Cable News Network found itself competing with Group W's Satellite News Channel for acceptance by cable systems, Turner was forced to offer a compensation plan similar to Group W's. For carrying CNN, superstation WTBS, and the CNN Headline Service (a second channel formatted like Satellite News Channel), an operator would receive \$3 per subscriber. Before Satellite News Channel went dark, Malone's cable company was receiving compensation from SNC and CNN for carrying both.

To what lengths will programmers go for a place on the TCI tier? In a canny move, TCI has enlisted participating pay services to help finance the modernization of its old 12-channel systems. According to Malone, the pay services are forgoing collection of their monthly license fees (the wholesale price for their pay services) for a short period of time. TCI will use that money to pay for converter boxes, which provide "addressability." (These boxes allow subscribers to

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## TCI took the logical step of choosing the national programming for all its systems.

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order one-time-only, pay-per-view events.) "The pay-TV channels are giving us a period of forgiveness of their monthly fee," says Malone. "In effect, they are giving us short-term, interest-free loans." The cable networks will be repaid through the additional revenue incurred as TCI's expanding channel capacity draws new subscribers. (Executives at the pay networks decline to discuss these arrangements, which they say are unique to TCI because of its need to upgrade so many of its systems.)

Complicating the relationships between operators and programmers is the fact that all the top five cable operators have financial interests in some program services. TCI and Cox Cable (along with three other MSOs) are partners in Spotlight, their own pay-TV movie service. ATC, the second-largest MSO, is owned by Time Inc., which owns Home Box Office and Cinemax and is a partner in USA Network. Group W Cable owns Home Theatre Network and the Nashville Network. Until recently, Viacom owned Showtime, the pay-TV service, and Warner Cable was sister company to Warner Amex Satellite Entertainment, which operates MTV and the children's channel, Nickelodeon. With American Express, Warner was a principal of The Movie Channel, the third-largest pay-TV movie service. Then several movie studios announced plans to join with Viacom, Warner, and American Express in operating The Movie Channel and Showtime as two separate channels in a joint venture. The partnership apparently has been approved by the Justice Department, which evaluates such mergers for any antitrust implications. At the same time, HBO, the largest pay-TV service, has received the green light for the creation of a new movie studio, Tri-Star, in partnership with CBS and Columbia Pictures.

Knowing the family trees of operators and programmers sometimes helps to explain their choice of programming. Bravo, a small pay cultural channel operated by several MSOs, is carried on those MSOs (not surprisingly), as is Spotlight by its partner operators. HBO, which pi-

oneered in cable networking eight years ago, is practically the generic name for cable. ATC—in contrast to other major MSOs—has a stated policy of encouraging local affiliates to make programming decisions on their own. "We maintain a completely arm's-length relationship," says ATC president Joseph Collins. Still, it is difficult to find any ATC system offering only one pay channel that would choose Showtime over HBO. Systems with a single pay channel, however, are increasingly rare. "Some of my best customers are ATC systems," says John Sie of Showtime. (But Showtime executives can barely conceal their fury over the fact that Manhattan Cable, the ATC flagship system in New York, does not carry their channel.)

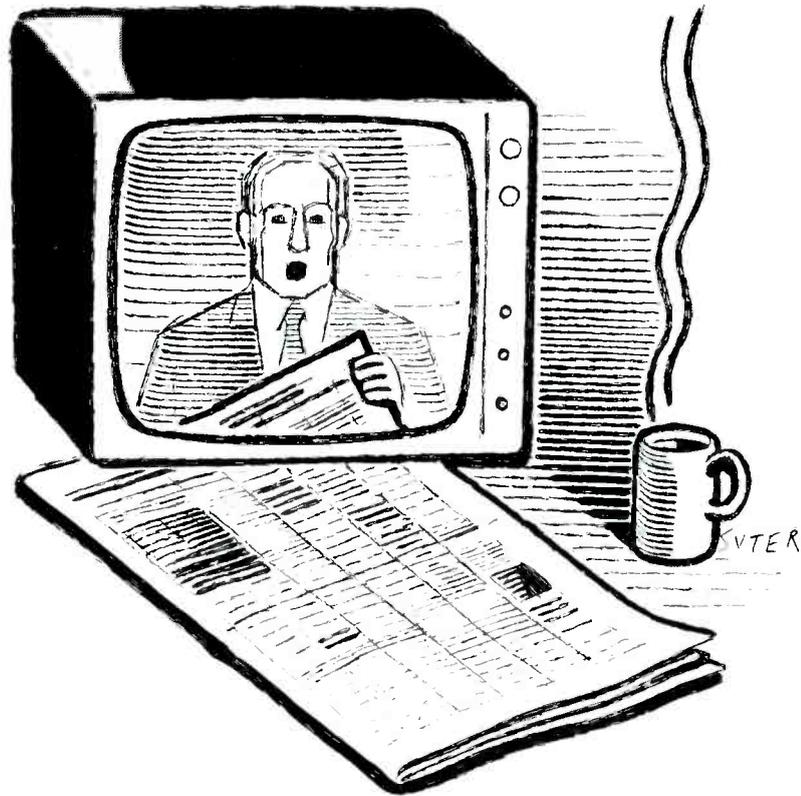
Viacom systems appear to be favoring their own pay network, Showtime, although the company insists that Viacom subscribers account for only 5 percent of the Showtime audience. "It's analogous to shelf space in the grocery store," says Ed Bennett, senior vice president of Viacom. "We always make HBO available, but we give Showtime a better position."

**L**IKE A YOUNGER BROTHER forever compared to his older brother, cable television has matured relatively unnoticed alongside broadcasting. The Justice Department is unlikely to look into questions of concentration in cable when it has approved alliances between large movie studios and the pay-TV networks. The Federal Communications Commission is unlikely to regulate cable when it is deregulating broadcasting.

Programmers must create compelling entertainment that attracts both subscribers and advertisers, and operators must spend millions to wire new urban markets. But despite these challenges cable is a growing industry. Cable penetration is at 40 percent today, and will probably go beyond 50 percent before 1990. By the time the strength of the young industry is perceived, the cards will have been dealt in the cable game: A few big operators and programmers will be the main players.

John Malone, for one, is betting on the operators. "We've invested a lot of money in the belief that the operator has a better business than the programmer," says Malone. "HBO took a risk eight years ago by creating the first satellite-delivered network, and they're the only cable network today that's making any money. In a fair fight, I'd rather be the guy with the seats in the auditorium than the guy with the entertainment." ■

# The Network Newscasts STILL HOT OFF THE PRESSES



**Television is breaking more stories than it used to, but that old dependency on the morning papers persists.**

by Michael Massing

**O**N OCTOBER 18, the *CBS Evening News* led its broadcast with a report on the “greenhouse effect.” The segment summarized a new study by the Environmental Protection Agency warning that the earth’s atmosphere was warming at a rate much faster than had been anticipated, and that little could be done to stop the trend. ABC’s *World News Tonight* featured the EPA report as its second story; *NBC Nightly News* placed it fifth. Americans sitting down to dinner across the country learned that, by the year 2100, New York would have the same climate as Florida, average temperatures in Los Angeles would rise nine degrees, and New Orleans would be under water.

*Michael Massing is a New York-based writer and former executive editor of the Columbia Journalism Review.*

This wasn’t exactly breaking news. After all, the theory of the greenhouse effect has been around for years. Its initial impact is not expected for at least another decade, and in any case we all know long-range predictions are not renowned for their accuracy. In the end, this was nothing more than just another government study.

Why, then, did it receive such prominent play on the evening news? The answer is no further away than the front page of that morning’s *New York Times*. There, in the lower left-hand corner, under an inconspicuous one-column headline, “EPA Report Says Earth Will Heat Up Beginning in 1990s,” is a brief account of the agency’s study.

This is far from an isolated case. A great many of the stories you see on TV news programs have their genesis in our leading newspapers. Sometimes the borrowing is explicit, as when an anchorman

begins a story, “*The Daily Bugle* reported today that . . .” At other times it is less direct, as when papers catapult a rather humdrum story onto the evening news by giving it front-page treatment; the EPA report is a good example. Two papers stand out for their influence: *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Their power is so great that the mere likelihood of a story appearing on their front pages the next day often compels TV producers to pay attention to it.

To close readers of the *Times* and the *Post*, this phenomenon might come as no surprise. Indeed, the point might seem rather academic. But the implications of the TV-newspaper connection are considerable. While the networks are almost universally regarded as the most powerful news organizations in the country, their own agendas are in many ways shaped by what appears in the major national dailies; for this reason, the role

*David Suiter*

played by the *Times* and the *Post* in setting the contours of national debate may be much greater than commonly allowed.

Something more is at issue as well: the extent of TV news's enterprise and originality, evidently a sensitive issue for many broadcast journalists. When I began researching this article, I naively expected my interviews to be dispassionate exchanges on the sources and wellsprings of TV news. In no way was I prepared for the vehement responses I received. For instance, when I called Jeff Gralnick, formerly executive producer of *World News Tonight* and now head of ABC's political broadcasts unit, his only response to my stated topic—relayed to me by his secretary—was, "The thesis is preposterous!" Others, less brusque, steadfastly maintained that television news has so matured in recent years that it now breaks as many stories as it borrows. Clearly, the subject touches a raw nerve, raising as it does many sensitive questions about television's proper place in the ranks of American journalism.

The initial story conference for each of the evening news programs takes place in New York each morning at 10 or 10:30. By then, all of the day-to-day decision-makers—producers, senior producers, and executive producers—have read the *Times*, and most of them the *Post* as well. Often, items in the two papers come up for discussion. "If something appears on the front page of the *Times* or the *Post*, it can't help but have an impact," says Tom Bettag, a producer at the *CBS Evening News*. "A large part of the news staff works in New York and Washington, and these two papers are so dominant in the two cities, they influence everything."

The *Times* and the *Post* are by no means the only publications that editors pay attention to. Also important are *The Wall Street Journal* (especially its off-beat front-page features), *Christian Science Monitor*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Miami Herald*, and *USA Today* (which seems to be gaining a following in television news). The Associated Press and United Press International also play very important roles as guides to breaking news during the day.

Before the morning is over, the producers in New York have conferred with their bureau chiefs around the country. Here again the morning papers are likely to play a role, helping to arbitrate among competing stories. As NBC Chicago bureau chief Rod Prince says, "It helps to have a story we're working on get joint play in the *Times* and the *Post*"; a story appearing in the morning "helps us get it on that night." Prince cites as an example

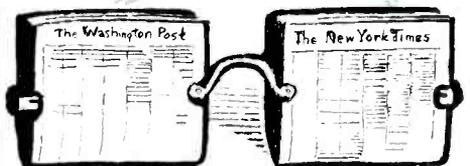
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## If a story makes the front pages of the *Times* and the *Post*, it's sure to be on the evening news.

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Harold Washington's Chicago mayoral campaign last year; the attention the *Times* and *Post* paid the story "buttressed" the network's interest.

The two papers make their presence felt in ways large and small. Sometimes it's nothing more than a simple human-interest story that's cribbed. One network news producer remembers watching a piece on the evening news about pit dogs, ferocious beasts trained to fight to the death in the canine equivalent of cockfights. "I thought, what a funny thing to do a piece on," recalls the producer. "Well, I looked at *The New York Times*, and there it was on the front page. The fact that the *Times* ran it meant we had to have it that same night."

Often, the networks give the original newspaper story a twist that makes it especially suitable for television. Last year, for instance, the *Times* ran an article on a museum commemorating the little-known role of black cowboys in the American West; soon after, NBC went out and found itself a real black cowboy, who became the focus of its own feature.

But the role of newspapers extends well beyond supplying television with feature material. Newspaper scoops are often lifted whole, as when NBC recently reported the result of a *Wall Street Journal* investigation revealing that the head of the Federal Aviation Administration had engaged in a number of questionable business practices. And when NBC reported late last October that U.S. pilots would be involved in a plan to equip a Jordanian rapid-deployment force, the network was simply relaying a report that had appeared on the front page of that morning's *Washington Post*. (In both cases the papers were credited.)

Ironically, one of the clearest recent

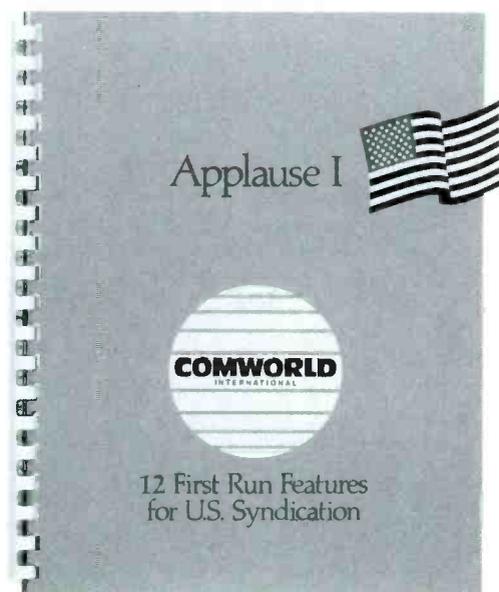
examples of print's impact on television concerns a story about television itself: the battle over network syndication rules. For several weeks last fall, the networks staged a concerted drive to repeal an FCC rule that prohibits them from owning TV programs and their lucrative rerun rights. The lobbying effort went unreported on the evening news programs until *The Washington Post* carried a prominently displayed story on October 19 headlined, "President to Review TV Ruling." On the following day, *Post* television critic Tom Shales lambasted the networks for having "zealously ignored" one of the "biggest TV stories of the year." Shales reported that when he asked CBS executive producer Howard Stringer about the oversight, he replied, "It's on the front page of *The Washington Post*. We'll be doing it tomorrow." Sure enough, CBS, as well as ABC, ran stories on the syndication dispute that night. (Stringer now says he was joking.)

Even seemingly inconsequential items in the *Times* and the *Post* can have strong ripple effects. In 1981, Kathy Bonk, then media director of the National Organization for Women, spent weeks trying to interest news organizations—the networks among them—in the emerging phenomenon of the "gender gap." She had little success—until a few paragraphs about the issue appeared on the "Washington Talk" page of the *Times*. Suddenly, says Bonk, the story "exploded," and the networks fell over themselves in their scramble to report it. "It was not until we got it into the *Times* that the story became accepted and took off," recalls Bonk, who describes the network role as "monkey see, monkey do."

In the Carter White House, Jody Powell discovered that network enthralment with newspapers could be exploited. According to a former assistant, Powell felt it was important to keep on good terms with newspaper reporters—not so much for their own sake as for the damage that might result if their stories were picked up by the networks. When an unflattering story appeared in the press, Powell and his staff would wait in suspense to see whether or not the networks would pick it up. If the *Post* printed something damaging in the morning, Powell, by stroking the right reporters, would try to get the story downplayed in the (now defunct) afternoon *Washington Star* and thereby help keep it off of television. The tactic often succeeded.

Of all network programs, perhaps none are more impressionable than the morning talk shows. David Fenton, head of a small public-relations firm in New York, works to get clients onto those shows.

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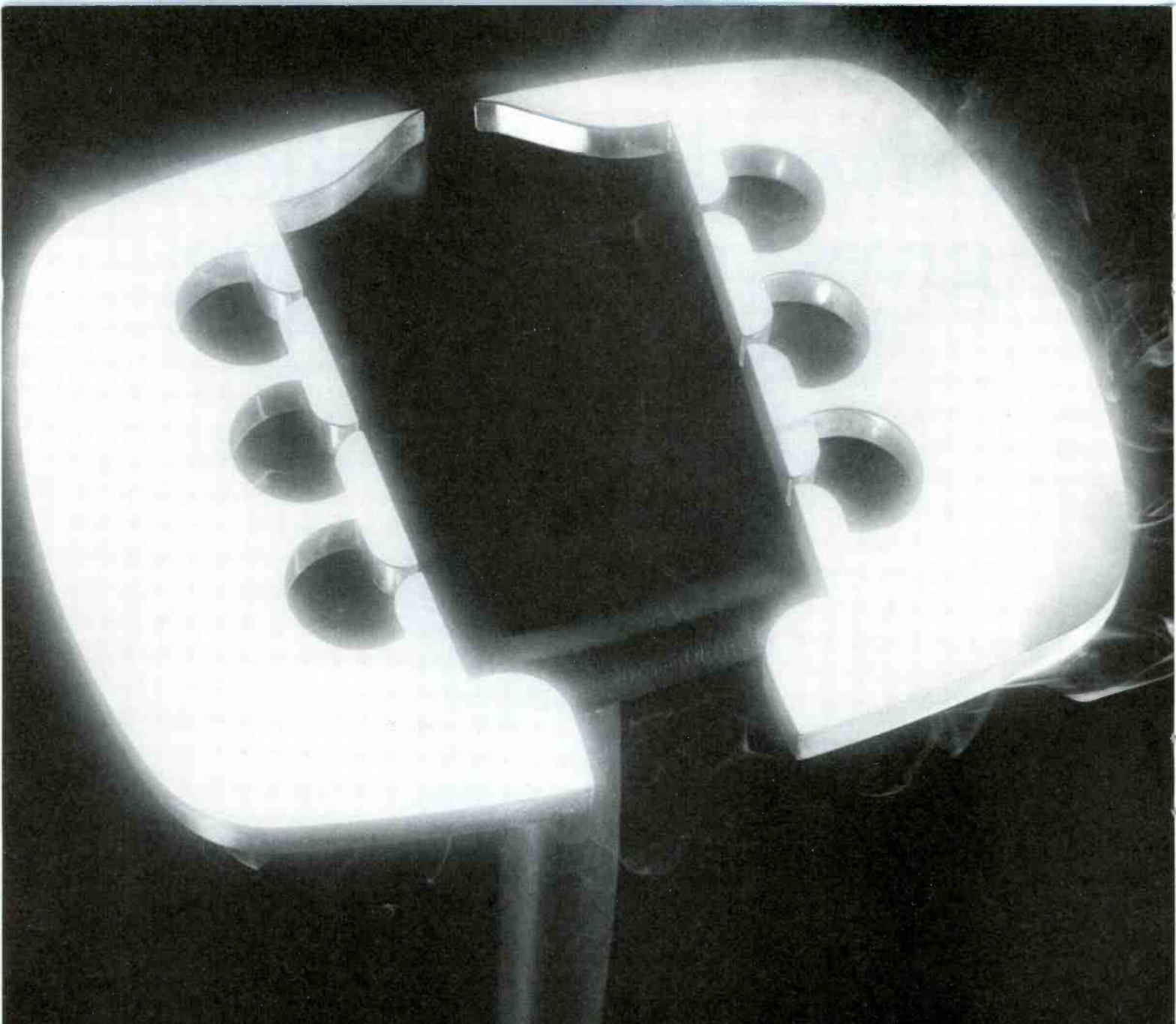


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"I'll tell people at the networks about a story and they won't be interested," he says. "Then it will come out in the *Times*—and they will call me. As far as the networks go, once it appears in the *Times*, it exists."

Such an assessment, as might be expected, is anathema to network news executives. "The subservient relationship has vanished, or at least is in the process of doing so," says CBS's Howard Stringer. "The idea that newspapers are a guide for us has changed. TV news has come of age. We have become more aggressive in digging up stories. We get angry when we're thought of as superficial."

At the same time, Stringer offers some concessions: "I wouldn't say newspapers have no influence. They play a complementary and supplementary role." In the case of the greenhouse-effect story, he acknowledges that the *Times* coverage did have an impact by "confirming our feeling that the story was important."

Robert Frye, executive producer of ABC's *World News Tonight*, is more insistent. "I've been in the business 21 years," he says, "and I really feel TV has evolved beyond the point where our primary editorial decisions are based on what's in newspapers. I've taken a lot of time to learn what news is and to develop my own sense of news." Frye denies that the *Times* coverage of the EPA study had any influence on his decision to carry it. "We're not making up our broadcast for the readership of *The New York Times*," he says. "We're making it up for a national audience of 18 to 25 million."

Frye and his colleagues point to the de-

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## While TV reaches more people, it's the daily press that puts issues on the national agenda.

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velopments that have transformed TV news in recent years. Advances in technology—including miniaturization, video tape, and satellites—have revolutionized TV newsgathering, allowing the networks to bring more news from more places much more quickly. The networks have more news bureaus than ever before, and higher-quality correspondents (many of them hired away from publications). Newspapers now sometimes find themselves having to cover stories that first appeared on television.

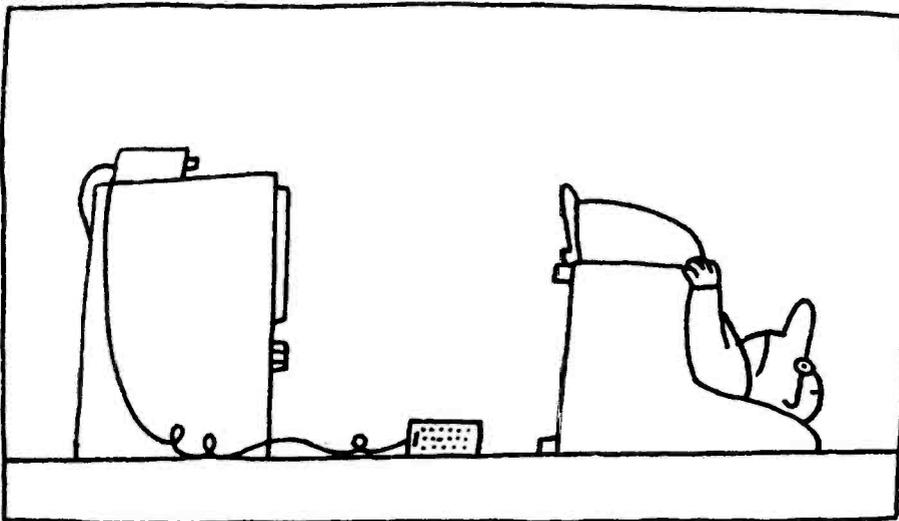
For instance, the *NBC Nightly News* recently broke the story that a young Salvadoran charged with having killed U.S. military advisor Albert Schaufelberger had not in fact committed the murder, but was coerced into confessing guilt; the story was picked up at once by both the *Times* and the *Post*. More generally, when it comes to covering major breaking stories, such as the assassination attempt on President Reagan, newspaper reporters gather in front of TV sets in their

newsrooms to take notes.

Today, it is much rarer for foreign correspondents in television to hand over exclusives to reporters at the *Times* or the *Post*, as they did 10 or 20 years ago, so that producers back home would read them and be persuaded of their newsworthiness. Daniel Schorr recalls that, while he was in Warsaw during the Vietnam War, he learned that the U.S. had asked the Polish government to act as a mediator in the conflict. In order to interest his editors in the story, Schorr first leaked it to a *Post* reporter, who duly reported it, helping Schorr to get his story on the air. "Every foreign correspondent can tell you such a story," he says, adding, however, that things have changed: "At one time it was true that TV editors and producers lacked confidence in their own judgment, and they'd say, 'We haven't seen your stories on the wires or in the paper.' Now editors and producers in broadcasting have developed more confidence in their own judgment."

The immense influence of print on television news perhaps has less to do with any weaknesses of TV journalism than with the extraordinary power of the national dailies, *The New York Times* in particular. "The *Times*, more than any other organization, has the ability to put an issue on the national agenda," for television as well as for other outlets, says Jon Katz, formerly an editor at the *Baltimore Sun* and *Dallas Times Herald* and now a senior producer for the *CBS Morning News*. And that, in the end, is how newspapers most truly influence TV news—by helping to set its agenda. The *Times* simply cannot be ignored; the exalted place it occupies in the profession causes second-guessing, self-questioning, and running for cover. "If the *Times* the next day has a lead story that you played as the fifth most important story, you'll stop and think whether they were right or you were right," observes Walter Porges, foreign news director at ABC. "When discussing a particular story, I've been known to say, 'I guarantee it will be on page one of the *Times* tomorrow,' as if that makes it important. And, by the broadly accepted standards of journalism, it probably does."

One network producer recounts the decision to do a piece on President Reagan's recent signing of an inconsequential resolution passed by Congress. "It wasn't a great TV story," says the producer. "There were no photo opportunities, and it wasn't really news. But we did a piece on it anyway. And the reason we did it is that we didn't want to look at the paper the next day and see a big picture of the signing." That, the producer says, could



HE HAS WATCHED T.V. EVERY NIGHT FOR 35 YEARS. HIS CABLE HAS JUST BEEN INSTALLED AND THE FIRST WORD HE HEARS ON SHOWTIME IS — .

have elicited a scream from the executive producer in New York. "A lot of what we do is covering our asses."

Is there anything wrong with relying on the *Times* or other papers? Not according to Stanhope Gould, a 20-year veteran producer at all three networks, most recently at ABC's *20/20*. "I often take stories from the *Times*—and I have no qualms about it," says Gould, who adds that he finds "print envy" a "bullshit attitude." As a matter of fact, he says, "it's an abdication of responsibility to say a story is not usable because it appears in the *Times*."

Indeed, television news can and often does perform a significant journalistic function by picking up print stories. The most important one of Gould's career was the landmark 14-minute piece he produced on Watergate for Walter Cronkite, which gave a vital boost to *The Washington Post's* coverage—then being ignored—and helped nudge Richard Nixon toward resignation. Little in the story was new, Gould recalls: "I jumped into bed with the *Post*: I credited it in every other paragraph. But no one was reading Woodward and Bernstein at the time. The function we played was to keep the story

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## CBS performed an important journalistic service when it picked up the Watergate story from the *Post*.

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going by nationalizing it." And that, he feels, is television's most significant role: "It can keep something alive. People talk to their congressmen about what they see on TV."

Gould's candor is exceptional. To many people in television, it must sound treasonous, a concession to the print enemy and its long tradition of disdain for TV land. Acknowledging the power of newspapers strikes at the cherished notion that television is, at long last, emerg-

ing from its days as a headline service to become the equal of newspapers.

Clearly, though, the relationship between the two media continues to be an asymmetrical one. Whatever strides it has made, TV news still seems to suffer from basic institutional inhibitions. Consider the assessment offered by one news veteran at CBS (who asked not to be identified): "There are no new ideas in TV. Everything is stolen from newspapers. It's quite shocking. For instance, TV reporters and producers have no original sources. As a result, the agenda is set by the David Broders, Martin Tolchins, and Lou Cannons. TV is simply not structured to do original reporting."

A former network producer agrees: "Very little premium is placed on original newsgathering in TV. They're actually rather scared of it." The *Times* does more than set the agenda, he says: "It gives the imprimatur of official news. It says a story is certifiable, safe, and not going to get them into trouble."

Television news has no peer when it comes to bringing a news story to the attention of the American people. But all too often, the story will have broken elsewhere. ■

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Zia Mohyeddin and Charles Dance

*produced by* Christopher Morahan

*directed by* Christopher Morahan and Jim O'Brien

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# The Best New Program Trend in Years

by William A. Henry III



**E**VEN CASUAL VIEWERS notice that television programmers run in packs: For a season or two, the dominant genre at all three networks will be, say, police shows; then, as if responding to some mating call, all three will transfer their hopes and affections to situation comedies; a year or two later, they will fall into simultaneous infatuation with, perhaps, family drama. The reason for these copycat allegiances is that, to Hollywood, success seems unpredictable and largely accidental. Thus, the guiding principle for most producers and program executives is not the pursuit of success, or even the avoidance of failure, which is presumed to be more or less inevitable in the long run. Rather, the aim is to avoid any behavior sufficiently conspicuous—in other words, original—as to be held responsible whenever disaster strikes.

More subtly, the faddishness holds true even in such abstract matters as style of storytelling. In the early 1970s, for example, the joint influences of a character, Archie Bunker, the artisan of invective, and a screenwriter, Neil Simon, the sculptor of the one-liner, led the networks into a round-robin of coarse-insult comedies. In the middle 1970s, as the anti-heroism that had spread through fiction and then the movies finally trickled down into Middle America's medium—TV—the craze was for "flawed, vulnerable characters."

As the decade ended, a new enthusiasm arose: for shows that had a documentary flavor, a seriocomic ambivalence of tone, and a diffuse style of storytelling that emphasized texture rather than plot. The innovation was often described as an "ensemble" format, but the term was misleading. A number of previous shows had been vehicles for large casts, rather than star turns. What was new was the narrative structure—a complex use of montage that was meant to look unstructured, like life.

The trailblazer show, and still the most deftly executed example, is NBC's *Hill Street Blues*, whose permanent cast of 14 permits multiple stories, involving each actor in turn, to sprawl over as many as four or five episodes. In the wake of *Hill Street* came *St. Elsewhere*, which transferred the format from one chaotic environment concerned with life and death, a ghetto-border police station, to another, an urban hospital. The result: The new

show joined its forerunner in the victory circle at the 1983 Emmy Awards.

Elated by the critical success of both, NBC expanded its roster in the fall with *Bay City Blues*, a show with potentially comparable quality but that had one marked disadvantage: It portrayed lives neither urgent nor all-encompassing. The characters were not keepers of a flame, but baseball players, and not such good ones at that. They lived, not from moment to moment, but from season to season. Their goal was not to stay together, but to move out of their minor-league obscurity into the majors. They

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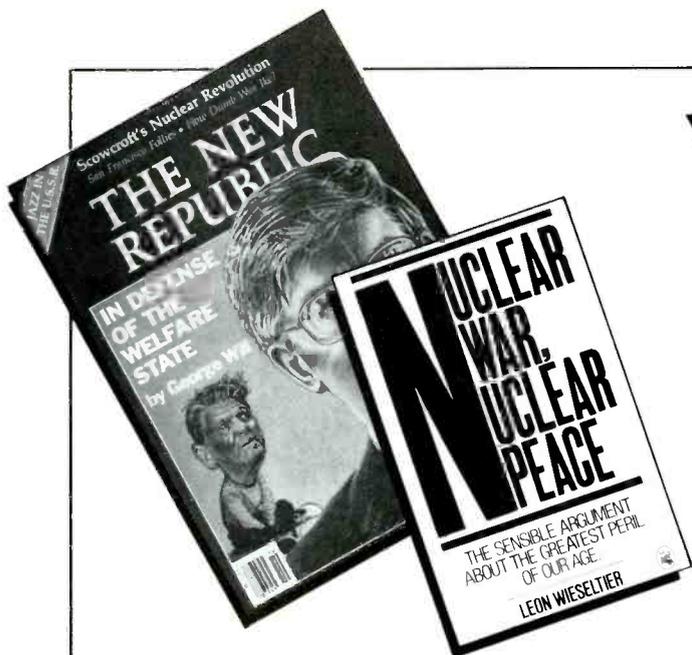
**The ensemble format  
exemplifies that rarity,  
a genuinely original way of  
thinking about prime time.**

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shared a comraderie that had a habitation—the locker room—and a name, team spirit. But they could not be as cohesive as the characters on *Hill Street Blues* or *St. Elsewhere* because theirs was not a lifetime trade, one not even practiced for a full 12 months per year. Aware of these structural problems, and worried that the show was failing to develop the documentary-like aura of reality that distinguishes the other two shows, NBC withdrew *Bay City* after a few weeks for rethinking and apparent termination. Whatever its eventual fate, the *Bay City/Hill Street* format exemplifies that rarity, a genuinely original way of thinking about prime-time television.

Like all art, the ensemble style has its roots in other forms. From soap opera it takes the notion that constant viewers bring a vast reservoir of memory to each new episode and appreciate resonances from past shows. While each *Hill Street* installment

*William A. Henry III is an associate editor of Time magazine.*



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stands on its own, the show also gives its steady viewers a cumulative sense of place. From the slice-of-life documentary (and particularly from a remarkable film, *The Police Tapes*, which *Hill Street* producers candidly admit having ripped off) comes the oblique storytelling, the rough, news-footage visual style (achieved with a hand-held camera), and the use of overlapping, often inaudible dialogue (to provide the sense that there is more going on than the viewer can possibly absorb, so rich and fast-moving is this world).

From the stage, the format derives an idea about the interplay between character and narrative that is absolutely antithetical to most television. In the best plays, even the smallest characters are vividly sketched: the watchman in *Macbeth*, the old servant at the end of *The Cherry Orchard*, the awkward maid in *Long Day's Journey into Night*. In television, small roles are deliberately limited to single, quickly sketched character traits. The rationale is simple: Not only might the audience be distracted from the stars, it might lose track of the plot. The purpose of storytelling in most television shows is not, as it is in the theater, to evoke a time and place, to give a heightened sense of life, to share subtle emotions. Instead, the plot poses a problem and resolves it; starts a story and ends it; hurls an object into the air and brings it back to earth. True, the classic theater offers catharsis, but the moments one remembers are rarely the climaxes: Often they are the small interstices between upheavals.

By this standard, *Hill Street* and its successors are not merely novel but daring. They run the risk of confusing the audience, of letting the plot disintegrate, of replacing hero worship of one or two stars with a loose attachment to an ambience, a milieu. They confront an audience accustomed to seeing minor characters as cartoon villains with people who clutch at the heartstrings and then disappear, perhaps never to be seen again. To be sure, writing with Shakespeare's precepts is not the same as writing with his skill, and the scenarists of *Hill Street*, *St. Elsewhere*, and *Bay City Blues* are not demonstrably better than those who wrote *All in the Family*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Columbo*, or *M\*A\*S\*H* (the show that in some ways ploughed the path for

the style of *Hill Street*). But it is at least arguably a greater achievement to get an audience to accept an unfamiliar form than to achieve even masterly craftsmanship in a familiar one.

The immense popularity of *Dynasty* and *Dallas*, which also use large casts and continuing narratives—though with cartoon-like writing, a conventional focus on stars, and a determined avoidance of reality—suggests that audiences are open to inventive storytelling. Indeed, the enduring power of daytime soap operas has been that large casts and multiple narratives offered viewers many more potential points for identification: if not the young woman, the old one; if not the black character, the white one; if not the lawyer, the file clerk. The ensemble shows offer less socioeconomic variety among the characters, but perhaps even greater variation in outlook and philosophy: the cynic and the idealist, the optimist and the pessimist, the rusher-in and the cogitator. Only a handful of characters are Kojaks or Lucys who

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## Among the educated, upscale members of the baby-boom generation, *Hill Street* has made viewing respectable again.

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appeal to almost everyone. If audience members can be persuaded to wait patiently in search of a character who will appeal specifically to them, then the ensemble shows can build more lasting loyalties than many conventional four-character sitcoms.

Whatever the lifespan of the ensemble format (it will, like all fads, die away eventually), *Hill Street* and *St. Elsewhere* have already performed a service for which all three networks ought to be grateful. Among the educated, upscale, mid-30ish members of the baby-boom generation—the audience that advertisers desire most—the ensemble shows have made television viewing respectable again. Because there are enough story lines, enough time to resolve them, and enough characters to live through them in unpredictable ways, *Hill Street* and its peers seem more real, more intelligent, more candid than most other television programs. They branch off on such quirky, seemingly spontaneous tracks that viewers who have seen the first half of a show do not, for once, feel able to predict how the second half will unfold. The ensemble shows do not represent writing without formula, but the formula is not yet intuitively grasped by the viewers. And even when it is grasped, it is still a formula with the tang of reality.

The series gives the viewer surrogate friends, a relationship with the slow pace of real life. The mini-series gives the viewer an intense, cathartic experience, usually of historical import. The ensemble show, an innovation of potentially equal significance, gives the viewer a different corner of the world, an environment with its own rules and imperatives. The experience is a sort of journey of the spirit, a means for an increasingly detached and belief-hungry populace to experience life as lived in common struggle, and even in pursuit of an ideal. ■

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## Action-Adventure Shows: Testosterone to the Rescue

by Mary Gaitskill

**A**MERICANS have always loved maverick heroes—lone guys who suddenly roar into problematic situations (they used to do it on horseback; now they travel by car) with determined jaws and clenched fists. To protect the innocent, they shoot guns, beat up mean people, pull devices from their shoes, kiss swooning women, and then ride off in a blaze of testosterone. The testosterone part was understated in guys like the Lone Ranger. But as our hero evolved into Peter Gunn and the Man from U.N.C.L.E., his ability to slug and blast and restore justice became clearly and intimately connected to his success with women. The blistering-hot saxophone that opens *Peter Gunn*, the sleazy jazz theme of *Burke's Law* (complete with sultry female voiceover whispering the title)—oozed both sex and danger. Each week, we invariably found our hero in the middle of a date with a pouting, bouffant-haired sex bomb, whom he left when called into action via secret telephone or private messenger. He usually encountered at least one more sex bomb during the course of the show. The Man from U.N.C.L.E. often met two or three, frequently in the form of an enemy such as Miss Dikeman ("The Concrete Overcoat Affair"), a bleached blond in a tight mini-dress who carried a stiletto in her garter and appeared to become aroused about murdering men. No matter what deadly situation he found himself in, Napoleon Solo always made time with any female bulging out of her blouse in his line of vision. Thus, male authority and strength was playfully but firmly linked with playboy sexuality.

The most recent bunch of lone heroes appear at first glance to continue in this tradition, or even to take it further. While Burke, Solo, and Gunn were all slender,

*Mary Gaitskill is a New York-based writer.*



**TV's macho shows over the decades: from the '50s and '60s—elegant *Peter Gunn* and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*—to the hunks of the '80s—*T.J. Hooker*, *The Fall Guy*, and *Knight Rider*.**

svelte, refined types who wore tuxedos and had gone to college, the new TV heroes are real Dash Rip-Rocks. *Knight Rider*, *Magnum, P.I.*, *A Team*, *The Fall Guy*, and *T.J. Hooker* all showcase barrel-chested specimens with meaty hands and massive necks. Lee Majors (*The Fall Guy*) and Mr. T (of *A Team*) look like they'd roar instead of talk. Magnum and *Knight Rider* are (by some standards, anyway) handsome men, exuding a kind of seedy, disco-dancing, health-club aroma. These days, you might think, sex-hungry viewers can turn on almost every night and cop enough body heat to last all week.

Wrong. Despite the extra poundage, these guys are not playboys—certainly

not in the way their predecessors were. Maybe their weight trainer told them sex would distract them. In recent episodes of *A Team*, *The Fall Guy*, and *Knight Rider*, the heroes were exposed (literally) to blouse-busting blonds in trouble—and they didn't seem to notice. *Knight Rider* recently featured a tough lady in tight pants trying to seduce Mike. He refused with a condescending leer. During a recent *Hooker* episode, the only time our hero embraced a woman was to comfort her during a crisis. (He did the same thing later to a male companion, his face set both times in a rock-hard expression of dutifulness.) Tough guys Simon and Simon seemed to live with their mom, and when one adventure led them into a nudist camp, they were ready to faint with embarrassment—especially when a naked lady made a pass. Later, when duty compelled them to flirt with two nubile teenagers, they stammered and fumbled while the girls laughed at them. Napoleon Solo would have been ashamed.

Thomas Magnum and *Knight Rider*'s Mike come the closest to the old-style playboy. They do kiss swooning women, often. But Magnum's sexuality almost seems like a device to illustrate just how friendly and normal a Vietnam veteran can be. As for Mike, he's just plain strange. His good looks are vapid and doll-like, his sexuality oddly passive. Women make passes at him, not vice-versa. And his responses, when they do come, are ambiguous. In action scenes he's also flat: His talking car, Kit, does and thinks more than he does.

What's wrong with these guys? Nothing. It's what's right with them. Their contained sexuality is a testament to their advanced morality. They aren't just out for kicks—they're concerned about serious issues. They're too manly to waste time on silly things like sex—unlike those skinny, decadent punks from U.N.C.L.E., who were just detectives or agents doing their job. The old playboys

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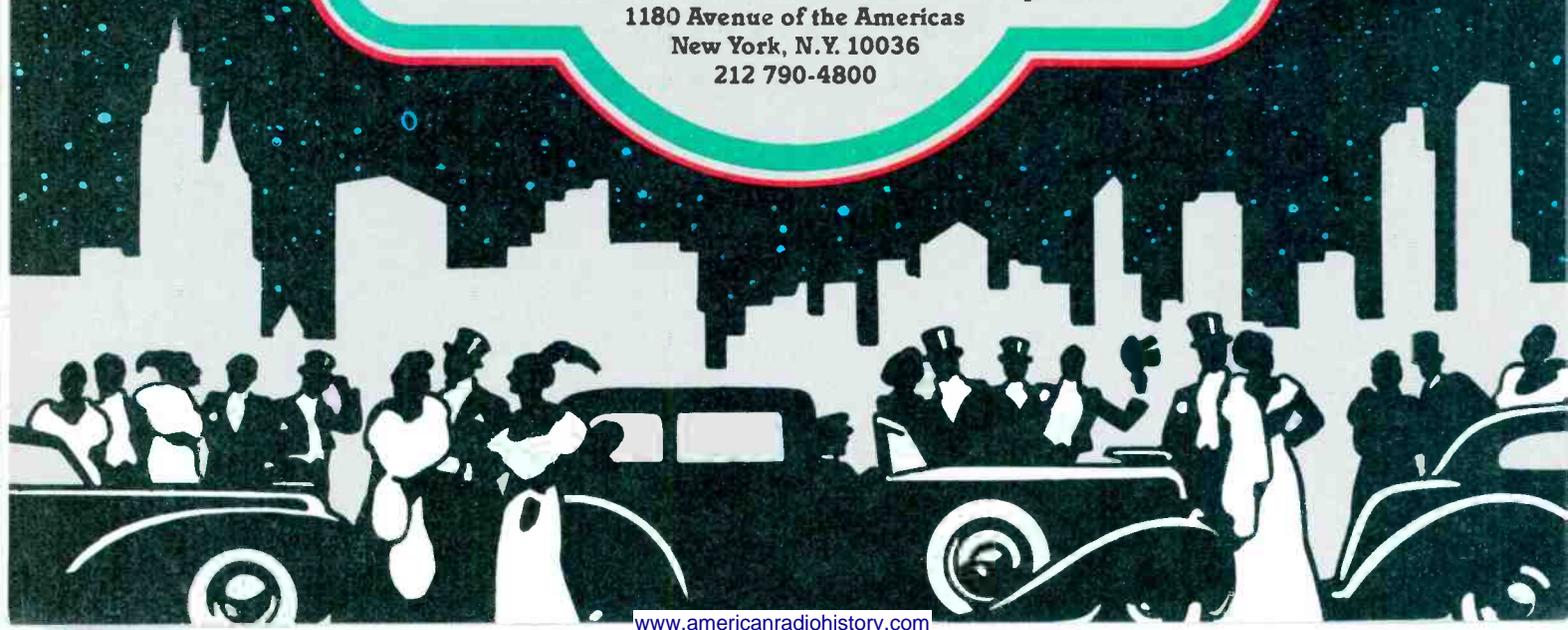
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*Kay Koplovitz is President and Chief Executive Officer of the USA Cable Network. She is responsible for the production and distribution of programming for the nationwide cable television network. Ms. Koplovitz is the first woman in the country to head a TV network.*

"Satellite communications, my first love, was introduced by our industry on September 30, 1975, the date of the first domestic use of satellites. It was "The Thrilla in Manila," if you remember that fight. I coordinated the media portion for Home Box Office. It started the whole explosion of satellite delivery for the cable industry—hence today's cable TV networks. In 1977, there was only one network being distributed by satellite. Today, there are over 50 networks reaching 27 million homes. By the end of this decade, we hope to exceed the 50-million-home mark.

"Sports programming will always be an important part of television, whether cable or network. TV can, first of all, bring you facial expressions better than you can get from a seat in the stadium. And TV gives you the instant replay—three different angles on the same play. Television

does that better than anything else. That's why I think sports is always going to be a prime product for television.

"USA Cable has a number of TV series that are produced on film for us, in addition to our movie specials, of course. These now include *Ovation*, which involves the performing arts; our children's series, *Calliope* (which has won several awards); our *Time-Out Theater* sports program; and *Night Flight*, a late-night music series. Probably 25% of our programming is produced on film.

"There are qualities one expects from film that tape cannot deliver. Film has the quality look—which has a lot to do with shading, color, and depth. Take the *Brideshead Revisited* series we're running. It has the most magnificent production values that you just can't get on tape, qualities that are captured best on film. When the look is the primary concern, we will always go to film.

"Without question, film is going to continue to be a major element on cable in the future. I think movies will always be on cable, for the production values film delivers. Regardless of what other kinds of program formats you try, the way a film or movie is put together and shot

(whether the audience realizes it's seeing *film* or not) makes it an enjoyable experience. We will also continue to shoot special segments, close-up personality segments, on film.

"The creative opportunities in cable today are endless. There's a continuous stream of projects and opportunities, basic cable and pay cable, syndication and disc, foreign and in-flight and so on. Writers and producers have never had so many windows before. What I've done, what I want to continue to do, is help open those windows!"

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approached each case as if it were a complex, macho game. As Burke put it, "This is my kind of case—interesting, intriguing, and impossible." They were symbols of a very personal power, of power almost for its own sake. The zany plots of *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* took place in gambling casinos, the Grand Prix, and amusement parks. They unfolded at breakneck speed, featuring kooky characters, wild coincidences, hair-pin turns, and danger exploding in every direction. They were sheer adolescent chaos, in which the greatest good seemed to be having a blast.

Not so with today's hero shows. Their focus is often blurry and confused, but it's desperately moralistic. "Issues" come up at every opportunity. In *The Fall Guy*, Lee Majors, looking like the wrath of God, tries to bulldoze the house of a rich bastard who offered him a bribe. Later, when his friend is planted in the rich bastard's house as a "body guard," Lee moralizes on how wrong it is to "get rich off other people's money." In *Magnam, P.I.*, a neglected, needy daughter commits murder to claim the land her grandfather has given to the public. We get a speech on how rotten his "humanitarianism" is because it caused him to abandon his family. From granddad we hear how wrong it is to chase money, how one should share with "the people." T.J. Hooker defends a female cop accused of cowardice. Feminism and rational authority are up against mob psychology: The entire department turns against Hooker, who stands firm, insisting, "I care about that badge and what stands behind it." And the anti-authoritarian funsters of the *A Team* are at the same time might-makes-right vigilantes ("It's time Garver learned a lesson in survival of the toughest") and hippies ("Nature can only replenish itself if you don't take too much").

Well, so they're all a little mixed up. A grab-bag of values is better than the cheap, aimless sex and violence of the past, and pop culture is marching in an upward direction, right? Who knows? There's a sad grimness in the new moral hero. It's not enough that he fly through the air with the greatest of ease; he's got to further the public good and raise consciousness, too. It is a comfort to see major political and social problems solved by a hulking daddy figure every night. It can give one a sense of moral rectitude just to have watched the damn thing. But deep down, anyone knows that only crossword puzzles get solved that fast.

Besides, I miss Napoleon Solo's lascivious smirk. It was a lot of fun. ■

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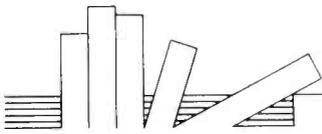
Williams, Colón and Hopkins were 1982-83 Fellows in the Bagehot Fellowship, an intensive program of study at Columbia University for journalists interested in improving their understanding of economics, business and finance. Guest speakers in the wide-ranging curriculum have included Paul Volcker, Murray Weidenbaum, Donald Regan, Felix Rohatyn, Douglas Fraser, Marina Whitman, John Kenneth Galbraith, Robert B. Reich, Irving Kristol, Otto Eckstein, David Rockefeller and Robert Heilbroner.

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# Rounding Up the Usual Suspects



**Inside Prime Time**  
by Todd Gitlin  
Pantheon, \$16.95

**I**T'S BEEN DONE BEFORE but never in an operation with such impressive credentials, or on a scale this ambitious. The Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities put up the research money, and Todd Gitlin, Berkeley sociology professor, set out to discover how prime-time network shows get on the air, and why.

He interviewed more than 200 network executives, producers, directors, writers, agents, and actors, hung around production sets, read scripts and the changes they underwent, and gained unprecedented access—for an outsider—to the industry's decision-making process, from 1980 to 1982. The result is Gitlin's comprehensive, often fascinating *Inside Prime Time*.

Despite his '60s counter-culture hipness, Gitlin is a sociologist, and so loves to dwell on methodology. Not unpredictably, then, Part I of his three-part book is devoted to program testing, audience ratings, demographics, scheduling, spinoffs, and more. Fun it ain't.

Part II contains his considerably livelier description of an industry of unparalleled

raw cultural power run by the several hundred people who dominate the inside track. If, as Gitlin shows us, deal-making is the art form, then small wonder there's appallingly little creativity left over for the product that goes on the screen—and even that is supplied by appallingly few people, some of them more appalling than others.

Gitlin describes how deals beget more deals—short-sighted network commitments to suppliers that lead to more of the same. NBC, for example, by the early 1980s the most "committed" network (CBS is the least), gave guarantees of pilots and television movies to Gary Coleman in 1980. In the same year it gave Johnny Carson a three-year deal guaranteeing his production company TV movies and three pilots, at least one of which had to go on the air as a series. As producer Barney Rosensweig says, "All these commitments eventually have to be paid off, and the free marketplace is reduced in the process." ABC has handed over much of its future prime time to Aaron Spelling, the creative force behind *Charlie's Angels*, *The Love Boat*, and *Fantasy Island*.

Part II will end forever any naïve notion the general reader might still have that those 3,342 hours a year called

"prime time" belong to the viewers. Network television belongs to "them"—what Gitlin calls the television-industrial complex. While there is nothing new about his conclusions, the density of the documentation supporting them should offer even insiders fresh insights—into the television industry's current chaotic situation, for instance. It seems that "they" do not necessarily know what they are doing.

The '60s social revolution gave the networks their enormously successful "relevant" '70s: *All in the Family*, *Maude*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Three years into the '80s the networks still have not been able to figure out what this decade's realities are, at least not in a form that can be distorted into sitcoms. According to Gitlin, the networks even misread Reagan's election as a shift to the right that automatically meant the public wanted law-and-order shows: ABC, for example, scheduled *Today's FBI*, *Strike Force*, and *McClain's Law* in the 1980-1981 season, and all flopped.

Social upheaval offered leads that could be developed into one hit show after another; the despair of unemployment and soup kitchens has not. There are few big hits now, and new shows come and go so fast they seem to have been canceled between commercials. All the networks know at this point is that they, the networks, do *not* want blacks, Hispanics, complex women, and gays. No one has yet come up with the right comedy format for Vietnam. Not only have the '80s not produced "relevant" shows for

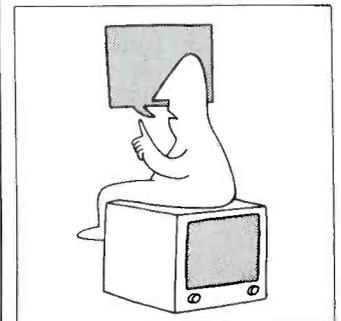
the networks, it is almost as if prime time itself has become irrelevant.

It is only human to think in terms of heroes and villains in this matter of what Gitlin refers to in another context as "meaninglessness raised to a universal principle." In the final chapter of Part II, "*Hill Street Blues: Make It Look Messy*," the author pays enthusiastic tribute to some very talented people, describing their struggle to produce a show they could be proud of.

Why isn't network television better? "Because," Gitlin concludes, "no one with clout cares enough to make it otherwise. It is good enough for its purposes," which are those of the television-industrial complex. Ultimately, Gitlin takes the philosophical high road: Television is merely one more symptom of "cultural exhaustion." Talk about cop-outs.

Yet, unexpectedly, the book is poignant. Perhaps its most poignant element is the eagerness with which more than 200 people talked to Gitlin, among them some who are known in the business for "giving good lunch." A new show this season involves a weatherman and a genie. Someone must have given great lunch.

BARBARA LONG



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- A 38-year-old American Indian, William Least Heat Moon, takes to the open road and discovers a simpler, less fettered America. (We previewed his

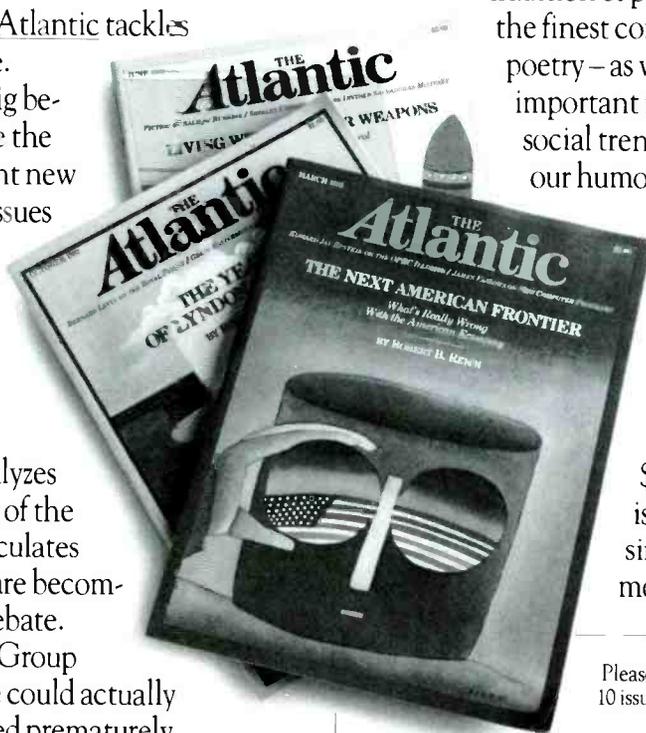
personal odyssey, *Blue Highways*, before it soared to the top of the best-seller lists.)

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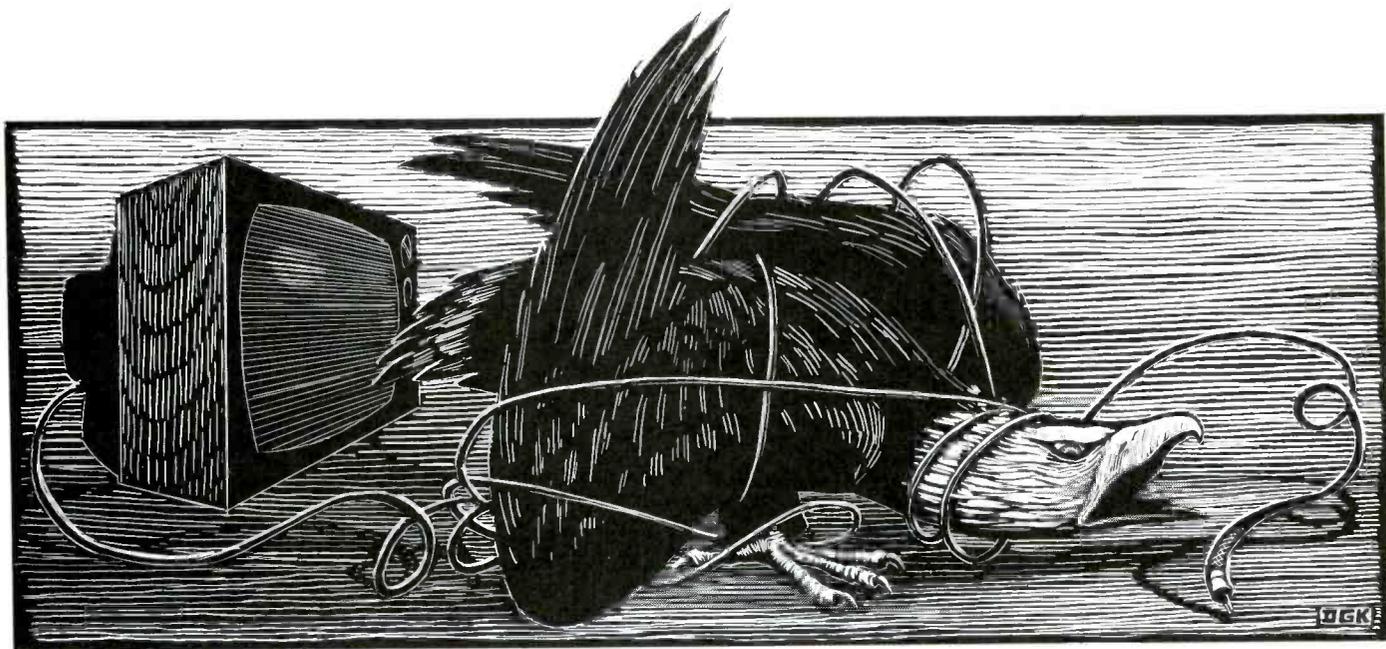
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# THE Atlantic

# Making Cable Safe for Democracy

by John Wicklein



**W**E HAVE REACHED a critical juncture in First Amendment rights in this country. The cable television industry is pushing legislation through Congress that would guarantee cable operators control of content on virtually every channel in their systems.

Those who oppose this legislation argue that, to protect freedom of expression and a diversity of viewpoints, cable must be required to lease channels to all comers, including their competitors for advertising, without discrimination and at reasonable rates. Moreover, they must not be permitted to interfere with content on these leased channels.

Cable operators cry outrage at such an idea. If they aren't allowed to have economic and editorial control over every channel in their systems, they maintain, *their* First Amendment rights are violated. Their concern, of course, has little

*John Wicklein's most recent book is The Electronic Nightmare: The New Communications and Freedom, published by Viking Press.*

## Cable's needs must be reconciled with those of the public.

to do with the expression of ideas; rather, it involves their ability to exercise commercial judgment on which services will bring the largest profits.

Cable's de facto monopoly in the communities where it is franchised, along with its vast channel capacity, gives the medium extraordinary power in mass communications. By 1990, some 60 percent of American homes are expected to have cable, which means that the public's right to be heard and its right to know will depend heavily on access to cable's facilities. If cable companies are allowed to bar that access, for commercial or political reasons, they will effectively be able to restrict the First Amendment rights of the rest of us.

Already there is stress in the cable industry itself over some operators' power to block entree to their systems. The systems owned by Time Inc., for instance,

have been partial to Time's own HBO, rather than to its competitor, Showtime. In business, restricting competition is the name of the game, but in the marketplace of ideas it runs counter to the Bill of Rights.

The cable lobby argues against broad access by insidiously invoking one of our most cherished rights, the right of free speech. The danger is that some judge, or even the Supreme Court, will be gulled by this line of thinking. The fact is that any cable operator's right to free expression—his lawful First Amendment right in a free society—is completely served through his exclusive control over the content of a *single* channel. His freedom of speech is not denied by his inability to dictate what comes over all the rest of the channels.

The First Amendment was not devised to guarantee anyone the right to make maximum profits, but to guarantee everyone the right to be heard and acquire widely diverse information and viewpoints. So the bill the cable industry is striving so vigorously to push through the Congress has nothing to do with the First Amendment at all.

David G. Klein

If it did, it would address the rights of consumers and competitors. But the bill known as S.66, which passed the Senate 87 to 9 last June, is only concerned with the cable operator's rights. (At the last minute, however, the Senate did agree to let the municipalities continue to require one public-access, one educational, and one government channel from the cable systems.)

The bill Congressman Timothy Wirth's telecommunications subcommittee is developing in the House is not much better. Wirth announced that, to protect diversity, the bill would have to mandate leased-access channels, whose content the operator will not be allowed to control. But then he proposed to leave the operators in economic control: The rates for leased access would be negotiated between the cable company and the applicant. This could have the effect of freezing out nonprofit users, who might not be able to afford commercial rates. Not only that, but Wirth asked the National Cable Television Association (NCTA) to draft the section that would provide for leased access on cable systems—to come up with "language they could live with." That's like asking the ferret to write the rules governing his entry into the rabbit warren.

This is not to knock Wirth. He's been one of the good guys in the fight for diversity in the media. What is deplorable, though, is the standard way of doing political business. Politicians start from the "art-of-the-possible" premise: How can we compromise to get some of what we want? But too often the compromise is

## The cable operator's free speech rights are fulfilled with control over a single channel.

offered before the demand is made—because achieving the compromise itself seems to mean achieving something substantive.

Senator Barry Goldwater said he would not put through a bill that the cable companies did not want and the cities could not live with. So he told the NCTA and the National League of Cities to work out a compromise Congress could adopt. The compromise became a deal: The NLC leaders traded the ability of cities to require public services for the cable companies' agreement to give them 5 percent of their profits. Since the two interest groups with the biggest clout seemed satisfied, Goldwater bought the deal.

But wouldn't it be refreshing if, instead, the general public—through consumer groups, access groups, nonprofit users, and small-business organizations—were asked to come up with language *they* could live with?

As it was, public-interest groups had to fight for a place at the table during the Senate hearings—but only after the legislation had already been lined out by the NCTA lobbyists and NLC representatives.

I asked David Aylward, staff director of the House telecommunications subcommittee, what would happen if the cable companies refused to accept a leased-access provision. "Then I don't think there will be a bill in the House," he replied. Cities that objected to the deal the NLC made in their name were saying much the same thing: Better no bill than one that puts the cable operators in complete control of the systems and the content.

The whole problem began with the fact that cable companies must be able to make profits if they're going to build systems, and I do not mean here to contest the idea that the profitability of cable is in the public interest. But there are legislative ways to reconcile the needs of the cable operator with the needs of the public.

I suggest a structure that would set one basic tariff for both nonprofit and commercial users of cable, a tariff that at least would let the operator recover the costs of providing the channel. If cable time could be leased at affordable rates, nonprofit users would be able to provide such public services as telemedicine and interactive continuing education courses. Without leased access, these services could only exist at the cable operator's discretion, and they would be unlikely offerings on systems ruled by profits.

Under this structure, commercial enterprises would pay the basic channel costs plus a percentage of the profits made from the channels. Rates would be set by the municipality in negotiation with the system operator, who would not be permitted to discriminate between providers of similar services. If a Time Inc. system were to take HBO, it would have to offer a channel to Showtime on the same terms.

Under this arrangement, the operator would have to supply leased channels up to the level of demand. With systems now being built to provide more than 100 channels, and with 1,000-channel systems in prospect within ten years, such a leased-access provision is both technically and commercially feasible.

The First Amendment is served, not by giving the cable operator the ability to exclude those he wishes, but by requiring him to make his services available to everyone at reasonable rates.



# The Pow of the Press

by Don Hewitt



## Fed up with the flak, a news producer strikes back.

**N**OT TOO LONG AGO, in discussing the Christine Craft story, *The New York Times* said: "Local television news is influenced by show-business values . . . those journalists who make it on camera as celebrity anchors . . . aren't there simply because of their journalistic skills but because they lure people to their channels just as surely as Clint Eastwood lures them to his movies."

What the *Times* left unsaid was that it

*Don Hewitt is executive producer of CBS's 60 Minutes. This article was adapted from his speech to the Radio-Television News Directors Association last fall.*

owns three local television stations, complete with "celebrity anchors." As a station owner, the *Times* is no different from any other: It wants those "celebrity anchors" to lure viewers to its channels—just as surely as Clint Eastwood lures them to his movies. If, as the *Times* says, the images of local anchors are central to the financial success of stations, all that the *Times* television writer had to do was produce a copy of her own newspaper's annual report—to see just how financially successful those three *Times*-owned stations are.

Last August, the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, which proudly proclaims itself "A Scripps-Howard Newspaper," asked in an editorial: "How many old, fat, balding men appear on the screen

each night reciting the news?" How many old, fat, balding men appear on the screen at Scripps-Howard's own television station in Memphis?

Why did we television news people get on the newspapers' enemies list? Because they think we want to crash their club. Newspaper people have long believed that getting a job on a newspaper is akin to joining the priesthood—that print journalists are not hired, but ordained, and that we who broadcast the news instead of printing it are somehow not worthy. They think God never intended that working journalists make more than the guild minimum.

Do you remember the hue and cry that greeted the news that Barbara Walters was going to make a million dollars a year?

"What is wrong with that?" I asked at the time.

"What's wrong with that? What's wrong with that?" they echoed. "This is journalism, not show business." (Notice that we are journalists when they are appalled at our salaries and performers when they write about our jobs.) But even though my newspaper friends were truly dismayed, the best they could come up with was, "It isn't right. It just isn't right." They reminded me of Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind*, nattering to herself, "It ain't fittin'. It just ain't fittin'."

Well, if it "ain't fittin'" to make money from journalism, how do you suppose the Hearsts, the Scripps, the Howards, the Chandlers, the Grahams, the Sulzbergers, and the Luces managed to amass those fortunes, or at the very least to add to the ones they already had? Their behavior seems perfectly proper to me. But Barbara Walters? How unseemly. And how curious that some of the newspaper people who are on television's back for not giving Christine Craft a chance to get a share of the pie are the same ones who were on television's back for giving Barbara Walters too big a share.

As I said in *Newsweek* last summer, we could put out a newspaper tomorrow morning if we had to. I did not say, as some at *The New York Times* insist I did, that tomorrow we could put out as good a newspaper as the *Times*. We couldn't. But tomorrow we could put out a lot better newspaper than they could put out a newscast. What newspaper people don't like to acknowledge is the plain, simple fact that if the *CBS Evening News* were the name of a newspaper and *The New York Times* the name of a newscast—we'd most likely end up running our newspaper as the *Times* is run, and they'd

David G. Klein

# Can You Find Your Hidden Subscribers?



Many Cable Systems have noticed that certain segments of their potential audience are, for one reason or another, not becoming subscribers. These non-subscribing households have been dubbed "Untouchables" by the Cable Industry. However, we prefer to think of them not as untouchable but as hidden subscribers, just waiting for the right programming source to come along.



You may have found a few of these hidden subscribers already, but if you'll look a little closer you will see that a large portion of these people make up the Religious Audience.

These viewers want 24 hour Religious programming just as other services offer 24 hour sports, movies or news. If there was a way for you to reach a large portion of these hidden subscribers, it could mean a great deal of additional income generated for your company.

We know where your hidden subscribers are, and we can show you how to find them. If you would like information on the actual number of PTL viewers in the area that your system serves, call (704) 542-6000, ext. 2123. That subscriber "jungle" just became easier to target.

most likely end up running their newscast as the *CBS Evening News* is run. Does anyone doubt that Walter Cronkite, Dan Rather, Bill Moyers, Diane Sawyer, Charles Kuralt, Mike Wallace, Morley Safer, Harry Reasoner, Ed Bradley, Tom Fenton, Bob Schieffer, Bruce Morton, Susan Spencer, and Lesley Stahl couldn't put out one hell of a newspaper?

This brings me to another question: If we did put out a newspaper, would we stoop to having a columnist on our staff regularly beat up on television? Damn right we would—not because there is any sound journalistic reason to have one, but because it sure as hell sells newspapers.

Newspapers run TV columns because their readers care about television. We don't run newspaper columns because frankly, my dear, no one gives a damn. Can that be why newspaper men and women resent us so, and love to talk about our "show-business values"? Trying to lure viewers to your channel doesn't sound like a capital crime to me. What's wrong with making your presentation as attractive as possible? One of the first things they teach you in journalism school is "makeup"—not the kind television anchors wear, but makeup, nonetheless: how to make up an attractive Page One, to lure readers to the newspaper.

The new favorite word of television

columnists is *outtake*. Most of them don't seem to know what an *outtake* is, and the public definitely doesn't. I think newspapers use the word because it sounds like television has been caught once again doing something seedy: "All right, Rocky,

---

**I object to  
being written about  
by a columnist whose  
area of expertise  
is *Gomer Pyle*.**

---

what about the *outtakes*?" or "Come clean, Louis, we got you covered—hand over the *outtakes*!"

An *outtake*, my young newspaper friends, is nothing more than the news that isn't fit to print—or to broadcast. Did you ever hear of a newspaper office without a wastebasket? I think newspaper wastebaskets are bigger than ours, and more numerous. The wastebasket is the place you file *outtakes*. Even though you don't call it that, an *outtake* is what newspaper reporters commit to paper and

then, for one reason or another, decide to throw away. Maybe it wasn't written very well; maybe it didn't ring true; maybe it was more than the newspaper had room for; maybe it even bordered on being libelous. An *outtake*, Mr. or Ms. TV columnist, is what you, or we, decide we do not want to appear under our by-line. The difference between our two institutions, however, is that no one rummages around in your wastebasket and everyone, it seems, rummages around in ours.

If "*outtake*" is currently the television columnists' favorite word, their favorite commandment—and this goes back to 1950 B.C. (Before Cronkite)—is "Thou Shalt Not Commit Happy Talk." Did you ever notice that when a TV news program is accused of committing happy talk, the accusation appears in the same section of the paper as Ann Landers, Dear Abby, Jeanne Dixon, Andy Capp, and Beetle Bailey?

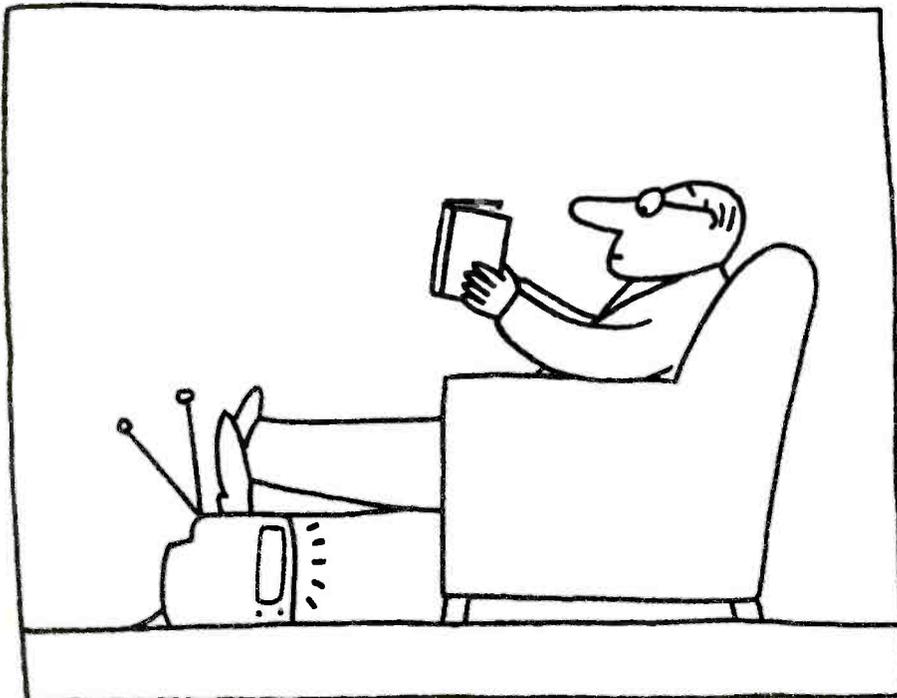
Having said all this, I must add that I don't really mind newspapers writing about us. What I do object to is being written about by a columnist whose area of expertise is *Gomer Pyle*. Who else but a television columnist critiques Sawyer and Kurtis on Monday, and Cagney and Lacy on Tuesday? If a newspaper thinks television news is a fit subject for comment, fine. But don't pull someone off the Linda Evans beat and sic him on us.

Do I have nothing good to say about our brethren in print? Of course I do. I used to be one of them: poor but honest, doing God's work and waiting to go to trench-coat heaven. I think they do a good job of covering the news. But do they do a better job than television journalists do? If you look at them all, probably not. If they want to go on thinking they do, that they are the real journalists and we are only playing at it, then we should remember not to take their writing too seriously. I don't know one of them who wouldn't pack it all in tomorrow morning if someone offered him a job in television news.

The other day a television critic—one of those who think the television journalist can't write his own name, let alone a good sentence—wrote about what he called the "highly touted megabucks anchor of Channel 7's *Eyewitness News*" being shifted to another program, adding that "the move, while surprising, was not unexpected."

With that fine bit of prose, this much too highly touted, some would say "megabucks," television producer, ends his tale—a move that, while surprising, is not unexpected. ■

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# A Case of Prime-Time Blues

**MEMORANDUM**

To: GT  
 From: RH  
 Re: Success in our Lifetime

The boys in Research have just sent me their first hard look at the early Nielsens. Not bad, but they could be a lot better—I know you're as tired of third place as I am.

What we've got to do this time is toss the losers over the side right away and build on the hits—the holdover biggies like *Hill Street Blues* and the new stuff like *Bay City Blues*. No slap-dash solutions, either: Let's go with what works.

I've been pushing Program Development to come up with some second-season replacements that'll fly, and I think they're onto something big:

**SUNDAY:**

*St. Louis Blues* (8–9 P.M., comedy-drama): the ups and downs of life at a Gateway Arch souvenir stand. An ensemble company, continuing story lines, a little bit of humor, a little bit of pathos, and at least one Gateway elevator chase every week.

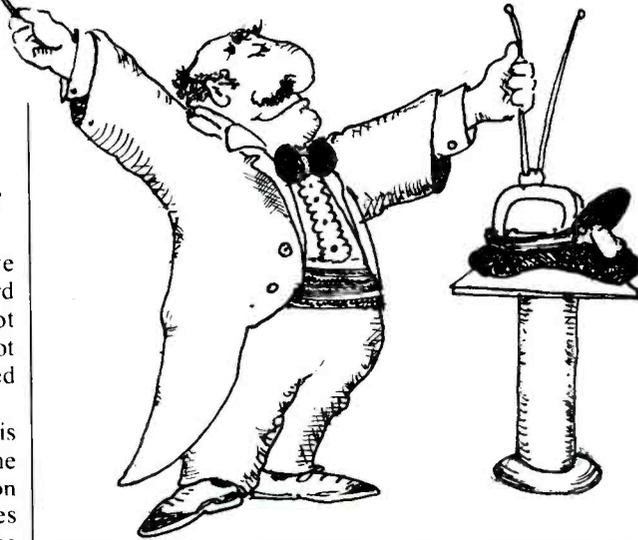
*Blues in the Night* (9–10 P.M., drama-comedy): the ups and downs of life in a 24-hour diner. A little bit of pathos, a little bit of humor, day-old doughnuts. A sleeper.

*Selsun Blues* (10–11 P.M., drama-comedy): the ups and downs of life at a Dayton, Ohio beauty parlor. A little rinse, a little tint, a little perm. Very high concept.

**MONDAY:**

*It's All Over Now, Baby Blues* (8–8:30 P.M., comma-dromedy): an eight-year-old black kid moves in with an aging folk

*Rick Horowitz is a Washington-based writer and columnist.*



by Rick Horowitz

singer. Snappy dialogue, plenty of stereotypes; the kid is too cute for words. Can't miss.

*Coronet Blues* (8:30–10 P.M., comedy-dromedy): ups and you-know-whats for an amnesiac ward in an inner-city hospital. Unforgettable.

*True Blues* (10–11 P.M., crama-drama): The setting is Yale in the 1920s. The hook: living and loving behind ivy-colored walls. A possible fashion tie-in here, too; it didn't hurt *Brideshead*.

**TUESDAY:**

*NBC Bluesday Night Movie* (8–11 P.M., cineromedy): Some of the product we've got lined up: *Blue Angel*, *Blue Collar*, *Blue Knight*. Also *Blue Lagoon* (for the kids), *Blue Max*, and *Blue Skies*. We premiere with *Blues Brothers*. Feel good about this one.

**WEDNESDAY:**

*Royal Blues* (8–8:30 P.M., comma-dramomedy): ideal lead-in. Chuck and Diane, two newlyweds stuck in dead-end jobs, get tired of waiting and decide to set up *their very own country*. Could be very big.

*Vita Blues* (8:30–9 P.M., crama-momedy): the ups and

downs of life in a herring factory in Bayonne. A laff riot. Abe Vigoda in a continuing role.

*Birth of the Blues* (9–10 P.M., mama-cramedy): Anything funnier than pregnancy and child-bearing? We couldn't think of it, so this one follows the ups and downs of a zany Lamaze class in Encino. Could be our *Three's Company*.

*St. Elsewhere* (10–11 P.M., hum-drum-momedy): Saves us having to reinvent it.

**THURSDAY:**

*Violet Tzar Blues* (8–10 P.M., historical drama): Our prestige entry, this ongoing saga explores the ups and downs of life in the Winter Palace in 1910 Russia. Passions and powerplays, pogroms and pi-roshki, all in one steamy weekly package.

*Hill Street Blues* (10–11 P.M.): the source.

**FRIDAY:**

*Funny, You Don't Look Bluish* (8–8:30 P.M., crom-dromedy): An eight-year-old black kid moves in with a rabbi. The kid is so cute you can't stand it; the rabbi—don't spread this, but we're looking very seri-

ously at Dick Van Patten for this one.

*Black & Blues* (8:30–9 P.M., crom-cromedy): An eight-year-old black kid moves in with an Eskimo family and tries to adjust to the cold. The kid is so cute you could kill him. Still casting the Eskimos.

*Wild Blues Yonder* (9–10 P.M., drama-crama): the ups and downs of life among the 88th Airborne Rangers. Sound familiar? It should: It's *For Love and Honor* with new opening credits. This change is worth five share points at least.

**NBC White Paper** (10–11 P.M., documentary): A graveyard slot anyhow, opposite *Falcon Crest*, so let's be a little daring, right? Brokaw hosts an eight-part documentary, "The Blues Magoos," the first-ever in-depth, almost-legendary, mid-'60s one-hit rock-group miniseries. Could surprise us.

**SATURDAY:**

*Red, White, and Blues* (8–9 P.M., crama-rama): What really went on in Betsy Ross's Philadelphia rooming house in 1776? Who knows? But we can certainly guess.

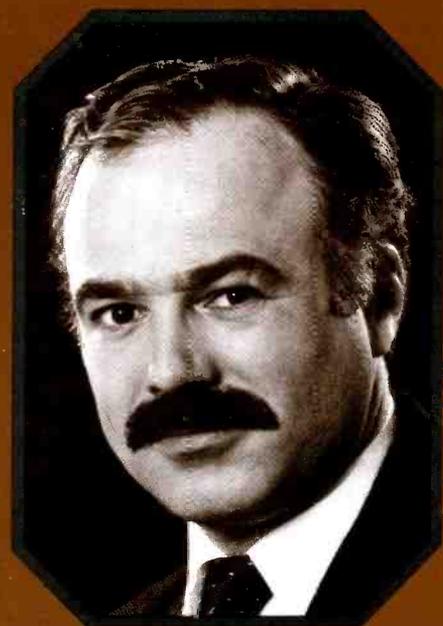
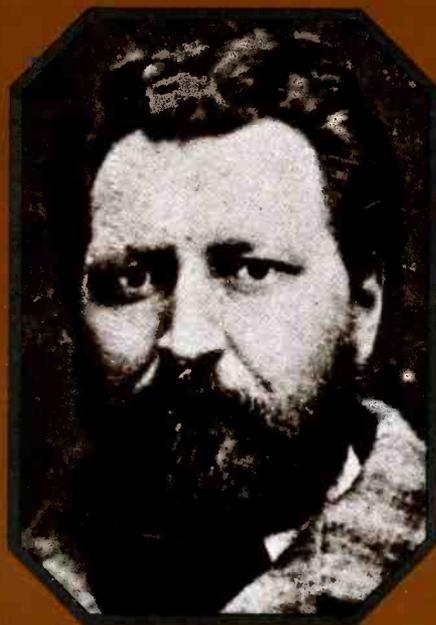
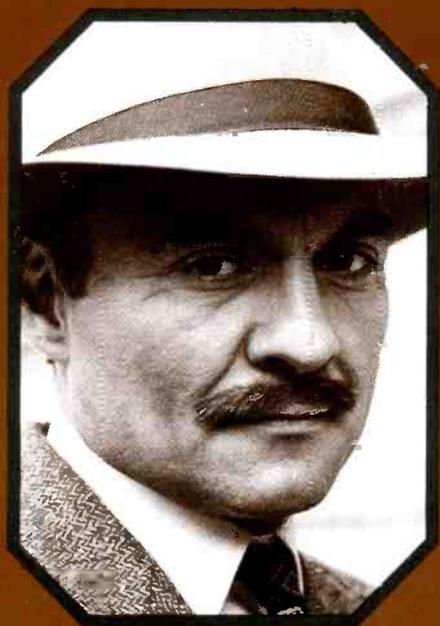
*Powder Blues* (9–10 P.M., schuss-boomedy): the ups and downs of life at a ski-rental shop in Aspen. See the rich meet the not-quite-so-rich. Occasional corn.

*Blues Danube* (10–11 P.M., trauma-drama): Everybody is *very high* on this one. A Viennese private eye in America. Has a touch of an accent and a gorgeous assistant, and he plays the harmonica, which he keeps tucked in his lederhosen when things get really tough. A great chance for character development.

I really think we're onto something here, GT. It's programming viewers can count on. Just say the word.

Peter Lippman

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