

Syllabus:- Journalism 291-&E

ISSUES IN TELEVISION:

The Other Side of the Looking Glass

Professor Jerry M. Landay

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Office:- #40 Gregory Hall

Office Hours: - by appointment.

Telephone: - (O) 333-4659 - (H) 344-8482

Some Points of View about TV



In the days before television

"A television set is merely a toaster with pictures."

- Mark Fowler, FCC Chairman under Pres. Ronald Reagan -

"To see this midget as a single instrument which has even an outside chance of attempting to save this nation, this world, from reentering the Dark Ages may be ridiculous, but this is exactly where I am at. No other institution can even attempt it."

- John W. Reavis, Jr., Kettering Conference on Public Television 1969

"It's commodity trading to us. We don't know [our] community. We're short-term players."

- Martin Pompadur, owner of eight TV stations -

"Human evolution is off on a new tack. People are coming closer together...crowded in a psychological sense, almost to the point of constituting a single organism. The mark of the times is the network, a declaration of interdependence, like a spiderweb: disturb it anywhere and it vibrates all over."

- John Pfeiffer, The Smithsonian Magazine, July, 1989 -

"It's about student nurses in Dallas in the summer and the air-conditioning doesn't work so they sweat a lot."

- Producer Aaron Spelling describing a proposed TV series to an NBC executive -

"This instrument can teach, it can illuminate, yes; and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise it is merely lights and wires in a box."

- Edward R. Murrow -

"If television is only a window, if it is only a peep show, if it is only a moving panel in the wall, then let us only read books. But if television is used to tell a story that excites our imagination, stimulates our intellect, and moves us to laugh or cry, then it deserves a place in our lives."

- Adrian Malone, Producer & Co-writer - COSMOS, MILLENIUM, THE ASCENT OF MAN, BBC-TV -

"He told me the network business was just like the investment banking business."

- A former NBC executive quoting the chairman of G-E -

"I believe in freedom of the press, so long as I own the press."

- Journalist-critic A.J. Liebling -

"[American] broadcasters talk of delivering audiences to advertisers and sponsors. In Britain, we deliver programs to audiences."

- Michael Checkland, Director-Gen., BBC -

"So many who come to life before the camera don't come to life anywhere else."

- Daniel Schorr -

"We now have a significant media presence in the U-S that's wholly dependent on the flow of concocted outrage to keep themselves in business ... Our artists are so crummy and our crummy media won't let anyone who's awake escape from their crumminess."

- "Schlock Shock", Wall Street Journal editorial -

"Television is arguably the most important technology to emerge in the modern world. It has become the nerve system of national societies and of the world society. It constructs our reality, it tells us what is going on out there, past the places we can see..."

- Professor Patrick O'Heffernan -

"The problem is that American values have included the primacy of the market. The maximization of box office is not conducive to what is euphemistically and nostalgically called the marketplace of ideas."

- Todd Gitlin, Prof. of Sociology, Univ. of California -

"He who prides himself on giving what he thinks the public wants is often creating a fictitious demand for lower standards which he himself will then satisfy."

- John Lord Reith, founder, the BBC -

"However incompatible a national communications policy may seem to the notion of a free market, the U-S will eventually have to adopt one."

- Rex Malik, late editor of the journal Intermedia -

A Preface to the Course

Once upon a time, a nation's story - who it is, what it thinks and likes, what it believes, what it values, how its people see themselves and their world - was written by its governors, teachers, thinkers, and balladeers. America's story has become, in large part, the unfolding creation of a relative handful of men who run the television industry.

Television plays a major role in the cultural life of other lands, of course. But the American system of broadcasting is unique. The overriding purpose of American TV is to deliver us viewers to its advertisers in the largest numbers it can muster. The advertisers, together with series re-run fees, in turn deliver large profits to the industry.

Television is the most powerful institution of learning in America. Its greatest amusement hall. Its most potent instrument of social power. Its central political stage. Its surrogate parent. One of its most lucrative businesses. The tube gives automatic hero-status and excessive pay to the luminaries who appear regularly on it - our pantheon of gods and goddesses. But, if we're at all awake and conscious, we have to seriously ask if the industry and its people are suited to the awesome tasks that have defaulted to them.

We have to ask, but we don't. The only question we ask about television as a rule is: "anything good on tonight?" For all of the hours we spend in front of the tube, or complaining about it, or writing critical screeds about it, we are strangers to television. We stare at it, but think little about the issues it raises. And most of us never trouble to sample the quality wares of public television.

What is television for? What's good about it? Bad about it? What should it do to and for our children? Should it pander to what we want (assuming we know), or try to uplift us? Buttress old values? Teach us new tastes? How does it work? Who runs it? Who should run it? If culture is the best that has ever been written, said, and thought, then what is television doing to American culture? What is it doing to our minds? If most of what we know about the world comes from the tube, is it telling us enough, and telling it well? What about its ideology? Its role in the economy? In politics? Are there any hidden messages? What are the consequences of mass television going global?

There has never been a wholly adequate debate about broadcasting in America, or the profound issues it raises. First radio, then television has grown into a uniquely American institution by default, not design. It's time for us to see TV - from another point of view.

The Purpose of the Course

One - beyond merely looking at television as an amusement or entertainment, to begin to see and know it.

Two - to bring our minds to what we see.

Three - to think and talk about how American television works, and whether and how it might be made better.

Four - to consider how techno-shock may be changing American mass communication and our viewing behavior.

PROCESSES, PROCEDURES, ASSIGNMENTS

The course is designed on a series of tiers. There will be lecture, formal and informal discussion, and writing assignments dealing with, of course, television.

As you'll note, all papers and projects are listed in the Course Timetable, below, along with their due dates. Several of these assignments are based on your television viewing experiences, designed to encourage you not simply to look at the tube, but to consciously see and hear it.

I've also listed required background readings in the Timetable. From time to time, we'll illustrate our lectures with relevant video and audio materials. Also on occasion, we'll invite equally relevant long-distance guests onto our Speakerphone to address our questions about topics we're looking at. We'll pay a visit to a local television station and to the Undergrad Media Center.

You'll be asked to complete the readings and regularly attend lectures. You'll do concise, critical papers on aspects of what we cover, read, and talk about. Much of the written work will call for viewing and original thought on aspects of our subject. The assigned readings and lecture notes will assist that process.

Grading Criteria:- Your written contributions will constitute a significant part of your grade. Papers and projects will be graded on the basis of quality of thought, insight, originality, critical reflection, and the generous application of what you've read, heard and learned here.

Project Grades:- You'll carry out the final class project in teams. Grades will be shared on a team basis.

Writing: Because I am a writer by trade and predilection, I very much appreciate reading effectively written (not over-written) papers, graced with correct English usage. I also like to learn from them. Satisfaction of these criteria, too, will be reflected in your assignment grades.

WEIGHTING OF GRADES

Semester grade will be based on this formula:

| | | |
|---------------------|-----|-----|
| Written Assignments | --- | 40% |
| Midterm Quiz | --- | 05% |
| Final Project | --- | 40% |
| Class Participation | --- | 15% |

ATTENDANCE

We cover much ground. The course is constructed on a carefully sequenced basis. One unexcused absence from lecture-screenings is okay without explanation. Unexcused absences beyond this will be reflected in your final grade. The responsibility for make-goods in the case of missed assignments is yours. Otherwise, late assignments will be graded down by one letter for each day missed beyond deadline. Uncompleted assignments are graded "E."

REQUIRED TEXTS

You'll need two print sources:-

1) Change in this field is exponential, and I have been unable to find a text on the subject which is both thorough and timely. So, I've prepared a Course Packet of required readings. It's available at Dup-It Copy Shop, 1001 S. Wright. One copy will be on reserve at the Communications Library.

2) We'll follow developments in the field for the run of this course. Therefore, you'll be required to subscribe to Electronic Media Weekly for thirteen weeks @ \$1.00 per issue = \$13.00. I'll be the delivery boy. I'd appreciate collecting for the semester at the next class session, 1/19/93.

RESERVE TAPES AND TAPE VIEWING

You're invited to browse through and screen television holdings at the Media Center of the Undergrad Library.

Students are asked to make advance screening reservations by phone or in person at the Media Center Desk for both the tape to be screened and the equipment - either 3/4" or VHS. Phone 333-2667. Reservations are normally accepted up to two weeks in advance. Longer-term arrangements can also be made. I suggest that you plan ahead. The Media Center is sadly under-budgeted, and not keeping pace with steeply-rising usage.

Note that tapes can be screened in groups of up to three, and the Media Center people encourage audiences of more than one whenever possible.

COURSE TIMETABLE:- Issues in Television

Thurs. Jan 14 - Introduction to Course and Subject

Tues., Jan. 19 - Television as Power: The Empire of the Air

Coursepack reading for today:

1. Crisis on the Air: Television in America, Landay, Swords and Plowshares, Summer, 1991
2. Paradigm, Ch. 1, from The Evolution of American Television, Comstock, pp 13-40

Thurs., Jan. 21 - American Television and Pop Culture

Coursepack Reading for today:

3. The LA Riots, A Story Made for and by TV
Patrick O'Heffernan, TV Quarterly, Fall 1992

Paper due today: A CRITICAL PERSONAL ESSAY: HOW HAS TV AFFECTED THE PATTERN OF YOUR LIFE AND HOW YOU LIVE IT - FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE? IN 3-5 PAGES

Tues., Jan. 26 - Marconi, the Hams and the Hucksters: Birth of the American System of Broadcasting

Coursepack Reading for today:

4. Inventors as Entrepreneurs, Douglas, from Inventing American Broadcasting, pp. 167-186

Thurs., Jan 28 - The Federal Communications Commission: Regulation and the Public Air

Coursepack Reading for today:

5. TO BE DISTRIBUTED SEPARATELY

Tues., Feb. 2 - Mass Versus Class: Free Enterprise, Advertising, and the Public Interest

Coursepack Reading for Today:

6. "Three Blind Mice," Auletta, pp. 301-319

Thurs., Feb. 4 - The Rise of the Networks: Filling a Need and a Vacuum

Coursepack reading for today:

7. "In All His Glory: Life of William S. Paley" - Ch. 3, "The Prince" - Pp. 53 - 74, Smith
8. "Tube of Plenty" on the 'golden age' of TV, Barnouw, pp. 151-184

Tues., Feb. 9 - The Decline of the Networks: Scorpions in a Bottle

Coursepack Readings for today:

9. Edward R. Murrow's RTNDA Speech, Chicago, 1958
10. "Three Blind Mice," Ch. 16, "The Network/Affiliate 'Partnership'"pp. 366-373

COURSE TIMETABLE - II

Thurs., Feb. 11 - NBC and the General Electric
College of Business Administration

Paper due today: DO A CONTENT-ANALYSIS LOG OF A COMMERCIAL TV STATION FOR TWO FULL EVENINGS, FROM 6 PM TO 10:30 PM. LIST ALL PROGRAMS AND COMMERCIALS, AND THE TIMES THEY APPEARED. UNDER EACH PROGRAM, WRITE A BRIEF DESCRIPTION. FINALLY, ATTACH A CRITICAL ESSAY OF THREE TO FIVE TRENCHANT PAGES ABOUT WHAT YOU SAW.

Tues., Feb. 16 - "The Wasteland I" - The Payola
Scandal and its Portents

Coursepack Reading for Today:

11. The Vast Wasteland, 5/9/61
12. How Vast the Wasteland Now, 5/9/91
Two Addresses by Newton N. Minow

Thurs., Feb. 18 - A Visit to WCIA-TV

Meeting with Mr. Guy Main, Gen. Mgr.

Tues., Feb. 23 - "The Wasteland II" - Values and the
Ratings Game

Thurs., Feb. 25 - Cable: Choices Plus

Coursepack readings for today:

13. "Broadcasters, Cable Enter the 'Era of Blur,'" The Wall Street Journal, 9/28/89
14. "Fledgling Cable Networks Are Poised for Flight," The New York Times, 6/13/90
15. "New Channels Vie for Slices of Growing Cable Pie," The New York Times, 12/28/92

Preparation for today: SCAN THE RANGE OF CHOICES ON LOCAL CABLEVISION. BE FAMILIAR WITH THEM, AND PREPARED TO DISCUSS THEM.

Tues., Mar. 2 - Foreign Models: A Comparative View

Coursepack reading for today:

16. Public Service Broadcasting, the History of a Concept, from Understanding Television, Goodwin, pp.11-29

Thurs., Mar. 4 - News I: From Murrow to Jellybean
Journalism

Coursepack reading for today:

17. Ch. 2, "Higher Murrow and Lower Murrow", from "Air Time," Gates, pp. 14-34

SPRING BREAK

COURSE TIMETABLE - III

Tues., Mar. 16 - News II: Critical Issues in Electronic Journalism

Coursepack reading for today:

18. Talking to America: The Rise of Talk Shows in the '92 Campaign

Preparation for today: WATCH SEVERAL NETWORK EVENING NEWSSES OF YOUR CHOICE AS WELL AS C-N-N. CRITIQUE THEM IN TERMS OF ATTEMPTS TO ADEQUATELY INFORM YOU, TO INFLUENCE, ENGINEER CONSENT, EDITORIAL THOROUGHNESS, PERCEIVED OMISSIONS AND DISTORTIONS. CITE SPECIFIC INSTANCES. IDENTIFY PRAISEWORTHY JOURNALISM AS WELL. FIVE PAGES.

Paper due today: DO A CONTENT-ANALYSIS LOG OF PUBLIC TV STATION FOR TWO FULL WEEKDAY EVENINGS, FROM 6 PM TO 10:30 PM. LIST ALL PROGRAMS AND ENHANCED-UNDERWRITING SPONSORS, AND THE TIMES THE PROGRAMS APPEARED. UNDER EACH PROGRAM, WRITE A BRIEF DESCRIPTION. FINALLY, ATTACH A CRITICAL ESSAY OF THREE TO FIVE TRENCHANT PAGES ABOUT WHAT YOU SAW.

MIDTERM QUIZ based on lecture and readings.

Thurs., Mar. 18 - CNN and C-Span:- Bypassing the Networks

Preparation for today: WATCH SEVERAL HOURS OF C-SPAN. BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS WHAT YOU SAW.

Tues., Mar. 23 - Politics and Television: The Erosion of Democracy???

Coursepack reading for today:

19. Let's Overhaul TV's Political Advertising, Landay, TV Quarterly, Fall, 1992

Thurs., Mar. 25 - Fudging the Issues: How TV Treats Race and AIDS

Guest: Prof. Paula Treichler, U of I

Tues., Mar. 30 - Public Television I - Cinderella Without a Prince

Coursepack reading for today:

20. Public Television: A Program for Action, from The Report of the Carnegie Commission on Educational TV, 1967, pp 1-18; 87-99

Thurs., Apr. 1 - Public Television II: A Captive of Politics and Ideology

Coursepack Reading for today:

21. Ch. 6, The Elusive Long-term money fix, from "The History of Public Broadcasting, pp. 47-57

COURSE TIMETABLE - IV

Tues., Apr. 6 - Culture Wars - The Right Wing and Other Special Interests

Thurs., Apr. 8 - KidVid: A Struggle for Purses and Minds

Coursepack reading for today:

22. Battle for the VidKids, Landay, TV Quarterly, Vol. XXIV, #II, 1989

Tues., Apr. 13 - MTV - A Struggle for Allowances and Minds

Thurs., Apr. 15 - Change I - Media Wars: the Battle of the Techno-Titans

Coursepack reading for today:

23. "Ma Bell, Big Brother and the Information Services Family Feud" - John Rodden, Media Studies Journal, Spring, 1992 - pp. 1-16
24. "On the Hill: All Powder, No Shot," Stephen Barr, ibid. pp. 17-27

Tues., Apr. 20 - Change II - Media Wars: Toward Demas- sification or Concentration? Sovereignty without Borders?

Coursepack reading for today:

25. At the Front: Clash of Cultures - Donald McNamara, ibid. pp. 29-45

COURSE TIMETABLE - V

Thurs., Apr. 22 - Change III - Convergence - the Gateway to the 21st Century

Coursepack reading for today:

- 26. "The Future of TV: Where is Broadcasting Heading? Electronic Media, 8/17/92 -
- 27. "Smart TV," Forbes Magazine, 10/14/91 - pp. 188-198

Tues., Apr. 27 - A Visit to the Future - the U/I Undergrad Library Media Center

Thurs., Apr. 29 - A New Paradigm - A MassComm Policy for the United States

Coursepack reading for today:

- *** 28. Epilogue, from "Inventing American Broadcasting," Douglas, pp. 315-322
- *** 29. "Over There," Rex Malik, Media Studies Journal, Spring, 1992 - pp. 61-72
- *** 30. "Toward a National Media Policy," Leo Bogart, ibid., pp. 73-92

Team projects due today: YOU ARE MEMBERS OF A PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION APPOINTED TO DEBATE AND FORMULATE A NATIONAL MASS COMMUNICATIONS POLICY FOR OVER-THE-AIR TELEVISION AND CABLE IN THE UNITED STATES. PLEASE DEVISE IT

CLASS: Oral presentation of projects, I

30. Tues., May 4 - Redesigning the System II - A MassComm Policy for the United States

CLASS: Oral presentation of projects, II

*** I urge that this material be read earlier than called for so that it can be brought to your thinking in your development of the final course project.

A FEW NOTES ABOUT THE FINAL PROJECT:

The project will be carried out in teams. We'll choose up the teams early in the course, by lot. The earlier your collaborations begin, the better. Initiative in researching and developing material addressed in the course counts a lot. So will the skill with which you plan and present our oral presentations on the final two days of class. A useful reading list follows.

You'll receive some guideline questions and other criteria which may guide your thinking, and which your presentation will perhaps wish to address.

A Partial Reading and Screening List

Most of the texts below are available in the Communications Library, Gregory Hall.

- 1 - Allen, R.C., Ed. 1992. Channels of Discourse, Reassembled. Chapel Hill and London. North Carolina University Press.
- 2 - Auletta, K. 1991. Three Blind Mice: How the TV Networks Lost Their Way. New York. Random House.
- 3 - Bagdikian, B. 1990. Global Corporations Control What We Watch. Utne Reader, July/August.
- 4 - Barnouw, E. 1982. Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television, Revised Ed. Oxford and New York. Oxford University Press.
- 5 - Barnouw, E. 1966. A History of Broadcasting in the U.S. 3 vol. Oxford and New York. Oxford Univ. Press
- 6 - Boddy, W. 1990. Fifties Television: The Industry and its Critics. Urbana, IL. University of Illinois Press.
- 7 - Boorstin, D.J. 1964. The Image: A Guide to Psuedo-events in America. New York. Harper and Row.
- 8 - British Government Publication 341/91 - Broadcasting in Britain: Recent Developments, May 1991 - Contact: Gareth Hoar, Third Sec'y, Press and Public Affairs, U-K Embassy, Washington, D.C., 202-898-4283
9. - Burns, K. 1991. Empire of the Air. VIDREC. PBS/WETA, Washington, D.C.
10. - Carter, B. 1992. This Fall, the Barely Adult Set is the Object of Network Desire, Sept. 10, and other articles.
11. - Comstock, George. 1989. The Evolution of American Television. Newbury Park, CA. Sage Publications.
12. - Dayan, D. and Katz, E. 1992. Cambridge, Mass. and London. Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History. Harvard University Press
13. - Douglas, S.J. 1987. Baltimore. Inventing American Broadcasting: 1899-1922. The Johns Hopkins University Press.
14. - Friendly, F.W. New York. 1967. Due to Circumstances Beyond Our Control. Random House.

15. - Galbraith, J. K. 1992. The Culture of Contentment. Boston. Houghton Mifflin Co.
16. - Garnham, N. 1990. London. Capitalism and Communication. London. Sage Publications, Ltd.
17. - Gitlin, Todd. 1983. Inside Prime Time. New York. Pantheon Books.
18. - Gates, Gary Paul. 1978. Air Time: The Inside Story of CBS-News. New York. Harper and Row.
19. - Goodwin, Andrew and Whannel, Gary. 1990. Understanding Television. London and New York. Routledge.
20. - LaMay, Craig L., Ed. Media Studies Journal: Media at the Millenium. New York. Freedom Forum.
21. - McChesney, R. Ph.D. Dissertation, Univ. of Washington, 1989 on Federal regulatory history of American broadcasting. Oxford University Press, in printing.
22. - Minow, N. M. 1991. How Vast the Wasteland Now. Media Studies Journal. Vol. 5, No. 4, and other articles.
23. - Moyers, B. 1989. New York. The Public Mind: Illusions of News. VIDREC. Public Broadcasting Service.
24. - National Association of Broadcasters. Washington, D.C. 1988. The N-A-B Legal Guide to Broadcast Law and Regulation. N-A-B.
25. - Newcomb, H., Ed. 1987. London and New York. Television: The Critical View, 4th Ed. Oxford University Press.
26. - Paglin, Max D., Ed. 1989. London and New York. A Legislative History of the Communications Act of 1934. Oxford University Press.
27. - Riggs, M. 1992. Color Adjustment. VIDREC. New York and Washington, D.C. P.O.V./PBS.
28. - Schiller, H.I. 1969. Mass Communications and American Empire. New York. Augustus M. Kelley, Publishers.
29. - Servan-Schreiber, J. 1974. The Power to Inform: Media, The Business of Information. New York and London. McGraw-Hill Book Co.
30. - Skornia, H.J. 1956. Television and Society: An Inquest and Agenda for Improvement. New York and London. McGraw-Hill Book Co.

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31. - Sloan Commission Report. 1971. On The Cable: The Television of Abundance. New York. McGraw-Hill Book Co.

32. - Smith, S.B. 1990. In All His Glory: The Life of William S. Paley. New York. Simon and Schuster.

33. - Tracey, Michael. 1992. The Comfort of Enemies, CURRENT, June 22, and other articles.

34. - Witherspoon, J. & Kovitz, R. 1989. The History of Public Broadcasting. Washington, D.C., CURRENT.