

Scientists' Institute for Public Information

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November 17, 1983

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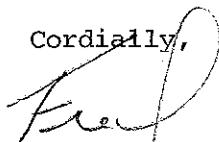
Dear George,

It was good to meet with you, albeit briefly, and I look forward to continuing our discussion at a future date.

Your point that commercial television does present science -- fantasized science, bad science, but science -- is right on target and essential if we are to consider how it might be improved. New science specials or science series a la "Discover" and "Universe," while probably useful for a limited audience, do not address the problem of pseudo-science digested daily by millions of television viewers.

I look forward to hearing from you after you have had a chance to consider further the seminar proposal, and I will keep you advised of discussions with the prospective participants. In the meantime, I'm enclosing the interim report on our Media Resource Service and a few other items which might be of interest.

Cordially,



Fred Jerome
Director, Media Resource Service

FJ:b
enclosures



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Proposal Summary for a Seminar on Science and Television

How would you like the biggest classroom in the world?

-- Edward R. Murrow, convincing David Schoenbrun to stay with CBS after World War II, instead of returning to teaching as Schoenbrun had planned.

This country has belatedly come to recognize that something is seriously wrong with our science and math education. The result has been a flurry of long-overdue media coverage and several much-needed proposals to upgrade science and math in the classroom.

However, virtually no attention on a national level has been paid to improving science understanding among the vast majority of Americans who have left school and who depend for the bulk of their information on television. This public has been described in a recent government report as approaching scientific illiteracy. The idea that it is possible to revive science education among the young, among our school children, while ignoring the sorry status of science in the adult community is like trying to light a torch in a vacuum.

SIPI proposes to organize a public symposium on "Television Coverage of Science and Technology -- A Look at Recent and Continuing Efforts to Present Science to the General Television Audience." Questions to be discussed would include:

- o Is television an effective medium for disseminating science?
- o Is the general television audience interested in science?
- o Can science be presented effectively through a prime-time science program of one hour or half-hour? Is there an audience for such a program? Can sponsors be found?
- o Can science be presented effectively as part of a dramatic series (such as "Quincy")?
- o Is science presented effectively as part of television news? How might it be improved?

Proposed participants include:

Walter Cronkite; Carl Sagan; Jack Klugman; Bob Bazell (NBC Science Correspondent); George Strait (ABC Science Correspondent); Don Herbert ("Mr. Wizard"); David Tsuzuki (Canadian Science-Television Host).

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SIPI projects approximately nine months would be necessary to organize a successful event. The cost of the organization, including press coverage and the publication of the proceedings as a booklet to be made available to journalism and science classes around the country -- as well as to the general public -- is estimated at about \$100,000.

Serious proposals for improving science coverage on television will be actively solicited prior to the event. (At least one such proposal, to establish a Science Television Center to seek out and make available scientists appropriate for television appearances, has already been put forward.) Indeed, it is to be hoped that this seminar will be the springboard for some ongoing effort in that direction.

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