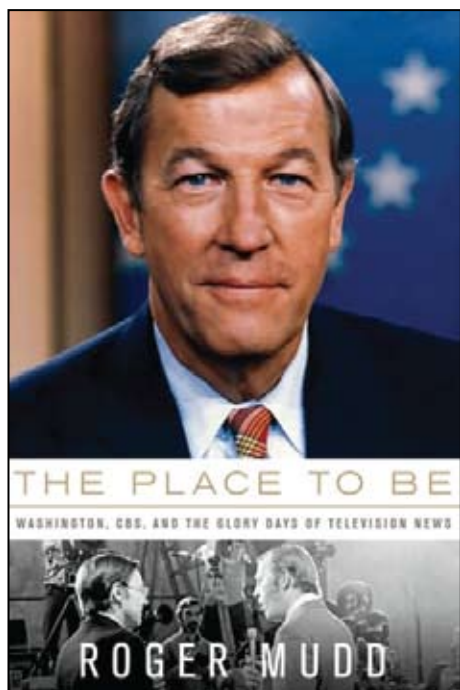


REVIEW AND COMMENT



The Place to Be: Washington, CBS, and the Glory Days of Television News

By Roger Mudd
Public Affairs, New York
(404 pages, \$27.95)

By **Bernard S. Redmont**

When Walter Cronkite neared retirement, Roger Mudd was widely viewed as the heir apparent to the anchor mantle of the CBS Evening News. It was not to be.

Mudd was a brilliant, hard-hitting reporter, with a rugged demeanor and an earthy sense of humor. He excelled as a weekend anchor and understudy for Cronkite when Walter was away. But Dan Rather eventually won the crown. Still,

Roger's luster has never faded, even in retirement.

Mudd won many distinctions during his television career. One of his best performances came at the time of President Richard Nixon's resignation address on television in 1975.

Four CBS stars were called upon for instant ad lib comment on Nixon's maudlin swan song. Three of them, who should have known better—Walter Cronkite, Eric Sevareid and Dan Rather—came across as almost sympathetic to Nixon. They were sad, sentimental, or perfunctory. Roger Mudd normally wasn't great at ad libbing. This time he spoke up brilliantly. He was cool, precise and articulate. Mudd reminded millions of viewers that nobody, not even a President, is above the law.

It was known that a nervous CBS management and station affiliates had been pressuring talent to go easy in "instant analysis," although many denied that corporate meddling was involved. The CBS chief, founder and owner, William S. Paley, eventually banned this instant analysis.

Mudd thought that Cronkite, Sevareid and Rather had "gone in the tank for management." Rather conceded later that he "had blown it, and had simply gotten it wrong." The relations between Rather and Mudd, never warm, did not improve.

Mudd also remembers "Rather's less than straightforward response" to signing a letter by the top correspondents protesting the death of instant analysis. Mudd says he concluded that Rather was "much too eager to please the bosses."

Mudd tells this and other stories in his new book, *The Place to Be*. He explains that it began as a simple memoir, but an agent warned

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that there would be no market for journalists' memoirs unless he "dished about the famous and powerful." He was told it would be a better book if he wrote about how great network news used to be.

The result is a gossipy, frank and witty account of "Washington, CBS and the glory days of television news." Those were in truth the glory days at CBS, when it was known to many, including its staff, sometimes ironically, as "The Tiffany of Broadcasting."

Mudd had joined CBS in 1961. As congressional correspondent, he became a star covering the historic Senate debate and filibuster over the 1964 Civil Rights Act. He established his reputation as a political reporter by appearing at the steps of Congress every morning, noon and night for the 12 weeks of the filibuster.

He created a sensation in 1971 with the tough CBS report, *The Selling of the Pentagon*, exposing the military's high-powered PR apparatus paid for by the taxpayers. Paley, however, was greatly irritated by the documentary, which provoked a storm of angry criticism from official Washington.

Mudd has won five Emmy awards, a Peabody, and the Joan Shorenstein Award for Distinguished Washington reporting, all marks of a distinguished journalist.

In the book, he is unsparing in his self-analysis. He frankly recounts his mistakes. One night he called the ailing Pontiff, Pope Pius XII, "Pipe Pocus." During Dr. Martin Luther King's 1963 march on Washington, Roger was so nervous about the assignment that he left the CBS broadcast booth and threw up in the boxwood trees near the Lincoln Memorial.

When CBS failed to give him the nod in the succession to Cronkite, Mudd walked out angrily, and moved to NBC to become the co-anchor of the weekday *NBC Nightly News*, and host of NBC's *Meet the Press* and for six years. Later, he joined the *MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour* on PBS for five "happy and rewarding years."

Mudd has a master's degree in history from the University of North Carolina and once a professor encouraged him to go on to a Ph.D., so it was no accident that he went on to become primary anchor for The History Channel and stayed for ten years.

Nevertheless, he says at the end of his memoir, "I never truly cased to be a CBS man."

Mudd gives candid and uninhibited portraits of his colleagues in that unique Washington bureau, matchless in quality, dedication and professionalism. The five in the so-called Front Row cubicles included Mudd and Rather, Dan Schorr, Marvin Kalb, and George Herman. Backing them up were Bob Schieffer, Ike Pappas, Phil Jones, Robert Pierpoint, Jim McManus, Bernard Shaw, Eric Engberg, Marvin's brother Bernard and many other strong reporters.

Mudd tells in sprightly and realistic fashion how the bureau worked—with all its pride and passion, and almost religious zeal. He makes no effort to spare or gloss over the big egos and petty rivalries—including his own. He concedes that he was "never easy," and admits he gave his editors and superiors "a pain in the neck and elsewhere."

Once at CBS Mudd was hauled on the carpet by management and almost lost his standing, if not his job, for making a speech at his alma mater,

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Washington and Lee University, criticizing the television industry for its “razzle dazzle” and the decline of its quality.

It’s refreshing to read Mudd, top broadcaster that he is, admitting that he “was not driven” like the others, and that many interpreted his independence and aloofness as arrogance. He says, “perhaps it was arrogance, because I believed that the values most journalists embraced, were, in fact, superior to those of our corporate owners, whose world turned on earnings, ratings, demographics, market share and spin.”

As the CBS congressional correspondent, Mudd describes himself as “prickly, at times sardonic, slightly self-important, unnecessarily unforgiving of others’ mistakes, reliable, trustworthy, knowledgeable, and regularly infatuated with the absurdities of the Congress in particular and the government in general.” One could argue that he was the best of the bunch.

Mudd tarnished his reputation with the top brass by trying to refuse a choice assignment as co-anchor of the Democratic convention in Atlantic City because he was devoted to his family and had rented a beach house for the summer. He assumes that the president of CBS News, Bill Leonard, remembered this 16 years later, when he picked Rather to be Cronkite’s replacement.

The cutthroat competition in the bureau often came out into the open. Rather at the White House and Kalb at the State Department sparred over who would cover Henry Kissinger at a time when he was actually running the State Department out of

the White House. Mudd and Rather were “professional rivals not only in the bureau but also for Cronkite’s chair,” Mudd admits.

Rather claimed Mudd was “rooting for Nixon’s impeachment” so he could look good, and Roger commented that this “revealed in Rather a calculating and suspicious turn of mind.”

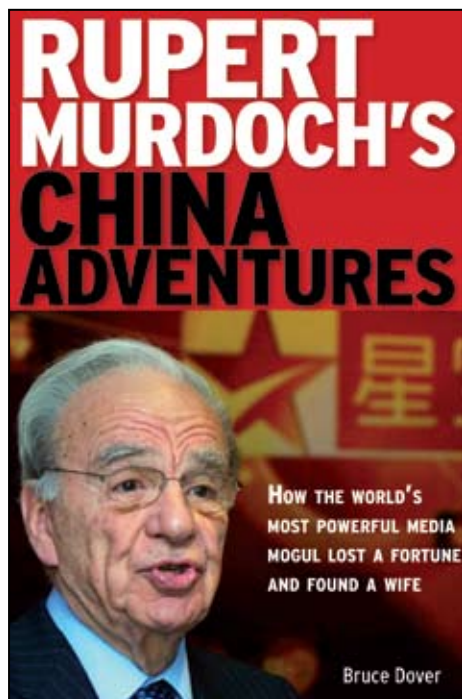
Remarkably, this band of brothers in quality journalism overcame their rivalries and ambitions to produce the type of exceptional reporting for two decades that is often missing or rare today. Believing they were the best, Roger says, “we tended to swagger, we were aggressive, we out-covered, out-wrote and out-filmed our competition.”

Mudd judges that CBS went downhill afterward with “the encroachment of entertainment values, the firings and the budget cuts, the sappy definition of news as ‘moments,’ the greedy takeover by Larry Tisch, the crushed and broken-hearted staff.”

All in all, Mudd has written a fascinating, nostalgic account of a bygone era, filled with insightful judgments about big-name journalists and politicians. It is the work of a first-rate reporter with character and class.

Bernard S. Redmont was a correspondent for CBS News for five years, in Paris and Moscow during “the glory days of television news,” from 1976 to 1981. He is the author of a memoir, Risks Worth Taking: The Odyssey of a Foreign Correspondent, and a frequent contributor to Television Quarterly.

REVIEW AND COMMENT



Rupert Murdoch's China Adventures: How the World's Most Powerful Media Mogul Lost a Fortune and Found a Wife

By Bruce Dover

Tuttle Publishing, Rutland, Vermont
(256 pages, \$18.95)

By William F. Snyder

The author was Murdoch's "man on the ground" in China for most of the 1990's and witness to the News Corporation chief's maneuvering in his quest to capture the massive Chinese media

market. In the mid-80's, Murdoch became obsessed with the idea of counting China among his global media fiefdoms, dazzled by the sheer size of the potential audience. Along the way, however, Murdoch and his minions committed monstrous blunders and numerous gaffes that put the prize out of their reach. The attraction of the Chinese media market cannot be overestimated, since Beijing alone is a city of 18 million people—more than New York, LA, Chicago, Houston and Philadelphia combined! China-wide, the population is lately estimated at 1.3 billion.

It is no wonder, then, that Murdoch, as chronicled by Dover, took huge financial risks and invested substantial personal capital (his reputation) in pursuit of the Chinese media consumer.

Murdoch's toe was already in the water in the region by the late 80's in a joint venture with China Central Television (CCTV) to build an international hotel and media center in which News Corp invested \$40 million. In 1987, he grabbed Hong Kong's valuable English-language daily, *South China Morning Post*, for \$230 million.

In 1993, Murdoch's first play to reach the Chinese TV audience was the purchase of STAR TV (Satellite Television for the Asian Region) from Richard Li, the first of many shrewd Chinese (and Chinese/Americans) in and out of government with whom Murdoch would attempt to dance. The price for STAR TV was eventually \$1 billion, far more than most observers thought it was worth. In '93, Li claimed 45 million viewers and big advertising revenues, both of which

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were undocumented. STAR TV was a potential pariah, however, because the Chinese Communist hierarchy was very wary of open satellite broadcasting. At the outset and in spite of his friendly overtures to the Chinese government, Dover observes, Murdoch was stuck outside the Great Wall.

As the BSkyB satellite service flourished in the UK and Europe and Murdoch emerged from a debt crisis, the News Corp giant jammed his foot into his mouth at a celebration of BSkyB's success at London's grand Banqueting House of Whitehall Palace in September, 1993. In a chapter appropriately titled "Whoops," Dover reports on Murdoch's almost unbelievable gaffe as he proudly proclaimed that George Orwell in his 1984 got it wrong, that new mass communications technology was not a totalitarian means of subordinating the individual, but a liberating force. Dover quotes Murdoch: "Advances in the technology of telecommunications have proved an unambiguous threat to totalitarian regimes everywhere. Fax machines enable dissidents to bypass state-controlled print media. Direct-dial telephony makes it difficult for a state to control interpersonal voice communication. And satellite broadcasting makes it possible for information-hungry residents of many closed societies to bypass state-controlled television channels."

Still smarting from global condemnation of the crackdown on the 1989 Tiananmen Square protest, (which was, according to Dover, largely orchestrated by fax!) the Chinese leadership, especially "the Butcher of Beijing" Premier Li Peng, took Murdoch's remarks as a personal insult

and, in Dover's words, "a premeditated and calculated threat by Murdoch to Chinese sovereignty." Later, Murdoch would say he didn't think about how his remarks would be received in China, as he was thinking more about the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall coming down. Dover says he and his colleagues agreed that "...word for word, Murdoch's remarks were probably the costliest ever uttered by an individual."

Within a month of Murdoch's big mistake, Li Peng decreed satellite dishes could not be distributed, installed or used anywhere in China. The Murdoch China dream went "poof!" The Communist Chinese Politburo established a team to deal with Murdoch and his new technologies threat. A principal member of the Murdoch watch team was Propaganda Department head Ding Guangen, who became Murdoch's arch nemesis for the duration of News Corp's halting and usually thwarted advance in China.

In succeeding chapters, Dover delivers an enlightening account, occasionally entertaining, of Murdoch's and his lieutenants' (the author among them) game of "Simon Says" with the Chinese bureaucracy, along with stories of a dizzying array of deals and intrigues that either came to naught or only allowed a baby step forward. The narrative provides some insight into "Old Grumpy," as Murdoch was dubbed by some of his staff, who eschewed any entourage and pinched pennies. No Murdoch bashing here, but no canonization, either. Dover writes that Murdoch expected "anticipatory compliance" from his senior executives and editors and rarely issued directives or

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instructions to them. An exception would be his order to “Kill the f--ing book!” to News Corp-owned HarperCollins, which had planned to publish a decidedly anti-China memoir of the former Hong Kong governor.

Dover’s “fly on the wall” perspective gives the reader a sense of how Murdoch operated, scurrying down one alley to a dead end, backtracking and finding a way out, and always believing that if he could get to the boss, he could make a deal. The boss, in the person of the Chinese President Jiang, was out of reach until after Murdoch’s American media nemesis, TimeWarner CEO Jerry Levin, got “face time” with Jiang, which sent Murdoch sputtering. However, Murdoch was eventually able to strike up a friendly relationship with Jiang with some positive results for News Corp in China, only to be rescinded or damaged by the ascension of Hu Jintao to the Chinese presidency, who resolved to rein in the media and reassert control. Dover recalls that in the early 90’s, China’s Great Leader Deng Xiaoping, commented on open media in China with, “When you open the windows, you have to live with the flies that come in.”

The influence of Murdoch’s third wife, Wendi Deng, is sketched in by Dover, describing her status as a well-connected, smart and attractive consort who brought some success to her new husband’s endeavors. The author also comments that she has assured Murdoch’s personal legacy in China with the birth of their two daughters, Grace and Chloe. Wendi Murdoch is in charge of the Chinese

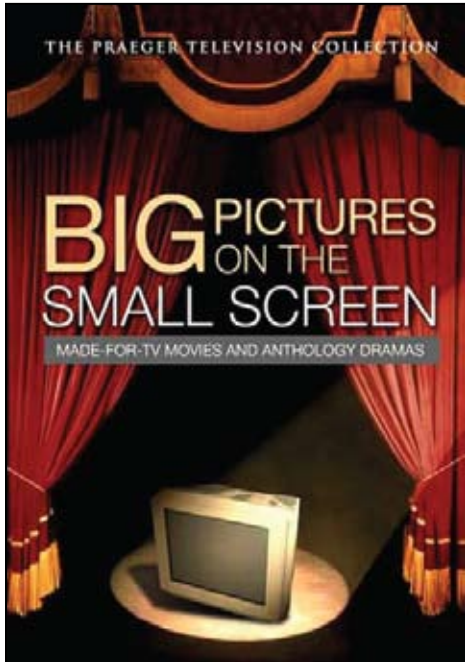
edition of My Space, but still regarded by detractors as “Rupert’s trophy wife” and maybe a Chinese spy. Dover defends her as Murdoch’s soul mate, but probably not the key to China that he needs.

Murdoch hit the Great Wall hard in July of 2005 when *The People’s Daily* proclaimed “China Bans Foreign Participation in Domestic TV Channels.” Murdoch had ignored earlier advice from a People’s Daily president, who warned, “Giants who seek to walk in China need to learn to tread lightly.” But, as Dover opines on Murdoch, “This was the Incredible Hulk on steroids—pumped up by his own self-belief and urged on by his advisers, he was stepping on toes everywhere.”

Dover’s conclusion is succinct: “Murdoch overstepped the mark—he became too impetuous, too impudent. The affair, and the adventure, has come to an end.”

William F. Snyder recently retired from the New York Network after more than 30 years of public service, notably under New York Governor Hugh L. Carey as his director of communications. . Formerly a television journalist, producer and anchor, he has served as a Trustee of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences and a Regional vice-president of the New York chapter

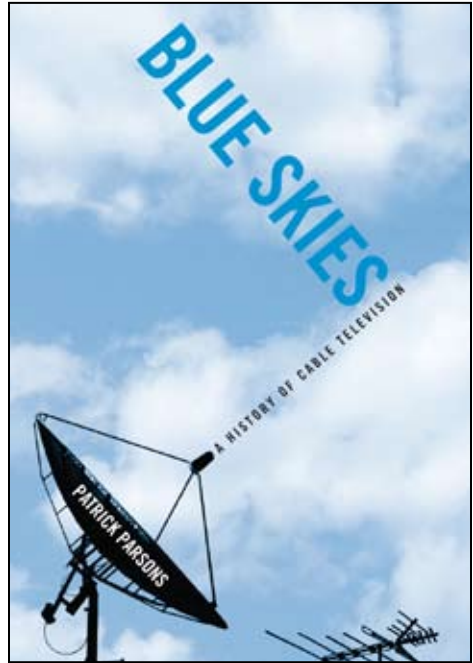
REVIEW AND COMMENT



Big Pictures on the Small Screen: Made-for-TV Movies and Anthology Dramas

By Alvin H. Marill

Praeger, Westport, CT
(183 pages, \$49.95)



Blue Skies A History of Cable Television

By Patrick R. Parsons

Temple University Press
Philadelphia
(816 pages, \$59.95)

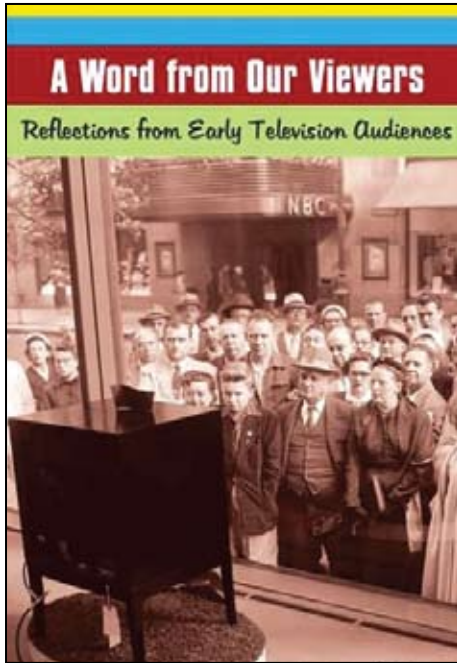
By Ron Simon

As revolutionary digital technology is transforming the entertainment industry, many books are being published about earlier analog eras that also brought dizzying changes to American society. These new works consider how broadcast television and cable also challenged our ideas of national communication, prompting major adjustments by business executives and audience alike. What seems so commonplace in contemporary culture,

such as the ability to receive distant and diverse images into the home, was the result of major struggles in public policy and consumer perception.

In *A Word from Our Viewers* Ray Barfield attempts to document how the post-war public integrated television into their homes and lives. Barfield is a professor of English at Clemson University and has written a similar book about another medium, *Listening*

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A Word from Our Viewers: Reflections from Early Television Audiences

By Ray Barfield

Praeger, Westport, CT
(158 pages, \$49.95)

to Radio, 1920-1950. He is very generous in allowing his “forum of veteran viewers” to speak directly to the reader, transcribing their thoughts without much critical or demographic interpretation. We are once again reminded how much television was an altering experience in the second half of the twentieth century.

The author solicited recollections from emails, telephone conversations and the increasingly old-fashioned face-to-face meeting. He cites members of his group as

those who constantly refer to the “TV set,” distinct from the succeeding generations whose TV is set in the computer and phones. Myrna McKee of Worcester, Massachusetts remembered how the novelty of television in the later forties created new family rituals: “Every evening two couples would arrive in time for the evening program to come on. The living room began to resemble a theater. Chairs were set in rows and Mama would make popcorn.” Everyone was on the move to neighbors, taverns or the department store to become acquainted with those tiny black and white images.

Barfield devotes a chapter to how families worked together to receive a signal with equipment that is rapidly disappearing from the American scene, “the rabbit ears.” The adjusting of the antennae helped to bring the family together as one member watched and another slowly rotated the poles in different directions. When someone discovered a way to make reception better in Milwaukee, adding aluminum strips to the rabbit ears, suddenly the whole community was investing in silver foil. Barfield nicely captures how the earliest years of television were an interactive experiment for everyone, as technical advice and programs were shared with the entire town.

Several chapters are also devoted to the viewer’s remembrances of programming, and this portion seems sketchy. I recently noticed, especially in the PBS series *Pioneers of Television*, that the era from 1948-1970 is now considered “the early days.” Traditionally, in such work by historians Eric Barnouw and his protégés, television history would be segmented at least into the live era (roughly 1948-58) and the Hollywood takeover of prime time (1958-70). Now those very distinct eras have been totally intermingled;

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Barfield and his viewers make little distinction between the live hour dramas from New York (*Kraft Television Theatre*, *Philco Television Playhouse*) and the filmed dramas produced in Hollywood (*The Loretta Young Show*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*). And those trusted TV watchers continue to perpetuate errors that linger in the poorly researched reference works. No, Douglas Galvin, now a college professor, Woody Allen and even Neil Simon did not write for *Your Show of Shows*, one of your favorite shows growing up. They wrote for later Sid Caesar series. And that goes for Larry Gelbart, too.

Mistakes have never been part of Al Marill's game. His encyclopedic *Movies Made for Television* is the go-to book for any information about TV single dramas and miniseries. His research has always been meticulous and his latest *Big Pictures on the Small Screen* gives a sweeping view of the dramatic special from live television to the cable universe. Like all Marill's books, it is chock full of facts and arcane information, but the bigger picture is elegiac. Once the television movie was the dominant genre of creativity and ideas. Such movies as *Brian's Song*, *Green Eyes* and *That Certain Summer* became forums where America could debate national issues, from racism to gender identity to war. Now that role has been usurped by the documentary, and the television movie has been marginalized to engaging character studies at best, with little national resonance. What was the last TV movie that you dissected with your friends?

Marill documents the growth of television drama from live television to the lavish and thoughtful miniseries of the eighties. He has talked to a wide

variety of talent, from directors Sidney Lumet and the late Del Mann to such esteemed writers as Ernest Kinoy and Loring Mandel. Truth be told, he even chatted with one curator, me. There is no meshing of the eras here; Marill is thoughtful and deliberate as he surveys the achievements of dramatic television in a very orderly, chronological fashion. He cites *Playhouse 90* as the apex of live drama, stating correctly that the series was a West Coast show. You would be amazed how many historians incorrectly place *Playhouse 90* as a New York production. Veteran writer David Shaw described one of the mainstays of live drama, especially on the set of *Playhouse 90*: the complex exchanges between writer and director. The writer was almost always "on the set or in the control room during rehearsals and blocking—tweaking the script." These live efforts helped to define what television seems to do best: the intense personal drama with societal repercussions.

In the sixties and seventies it was not the bond between writer and director that engendered the development of the television movie, but the network working in concert with a Hollywood studio (Yes, there was a day when the two were separated). NBC with Universal and ABC together with Paramount or Columbia helped to sustain the genre that could be escapist or socially conscious, but always something unique, with a different creative team and cast behind each individual project. In the eighties cable took hold of the genre, bringing a Hollywood gloss to the *MMFT* genre (as the author initializes *Movies Made for Television*). All told, there were 5,600 different television movies and miniseries produced through the

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end of 2006. Marill does not go in for any analysis about the dramatic evolution and changing content of the television movie, but in providing the high points of the genre, complete with credits, he is the master.

In standard textbooks, cable is always the second act: First comes broadcasting and then audience fragmentation. But cable has its own first act, and no one has written as compellingly about it than Patrick Parsons in his definitive work on the cable industry, *Blue Skies*. Parsons, a professor of ethics in the communications department at Penn State University, has published two previous books about cable, but not with the range and research of this one. With a sweeping narrative, replete with detail and explanation, *Blue Skies* illuminates the complex history of the industry that redefined mass communication in American society.

Parsons traces the origins of cable to the hunger for television. Pioneers, like George Gardner in Lewistown Pennsylvania during the early fifties, recognized that they could bring the network signal to remote areas via the community antennae television system (CATV). Cable began to make us one country under TV technically, and then in the sixties there was an almost messianic promise, which Parsons terms "Blue Skies." For social planners, business executives and regulators, cable held the potential "to become a broadband communications utility, spanning the country and providing news, specialized entertainment, electronic banking, electronic mail, health care services, outlets for community expression, and a local and national forum for political debate." Parsons spends the next 700 pages assessing how government, industry and the public modified the expectations and delivery of

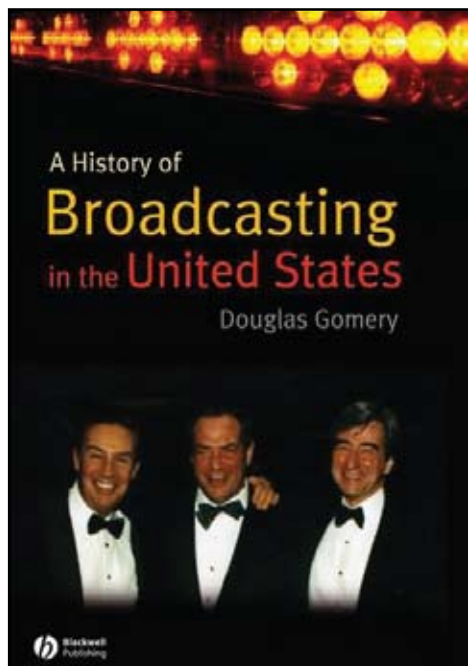
cable over the next four decades.

The headaches of making *Blue Skies* a reality began with construction costs. The cost of laying a mile of cable was approximately \$3,000 to \$10,000 in small or medium markets and up to \$80,000 in New York City. All the difficulties in Manhattan, including steam pipes that melted cable, almost sank the industry in the early seventies. Cable was saved not under the ground but in the skies, where satellite technology made possible diverse programming companies. By the early eighties such cable companies as HBO and CNN were thinking globally. Although Parsons does not concentrate on content, he documents how programmers reached audience acceptance and financial stability. As the new century begins, the cable industry's battle is now in the home, vigorously competing with telephone companies to provide high-speed access to the Internet.

If the past is prologue to the future, these three books offer different conceptions of the technological past. For Barfield, it is more nostalgic, where disruptions and difficulties are ironed out by memory. For Marill, it is a series of achievements, factual and linear. And for Parsons, it is a series of complex negotiations between invention and institutions. But the questions that ends *Blue Skies* still remains, ever perplexing and a little scary: "What's gonna be next?"

Ron Simon is curator of television and radio at the Paley Center for Media (formerly the Museum of Television and Radio), where he has organized exhibitions and seminars on the early days of broadcasting, cable and high-definition television.

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A History of Broadcasting in the United States

By Douglas Gomery
Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA
(357 pages, \$34.95)

By Kenneth Harwood

Professionals in television and radio often wonder how what we see and hear today came to be. What has been tried? What was successful? What might be successful again? Students and professionals alike see in this single volume how these media developed since the 1920s.

The title is the same as the title of a cluster of three books by Eric Barnouw (1908-2001), whose tale ends two

generations ago. Gomery gives us a sweeping view of nearly a century, while he brings us insights from the history of theatrical motion pictures.

A main part of the story is about the rise and fall or survival of radio formats and television genres. We tour some high points of program content, see media as businesses, and watch as causes and consequences of broadcasting unfold through the decades.

If there is a chief hero in all of this, it seems to be Lew Wasserman. The index shows Wasserman to be mentioned more often than anyone else. Wasserman's formula lets each hour of drama stand alone.

That idea was not in much television drama of the winter of 2007-2008 at the end of a 100-day strike by Writer's Guild of America. Viewers came back to programs that did not require remembering interrupted plots from months before.

The final paragraph of the text tells us that David Sarnoff and William Paley promoted "themselves and their favorite employees" as movers and shakers of broadcast history, while "their contribution never matched their claim."

Lew Wasserman appears to be more modest, "so most historians ignore his contributions." Wasserman is identified as packager of *Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge* for network radio in 1937. His saga ends with his approving production of *Law & Order* for network television in 1990. He is compared to a master director of film, Alfred Hitchcock. Wasserman is said to be the man "behind the scenes at nearly every major turning point in radio and

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television history.”

Time divisions of network broadcasting mark the main topics. We visit network radio from 1921 to 1950, hear and see the transition to television during 1945 to 1957, explore network television from 1958-1982, and find a summary of recent events in radio and television in 1982-1996. The epilogue traces the time from 1996 until tomorrow. A script of *Sorry, Wrong Number* from CBS radio of 1943 is an appendix.

Domination of viewer attention by network television broadcasting ends with the season of 1982-1983, when cable network programs come to the fore in the writing of television critics such as Tom Shales of the *Washington Post*. Cable spurts to prominence in the 1980s.

The fraction of television-equipped homes subscribing to cable services begins with one in five in 1980, and half of television households and more are subscribing by 1990, according to an appendix table in the third edition of *Stay Tuned: A History of American Broadcasting* by Christopher H. Sterling and John Michael Kittross. Tom O’Neill tells us in the third edition of *The Emmys* that prime-time cable-network programs begin to be honored for high achievements in the season of 1987-1988.

We learn in the chapter on network television’s social, cultural and political impact that “NBC was always the most progressive” of the broadcasting networks, as audiences struggled with emerging views of race and gender. We see network-television news maturing in the 1960s and 1970s with coverage of events surrounding

assassinations of civil-rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., and President John F. Kennedy. Television coverage of combat in Vietnam creates the nation’s “living room war” in a more graphic way than network radio chronicles World War II.

Editors of academic books and those of scholarly journals welcome Douglas Gomery as a leading historian of media in the United States. He writes for general readers. Photographs remind us of faces behind the written word. Endnotes offer a glimpse of resources in the Library of American Broadcasting at the University of Maryland, where he is Resident Scholar.

An editor of *The New York Times* copies for our consideration a list of the ten longest running broadcast television programs in the United States. We see the list in the *Times* of June 9, 2008. The index has entries for the longest running, *60 Minutes*, and the third longest running, *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Second place goes to *20/20*, fourth to *The Ted Mack Amateur Hour*, and fifth to *The Red Skelton Show*. We see no entry in the index for three of the top five.

Historical review of network comedy in this book bills comedy as TV’s bread and butter, just as it forgets the longest-running comedy program in network television. Gomery sketches a biography of Sheldon Leonard in the section on comedy, for Leonard produced *The Danny Thomas Show*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, and *Gomer Pyle, USMC*. None is in the top ten of long-running shows, successful as each program is.

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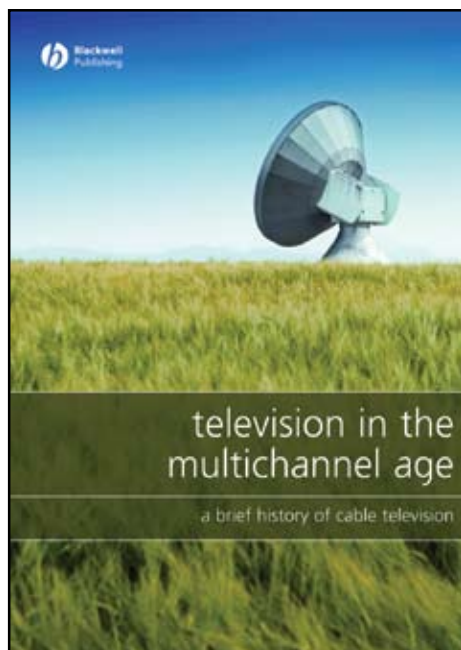
Perhaps a silent criterion of success today is long run in DVD and Web download after a program leaves its first run on the air. The Red Skelton Show amounts to little on that count, while Seinfeld amounts to much.

We recall the homage to Lew Wasserman, and we think about the homage to Sheldon Leonard. Then we begin to wonder about auteur theory in film criticism and film history. Auteur theory tends to put the director at center stage as the truest single author of a theatrical motion picture, replacing the literary tradition of writer as the chief author in another medium, the stage, for film is not stage. Are television packagers and producers truest auteurs of network radio programs and network television programs because radio and television are neither stage nor theatrical motion picture? Should we look for a brief biography of the producer of *The Red Skelton Show* in a history of television broadcasting in the United States?

Work of an historian is somewhat like that of an archivist. Both choose what we ought to remember for a long time. Both kinds of professionals seem to do their work as their muses require.

Here's a history worth reading. Producers, undergraduates in media studies, and fans of media history should be avid readers. Writer and publisher could add value by offering a DVD of text, audio clips and video clips.

Kenneth Harwood is an adjunct professor of communication at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he studies media economics and media ethics.



Television in the Multichannel Age: A Brief History of Cable Television

By Megan Mullen

Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA
(248 pages, \$29.95)

By Norman Felsenthal

Television in the Multichannel Age is a two-part book. The first six chapters comprise -- as the subtitle suggests -- a brief history of cable television. In these chapters, the author, a professor at the University of Wisconsin/Parkside, has done a good job of condensing 60 years of cable history into a tight,

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well-organized summary. The last two chapters take the reader from the present “multichannel” period to a future “multimedia” or “multiplatform” era best described by the all-encompassing term “broadband.”

Early chapters provide a simple but thorough explanation of signal transmission and a typical Community Antenna Television (CATV) infrastructure. The author identifies CATV pioneers Ed Parsons, James Davidson, John Walston and Robert Tarlton, but wisely makes no attempt to determine who was the “first” to provide the retransmission of TV signals that characterized CATV.

Numerous boxed inserts deal with cable-industry leaders, with various reports such as the Sloan Commission, and with emerging cable networks as different as MTV and Al Jazeera. One such insert discusses the multi-faceted career of Milton Jerrold Shapp from his boyhood interest in radio to his role as the founder of Jerrold Electronics, a principal supplier of equipment for the fledgling cable industry, and eventually to his entrance into politics and election as governor of Pennsylvania.

Pay cable is a topic that covers several decades and several chapters, from the earliest scrambled broadcast attempts in the 1950s to Pat Weaver’s unsuccessful attempt in the 1960s, to Charles Dolan’s creation of a limited-distribution HBO in 1972, and eventually to HBO’s success as a nationwide satellite-delivered premium supplement to basic cable. The role of satellites in the development of cable’s multichannel offerings is well explained, with

specific attention given to the emergence of various cable networks including superstation WTBS, CNN, CBN, C-Span, the Discovery channels, A & E, Lifetime, BET, ESPN and numerous others. The author tells how ABC, NBC and CBS all lost money on “cultural” channels but says little about NBC’s eventual success with both CNBC and MSNBC.

A chapter on regulatory issues reviews the various, and often contradictory, FCC Reports and Orders. Key judicial rulings including *United States v. Southwestern Cable* (1968), *Fortnightly Corp. v. United Artists Television* (1968), and *Teleprompter Corp. v. CBS, Inc.* (1974) are mentioned only briefly and could have been discussed more fully, since these legal decisions determined the very development of cable television. Cable’s principal lobbying organization, the National Cable and Telecommunications Association (NCTA), is also referenced only briefly. A fuller discussion of this important organization and its Washington-based rivals, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), might also have been warranted.

Must carry, syndicated exclusivity and retransmission consent are continuing issues that could have benefited from greater coverage and more specific examples. For example, while the 1992 Cable Act states that stations may require cable systems to provide either must carry or compensation for retransmission consent, the cable industry has successfully avoided

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financial compensation by substituting various “non-financial” benefits in almost every case.

The current cable industry, notes the author, can be summarized by three words: consolidation, clustering and convergence. Multiple-system operators have consolidated to the point where a few giant corporations – Comcast, TimeWarner and Cox – now own and control cable television in most major urban and suburban areas. These corporations are in a better position to negotiate favorable rates from cable networks and even to demand partial ownership of these networks in exchange for long-term carriage contracts that assure the cable networks access to large subscriber bases.

While municipalities stubbornly retain the right to individually franchise local systems, cable corporations have managed to merge or buy adjacent systems and create cable clusters that share transmission head-ends, centralized billing, as well as access and local origination channels.

Fiber-optic cables are rapidly replacing the original coaxial cables that initially built the cable industry. These fiber-optic cables have a much greater bandwidth – the capacity to carry more information – than do coaxial cables. Broadband optical fiber can carry telephone conversations and Internet computer data in addition to traditional television signals. This convergence of communication media has seen cable and telephone companies become sales rivals eager to sell “triple play” packages to

consumers who hope to benefit from such “single bill” convergence.

Ms. Mullen describes all of these changes and provides an excellent overview of both the industry and her book with the following observation:

“Looking back over multichannel television’s six-decade history in the United States and elsewhere, it is clear that this is a story of a ‘making do’ industry evolving into a ‘can’t do without’ industry.”

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