

1944-45 SEASON

4. We Want to Find Out First Where TV's Goin'

ON FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1944, THE FIRST successful long-lasting commercial network television program premiered, *The Gillette Cavalcade of Sports*. That evening, Steve Ellis, the announcer for the Gillette Razor Company's radio sportscasts, did the blow-by-blow description as world featherweight champion Willie Pep easily defeated Chalky Wright in fifteen rounds. The entire NBC television network – New York, Philadelphia, and Schenectady – carried that first program and the series became a Friday night fixture on NBC, lasting sixteen years.

The Gillette Cavalcade of Sports was an outgrowth from radio. Gillette had joined with Mike Jacobs's 20th Century Sporting Club in the late 1930s to present weekly boxing matches over the NBC radio network, which met with considerable success. In October 1943, NBC television began occasional sports broadcasts from Madison Square Garden for servicemen in hospitals, carrying such events as the rodeo and boxing. By mid-1944, it was clear that television boxing and wrestling were quite popular. Telecasts from Madison Square Garden, local semi-professional matches, and a few professional prize fights drew a strong response. With hordes of servicemen expected back soon from the war, Gillette felt it might be wise to expand its sports coverage and get in on the ground floor of television by adding a TV version to its regular radio broadcasts. It scheduled telecasts for three nights of the week: boxing from St. Nicholas Arena on Monday, wrestling from the same spot on Tuesday, and, the main draw, boxing from Madison Square Garden on Friday.

Gillette's commitment to weekly television sponsorship, coming so soon after J. Walter Thompson's initial entry into television over the summer, gave the video industry a much-needed shot of respectability among the hard-to-impress skeptics on Madison Avenue. It proved that advertising on television was no longer a farfetched fantasy for the future, but could be a daily commercial reality.

The success of Gillette's sports show (with its roots in radio) also showed that, while radio and television had ostensibly gone their separate ways a decade before when NBC ended its reliance on simulcasts, the two media were still inexorably tied. Not only did radio provide the funds to pay for television expansion, it also supplied ideas for shows. Programmers would look at established radio hits and restage them for television, hoping to attract a similar loyal following of fans to the new medium. Besides sports,

radio stunt and game shows in the style of *People Are Funny* and *Truth or Consequences* had the most obvious visual appeal. The format consisted of handsome interchangeable male hosts using the lure of cash or gifts to lead unsuspecting, eager, basically naive average Americans through demeaning yet undeniably funny shenanigans. In these audience participation programs, the antics were much more entertaining when seen rather than merely described.

The first network radio game show to be made into a weekly television series was *Missus Goes A' Shopping*. CBS had brought it to the air two months before the premiere of NBC's Gillette boxing, but because it was unsponsored the program was not considered as important to television's progress. Host John Reed King, a veteran of the same sort of thing from radio's *Double or Nothing* game, presented such stunts as a woman trying to slide a quarter off her nose without moving her head and a 250-pound truck driver trying to squeeze into a girdle. CBS producer Worthington Miner added some clever visual production bits to this generally undistinguished show and perhaps it was his touch that won *Missus Goes A' Shopping* rave reviews. One critic wrote: "This removes all doubts as to television's future. This is television."

Simple stunt and game shows were the easiest choice among radio programs being considered for television and were especially appealing to CBS (which still treated TV as chiefly experimental) and the newly established Blue (ABC) network. In fact, the first television program by ABC-Blue was a TV version of a mediocre radio game show, *Ladies Be Seated* (hosted by Johnny Olson), which began on February 25, 1945. Five months later, Blue was officially renamed the American Broadcasting Company, though it still did not have a home base for its television operations. It had applied for stations in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, but the FCC had put a halt to processing applications for the duration of the war. As a result, ABC was forced to bicycle along the East Coast, producing television shows in the studios of General Electric's WRGB in Schenectady and DuMont's WABD in New York. Among the productions in this jerry-rigged television operation were a video version of radio's *Quiz Kids* and a ten-week variety series, *Letter to Your Serviceman*, with Joey Faye, Burt Bacharach, and Helen Twelvetrees as headliners.

DuMont did not have a stable of radio shows to draw from, so it put more emphasis on formats specifically designed with video in mind. Instead of radio game shows, the network dabbled in travel-

FALL 1944 SCHEDULE

| | 7:00 | 7:30 | 8:00 | 8:30 | 9:00 | 9:30 | 10:00 | 10:30 | |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-----|
| M O N | | | | | | | | | ABC |
| | | | | | | | | | CBS |
| T U E | | | | | | | | | DUM |
| | | | | | | | | | NBC |
| W E D | | | | | | | | | ABC |
| | | | | | | | | | CBS |
| T H U | | | | | | | | | DUM |
| | | | | | | | | | NBC |
| F R I | | | | | | | | | ABC |
| | | | | | | | | | CBS |
| S A T | | | | | | | | | DUM |
| | | | | | | | | | NBC |
| S U N | | | | | | | | | ABC |
| | | | | | | | | | CBS |
| | | | | | | | | | DUM |
| | | | | | | | | | NBC |

logue presentations such as *Magic Carpet* and breezy cooking instruction such as *Shopping with Martha Manning*. Like game shows, these were cheap, visual, and easy to produce, though the subject matter of travel and cooking ultimately proved just as dull and trivial. However, because they were so simple, such programs proliferated for years on all the networks, serving as inexpensive filler with such appropriate titles as *The World in Your Home* and *I Love to Eat*.

When striving for class and recognition, however, DuMont continued to concentrate on drama and achieved mixed success. In the fall, DuMont presented the first televised version of "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens as well as the first full-length musical comedy specifically written for television, "The Boys from Boise." "A Christmas Carol" was well received but "The Boys from Boise" (staged by the Charles M. Storm Theatrical Company) suffered from the technical shortcomings of mid-1940s television. The cameras could focus clearly on only a limited area of action and so, on the small TV screen, movement seemed very cramped. As a result,

the life and bounce of a wide-open stage show was absent and the meager plotline typical of such musical-comedy efforts wore through very quickly.

All of the TV networks were anxious to develop a successful TV format for music because music and musicians were the essential ingredients of radio. Programmers assumed that, to a degree, the same would hold true for television. CBS launched its own modest efforts at television music with a special fifteen-minute solo program featuring Victor Borge, a recent Danish émigré, and a weekly variety show hosted by Paquita Anderson, *At Home*, which featured regular appearances by singer-guitarist Yul Brynner. Developing musicians with TV experience seemed vital because, in network radio, most of the big stars had begun as singers or instrumentalists, and even the comedy giants included musical bits or singing sidekicks in their comedy-variety shows for a change of pace. In fact, that fall CBS Radio promoted to top billing just such a pair of second bananas: Ozzie and Harriet Nelson.

Ozzie and Harriet had become man and wife in the mid-1930s,

three years after Harriet Hilliard joined Ozzie Nelson's band. While later becoming the symbols of middle-aged parenthood at its best, at that time Harriet was quite a beautiful young singer and Ozzie was a very popular dance band leader. The two gained national recognition during their 1941-44 supporting stint on Red Skelton's radio comedy show. Their relaxed ribbing of each other concerning marital spats and their young children made them well-liked radio personalities who showed they could handle comedy as well as music. When Skelton was drafted into the army, the Nelsons received their own show.

Billed as "America's favorite young couple," Ozzie and Harriet began their radio series on October 8, 1944, their ninth wedding anniversary. Over the years, their personal and professional lives had become intertwined in the public's mind, so their program was structured to continue that impression. On *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, Ozzie Nelson, band leader, portrayed a fictitious Ozzie Nelson, band leader. In both worlds, he and Harriet had two young sons, eight-year-old David and four-and-one-half-year-old Eric (known later as Ricky). At first, child actors (Tom Bernard and Henry Blair) played David and Ricky, but by 1948 the real Ozzie Nelson allowed his real sons on air to portray their fictional counterparts.

The Nelsons thus became another successful example of the "mirror of reality" sitcom approach, in which celebrities were placed into a setting in which their fictional characters were almost identical with real life. Top radio comedian Jack Benny had developed this style in the 1930s by playing a comedian surrounded by a talented supporting cast, who was trying to stage a radio comedy show aided by a talented supporting cast. In Benny's program, though, showbiz life usually remained the focus and what emerged was a very funny comedy-variety show about putting on a comedy-variety show. Ozzie and Harriet shifted the emphasis almost completely to family home life in California, with occasional nods to the professional work that made the comfortable lifestyle possible. Their program was really a domestic situation comedy about a very likable family and their friends and neighbors. *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* was a pioneering innovation and a tremendous success. The format carried them through both long radio and, later, television runs. It served as the model for other television performers in the mid-1950s, such as Danny Thomas in *Make Room for Daddy*, who wanted to place their show business characters into warm family settings.

Whatever plans the networks may have had for increasing the amount of music on TV were dealt a severe setback at the start of 1945 by James C. Petrillo, president of the American Federation of Musicians (AFM), the largest of the musicians' unions. Petrillo had become one of the most powerful men in American broadcasting by using radio's reliance on music as an effective bargaining tool. He had won fat pay raises for "his boys" in the radio orchestras by calling crippling musician walkouts during protracted contract negotiations throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s. Petrillo claimed that large raises were necessary to rectify the inordinately low-paying labor contracts that had been signed by his predecessors when radio was not yet a lucrative mass medium. He had no intention of falling into the same trap himself with television, so in February 1945, before any bad video contract precedents could be set, he decided to put a total ban on all television appearances by any AFM musicians. There were no specific negotiating points on the table, just the desire to avoid premature agreements. Before making any deals, Petrillo said, "We want to find out first where TV's goin'!"

The Petrillo ban, which lasted three years, was a crippling blow to television at this stage because it eliminated some of the most



WTOP's Arthur Godfrey covered the Independence Day ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery in July 1945. (National Archives)

popular radio talent, techniques, and formats, such as musical-variety shows and shows with famous singers. Without live music, television would never get off the ground. The few musical-variety shows tested on television after the Petrillo ban went into effect demonstrated the futility of such ventures without live musicians. Performers on a test TV version of ABC radio's popular *Breakfast Club* with Don McNeill tried to mime (or "lip synch") records, but the results were disastrous. Until the networks and Petrillo came to an understanding, television had to restrict itself to boxing, drama anthologies, cheap film shorts, cooking instruction, game shows, and, to a very limited extent, news.

The television networks had made little effort to establish any news service by 1944 because television as a whole was not yet profitable and there seemed no reason to spend money in such a low return area. Instead, the networks used theatrical newsreel companies as the cheapest source of news film, even though most of these reports barely qualified as news. The newsreels were generally light, upbeat, and oriented toward highly visual events such as far-off natural disasters, the christening of a new ship, or the finals of a beauty pageant. There was very little on-the-spot sound and no in-depth reporting. Instead, an announcer delivered breezy narration in stentorian tones while hokey "appropriate" music matched the action (a news clip of an earthquake in Japan would be accompanied by Japanese-style music).

In the 1930s, there had also been a similar scarcity of news on the radio, with most reports consisting of a few headlines supplied by the major newspaper wire services, or leisurely observations by commentators such as Lowell Thomas (NBC) and H.V. Kaltenborn (CBS). The outbreak of World War II changed all that as CBS made a concerted drive to become the top radio news service. Emphasizing on-the-spot coverage, the network built a solid corps of

battle-trained correspondents (led by Edward R. Murrow) who brought their sharpened reporting skills back to the States when the war ended.

The same sort of style was impossible in the early 1940s for television, which lacked the technology, personnel, and finances for on-the-spot coverage. In the first half of 1945, as the war in Europe ended and the leadership of many major powers changed

September 29, 1944

Gillette Cavalcade of Sports. (NBC). The first successful, long-lasting commercial network television series.

October 8, 1944

The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet. (CBS Radio). "America's favorite young couple" begin twenty-two years of weekly shenanigans.

December 11, 1944

Chesterfield Supper Club. (NBC Radio). Perry Como's first musical-variety series, in which he follows Bing Crosby's formula of easy, natural singing.

January 15, 1945

House Party. (CBS Radio). After a year as sole host of *People Are Funny*, Art Linkletter adds a second show, one with less slapstick and more interviews.

February 25, 1945

Though it has no "home base" station of its own, the Blue network gamely begins television operations with a video version of its radio game show *Ladies Be Seated*.

April 15, 1945

NBC Television Theater. (NBC). Producer Edward Sobol begins Sunday night television drama on NBC, with Robert Sherwood's "Abe Lincoln in Illinois." Twenty-nine-year-old production assistant Fred Coe takes over as producer in 1946.

April 30, 1945

Arthur Godfrey Time. (CBS Radio). Slotted as an unsponsored summer filler, the "old redhead" stays on for twenty-seven years.

April 30, 1945

Queen for a Day. (MBS). Distraught women vie for fabulous prizes by describing their personal crises (on cue). Jack Bailey becomes emcee of this tearfest in January 1946.

May 13, 1945

NBC sets up its own television news film department.

June 7, 1945

The Adventures of Topper. (NBC Radio). Roland Young recreates his movie role as host to a pair of ghosts.

June 15, 1945

The Blue network officially is renamed the ABC network.

July 2, 1945

Beulah. (NBC Radio). After a stint on the *Fibber McGee and Molly* show, the popular character of Beulah, a black maid dubbed "queen of the kitchen," begins "her" own program. Beulah is actually played by a small white man, Marlin Hurt.

hands, world events moved too quickly for newsreel orientation, yet the networks continued to rely on them. Television could only pretend that it was covering the news. On V-E Day, May 7, 1945, not one television network had its own news-gathering operation.

That day, all three networks managed to assemble specials on the end of the war in Europe, but most of the coverage consisted of live pickups of the celebrating crowds in New York City's Times Square. A week after V-E Day, NBC decided to get the jump on its television competition and established the NBC Television News Film Department. It was a lovely title, but all the department consisted of was a few cameramen who made extensive use of a 35mm camera "borrowed" from the government. For news anywhere outside New York, NBC continued to purchase newsreels.

On August 8, 1945, NBC did present the first network-produced television news show, *The NBC Television Newsreel*, but it was virtually indistinguishable from the coverage provided by the theatrical newsreel companies. For example, as the country celebrated the end of the war against Japan one week later, the program merely featured more live pickups of cheering crowds at Times Square. Since mid-1944, CBS had been presenting fifteen minutes of news on the nights that the network was on the air, but *The CBS Television News* relied solely on material purchased from the newsreel firms. Anchor chores on the CBS newscast fluctuated for over two years until late 1946 when twenty-nine-year-old Douglas Edwards became the regular anchorman (a post he held for more than fifteen years). Edwards resisted the assignment at first because he feared that television news was a dead-end occupation. In the mid-1940s, the only road to broadcast news stardom was on radio, which had made a celebrity out of Ed Murrow and, more recently, Arthur Godfrey.

Godfrey began his radio career as "Red Godfrey, the warbling banjoist" on Baltimore's WFBR in 1929. During the 1930s, he served a long stint as a disk jockey on CBS affiliate WTOP in Washington, where he pioneered a "natural" style of announcing. Godfrey tried to sound like a "regular Joe" rather than an officious announcer mechanically hustling some sponsor's products. He presented himself as an honest fellow who ad-libbed and talked directly to each individual listener, sharing just what was on his mind. The stuffy commercial scripts that shamelessly plugged sponsor products frequently served as a springboard for his comments, and Godfrey became infamous within the radio industry for his on-the-air ribbing of advertising. ("Boy, the stuff they ask me to read!"). The audience grew to love Godfrey and, because he directed his comments at the commercial presentation rather than at the product itself, their support kept nervous sponsors and programmers at bay.

National newspaper columnist Walter Winchell ran some complimentary reviews and this gave Godfrey a national reputation. Godfrey served a brief stint on the small Mutual radio network in the late 1930s and, in 1941, he secured a morning slot on CBS radio's local New York station. He handled this new assignment while still remaining in Washington by pre-recording the New York show. After finishing his early morning chores at WTOP, Godfrey would start all over again and record onto disc (or "transcribe") another music and gab show which would be shipped up the East Coast for airing the following morning. By early April, 1945, Godfrey was a radio workaholic, on the air ten hours a week from WTOP and sending another seven and one-half hours to New York. Though Godfrey was popular locally, the CBS radio network was not sure whether he could be sold nationally. It decided to give him a test run in the spring and summer of 1945, when the network's *American School of the Air* (a highly acclaimed educational show) took a summer vacation. CBS ran the educational



The funeral procession for President Franklin Roosevelt. (National Archives)

program on a "sustaining" (unsponsored) basis anyway, so Godfrey was given the weekday morning network show unsponsored. If he caught on, it might be possible to snare a brave national sponsor and keep the show going on its own in the fall. Just two weeks before Godfrey's scheduled network debut, President Roosevelt died.

Franklin D. Roosevelt had been in the White House for twelve years and he was the only president many Americans had ever

known. "FDR" engendered very deep emotions in almost everyone; he had helped the country out of the Great Depression and had led it to the brink of victory in World War II. Though his death was not totally unexpected—he had been quite ill for a while—it was still a jolt.

On April 14, 1945, the whole country turned to radio for coverage of Roosevelt's funeral in Washington. Arthur Godfrey, as top man at CBS's WTOP, had the assignment of narrating the network's radio coverage of the slow caisson parade down Pennsylvania Avenue. Like everybody else, Godfrey was overcome with emotion that day, but, unlike his broadcasting brethren, he let those emotions show. As the parade moved slowly by, Godfrey talked of the millions of people listening who were "getting ready for supertime." When the car carrying the new president passed, Godfrey choked as he spoke of the man who "just had such burdens fall upon him, God bless him, Harry Truman!" As Roosevelt's coffin came into sight, Godfrey broke down and sobbed into the microphone, "Oh God, give me strength!" It was a natural reaction for a man whose radio style was based on naturalness. Nobody else on the air that day better captured the way the country felt. When Godfrey began *Arthur Godfrey Time* on April 30, he already seemed like a close friend to many listeners.

Arthur Godfrey remained a daily fixture in broadcasting for the next thirty years, though he had no exceptional performing talent (his banjo and ukulele playing were only average and his jokes only mildly humorous), and his program (standard musical-variety with comedy) was different only in that it was ad-libbed. Years before the heyday of television, though, Godfrey had discovered the secret of longevity that would prove so important in the decades to come: personality. Because he was not tied to an act or theatrical style, Godfrey could remain on the radio day after day, year after year, and still not use up his material or overstay his welcome. People did not tire of him because he was an interesting person to listen to. He was himself.

Advertisers noted that, despite Godfrey's reputation for ribbing sponsor scripts, his approach to commercials was very effective. He was not just selling something, he was recommending it to his radio friends. Listeners enjoyed visiting with Godfrey, trusted him, and bought what he asked them to.

He was the ideal pitchman.

5. After the Storm

WHEN WORLD WAR II OFFICIALLY ENDED on September 2, 1945, there were fewer than 7,000 working television sets in the United States. There were only nine television stations on the air: three in New York City, two each in Chicago and Los Angeles, and one each in Philadelphia and Schenectady. Programming on all of them was spotty. Yet within sixty days, three events occurred which signaled the approaching expansion of television and the end of this torpid era of American broadcasting.

On October 8, the government lifted its wartime ban on the construction of new television stations and television sets. Over the previous four years, the FCC had received several applications for television station licenses, but had taken no action because most of the country's industry was occupied with War Department contracts. With the wartime restrictions at an end, manufacturers could start to gear up for the production of TV station equipment and home sets on a mass market scale. People once again began to take an active interest in acquiring commercial television stations and the FCC received a steady stream of applications, chiefly from major cities in the East and Midwest. Though the commission's own bureaucratic procedures kept it from moving very fast processing the requests, within a year television managed to expand in areas outside New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

Near the end of October, Gimbel's Department Store in Philadelphia held the first large-scale television demonstration in years. Aside from the RCA Pavilion display at the 1939 New York World's Fair, most Americans had never seen a working television system close up. More than 25,000 people came to Gimbel's over three weeks for a chance to watch NBC programs from New York and local shows sent out by Philco's Philadelphia station. Because the major set producers had not yet retooled for domestic work, it would be another eleven months before large numbers of postwar sets reached the stores, so most of the sets on sale in 1945 were actually RCA and DuMont prewar models. Nonetheless, the public's response to even these old sets demonstrated great potential for television sales and it brought TVs back into store showrooms for the first time in years.

In October, RCA held its first public demonstration of a brand new type of television camera, the image orthicon, the first major improvement in TV cameras since Vladimir Zworykin's iconoscope of the late 1920s. The image orthicon was 100 times as sensitive as the other cameras then in use. This not only produced a sharper picture overall but also extended television's "depth of

field." Previously, television cameras could show clearly only a relatively small area of stage or playing field. With the image orthicon, much more remained sharply in focus, so television producers could present indoor productions that occupied an entire stage, and outdoor events that were spread over large playing fields.

The first tangible benefits from the new camera turned up in the field of sports. The networks stepped up their interest in wide-open team sports. NBC began regular Saturday afternoon telecasts of college football games in the fall of 1945 and, the next summer, it made professional baseball an important part of its local New York programming. NBC also realized that the image orthicon camera allowed the already very popular one-on-one boxing matches to be presented with "crystal clarity." With a sharp new product to display, NBC and Gillette staged what was billed as the first "television sports extravaganza," the Joe Louis-Billy Conn heavyweight fight at Yankee Stadium in June 1946.

The Louis-Conn fight was heavily promoted in the East Coast television cities as both an important sports event and a special television program. By the time it aired, Washington had been connected to the East Coast coaxial cable network, so NBC added DuMont's experimental Washington station, W3XWT (later WTTG), to its four-city ad hoc fight network. Even though the program was an NBC exclusive, there was no reluctance to include a DuMont O&O in the hook-up because it was the only way the event could be seen in Washington. In the immediate postwar years, competing network affiliates in a market were rare, so any station on the coaxial cable would be offered a show if it was the only outlet in a new TV city.

The fight was a tremendous success, with an estimated audience of 150,000 watching on more than 5,000 TV sets, as Louis defeated Conn in eight rounds. Announcer Ben Grauer compared the event to the 1921 Jack Dempsey-Georges Carpentier bout which, as the first heavyweight championship fight on radio, generated similar excitement in its time. Tube veterans and television novices raved about the new clarity provided by the image orthicon camera. One reviewer said, "This is the sort of event that'll make people buy televisions, not the endless boring cooking shows that seem to turn up on every channel."

Gillette had proved its point. There was a huge potential audience for TV sports. For every TV set tuned to the fight, there were, on average, thirty people watching, many of whom were seeing an event on television for the first time. NBC inserted frequent refer-



RCA's new image-orthicon cameras allowed better coverage of sporting events. (National Archives)

ences to Gillette's weekly *Cavalcade of Sports* show, hoping that the excitement over the Louis-Conn fight might translate into a greater number of regular TV viewers. The chief stumbling block to this strategy was that, aside from sports, no other program format had shown itself to be a sure-fire video hit, worthy of a sponsor's support or a viewer's investment in a home set.

Network programmers turned again and again to radio for precedents and ideas, but not all radio translated well into video. Game shows continued to appear all over television, both as clones of radio hits and as original video productions, but none could capture a sponsor. In the 1945-46 season, television presented such short-lived experiments as *Cash and Carry* (with Dennis James), *Play the Game* (more charades), and *See What You Know* (with Bennett Cerf). NBC's suspense radio thriller, *Lights Out*, failed in its attempt to cross over to TV in 1946. On radio, the program used spooky sound effects and the power of suggestion to create masterpieces of audio horror. During a few test television episodes, equivalent video tricks were either impossible or too expensive. As a result, the stories in the television version emerged as much too tame to match the reputation of the original.

NBC was more successful with *The NBC Television Theater*, a weekly drama series launched in April 1945. Following DuMont's lead, NBC turned to the stage for inspiration, presenting drama productions with firm roots in the legitimate theater rather than radio. By 1946, Fred Coe had taken over production chores for the series, and he displayed a tremendous understanding of drama as both a serious and entertaining form. In its first year, *NBC Televi-*

September 29, 1945

NBC begins regular Saturday afternoon telecasts of college football games, featuring the few East Coast schools that will allow television coverage. In the first game, Columbia defeats Lafayette, 40 to 14.

October 5, 1945

Meet the Press. (MBS). Martha Rountree and Lawrence Spivak lead weekly, unrehearsed radio interviews with newsmakers. The first guest is U.S. Chamber of Commerce president Eric Johnson.

October 8, 1945

The war-induced freeze on handling new station applications ends. ABC officially files for three television O&Os, including one in New York.

October 25, 1945

NBC unveils its new image orthicon camera.

October 27, 1945

Harry Truman makes his first live television appearance as president: a Navy Day speech in New York's Central Park.

December 1, 1945

Army beats Navy (on NBC) in their annual football contest, the first event to be televised with the new image orthicon camera.

January 9, 1946

William Paley, president of CBS since 1928, moves up to chairman of the board. Frank Stanton is the new president.

February 12, 1946

Washington is linked to the East Coast television network. General Dwight Eisenhower is shown laying a wreath at the Lincoln Memorial.

March 1, 1946

New York City begins a final six weeks without television as NBC joins CBS and DuMont in signing off temporarily for frequency alignment. On April 15, DuMont's WABD is the first to return to the air.

April 15, 1946

The DuMont television network is officially inaugurated and becomes the first TV network to have two O&Os on the air, connected by coaxial cable.

May 9, 1946

Hour Glass. (NBC). Vaudeville comes to television and it seems to work.

June 6, 1946

Here's Morgan. (ABC). Taking advantage of television's visual nature, Henry Morgan, radio's reigning bad boy, illustrates his monologue about the intense light necessary in a TV studio by stripping to the waist—on camera.

June 19, 1946

Joe Louis overcomes Billy Conn in television's first "sports extravaganza."

July 2, 1946

Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts. (CBS Radio). Godfrey enters prime time, as host of an amateur talent show.

FALL 1945 SCHEDULE

| | 7:00 | 7:30 | 8:00 | 8:30 | 9:00 | 9:30 | 10:00 | 10:30 | |
|-------------|------|------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------------|-------|--------------------------|
| M O N | | | Wings Of Democr. | local | Televiews | | Gillette Cavalcade Of Sports | | ABC CBS DUM NBC |
| | | | CBS News | local | Missus Goes A' Shopping | | | | ABC CBS DUM NBC |
| T U E | | | KING'S RECORD SHOP | | | | A.A.U. Boxing Bouts | | ABC CBS DUM NBC |
| | | | CBS News | local | | | | | ABC CBS DUM NBC |
| W E D | | | | | | | | | ABC CBS DUM NBC |
| | | | | | | | | | ABC CBS DUM NBC |
| T H R | | | | | | | | | ABC CBS DUM NBC |
| | | | | | | | | | ABC CBS DUM NBC |
| F R I | | | CBS News | local | PHOTOCRIME There Ought To Be Law | | | | ABC CBS DUM NBC |
| | | | FRIDAY NT. Q'BACK | World In Your Home | | | Gillette Cavalcade Of Sports | | ABC CBS DUM NBC |
| S A T | | | | | | | | | ABC CBS DUM NBC |
| | | | | | | | | | ABC CBS DUM NBC |
| S U N | | | | | | | | | ABC CBS DUM NBC |
| | | | NBC NEWS | local | NBC Television Theater | | | | ABC CBS DUM NBC |

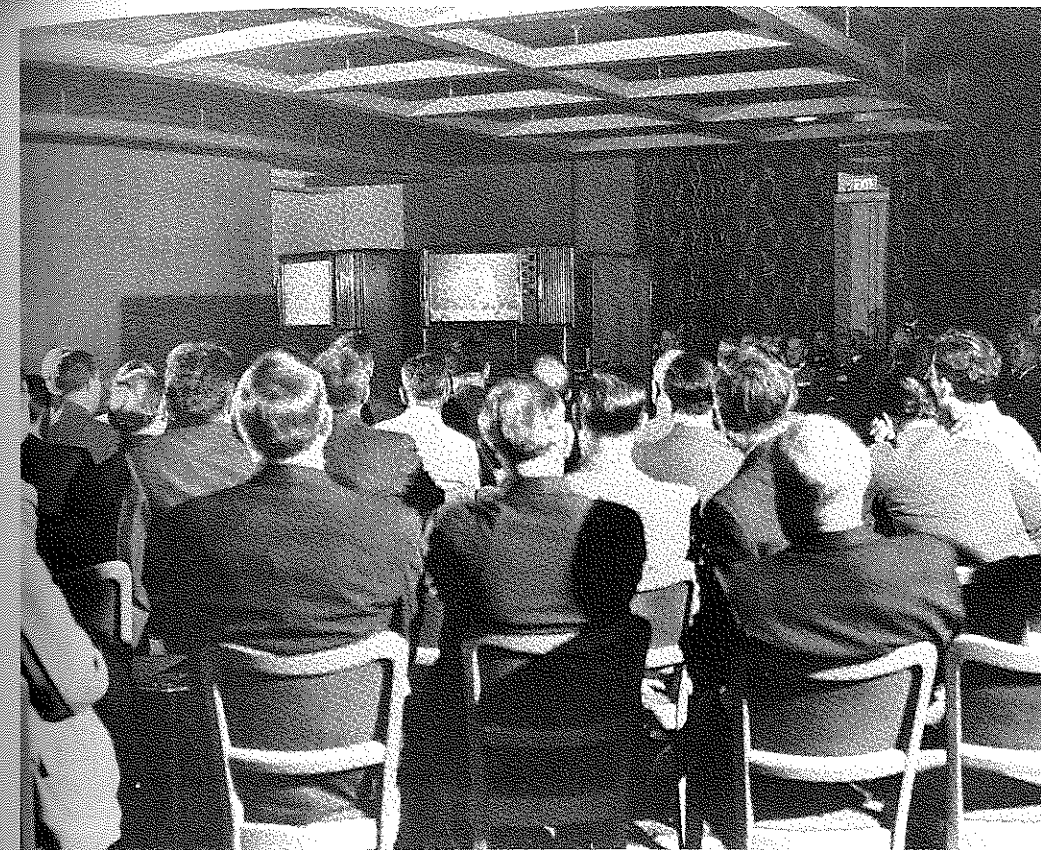
sion Theater presented: Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit"; "Angel Street," a ninety-minute thriller using the entire Broadway cast of four people (an ideal size for television staging); and "Mr. and Mrs. North," adapted from a Broadway show taken from a radio series based on magazine articles, with Efrem Zimbalist, Jr. in a bit part. Critics who had barely heard of television just months before began to praise NBC's television drama productions as being as good as or better than anything running on Broadway. Under Fred Coe, the performers, scripts, and direction were top notch and, almost single-handedly, Coe made NBC the leader in serious TV drama for a decade. He was NBC's equivalent to Worthington Miner at CBS, a producer with superb television instincts.

The NBC Television Theater ran Sunday night, usually starting about 9:00 P.M. (NBC devoted the time slot to drama for the next twelve years). From the beginning, the network had high hopes for the series. Though it remained unsponsored for more than three years, the critical acclaim given to *The NBC Television Theater* served as a reminder to viewers that television could expand be-

yond theretofore typical fare such as newsreels, games, cooking, film shorts, and sports. Just like Broadway, television could present high quality entertaining stories.

While pleased at the artistic success of its unsponsored Sunday night drama, NBC was still searching for a formula that could generate a commercial television hit. Comedy-variety and musical-variety programs were among the network's most successful radio shows then on the air, so in May 1946, despite the continued ban on live music by James Petrillo's musicians union, NBC and Standard Brands, one of the major advertisers on radio, gambled with the first big budget TV variety show, *Hour Glass*.

In adapting the variety format to television, *Hour Glass* took a simple approach: On each program a host introduced four or five performers (nonmusical) who stood in front of the curtain backdrop or a simple set, did their individual acts, and departed. The show was really nothing more than a series of vaudeville routines staged before a camera, yet *Hour Glass* served as an important experiment in TV programming. Though this pioneer television



Members of Congress gathered at the Statler Hotel in Washington to view the first "television sports extravaganza": the Joe Louis-Billy Conn heavyweight fight. (Harris & Ewing Photo / Stock Montage)

vehicle rarely could afford a "name" act, its weekly talent budget of \$4,000 was far higher than any previous video series. There was also money for better lighting, sets, props, and writers.

Because *Hour Glass* was the first program of its type on television, it started out ragged and uncertain. Singer Evelyn Eaton, the program's first host, had to lip-synch her records because of the Petrillo ban. During the show's first weeks, the pretty young women showing off the sponsor's products frequently forgot their lines and the ads often dragged on for five minutes. By the fall, the show had tightened up and such fluffs were rare. Actress Helen Parrish took over the hosting chores and she proved more adept at projecting her personality through television and catching the imagination of viewers. Parrish became one of the first performers to be stopped in the streets of New York City and recognized as a television personality. *Hour Glass* attracted a loyal following and soon Edgar Bergen, one of radio's biggest stars, did a guest spot.

Hour Glass was the only commercial success of the TV season, yet it lasted less than a year. The program was the most expensive television production at the time and there were still not enough stations, sets, or viewers to justify such a costly experiment. Standard Brands could not point to any dramatic increase in sales as a result of its television advertising and there seemed to be no end in sight to the stagnant situation in live television music. Just as important, the FCC's continuing indecision on whether to adopt new technical standards to allow color broadcasting was serving as a deterrent to new station applications. In early 1947, the program was canceled. *Hour Glass* had been just slightly ahead of its time.

Yet *Hour Glass* set very important programming precedents in its brief run and became the model for future television variety shows. It demonstrated the surprising fact that the simple vaudeville format—long judged passé on stage—seemed tailor-made for the home screen.

6. TV Gets the Green Light

NETWORK RADIO WAS AT THE HEIGHT of its golden age in the fall of 1946. The nation was resuming peacetime activities. More people had radios than ever before, and they spent more time than ever listening. There seemed to be an almost perfect mixture of news, familiar entertainment programming, and promising new series available. Network news operations, staffed with battle-trained correspondents, were given a larger share of the weekly schedule. Nationally known commentators such as Walter Winchell, Ed Murrow, and H.V. Kaltenborn had very popular regular slots in the early evening. In the ratings for evening entertainment shows, Jack Benny was number one, closely followed by Bob Hope, *Fibber McGee and Molly*, and Edgar Bergen. The strength of relative newcomers such as Red Skelton and Arthur Godfrey augured well for the future.

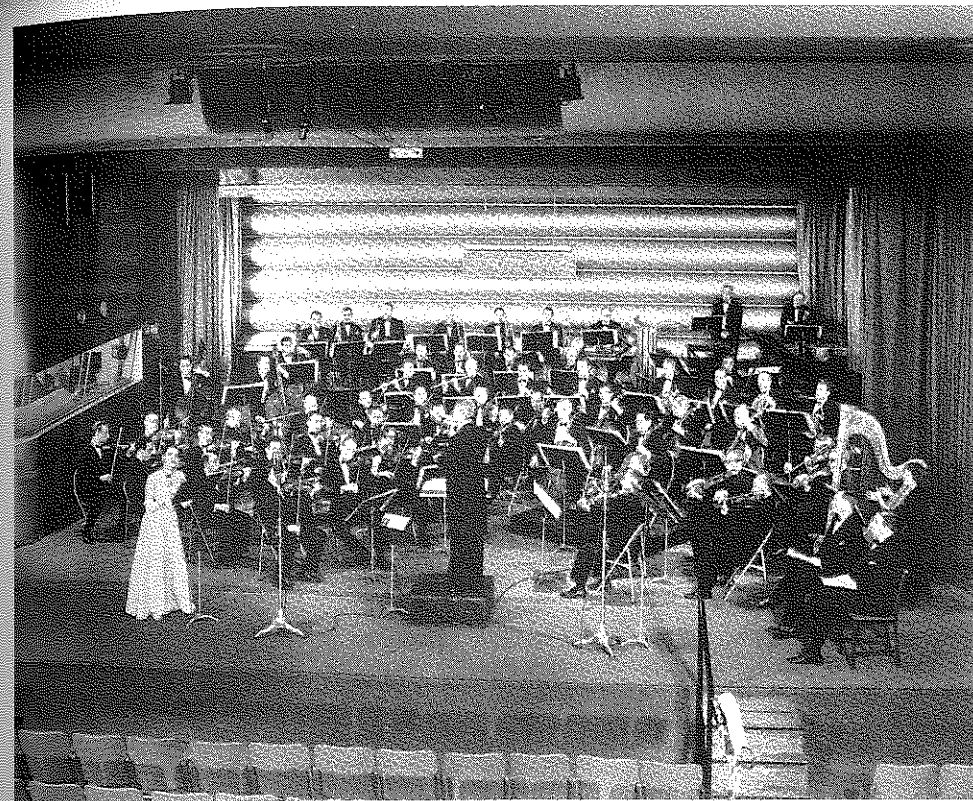
The NBC network was the unquestioned champion of radio. Through the early 1930s, the Crossley ratings showed NBC far ahead of CBS. In 1935, the Hooper organization supplanted Crossley as the most respected radio ratings source, and NBC continued its healthy lead in "the Hoopers." Even the 1943 government-induced sale by NBC of its Blue network (which became ABC) had not shaken NBC's financial stability and dominance in the ratings. Though stars such as Jack Benny and Fred Allen might hopscoth between NBC and CBS in constant search of a better contract deal, NBC always maintained the strongest roster of programs. As the fall of 1946 approached, NBC had claims on Jack Benny, Bob Hope, Edgar Bergen, Bing Crosby, Fred Allen, Perry Como, Red Skelton, Kay Kyser, Dennis Day, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Bud Abbott and Lou Costello, Eddie Cantor, Alan Young, and Art Linkletter, plus such popular continuing programs as *Amos 'n Andy*, *Fibber McGee and Molly*, *Life of Riley*, *DuPont's Cavalcade of America*, *The Voice of Firestone*, *The Bell Telephone Hour*, *Dr. I. Q.*, *Mr. and Mrs. North*, *The Great Gildersleeve*, *Duffy's Tavern*, *Mr. District Attorney*, *The Aldrich Family*, *The Kraft Music Hall*, *Truth or Consequences*, and *The Grand Ole Opry*.

NBC's schedule included several popular sitcoms as well as a few high caliber drama and music shows (usually financed by large industrial corporations in order to promote a positive company image), but the network based its ratings strategy on the strength of its line-up of established singers and comedians. NBC favored the variety format to showcase its stars and used them as hosts of comedy-variety and musical-variety vehicles. CBS's radio schedule was structured essentially the same way, but without as many big

names. At CBS, there were such celebrities as Kate Smith, Frank Sinatra, Dinah Shore, Jimmy Durante, and Arthur Godfrey, plus a smattering of musical and dramatic programs such as *Texaco Star Theater*, *Lux Radio Theater*, *Suspense*, *The Thin Man*, and *Your Hit Parade*.

In January 1946, William Paley, president of CBS since 1928, was promoted to the position of chairman of the board. During the war, Paley was away from broadcasting, serving as head of the government's Department of Psychological Warfare, and, upon his return to civilian life, he was eager to begin a concerted drive to move CBS ahead of NBC and into the role as America's number one network. Paley chose Frank Stanton, a man who had worked his way up the CBS corporate ladder over nine years, to succeed him in the post of president, and the two began their task by analyzing CBS's strengths. CBS had earned the reputation for superiority in radio news during the war by pioneering the on-the-spot style of reporting. In an equivalent move in the entertainment field, the Paley-Stanton team decided that, instead of merely trying to imitate NBC's approach to programming, they would give CBS a distinctively different "feel" from the competition. At NBC, sitcoms were generally passed over in favor of variety formats, so CBS began to encourage ideas for popular sitcoms, adding to the handful—led by *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*—it already had on the air. The network also attempted to break from the accepted practice of program control by advertisers and their production companies to produce some shows completely on its own instead.

In the early days of radio, the networks had willingly turned over artistic and production control of their radio programs to the sponsors. At the time, the networks needed the advertising revenue to fund their fledgling but rapidly expanding operations, and felt relieved that some of the production burden had been removed. The sponsors, in turn, did not usually hire the talent and organize the shows themselves, but instead contracted with advertising agencies such as J. Walter Thompson and Young & Rubicam, which actually put the shows together. Soon it became clear that the networks had lost control of what they were broadcasting. For all practical purposes, popular shows on competing networks often sounded the same because the same agencies had created them. With those additional parties in the production process also laying claim to a share in each program's profits, the networks found their portions noticeably reduced. Because this policy was very lucrative to the "outside" producers, the networks found it next to impossi-



In the 1930s and 1940s, network radio was the prime source of home entertainment, with high quality productions such as Bell Telephone's prestigious concert series *The Telephone Hour*. Here, conductor Donald Voohees (center) welcomes guest artist Lily Pons (left) in 1942. (Property of AT&T. Reprinted with permission of AT&T.)

ble to eliminate on established shows. The only way around the status quo was to retain control on new programs and hope that they became big hits as well.

The sponsor-agency combination turned out very slick packages that worked well in popular comedy, adventure, music, and variety formats. These were light entertainment vehicles perfect for showcasing sponsor products and big name stars. Applying the same standards to drama, however, tended to eliminate any serious or controversial productions. Shows such as *The Lux Radio Theater* usually settled for fluffy star-laden melodrama. Appropriately, one of the first series in CBS's postwar independence drive was an ambitious radio drama anthology, *Studio One*, under the direction of Fletcher Markle. The program began in April 1947 with a poignant and exciting adaptation of Malcolm Lowrey's "Under the Volcano," a masterpiece on the alcoholic mind. Subsequent *Studio One* productions continued to emphasize high quality writing rather than glamorous stars. The network hoped that such distinctive network-controlled programs, combined with its established shows and stars, would eventually push it to the top. As long as NBC had so many big name stars under its banner, this was about the best strategy CBS could pursue.

The battle for supremacy in network radio was between NBC and CBS. Far behind, but still turning profits in this golden age of radio, were the two other networks, ABC and the Mutual Broadcasting System (MBS). Mutual was the third oldest independent radio network, formed in 1934 by owners of a few powerful radio stations not affiliated with either NBC or CBS. As a self-proclaimed "voluntary association of independent broadcasters" (thus the name "Mutual"), the network allowed its affiliates much more local control over network programming decisions and did not even have any owned and operated stations. While the individual stations did quite well, as a network Mutual was always on very shaky financial grounds and could rarely afford high budget series.

Since the mid-1930s, Mutual had been playing an unsuccessful game of catch-up with the other networks and, in 1946, found itself last in the network radio ratings race, suffering the inherent frustrations of that position. Any hit shows developed by Mutual were inevitably snatched by the competition, so the network lost such programs as *Dick Tracy*, *The Lone Ranger*, *It Pays to Be Ignorant*, *Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge*, *Juvenile Jury*, *The Green Hornet*, and *Roy Rogers*. In the other direction, Mutual served as the dumping ground for network shows on their last legs such as *Lights Out*, *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon*, and *Sky King*. Nonetheless, even Mutual found gold during this era of broadcasting prosperity, chiefly with flashy but inexpensive game and quiz shows such as *Queen for a Day* and *Twenty Questions*.

The prestige program of the Mutual network was *Meet the Press*, a simple panel show with an important innovation. Previously, most radio interview programs consisted of tame reporters lobbing softball questions at that week's guest. Items of substance were rarely covered. In 1945, thirty-year-old Martha Rountree, a freelance writer, and Lawrence Spivak, editor of the magazine *American Mercury*, convinced Mutual to try a different interview approach, an unrehearsed interrogation with bite. Each week on *Meet the Press* an important, often controversial, public figure was grilled by some of the nation's top reporters. During the give and take between the guests and the questioners, important revelations and admissions sometimes slipped out and soon the national news services were covering *Meet the Press* as a legitimate news event itself. On one program, for instance, labor leader John L. Lewis unveiled a threat of a national coal strike. For a while, Mutual had toyed with the idea of entering television, but its loose organization and meager financial resources eventually forced it to ignore video altogether. *Meet the Press*, however, was brought to television in late 1947 by NBC.

The ABC radio network ran ahead of Mutual in the ratings, coming in a distant but still respectable third. Even though it was

FALL 1946 SCHEDULE

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technically the newest independent radio network, ABC's network roots (as NBC Blue) stretched back twenty years. As a result, ABC had a much stronger and more formal network organization than Mutual. Though it could not possibly match the depth of programming by NBC and CBS, ABC carried as varied a selection as possible, including comedy and adventure staples such as *Lum and Abner*, *Gangbusters*, and *The Lone Ranger*, as well as prestige programs such as *The Theater Guild of the Air* (later *The U.S. Steel Hour*), *The American Town Meeting of the Air*, and commentary by political gadfly Drew Pearson. Like Mutual, however, ABC turned increasingly to quiz shows for its most successful popular programming. In 1947, ABC had the most popular quiz show on the air, *Break the Bank*, which handed out the largest prizes (up to a then hefty \$9,000) and offered one of the most enthusiastic quiz hosts, Bert Parks. He displayed an amazing knack for getting caught up in the quiz itself, urging contestants through their paces, and sounding as if he truly cared whether or not they won.

Television did not enter into the overall broadcast picture very

much going into the fall of 1946, and seemed as distant a threat to radio's supremacy as ever. Few television stations were on the air, very few TV sets were in people's homes, broadcast schedules were brief and irregular, and there were next to no hits or stars to attract an audience. The debate over the adoption of a color TV system seemed to go on forever and there were moves afoot to discard all the TV sets then in use and shift television to a different set of broadcast frequencies.

Beneath this apparent weakness, there was a dramatic expansion building. Special events such as the Louis-Conn boxing match in June 1946 and regular series such as *Hour Glass* had demonstrated the public's interest in television. In September 1946, the first large batch of postwar television sets rolled off the assembly lines and into department stores. For the first time ever, interest in TV began to translate into sales. People began to buy television sets in great numbers.

The rise in television set production that fall was nothing short of phenomenal. In the first eight months of 1946, only 225 TV sets

were produced in the United States. In September, 3,242 were turned out. On November 4, RCA put its first postwar models on sale and, to pump up interest, NBC-TV aired a star-studded special edition of *In Town Today*, with Bob Hope, Edgar Bergen, and Ben Grauer. By January 1947, the monthly TV set production figure had jumped to 5,437 and, by May, it reached 8,690.

This sudden surge of TV set production added a sense of urgency to resolving the important technical questions that still faced the industry. The central problem was color. Because both RCA and CBS's proposed color systems used the spinning disk concept, they were incompatible with the black and white sets then being manufactured and sold. Since 1940, the FCC had been cautiously considering the wisdom of ordering the few TV sets then in use to be junked in favor of new ones designed for color reception. At mid-decade, however, the color question became entangled in yet another problem: frequency allotment.

In the late 1930s, the FCC had assigned television stations space on the VHF (Very High Frequency) band (channels 1 to 13), even though, practically speaking, this could accommodate only about 400 TV stations throughout the country without cross-signal interference. This was barely enough to support two national networks with affiliates in all major American cities and certainly could not provide outlets for three or four networks.

In April 1944, CBS executive vice president Paul W. Kesten suggested that both the color and frequency problems could be solved in one fell swoop by "kicking TV upstairs" into the UHF (Ultra High Frequency) band (channels 14 to 83). In UHF, there would be room for four times as many TV channels, and broadcasts in spinning disk color could commence at once. In 1944, with the war still on and no new television sets in production, the transition could be relatively easy. The few people who owned TV sets would have to buy new ones but, Kesten said, in the long run it would be worth it.

Most of the other important television powers disagreed and CBS was virtually alone in supporting this plan. RCA-NBC, DuMont, Philco, and General Electric were already heavily committed to TV stations in VHF and to the promotion of black and white TV sets. They saw such a radical proposal as harmful to their own best interests and an unnecessary delay to the progress of commercial television in the United States. Once the war ended, they observed, network operations would begin in earnest as TV station construction and set production resumed. CBS countered that color was essential to television's success and that the move to UHF offered the best solution to the problem. The network insisted that television was still only "experimental" in its monochrome stage and, to show that it was serious, CBS restricted itself to broadcasts on its sole outlet, WCBW in New York City.

During 1945 and 1946, the FCC held lengthy hearings on CBS's suggestion. RCA insisted that the CBS color system would not be ready for five to ten years, while CBS countered with a string of "surprise" demonstrations of progress in its color system, which it claimed would be ready by mid-1947, at the latest.

The psychological turning point of the struggle came at the end of October 1946, when RCA held its own "surprise" demonstration of a brand new color system that would make the CBS spinning disk version obsolete. The big news was that the new RCA color system was partially compatible with black and white sets. When a converter was attached to an existing set, RCA's system would allow reception of shows sent out both in black and white and in color. This meant that the TV sets already in operation could be kept and, with a flick of a switch, could be used no matter what sort of program was sent. RCA promised the FCC that, within five years, further improvements would make the RCA color system

totally compatible with black and white sets, and the bulky converters would be unnecessary. Without any new equipment at all, owners of old TV sets would then see color shows in black and white, and those who bought RCA's color sets could see black and white shows without any problem.

RCA's promised compatible system involved far fewer headaches for the TV industry and for TV set owners, but CBS's non-compatible system seemed the closest to being ready for mass use. When sales of black and white VHF sets began multiplying in the fall of 1946, it became clear that the time for some sort of decision was at hand. If the CBS plan was to succeed, it had to be approved as soon as possible, before sales of monochrome sets increased further. In March 1947, the FCC issued a ruling, stating that, despite the promises, CBS's color system was not yet ready for commercial use. The commission added that, in the meantime, there was no reason to prevent Americans from buying and using black and white television sets. This fateful statement relieved manufacturers and potential station applicants, who were worried over the possibility that the entire television system could be pulled out from under them in a sudden move to color. Though the FCC had simply put aside the pesky color question for the foreseeable future, this decision, in effect, made black and white VHF the

September 14, 1946

Professional football comes to prime time (on an experimental basis) as DuMont airs one Saturday night contest between the New York Yankees and Buffalo Bisons of the All-American Football Conference. Dennis James helps on the play-by-play.

September 22, 1946

Broadway Preview. (NBC). Fred Coe, with help from the Dramatists Guild, presents television "sneak previews" of plays under consideration for Broadway runs.

October 2, 1946

Faraway Hill. (DuMont). Television's first regular soap opera series stars Flora Campbell as Karen St. John, a young city widow who moves to the country and finds a new love. This vanguard effort fades by Christmas.

October 17, 1946

CBS begins televising sports (other than boxing) from Madison Square Garden, opening with a rodeo contest. John Henry Faulk, a new CBS acquisition from Texas, handles the announcing chores.

November 1, 1946

WCBW, CBS's New York TV station, becomes WCBS.

January 3, 1947

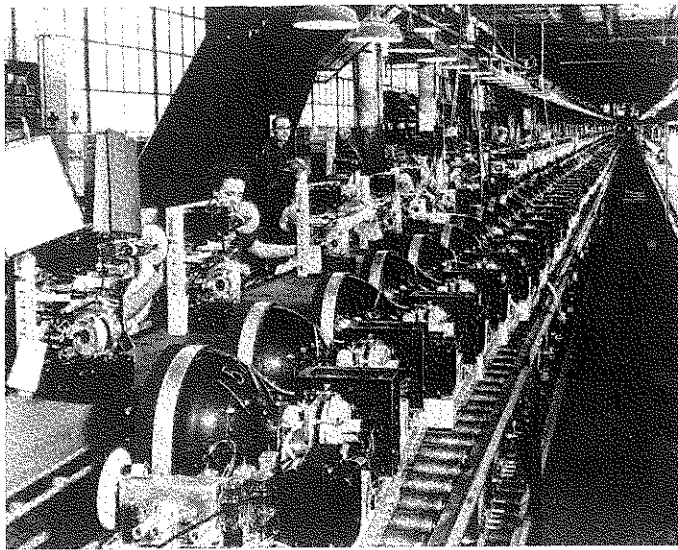
Television covers Congress for the first time, carrying its opening day ceremonies live. Three days later, President Truman's state of the union address before the House and the Senate is also broadcast.

January 9, 1947

ABC temporarily ceases television programming in order to sink its money into station construction.

May 7, 1947

Kraft Television Theater. (NBC). New York says "cheese" and Kraft smiles.



By late 1946, the postwar television production lines rolled at a record pace. (National Archives)

approved television system for the country. The path seemed clear at last for a rapid expansion in TV growth because, intended or not, the FCC had given commercial TV the green light.

Almost immediately following the FCC decision, applications for stations began pouring in. Within a few months, the number of stations on the air more than doubled. Most of the new licenses were for cities that previously had no TV stations at all, such as St. Louis, Detroit, Baltimore, Milwaukee, and Cleveland.

As more TV stations signed on across the country, local non-network programs began to reach a fair level of quality and talented local personalities began to emerge from cities other than New York. By mid-1947, WBKB, in still far-off Chicago, had developed several performers who would later become network stars. Young Dave Garroway, a former NBC page, added a touch of humor to *Remember the Days*, a weekly thirty-minute sustaining series that consisted of old silent films. As host, Garroway not only read the subtitles but also gently poked fun at the stylized flicks. One reviewer thought that the show was too cute, asking, "Won't we be doing the same thing to 1947 television one day?" A few months later, Fran Allison, who played the gossipy Aunt Fannie on radio's *Breakfast Club*, and Burr Tillstrom, a puppeteer, began a daily kiddie show on WBKB, *Junior Jamboree* (sponsored by RCA). The program focused on Fran's interaction with a group of puppet characters, especially Kukla, a well meaning little bald man, and Ollie, a scatterbrained dragon. Allison's gentle good humor and Tillstrom's imaginative puppet characterizations made the team regional celebrities and soon won *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* a network slot on NBC.

By the end of 1947, Washington, Philadelphia, and Baltimore had joined New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles in having more than one TV station on the air. Stations connected to the East Coast coaxial cable began establishing regular network affiliations, though most stations continued to accept programs from two, three, or even four networks-for the time being. With its long head start in video programming, NBC was the most successful in signing up TV affiliates.

CBS was the apparent loser in the color TV shuffle. Expecting its color system to be approved and television "kicked upstairs" to UHF, the network had been lax in developing regular programming, seeking out sponsors, signing up TV affiliates, and applying for other owned and operated TV stations outside New York City.

Grudgingly accepting the fact that black and white VHF TV was here to stay—at least for a few years—CBS applied for a Chicago O&O.

Two months after the FCC's "no go" to color, CBS began an ill-fated drive to make up for lost time in TV programming and to leapfrog into the TV lead by adopting a distinctively different "feel" from the competition. The network closed its TV studios at Grand Central Station in favor of all on-location ("remote") and filmed broadcasts. CBS announced plans to sharply increase, in the fall of 1947, telecasts of live sports events such as college football, basketball, hockey, track and field, and the rodeo. In addition, cooking shows would originate from famous restaurants, drama shows would come from theaters, and children's shows would be staged in parks throughout New York City. The Douglas Edwards news broadcasts would continue, but with Edwards relegated to the role of off-screen newsreel narrator.

CBS touted its outside-the-studio broadcasts as a great leap forward in television. The other networks merely televised the inside of a studio, which, it was said, was too much like radio with pictures. CBS promised to bring the world (or at least New York City) directly into viewers' living rooms. CBS's move was, at best, ill-timed and highly unrealistic. Television's bulky technology was not yet ready for extensive out-of-the-studio broadcasting and, with little preparation, CBS had nothing special to offer potential sponsors and potential viewers with its new format.

DuMont adopted a much more reasonable middle ground. The network also could not match NBC's in-studio expertise, but, unlike CBS, DuMont launched a more limited series of remote telecasts. The network copied NBC's already successful prime time sporting schedule and began an extensive series of on-location sports telecasts in the fall of 1946, with a series of Monday-Wednesday-Friday boxing and wrestling matches from New York's Jamaica Arena. NBC had aired a number of wrestling matches, but it had always concentrated on boxing, so DuMont emphasized wrestling, and eventually turned it into a national fad. Like boxing, wrestling was confined to a small space and limited to just a few contestants at a time, which made it ideal for television coverage. Unlike boxing, wrestling had been a sport of only marginal interest until the arrival of television. Very quickly, the promoters of wrestling began to emphasize the theatrical values of the contests above the sport itself, which TV insiders soon nicknamed "flying beef." Before and after matches, the wrestlers threatened each other in pre-planned interviews and confrontations. Once in the ring, such colorful characters as Haystack Calhoun, Gorilla Monsoon, and Gorgeous George played up every stomp, scream, and painful grimace to the audience for maximum effect. DuMont's ringside wrestling announcers patterned their actions to fit this style. Dennis James added such touches as snapping chicken bones next to his microphone when a wrestler was put in a particularly painful-looking hold. As wrestling grew increasingly popular, James became known for his trademark phrase, "OK, Mother" which he used to begin explanations of the sport directed toward housewives in the audience.

DuMont's on-location sports programming was a rousing success and wrestling remained a part of the network's schedule through the next decade. Unlike CBS, DuMont continued to try in-studio program formats as well, achieving mixed results. *Faraway Hill*, network television's first soap opera series, was short-lived, but *Small Fry Club*, starring "Big Brother" Bob Emery, became television's first hit children's show. By April 1947, *Small Fry Club* aired Monday through Friday, 7:00-7:30 P.M., beginning the television day with kiddie games and clowns for the small fry lucky enough to have a TV set at home. (After a successful five-

May 11, 1947

CBS closes its Grand Central Station studios and begins a schedule of all-remote and film telecasts.

June 1, 1947

The Jack Paar Show. (NBC Radio). One of the "post-war" generation of comics, Paar begins a summer substitute series for Jack Benny and then, in the fall, moves over to ABC Radio for his own regular weekly program.

June 8, 1947

Lassie. (ABC Radio). The perspicacious canine travels from the movies to radio.

June 16, 1947

News from Washington. (DuMont). The first nightly network television news show. Walter Compton is anchor, but the program lasts only eleven months.

June 29, 1947

Strike It Rich. (CBS Radio). Warren Hull is emcee of "the quiz show with a heart." Poor unfortunates plead for help and the studio audience decides which ones get the loot.

July 6, 1947

Candid Microphone. (ABC Radio). Allen Funt starts sticking his nose into other people's business.

year network run, Emery relocated to a local Boston station where he remained a comforting uncle figure to yet another generation of children.)

NBC continued to televise college football on Saturday afternoons and boxing matches in the evening two nights a week, but its primary focus remained on attracting advertisers for in-studio programming. The Borden Milk company sponsored a series of variety programs that served as try-outs (or "pilots") for formats that might work on TV, all without live music (the Petrillo ban was still in effect). Fred Coe beefed up the Sunday night drama show with assistance from the Dramatist's Guild. For a while, the lead-in to the drama slot was *Geographically Speaking*, starring world traveler Mrs. Carveth Wells, who narrated films of her world trips. The show ended abruptly after twenty-six weeks when she ran out of films.

The radio talk show duo of Tex and Jinx made a more conscious effort to adapt to television, experimenting with three different program formats that season on NBC. John Reagan "Tex" McCrary (newspaperman-turned-commentator) and his wife, Eugenia Lincoln "Jinx" Falkenburg (tennis player-swimmer-glamour girl), had been on NBC's local New York radio outlet since early 1946, leading a low-key, intelligent celebrity talk show program. On April 27, 1947, they brought their successful format to television in *At Home with Tex and Jinx*. From a studio set resembling a fancy apartment, Tex and Jinx entertained their famous friends and showed home movies. (Apparently they took trips, too.)

During the summer of 1947, Tex and Jinx took a brief vacation, but NBC wanted to continue their Sunday evening broadcasts, so, in spite of the network's preference for live programming, a filmed

series was shown in its place. The new format, *Ringside with Tex and Jinx*, moved the show's locale from the couple's "apartment" to their favorite club haunts, where they continued to hobnob with their celebrity chums.

The success of the duo's Sunday evening program earned them an additional assignment, the first commercial network daytime television program. On May 16, *The Swift Home Service Club* began a one-year residency on NBC, Friday from 1:00 to 1:30 P.M. Geared toward the housewife audience, the show featured Tex and Jinx (especially Jinx) giving tips on interior decorating and home economics, while their ever-present celebrity friends tossed *bons mots*. Apparently Tex's chief responsibility was to sample, with relish, Swift's taste-tempting meat products specially prepared for the show. Because television broadcasting still required enormous amounts of light, the resulting heat could wreak havoc on the food. The mayonnaise went bad often enough that an off screen bucket was kept close at hand so that Tex could immediately vomit, if necessary.

The longest-running and most important program that NBC brought out in the 1946-47 season was *The Kraft Television Theater*, which began in May. NBC and Fred Coe had been staging weekly unsponsored dramas for some time, but the Kraft dramas were different. Not only were they sponsored by a major national concern, they were also produced by an outside firm, the J. Walter Thompson agency. All the early NBC and CBS video productions were "in-house," so it came as quite a surprise to the industry that NBC would allow its first major sponsored TV drama series to be run by outsiders.

Kraft and J. Walter Thompson had been long-time partners in staging *The Kraft Music Hall* on radio, so the television arrangement made good business sense. It also offered NBC a ready-made sponsored vehicle to plug into its slowly expanding schedule. If the Kraft series caught on, the network might have an easier time finding support for its own drama series. In spite of network fears that the agency would turn out a slick and shallow *Lux Radio Theater* style drama series, *The Kraft Television Theater* maintained a remarkably consistent, high quality approach over the years (rarely stupendous but generally quite good). Though the first presentation of the series, the slightly dull melodrama "Double Door," did not receive rave notices, another part of the program did.

Kraft's new McLaren's Imperial Cheese had been introduced to the market in early 1947 but, at one dollar a pound, was doing quite poorly in sales. Kraft subscribed to the notion that television might be an excellent advertising medium on a par with radio and decided to use Imperial Cheese as the acid test. For the first two weeks, all of the ads run on Kraft's drama show were for McLaren's Imperial Cheese. For two weeks, pretty model Dana Wyatt demonstrated the tastability of the cheese. For two weeks, the ever-convincing voice of Ed Herlihy expounded on the wonders of this new cheese marvel. By the third week, every package of McLaren's Imperial Cheese available in New York City had been sold.

Now this was news! Mrs. Carveth Wells could show all the travelogues she wanted, but this was something to make Madison Avenue sit up and take notice. Everyone had always suspected that television, with its combined visual and aural appeal, would probably be the "biggest ad medium yet," but until Kraft, nobody had proved it.

7. Vaudeville Is Back

IN SEPTEMBER 1926, RCA PLACED A FULL PAGE AD in the nation's major newspapers announcing the birth of NBC and the beginning of network radio broadcasting, saying, "The day has gone by when the radio receiving set is a plaything. It must now be an instrument of service ... The purpose of [NBC] will be to provide the best program[ing] available for broadcasting in the United States."

Only two years later, NBC began operating an experimental television station. However, it was not until January 5, 1948, that the followup ad appeared, announcing network TV under the headline "1948-TELEVISION'S YEAR." The ad touted, "an exciting promise is now an actual service to the American home. After twenty years of preparation, the NBC television network is open for business."

NBC proudly spoke of the four TV stations already programming its network material, with stations in Boston and Baltimore to open soon. In 1947, it was pointed out, the number of TV sets operating in America had increased by more than 2,000 percent, from 8,000 to 170,000.

The ad further noted, "Nineteen forty-seven marked the end of television's interim period. Nineteen forty-eight marks TV's appearance as a major force."

In almost awe-struck tones the ad concluded with the declaration, "The greatest means of mass communications in the world is with us."

The excitement that followed Kraft's successful entry into TV in the summer of 1947 had continued into the fall as more and more sponsors invested money in television entertainment. Throughout the fall, the networks launched new television vehicles and the quality of their programming began to rise noticeably. In October, DuMont presented gossip columnist Jack Eigen in a nightclub setting, surrounded by glamour girls. For fifteen minutes, Eigen talked about the latest showbiz rumors and chatted with whatever celebrity he could corral. (Both Frank Sinatra and Fred Allen were on the show, but only via a telephone hookup.) In November, NBC brought Mutual radio's popular *Meet the Press* interview program to TV, after convincing a sponsor, General Mills, that the show was not too controversial for television. Fred Coe enlisted help for his NBC Sunday night drama presentations from two respected Broadway organizations, the Theater Guild and the American National Theater Academy (ANTA). In December, DuMont restaged "A Christmas Carol," using twelve sets and a cast of twenty-two.

Still, it was another sports remote that produced the most exciting television in the fall of 1947: baseball's annual World Series contest, the first to be televised. All eight TV stations on the East Coast coaxial cable broadcast the seven game "subway" series between the New York Yankees and the Brooklyn Dodgers, two bitter cross-town rivals. With Gillette and the Ford Motor Company as sponsors, CBS, NBC, and DuMont organized a "pool" coverage system in which the three networks each carried all of the games but took turns on the play-by-play and camera chores. Bob Stanton of NBC was the broadcast voice for games one and seven, Bill Slater took games two, five, and six for DuMont, and Bob Edge handled games three and four for CBS. Close-up cameras presented viewers at home and in bars with sharp, clear pictures of every phase of the game: the antics of baseline coaches giving complicated signals, the challenging stance by a batter waiting for a pitch, and the dejection on the face of a pitcher taken out of the game. Television, in effect, provided the best seats in the house and gave the dramatic championship match a greater sense of theater than ever before as the Yankees won the series, four games to three.

Viewer response to the World Series was even greater than the reaction to the Louis-Conn fight of the year before. The TV audience was estimated to be at least 3.8 million, and retailers reported a sharp increase in TV set sales during early October. Welcome as this news was, the World Series was merely another short-term special event. The TV networks were still searching for regular weekly hit series to solidify their position as the primary source of video programming. They were a bit anxious to find such material because the very concept of national live TV networks was under attack from the West Coast.

In June 1947, Jerry Fairbanks, a former producer of film shorts at the Paramount studios in Hollywood, announced that he was setting up a TV film unit. He promised to supply programs directly to individual stations (bypassing the networks), a process called "syndication," dispatching filmed episodes through the mail for airing at each station's pleasure. Not only did this represent a considerable saving when compared to the potential cost of using AT&T's coaxial cable, but, with coast-to-coast network TV hookups still years away, Fairbanks offered a ready supply of programs to new TV stations not yet connected to the cable. He filmed seventeen episodes of a crime drama series, *Public Prosecutor* (at the unconventional length of twenty minutes per episode), but the networks were able to pressure the local TV station managers into

ignoring the service. The networks feared that if local stations began to obtain filmed shows directly from a syndicator, they might eventually decide not to use network programming at all. Stressing that television should be *live*, not filmed, the networks assured the locals that once the cable connections were made, stations would receive much better material if aligned with a national network. In the meantime, for those in the hinterlands, DuMont supplied the stopgap solution when it announced development of a method of preserving live TV shows by filming them directly from a television monitor. These kinescope recordings, popularly known as "kines," meant that while a local station waited for the arrival of live network TV in its area, it could still obtain network programs, albeit delayed a week or two. Though the kines were often grainy and hard to hear, they allowed the TV networks to beat Fairbanks at his own game. Finding no buyers, Fairbanks dropped the idea and, as a result, his *Public Prosecutor* series stayed on the shelf until the early 1950s.

The success of the networks in scuttling the Fairbanks film proposal had as much to do with the standoffish attitude of Hollywood to television, and vice versa, as their own influence on the locals. All the major film studios considered TV to be a prime competitor for the future, and they refused to allow any of their feature films, producers, directors, or stars to appear on television in any form. Consequently, they also gave Fairbanks no support in his scheme. Their strategy was to treat the upstart television with disdain and not give it any help or support, hoping that it would just fade away.

While Hollywood viewed television as a possible economic threat in the future, the movie industry had to concentrate on handling a more immediate crisis in the fall of 1947: the growing fear that Hollywood films might be used to spread Communist propaganda. Only two years after World War II had ended, the new "Cold War" between the United States and the Soviet Union dominated the nation's thinking. Many Americans truly felt that the country was in danger of being infiltrated by sinister forces. They looked with suspicion at the many pro-Soviet organizations in the United States, which had been formed during the Great Depression of the 1930s and the war camaraderie of the 1940s, and regarded them as a subversive fifth column that could not be counted on in the seemingly inevitable struggle with Communism.

Newsletters and magazines, such as *Counterattack* (founded in May 1947, by two former FBI agents), sprang up to publicize the names of Americans suspected of having ties to Communism. Congressional committees such as the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) held public hearings designed to document "Red" collusion wherever it could be found. One of the first targets of HUAC was the film community of Hollywood, which possessed the most popular system for capturing the nation's attention in an effective, entertaining manner. The committee feared that Communists seeking to subvert the national will would logically try to take over various parts of the film industry as a quick way to reach the American public.

In October 1947, HUAC opened public hearings to prove that Communists had been writing, producing, and starring in "suspicious" Hollywood films for years. The hearings, which featured some of Hollywood's leading producers and stars, were broadcast live by many stations along the East Coast television coaxial cable. These were the first important congressional hearings ever to allow television coverage and they provided the first national television exposure for a young first term congressman from California, Richard M. Nixon, a HUAC member. At first, Hollywood's bigwigs treated the hearings as a joke, but they soon realized that, in

the national climate of fear and suspicion, the committee was looking for a scapegoat. Fearing that a lack of cooperation might lay the industry open to a governmental takeover, the movie moguls offered up for sacrifice the "ten unfriendlies," ten writers with alleged leftist and Communist connections who had refused to cooperate with HUAC. The writers' refusal to answer questions on their political backgrounds had infuriated the members of HUAC, who loudly observed that they "must be hiding something." The ten unfriendlies were suspended from their jobs and "blacklisted," that is, nobody in Hollywood would hire them any more because they had been linked to communism. Soon, blacklisting spread from these ten to others who worked in movies. In each case, the mere accusation of leftist ties was tantamount to being pronounced guilty, and the blacklisted artists were rarely given a chance to try and "clear" themselves. Writers, producers, directors, and actors suddenly found themselves out of work because of unsubstantiated charges made by unseen accusers. At first, television was mostly untouched by blacklisting because it was felt that TV in 1947 was not even worthy of infiltration.

As television continued to expand through the fall and winter, though, that situation was rapidly changing. Applications for stations, which had been crawling in at one or two per month the year before, averaged three a week by the end of 1947. Set sales were climbing and the January 1948 declaration by NBC that network television had arrived served as a signal that the time had come for serious efforts at regular weekly programming.

Less than two weeks after the NBC ad, DuMont revived the long-successful radio variety standard, *The Original Amateur Hour*. Major Edward Bowes had run the series on radio from the early 1930s until it ended in 1945, just before he died. Bowes had assumed a wholesome, fatherly, yet realistically critical role introducing new talent to the nation. The possibility of rags-to-riches stardom had made the show very successful on radio and DuMont had high hopes for the TV version. Ted Mack, who had worked under the tutelage of Bowes, took charge, adopting the same approach in welcoming the aspiring performers. Though DuMont took a chance and slotted the program earlier than practically anything else then on (Sunday night, 7:00-8:00 P.M.), it became a very popular video hit. But how popular?

Television was being run by people familiar with radio formats and strategies and, as they began to develop more expensive new video series, they felt the need for program ratings just as in radio. Less than one month after *The Original Amateur Hour* premiered, the Hooper organization, radio's most respected ratings service, conducted the first television rating sweep, in New York City. Ted Mack's show walked away with the number one slot, registering a 46.8% rating (that is, of the televisions in the homes contacted, 46.8 percent were on and tuned to *The Original Amateur Hour*). The J. Walter Thompson agency, an early believer in TV advertising, was the first ad agency to subscribe to Hooper's rating service.

In early 1948, NBC also found itself with a hit show, though it took a while longer to catch on. *Puppet Television Theater* had begun at Christmastime 1947 as a one-hour children's show running Saturday afternoons at 5:00 P.M. By April 1948, two weekday episodes were added and the series was renamed *Howdy Doo-dy* after the main puppet character. The idea behind the show was simple: a few kids, a few puppets, a clown, and some music. What made it click was the personality and verve of the program's ringmaster, "Buffalo" Bob Smith, a former New York disc jockey who had previously been the host of a relaxed Arthur Godfrey-type morning radio show for adults. Smith seemed to enjoy the children present in the "peanut gallery" and his efforts to entertain them

FALL 1947 SCHEDULE

| | 7:00 | 7:30 | 8:00 | 8:30 | 9:00 | 9:30 | 10:00 | 10:30 | |
|-------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------|-----|
| M O N | | | | | | | | | ABC |
| | | | | | | | | | CBS |
| T U E | Small Fry Club | Doorway To Fame | SHOWCASE | Swing Into Sports | Boxing From Jamaica Arena | | | | DUM |
| | | | NBC News | local | Gillette Cavalcade Of Sports | | | | NBC |
| W E D | | | | | | | | | ABC |
| | | | | | | | | | CBS |
| T H U | Small Fry Club | PHOTOGRAPHIC HORIZONS | LOOK UPON A STAR | local | MARY KAY & JOHNNY | Boxing From Park Arena | | | DUM |
| | | | | | | | | | NBC |
| F R I | | | | | | | | | ABC |
| | | | | | | | | | CBS |
| S A T | Small Fry Club | local | CAFE DE PARIS | local | JACK EIGEN | | | | DUM |
| | | Kraft Television Theater | In The Kitchen | local | CURRENT OPINION | | | | NBC |
| S U N | | | | | | | | | ABC |
| | | | | | | | | | CBS |
| M O N | | | CBS News | TO THE QUEEN'S TASTE | Sports From Madison Square Garden | | | | DUM |
| | Small Fry Club | Birthday Party | local | CHARADE QUIZ | local | WRESTLING FROM JEROME STADIUM | | | NBC |
| T U E | | | NBC News | MEET THE PRESS | MUSICAL MERRY-GO ROUND | You Are An Artist | EYE-WITNESS | | ABC |
| | | | | | | | | | CBS |
| W E D | Small Fry Club | THE GAY COED | local | Magic Carpet | local | Wrestling From Jamaica Arena | | | DUM |
| | | | Campus Hoopla | World In Your Home | Gillette Cavalcade Of Sports | | | | NBC |
| T H U | | | | | | | | | ABC |
| | | | | | | | | | CBS |
| F R I | | | CBS News | THE SCRAPBOOK | Sports From Madison Square Garden | | | | DUM |
| | | | | | | | | | NBC |
| S A T | | | | | | | | | ABC |
| | | | | | | | | | CBS |
| S U N | SCRAPBOOK, JUNIOR EDITION | local | Week In Review | Sports From Madison Square Garden | | | | DUM | |
| | | | Author Meets The Critics | THEATER GUILD TELEVISION THEATER | A.N.T.A. PLAYHOUSE | REVIEW OF THE NEWS | | | NBC |

came out in an ingratiating but not condescending form. He supplied the voices to most of the puppets (such as Howdy Doody, Phineas T. Bluster, and Captain Scuttlebutt), giving each an individual personality. The live characters such as Princess Summer-Fall-Winter-Spring and the mute clown Clarabell (played by Bob Keeshan, later renowned as Captain Kangaroo) shared his enthusiasm and helped to make the humans as warm and friendly as the puppets. By the fall of 1948, the program aired Monday through Friday.

Howdy Doody was one of television's first superstars. Small fry seized control of the family TV set in the late afternoon and demonstrated that they could become quite devoted to a television character. Mothers were not upset because, when the kids were occupied with *Howdy Doody*, they could relax. In the postwar "baby boom" era, television had a practical function. It was an excellent babysitter. As a result, the late afternoon and very early evening "after school" timeslots were recognized as prime "kidvid" hours perfect for programming geared toward children,

whose parents were still too busy with everyday household tasks to settle down and watch.

Television was becoming an item of interest to more and more households. Newspapers began accepting the medium as a fact of life and grudgingly agreed to print daily broadcast schedules for no charge, just as they did with radio. CBS, which had been airing only remote telecasts for almost a year, realized that NBC and DuMont had seized the initiative in television programming. Having attracted only a few sponsors for its outdoor broadcasts, the network conceded defeat in February 1948 by announcing that it would soon reopen and greatly enlarge its studios at Grand Central Station. ABC, which had abstained from TV production for a year while awaiting construction of its home base in New York, decided not to wait until the August completion date but geared up instead for a mid-April kick-off, using its affiliates on the East Coast.

All the networks realized that if their new program drive was to go anywhere, they would need live music. They at last came to terms with James C. Petrillo's American Federation of Musicians

and the total ban on live television music ended. Within hours, CBS and NBC staged a nip-and-tuck race to be the first network to present live music on television. CBS won by ninety minutes. Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra hit the air at five in the afternoon on March 20, while Arturo Toscanini and the NBC Orchestra weighed in at 6:30 P.M. These orchestral presentations, however, were not really representative of the future of live television music. Soon, pop-oriented musical programs appeared, modeled after the popular radio music shows, showcasing singers in either an all music format (usually a fifteen-minute slot) or more elaborate musical-variety shows (a half-hour or an hour long).

Though CBS was far behind NBC in developing studio entertainment programming and signing up new TV stations as affiliates, once it decided to reenter in-studio commercial television in earnest, the network quickly became the chief competitor to NBC, leapfrogging the competition. This was a reflection of CBS's radio strength. It was a very strong number two in radio behind NBC and the two were generally regarded as the powerhouses of broadcasting. As television stations decided to align themselves with a network, it made sense to go with one of the two biggest in radio.

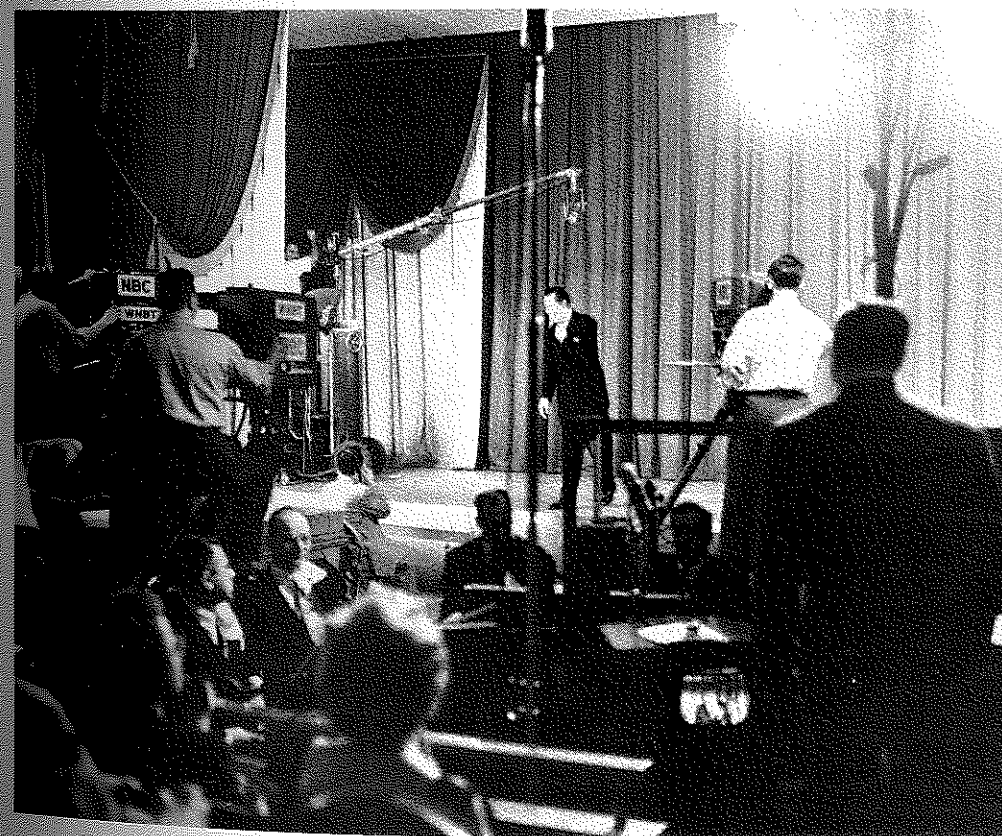
CBS's only holdover from its all-remote concept was the network's first effort in theatrical drama, *Tonight on Broadway*. Producer Worthington Miner took TV cameras to New York theaters in order to present hit Broadway plays, beginning with "Mr. Roberts," starring Henry Fonda. Miner treated the series like any other remote event and positioned the cameras from the perspective of an audience member sitting in the theater so that the entire stage was visible at all times on the TV screen. While dead center, twenty rows from the front, might have been perfect for a patron at the theater, it was deadly for viewers at home who tried to follow the action on their eight-inch screens. (Opera glasses were not much help.) The tiny figures were lost in the open expanse of stage, but it was felt that this was the only way to correctly convey the feel of theater. The cameras were there to present the event exactly as a

member of the audience would see it. Home viewers were, in effect, sneaking in for free.

The resurrected ABC also dabbled in drama with its first new series in April, *Hollywood Screen Test*. Originating at first from Philadelphia, the program was a combination drama-anthology and talent show in which two performers who had Broadway experience, but who were not yet stars, appeared in a scene with a celebrity veteran. Just as in *The Original Amateur Hour*, there was the lure of seeing stars-in-the-making, but the overall quality of production was much higher. The show was set up as if it were an actual West Coast "screen test," which not only served as an innovative format but also covered up the lack of expensive scenery. The series lasted five years for ABC, with veteran Neil Hamilton acting as host for all but the first few months.

Through the spring of 1948, the networks' TV schedules expanded tremendously to include elementary versions of basic entertainment formats that were popular on radio. NBC presented *Barney Blake, Police Reporter*, starring Gene O'Donnell as a reporter-as-cop. On DuMont, real-life husband and wife Johnny and Mary Kay Sterns faced the humorous trials and tribulations of married life in the appropriately titled situation comedy, *Mary Kay and Johnny*. Kyle MacDonnell, one of the first singing stars to make a name on television, hosted a series of pleasant fifteen-minute musical vehicles for NBC: *For Your Pleasure*, *Kyle MacDonnell Sings*, and *Girl About Town*. All the networks had quizzes such as *Americana Quiz* and *Charade Quiz*. DuMont offered the imaginative *Court of Current Issues*, in which actors would argue a case in a courtroom setting and the studio audience acted as jury. This seemed the perfect setting for a television discussion show.

While television developed its selection of entertainment vehicles in an effort to duplicate some of the draw of network radio, a dramatic and symbolic change took place in radio programming. On March 21, the day after the Petrillo ban ended for television music, *Stop the Music* premiered on ABC Radio. It was a musical



Milton Berle, the first host of *Texaco Star Theater*, soon became known as Mr. Television. (Smithsonian Institution; Allen B. DuMont Collection)

October 27, 1947

You Bet Your Life. (ABC Radio). After several misfired flops, Groucho Marx, the great ad-libber, finds a successful radio format under producer John Guedel. The setup is simple: Groucho acts as host of a quiz show that devotes most of its time to his jokes.

November 13, 1947

Boston is connected to the East Coast network, though it does not yet have any television stations on the air.

November 18, 1947

Mary Kay and Johnny. (DuMont). Television's first weekly situation comedy.

February 9, 1948

The Frederick W. Ziv Company, radio's largest program syndicator, sets up a television film branch to help fill the many programming gaps on the local TV stations.

February 16, 1948

Camel Newsreel Theater. (NBC). Fox-Movietone produces NBC's first nightly television news show.

April 15, 1948

ABC resumes television broadcasting, using as its temporary headquarters WMAL in Washington and WFIL in Philadelphia.

April 28, 1948

CBS resumes in-studio television broadcasts as the Douglas Edwards news show becomes a Monday through Friday production. By fall, twenty-five-year-old Don Hewitt becomes the program's first regular producer.

May 3, 1948

The Supreme Court upholds the antitrust decision in the ten-year-old "Paramount Case." Movie studios Paramount, MGM, Warner Bros., Twentieth Century Fox, RKO, Universal, Columbia, and United Artists must begin to comply by divesting any theater chain ownership.

quiz show conceived by Louis G. Cowan, directed by Mark Goodson, and slotted in one of the toughest time periods of the radio week: Sunday night against Edgar Bergen and Fred Allen. Surprisingly, within months, Fred Allen, a member of radio's top ten for a decade, had dropped to thirty-eighth place. By the end of the year, Edgar Bergen took his Sunday night show off the air for a season. *Stop the Music* had beaten them both.

Quiz and game shows had been a part of radio for years, but *Stop the Music* was different. It was a quiz that directly connected entertainment with the personal greed of listeners at home, offering prizes for merely tuning in. The contest was simple: Phone numbers from across the nation were selected at random. While host Bert Parks dialed a number, the show's musical regulars began performing a popular song. As soon as the home contestant picked up the phone, Parks would say "Stop the music!" and ask the listener to identify the song that had just stopped playing. If correct, the listener would win a prize and a chance to identify a much more difficult "mystery melody" worth as much as \$30,000. Though the odds against being called were astronomical, enough listeners felt it was wise to tune in and be prepared. Just in case. Besides, the music was good, Parks was energetic as ever, and the show was entertaining in its own right.

34 WATCHING TV

In the fall of 1948, Allen offered insurance (up to \$5,000) to any listeners who lost out on winning on *Stop the Music* because they were tuned to him. "In other words," Allen said, "my listeners can only lose thirty minutes." That was not quite true. With a top prize of up to \$30,000 on *Stop the Music* they could lose up to \$25,000. But in any case, the offer came too late. Large numbers of similar giveaway shows appeared, at the expense of both established comedians such as Allen and youngsters such as Danny Thomas and Jack Paar. By June 1949, Allen quit radio in disgust.

At the time radio was about to meet television in a head-to-head battle for advertising dollars, *Stop the Music* demonstrated that a game show could topple a highly paid star. This offered radio sponsors an attractive way to cut costs yet still have a top rated show. Even with all that fancy prize money, quiz show budgets were much less than the salaries of top radio stars who at the time made as much as \$30,000 a week. A subtle shift in priorities began to take place. Though radio was still regarded as important to sponsors, the high-class high-budget formats had become expendable if necessary. Lower-budget quizzes could pull in high radio ratings while advertisers directed more of their money to television.

The giveaway quiz show fad did spill over into TV in mid-1948, but none of the programs became big hits. Video production budgets were still relatively small so the TV quiz programs looked cheap rather than magical and glamorous. The shows simply did not appear as visually exciting as the equivalent radio programs sounded. They remained just one more experimental format for television programmers in search of hit shows and prestige events.

The 1948 presidential race provided the networks with an excellent opportunity to boost television's stature. President Harry Truman, who had assumed office when Franklin Roosevelt died, was running for his first elected term and the Republicans felt certain they could beat him. As the race heated up through the spring and summer, the networks devoted as much air time as possible to the various campaigns. Most of the stories appeared on the fifteen-minute nightly newsreel shows that the networks had established over the previous year in an effort to upgrade the image of their news departments. DuMont had been first in the summer of 1947 with Walter Compton's *News from Washington*. NBC soon followed with *Camel Newsreel Theater*, a ten-minute collection of newsreels completely produced by Fox-Movietone (which even took responsibility for hiring the show's off-screen announcing trio of Ed Thorgensen, George Putnam, and Helen Claire). In April 1948, as part of its return to in-studio broadcasts, CBS brought Douglas Edwards back on camera and retitled the daily program *Douglas Edwards and the News*. ABC joined the others in the summer with *News and Views*, which used a rotating anchor crew, including TV's first anchorwoman, Pauline Frederick.

In addition to coverage on the newsreel shows, that summer CBS gave thirty-minutes of time to a different presidential candidate each week on *Presidential Timber*. Republican Harold Stassen was the first to appear. At the time, the radio networks banned the "dramatization of political issues," so most political forays into radio were generally dull discussions and speeches by either the candidate or a chosen representative. Television had no such ban, so Stassen hired an ad agency to produce a thirty-minute film to run in his segment of *Presidential Timber*. The film did not spend much time on "the issues" at all, but instead served as a warm pictorial biography meant to promote Stassen as a "nice guy" rather than just a speechmaker.

The planners of both party nominating conventions had noted the staggering growth of television set sales in 1947 and realized that a city connected to the Eastern coaxial cable network offered



Paul White (left), who helped create the CBS news organization in the early 1930s, and Douglas Edwards. (CBS News/CBS Photo Archive © 2003 CBS Worldwide, Inc. All Rights Reserved.)

the opportunity for a tremendous publicity boost at convention time. Both parties chose Philadelphia and, by the time the first gavel fell, there were eighteen stations from Boston to Richmond sending out the proceedings to ten million viewers watching on 300,000 sets.

There was little to distinguish one network's convention coverage from another's because all four of them used the same pictures, provided by a common pool camera set up to focus on the main podium. There were no additional pickups from roving floor reporters, though NBC set up a small studio off the convention floor ("Room 22") in which Ben Grauer conducted on-the-spot, off-the-cuff interviews with political bigwigs. To anchor coverage of the proceedings, the networks rotated among their top reporters. CBS featured Ed Murrow, Quincy Howe, and Douglas Edwards, while NBC had H.V. Kaltenborn and Richard Harkness. ABC made extensive use of Walter Winchell, while DuMont, which had no formal news staff, hired Drew Pearson as its main commentator.

The Republican convention was generally uneventful and dull as Governor Thomas Dewey from New York easily beat Harold Stassen, but the Democrats staged a drawn-out free-for-all. Minnesota's Hubert H. Humphrey, a candidate for the U.S. Senate, led a floor fight over inclusion of a civil rights plank in the party platform and, in response, Southern Democrats walked out and formed their own splinter party, popularly known as the Dixiecrats, which chose Strom Thurmond as their candidate for president. The Democratic nominee, President Harry Truman, fell victim to the floor wrangling along the way and his acceptance speech was delayed until 2:00 A.M. By then most viewer-voters were asleep and consequently missed a truly electrifying presentation. Though Truman was a horrible reader of prewritten speeches, when he started

speaking ad-lib from the heart, his oratory was close to perfection. This was the style he used for his acceptance address and it resulted in one of the best speeches of his life.

It was also a very good television speech. By not reading from a script, Truman could look the camera (and the voter) in the eye, without the distracting pauses and downward glances of most speech readers. He came across on TV as a sincere natural man who was not so much the President of the United States as "one of the guys." Truman's speech vividly demonstrated the personal intimacy possible through television. Sharp politicians sensed that television might be even more important than first suspected, but they were not yet ready to incorporate the medium into a full-scale presidential campaign. That fall, Governor Dewey turned down an advertising agency's suggestion to concentrate on short "spot announcements" for television. Instead, he and President Truman both restricted their use of TV to a few live pickups of large political rallies. It was generally agreed that television played very little part in Truman's come-from-behind victory.

While politicians were just beginning to experiment with television, the era of testing had passed for entertainment programming. The networks and sponsors were ready for a dramatic breakthrough to tie it all together. Kraft's McLaren Cheese promotion demonstrated how effective television advertising could be. The top-rated Ted Mack show proved that viewers liked variety. The vaudeville styled *Hour Glass* had attracted a devoted following in 1946 without any live music, and now the Petrillo ban was lifted. The total number of TV sets in the country was doubling every four months. It was time to move!

On pages 26 and 27 of the May 19, 1948, issue of the entertainment trade weekly *Variety*, the William Morris talent agency placed a two-page ad with a large headline:

May 6, 1948

The FCC takes away channel one from television, giving the military use of the frequency instead.

July 5, 1948

My Favorite Husband. (CBS Radio). Lucille Ball plays a wacky wife whose zany escapades make life difficult for her banker husband and his short-tempered boss (played by Gale Gordon). Jess Oppenheimer produces this "in-house" CBS radio sitcom.

July 19, 1948

Our Miss Brooks. (CBS Radio). In another successful home-grown CBS radio sitcom, Eve Arden plays Connie Brooks, a level-headed, believable teacher at mythical Madison High School. She is backed by the omni-present Gale Gordon as the blustery principal, Osgood Conklin.

July 26, 1948

The Bob Howard Show. (CBS). Piano-playing Bob Howard becomes the first black to host a network television series, appearing in a fifteen-minute weekday evening musical show.

August 10, 1948

ABC at last gets its own home-base television station as WJZ (later WABC) goes on the air in New York.

August 11, 1948

News and Views. (ABC). Six different anchors handle ABC's first television news show.

VAUDEVILLE IS BACK

The Golden Age of variety begins with the premiere of *The Texaco Star Theater* on television, Tuesday, 8:00-9:00 P.M. E.D.T., starting June 8 on NBC and its affiliated stations in New York, Washington, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Richmond, and Schenectady.

WANTED - Variety artists from all corners of the globe. Send particulars to the William Morris Agency.

A radio version of *The Texaco Star Theater* had played since the fall of 1938, but that mixed variety and drama under a succession of celebrity hosts (including Ken Murray, Fred Allen, James Melton, Alan Young, and Gordon MacRae). The new television version was conceived as a throwback to the vaudeville houses (such as New York City's famed Palace Theater), which had thrived from the turn of the century until the advent of radio and talkies.

In vaudeville, a few acts would appear on stage, perform, and step off, beginning with the unknowns and working up to the headliners. An emcee would introduce the performers and attempt to give the show some continuity. NBC felt that a big budget television version of the vaudeville form might catch on, just as *Hour Glass* had done in its brief run. With imaginative production, a good selection of talent, and a strong host, *Texaco Star Theater* could be a big hit. Finding the right host was the most difficult part of the formula, so the network decided to spend the summer giving a few candidates trial runs. It quickly settled on Milton Berle to open the series. Berle was a successful nightclub comedian who had been a flop in numerous attempts to make it on network radio, but he had brought down the house on a heart fund auction program televised by DuMont on April 7. It seemed that the added visual nature of television was just the extra plus Berle needed and, on June 8, he stepped out for the first *Texaco Star Theater*. It was as if television had been reinvented.

Reviewers were ecstatic: "Television's first real smash!" "Let the hucksters make way for the show folk!" As emcee, Berle delivered a cleaned-up version of his nightclub routine, with visual mannerisms impossible to convey over radio, then introduced a succession of acts (including Pearl Bailey). Yet that was just the beginning. Berle also had an amazing sense of timing and pacing. When he saw the show was lagging, he would dash on stage and ham it up, holding the program together with the force of his personality. Unlike old-time vaudeville and every other variety show previously on television, Berle's *Texaco Star Theater* opened fast, stayed fast and tight, and finished fast. Even the one commercial—known as the middle ad—was integrated into the act as a funny plug by pitchman Sid Stone, whose "tell ya' what I'm gonna do" come-on soon became a national catch phrase.

Instead of staging the show for the studio audience, the producers were more interested in giving the viewers at home a sharp, clear picture. Cameras were placed on stage instead of presenting the view seen by the audience sitting in the theater. The resulting closeups produced an immediacy and intimacy unmatched by radio

and theater. This marriage of vaudeville and video techniques produced a new form, vaudeo. There had never been anything else like it on television.

NBC had hoped for success, but had not expected a hit of such proportions. After Berle's three appearances in June and July, a rotating group of emcees took over (including Henny Youngman, Morey Amsterdam, and George Price), but none could generate anything near the excitement of Berle. The format and his personality had meshed perfectly. After frantic importuning by NBC, Berle signed to become permanent host of *Texaco Star Theater* beginning in September.

Twelve days after Berle's June premiere, CBS unveiled its own television vaudeville show, *Toast of the Town*, with Ed Sullivan as host. Sullivan had been a Broadway newspaper columnist for almost twenty years and his Broadway contacts made him the perfect choice to head a variety show drawing on new talent. CBS producer Worthington Miner first spotted the somewhat dour, low-key Sullivan as a potential for television, and chose him to emcee the 1947 Harvest Moon Ball, staged and televised in Madison Square Garden by CBS and the *New York Daily News*. He used him again in a 1948 Easter Sunday variety benefit, and *Toast of the Town* soon followed.

Coming so soon after Berle's spectacular, Sullivan's June 20 debut suffered in comparison. He was judged by the same standards even though Berle had been chosen for his abilities as a performer and Sullivan for his skills as an off-stage producer who could unearth new talent. *Toast of the Town* itself was much closer to a traditional vaudeville set up than *Texaco Star Theater*, as Sullivan merely introduced a succession of acts and stepped aside. At first, even the cameras were placed back out with the audience in the theater rather than moving them right up front to benefit the home viewers.

Jack Gould of the *New York Times* called the selection of Sullivan as emcee "ill advised," saying: "his extreme matter-of-factness and his tendency to introduce friends in the audience add up to little sparkling entertainment."

In a medium centered on performing talent and warm intimacy, Sullivan was the permanent exception to prove the rule. He had neither, but his knack for finding talent on the verge of making it big was uncanny. Two of the seven performers on the opening show were the then unknown "zany comic" team of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis (paid \$200 for their appearance). Nonetheless, jokes about Sullivan's stage mannerisms never ceased, even after the show became a big success. Budding impressionists cut their teeth on mimicking his scrunched stance and his frequently repeated phrases such as "And now, right here on our stage" and "really big shew." For years, husbands would turn to their wives in the glowing dark and opine, "He's got no talent. He'll never last." It was Sullivan who had the last laugh as his program ran for twenty-three years. Fred Allen explained the incongruity: "Ed Sullivan will stay on television as long as other people have talent."

1948-49 SEASON

8. The Freeze

THE EXPANSION OF TELEVISION during the first nine months of 1948 was nothing short of miraculous. Set manufacturers could hardly keep up with the demand for new product. The FCC could hardly keep up with the paperwork of applications for new stations. All four television networks planned major program premieres in the fall, treating the new TV season with the same respect as a new radio season. To the television industry, the era of "the greatest means of mass communications in the world"—also known as "the biggest ad medium yet"—had arrived at last. There seemed to be no limit to the coming boom. At the end of September, though, a long festering technical problem cast a chill over this euphoria.

In the 1930s, when the FCC had first set technical standards for television broadcasting, it frankly had no idea how far apart stations assigned to the same channel should be. If they were too close to each other, signals would clash and many home viewers would receive a jumble of images. In 1945, the commission set 150 miles as the minimum distance between stations on the same channel but, during 1948, when the number of TV stations on the air almost tripled, there were more and more reports of cross-station interference. The FCC felt impelled to do something quickly because unlike the question of color, which could be postponed indefinitely, signal interference was an obvious, irritating, and immediate problem which would only get worse as more stations signed on. Yet the FCC really needed time to study the situation and to work out new standards, so on September 30, 1948, the commission put a freeze on processing applications for new television stations.

When the freeze was announced, there were thirty-seven stations on the air in twenty-two cities, with eighty-six other stations already approved and in the process of preparing to sign on. These new stations would be allowed to go on the air, but the 303 station applications sent in but not yet acted on were filed away until the FCC could work out the frequency problem. The commission said that the freeze would be in effect for only a short time (approximately six months), so the networks took no immediate notice of it. At worst, they felt, there would be a slight pause in the rapid rise of television. Instead, the freeze extended three-and-one-half years and placed television in a peculiar state of suspended animation, just on the verge of expanding into a national mass medium. From 1948 to 1952, advertisers and programmers were given the opportunity to refine their formats and techniques while serving a large, but limited, audience. While part of the nation continued to wait

breathlessly for the long-postponed arrival of television, people in the rest of the country became caught up in the new focus of popular entertainment.

The most exciting event of the new season was the return of Milton Berle, the uncrowned king of television, to the *Texaco Star Theater*. Milton was back and NBC had him. What's more, he was still "boffo!" The magic chemistry that had powered Berle's few summer appearances continued to charge his fall shows. When the first ratings came in, Berle and *Texaco* were so far out in front that the number one slot was virtually conceded to them, and the other networks lowered their sights and aimed for number two. By November, *Texaco Star Theater* had an 86.7% rating (meaning that of all sets, including those not turned on, 86.7 percent were tuned to Berle on Tuesday) and a 94.7% share (meaning that of all sets then being used, 94.7 percent were tuned to Berle). Milton Berle had a hammerlock on the Tuesday-at-8:00 P.M. time slot that he would keep for almost eight years.

It soon became clear that any program slotted against Berle's show was going to lose big, and sponsors knew it. So the other networks began to fill early Tuesday evening with extremely weak programming (usually unsponsored) that had little hope of attracting a large audience anyway. One of the first to do so was DuMont, which moved out its promising *Court of Current Issues* and moved in *Operation: Success*, a program of self-help tips for disabled veterans.

Milton Berle's program seemed irresistible with its fast-paced tempo aimed directly at the home audience. Gradually, the program evolved from basically a vaudeville format into an even stronger vehicle for Berle's dominating personality: a "sketch" show. This formalized Berle's habit of butting into routines by adding as a regular feature scenes with Berle and his guests performing together. This provided better continuity as well as the assurance that Berle would appear throughout the show as often as possible. Although sometimes he seemed to be staging a one man production, Berle also introduced some very talented performers as *Texaco Star Theater* became one of the prime television showcases for new talent. Sid Caesar, a rising young comic, appeared on one of the early shows to recreate an airplane skit he had performed in the feature film "Tars and Spars." In March, band leader Desi Arnaz soloed with his hot bongo drumming.

Number two in the ratings behind Berle was Ed Sullivan's *Toast of the Town*, which also served as a television springboard for new talent. In February, Jackie Gleason, who was then starring

FALL 1948 SCHEDULE

| | 7:00 | 7:30 | 8:00 | 8:30 | 9:00 | 9:30 | 10:00 | 10:30 | |
|-----------|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|--|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| MONDAY | News And Views | local | Kiernan's Corner | ON TRIAL | ^ VAUDEO VARIETIES | ^ SKIP FARRELL SHOW | local | | ABC |
| | local | Places, Please | CBS News | Face The Music | local | Sports From Madison Square Garden | | | CBS |
| | Doorway To Fame | Camera Headlines | local | Champagne & Orchids | local | Swing Into Sports | local | Court Of Current Issues | DUM |
| | ^ KUKLA, FRAN AND OLLIE | American Song | Camel Newsreel | CHEVROLET ON BROADWAY | Americana Quiz | | | Gillette Cavalcade Of Sports | NBC |
| TUESDAY | News And Views | local | CHILD'S WORLD | local | AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING | ^ TOMORROW'S CHAMPIONS (to 12 Midnight) | | | ABC |
| | ROAR OF THE RAILS | local | CBS News | Face The Music | local | We, The People | Straws in the Wind | local | CBS |
| | OFF THE RECORD | Camera Headlines | INS Telenews | OPERATION: SUCCESS | local | Boxing From Park Arena | | | DUM |
| | ^ KUKLA, FRAN AND OLLIE | MUSICAL MINIATUR. | Camel Newsreel | Texaco Star Theater | MARY MARGARET McBRIDE SHOW | Gillette Cavalcade Of Sports | | | NBC |
| WEDNESDAY | News And Views | local | BUZZY WUZZY | local | Club Seven | Quizzing The News | Wrestling From Washington | | ABC |
| | local | Places, Please | CBS News | Face The Music | KOBB'S KORNER | Winner Take All | local | TOURNAMENT OF CHAMPIONS | CBS |
| | Birthday Party | Camera Headlines | local | Photographic Horizons | THE GROWING PAYNES | Boxing From Jamaica Arena | | | DUM |
| | ^ KUKLA, FRAN AND OLLIE | Story Of The Week | You Are An Artist | Camel Newsreel | Girl About Town | PICTURE THIS | PHIL SILVERS ARROW SHOW | Kraft Television Theater | NBC News |
| THURSDAY | News And Views | local | FASHION STORY | Critic-At-Large | ABC FEATURE FILM | local | | | ABC |
| | local | CBS News | Face The Music | To The Queen's Taste | Sports From Madison Square Garden | | | | CBS |
| | ADVENTURES OF OKY-DOKY | Camera Headlines | Jack Egan | local | Charade Quiz | Wrestling From Park Arena | | | DUM |
| | ^ KUKLA, FRAN AND OLLIE | Paris Fashions | MUSICAL MINIATUR. | Camel Newsreel | PRINCESS SAGAPHI | Nature Of Things | Lanny Ross Swift Show | BOB SMITH'S GULF ROAD SHOW | WINCHELL BIGELOW SHOW |
| FRIDAY | News And Views | local | RED CABOOSE | local | Candid Microphone | Gay 90s Revue | BREAK THE BANK | ^ MUSIC IN VELVET | ABC |
| | YOUR SP. SPECIAL | Places, Please | CBS News | Face The Music | What's It Worth | Capt. Billy's Music Hall | local | | CBS |
| | Key To The Missing | Camera Headlines | local | Television Fashions On Parade | local | Wrestling From Jamaica Arena | | | DUM |
| | ^ KUKLA, FRAN AND OLLIE | Musical M.-G.-Round | Camel Newsreel | NBC Presents | Stop Me If You've Heard This One | I'D LIKE TO SEE | Gillette Cavalcade Of Sports | GREATEST FIGHTS | NBC |
| SATURDAY | News And Views | local | Joe Hasel Sports | Three Abo. Town | local | ^ STAND BY FOR CRIME | ^ SUPER CIRCUS | local | ABC |
| | local | | | | Sports From Madison Square Garden | | | | CBS |
| | local | | | | local | | | | DUM |
| | local | | | | THE EYES HAVE IT | Television Screen Magazine | SEMI-PRO BASKETBALL FROM JAMAICA ARENA | | NBC |
| SUNDAY | local | | THE SOUTHERNAIRES | Hollywood Screen Test | ACTOR'S STUDIO | ^ ABC TELEVISION PLAYERS | local | | ABC |
| | Week In Review | local | STUDIO ONE | FORD TELEVISION THEATER HOUR | DENNIS JAMES CARNIVAL | Toast Of The Town | AMERICA SPEAKS | local | CBS |
| | Original Amateur Hour | | | | | local | | | DUM |
| | Mary Kay & Johnny | Review Of The News | WELCOME ABOARD | Author Meets The Critics | Meet The Press | PHILCO TELEVISION PLAYHOUSE | local | | NBC |

on Broadway in "Along Fifth Avenue," delivered a comedy monologue about a man in love with a jukebox. Later that month, young nightclub comic Larry Storch offered some hilarious impersonations and, in June, Sam Levenson, a former schoolteacher, presented his view of life in New York City in a monologue that drew strong critical praise. Sullivan also arranged for the first television appearances by established stars such as Faye Emerson, Rosemary Clooney, Vaughn Monroe, Peter Lind Hayes, Skitch Henderson, Bil and Cora Baird's puppets, Frankie Laine, and Frank Fontaine. Unlike Berle, Sullivan continued to present his guests in a pure vaudeville format, always stepping aside once the introductions were finished. He also included a greater variation in types of guests than Berle, placing concert singers, circus animal acts, acrobats, and ballet troupes alongside more traditional comedy and popular music performers. Sullivan boasted that he put on a show with something for everybody in the family.

Even though Berle and Sullivan had only been on the air since June, their shows had become the standards other television series

tried to copy. The makeup of the program schedule for the fall of 1948 made it quite clear that television had adopted yet another radio trait: mass imitation. Nervous radio sponsors, desiring the largest possible audience for their programs, tended to choose carbon copies of already successful formats rather than risk audience rejection with an untested concept. The same was holding true for television. Berle and Sullivan had vividly demonstrated the popularity of vaudeo shows, so the airwaves were filled with similar programs trying to cash in on this proven path to video success. Combined with the expected deluge of new musical-variety shows launched after the Petrillo ban was lifted, these gave viewers their first overdose of a hit formula.

Russ Morgan hosted *Welcome Aboard*, which was ostensibly set aboard a ship, and featured numerous guest appearances by Sullivan's first finds, Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. Frank Fontaine and later Jan Murray hosted *Front Row Center*, while Morey Amsterdam's show brought forward the talents of second banana Art Carney. NBC slotted Phil Silvers to host *The Arrow Show* but, because

he was also starring in "High Button Shoes" on Broadway at the time, Silvers had to rush from the studio immediately after his live TV program in order to appear live on stage. After a few months of this madness, Silvers gave up *The Arrow Show*. NBC placed Perry Como's casual fifteen-minute *Supper Club* after the fights on Friday, marking the first attempt at late night network programming.

Band leader Fred Waring conducted the classiest musical-variety show of the season, and the most expensive at the time (\$20,000 each week). Waring rarely used guests, relying instead on his sixty-five-member family of dancers, singers, and musicians. In contrast, some of the season's weaker vehicles included ABC's *American Minstrels of 1949*, which placed twenty-six-year-old Jack Carter and the blackface duo of Pick and Pat into a cumbersome mix of the vaudeville era and the minstrel age; *Paul Whiteman's TV Teen Club*, which presented only mildly uptempo big band dance music; Bob Smith's attempt at a weekly half-hour of song and chat, similar to his pre-*Howdy Godfrey*-esque radio show; and the unwieldy team of ventriloquist Paul Winchell and Dunninger, the mind-reading mentalist.

The prime exponent of pure and simple variety was "the old redhead," Arthur Godfrey, who quickly became as much of a workaholic on television as he was on radio. Godfrey's first television series was a simulcast of his Monday night radio hit, *Talent Scouts*, in which he played the genial Ted Mack role. A month later he added *Arthur Godfrey and His Friends*, a Wednesday night television version of his popular morning radio show in which he headed a close knit "family" of musical performers. Like Godfrey, the show was extremely low-key. Guests came on, engaged in chit-chat, and sang a song or two. One of the program's regulars performed a number. Godfrey recommended some products he truly believed in, played his ukulele, told a few slightly ribald jokes, and said goodnight. His warm, sincere personality carried over to television perfectly as he transformed such potentially boring routines into entertaining visits with an old friend. Both shows immediately became top ten hits and remained so for years.

One vaudeville format that failed miserably in the transition to television was the hellzapoppin' humor of Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson, the hosts of *Fireball Fun-For-All*, Milton Berle's summer replacement. For three decades, Olsen and Johnson had specialized in cornball punchlines and comic anarchy, including exploding scenery, stooges in gorilla suits, pop-up midgets, seltzer bottles, and gobs of custard pie. Their very busy productions worked well with a live audience in a large theater, but they were stopped cold by television. Even though the writers worked out detailed scripts and camera shots in advance, the very nature of their act (which Olsen and Johnson brought unaltered to television) made it impossible for the camera crews to follow close up, so the action was generally shown in long shots. As a result, the complicated bits were completely lost to the home audience watching on eight-inch screens. Without the impact of the visuals, Olsen and Johnson's cornball humor bombed.

In the summer of 1949, one year after Berle and Sullivan had first appeared, DuMont launched its big effort in vaudeo, *Cavalcade of Stars*, with Jack Carter as host. By then, there had been so many others like it already that *Cavalcade of Stars* was almost lost in the crowd. The only unique feature of the program was its unorthodox time slot: Saturday night at 9:00 P.M. The other networks did not place any of their stronger programs on Saturday because it was assumed that on "date night" the home audience would put television aside (as it had done with radio) and go out. Instead, more people stayed at home with the TV set than the networks had expected, so *Cavalcade of Stars* built a moderate (but not overwhelming) following and served as a training ground not only for

Carter, but also for his successors as the show's host: Jerry Lester, Jackie Gleason, and Larry Storch. Each, like Carter, went on to success with other networks after a stint with the program.

The less-than-spectacular performance by *Cavalcade of Stars* even against weak competition was a grim disappointment to DuMont, which badly needed a smash hit show. Though all the networks had ignored the FCC-imposed freeze at first, after the flurry of fall premieres it became apparent that, as a result of the freeze on new stations, the competition for affiliates would be tighter than ever before. During the freeze, there were many cities with only one television station, and, consequently, these stations found themselves besought by all four networks to air programs. Broadcasters in one-station markets regularly took programs from all the networks, depending on which shows were doing the best. DuMont and ABC were especially hurt by this situation because NBC and CBS, the leaders in network radio, had the biggest names and already occupied the top of the TV ratings. By the middle of 1949, the two major networks dominated the airtime on most stations, at the expense of the two smaller networks. *Cavalcade of Stars* demonstrated how difficult it was to break this cycle, even with a reasonably good show. ABC and DuMont needed smash hits just to catch the attention of local programmers and have them consider airing their material. This became a circular "Catch-22" situation because if local stations regularly chose the most popular programs, how could any new show build an audience and become a hit? Soon, however, DuMont realized that the tight market limitations of the freeze had also provided it with one important weapon it could use to fight back: the city of Pittsburgh.

Before the freeze took effect, DuMont had won FCC approval for its third O&O station, WDTV (later KDKA-TV), the first television station in Pittsburgh. During the freeze years, this gave the network the only television outlet in one of the nation's largest markets, so sponsors that wanted to be seen in Pittsburgh had to "play ball" with DuMont. This monopoly over the Pittsburgh airwaves soon became one of the network's most important assets and it won sponsors for a number of DuMont shows that would have been otherwise ignored. One of the most peculiar program deals took place in early 1949 when Admiral agreed to run its *Admiral Broadway Revue* on DuMont as well as NBC (which had more affiliates than any other TV network) in order to get into Pittsburgh. The simultaneous placement allowed DuMont to tout the program to local stations as a DuMont show and to try to interest them in its other network offerings. This short cut to credibility failed because broadcasters considered *The Admiral Broadway Revue* an NBC program anyway, so it never became the "DuMont hit" the network so desperately needed.

NBC had its own problems with *The Admiral Broadway Revue*, chief among them the fact that its Broadway-based producer, Max Liebman, concentrated on the theatrical aesthetic of the live presentation itself, with the cameras framing the action within the proscenium arch of the stage rather than as part of a production geared to audiences at home. He brought together a talented group of young performers—comics Sid Caesar, Imogene Coca, and Mary McCarthy as well as dancers Marge and Gower Champion—and each week staged a very funny Broadway-style revue that worked well in the theater but felt constrained on the TV screen, even with some close-ups and zooms. Though a popular hit, *The Admiral Broadway Revue* ended after a thirteen-week run when Admiral pulled out as sponsor. Liebman learned from this experience and had considerably more success the following season when he returned with a restructured approach to that program mix under the banner *Your Show of Shows*.

When the FCC approved DuMont's request for a TV station in



Washingtonians watched the 1949 World Series on a set displayed in a store window. (National Archives)

Pittsburgh, the commission reiterated its belief that DuMont was controlled by its major stockholder, Paramount Pictures, and said that it would not grant any more TV licenses to either Paramount or DuMont. The FCC had set an ownership limit of five TV stations for any one group and because it classified Paramount and DuMont as one organization, it counted the two Paramount stations (WBKB in Chicago and KTLA in Los Angeles) and three DuMont stations (WABD in New York, WTTG in Washington, and WDTV in Pittsburgh) as reaching that limit. Both companies refused to accept the FCC's decision as final and planned to continue the fight once the freeze was lifted. Paramount wished to establish TV stations in Boston, Detroit, and Dallas, while DuMont intended to push for O&Os in Cincinnati and Cleveland. With the battle over network TV affiliates already so intense, DuMont felt that it needed five O&Os as a solid base for expanding its network. Paramount also felt that it badly needed the income from some extra television stations because the end of a decade-long legal case had jeopardized the financial structure of the big Hollywood studios.

In 1938, the Department of Justice had filed an anti-trust suit against eight major film studios (including Paramount), claiming that they were monopolizing the movie business by controlling both the production and projection of films. The "big eight" not only created most of the movies in Hollywood, but also owned and ran large national chains of movie theaters, which routinely obtained exclusive screening rights to the latest films. By 1948, the Supreme Court ended the marathon suit (popularly called the "Paramount Case") by siding with the government and ordering the eight studios to end their production-exhibition arrangement. Along with the others, Paramount had to divest itself of its chain of theaters, a major source of the company's revenue.

In 1949, Paramount Pictures, Inc., split in two. The Paramount Pictures Corporation was set up to continue making movies. It also

kept control of KTLA and about 30% of DuMont. A separate company, United Paramount Theaters, was created to manage the movie theaters and run WBKB. The Justice Department was satisfied that Paramount had complied with the Supreme Court's ruling, but the FCC was not so sure. Preoccupied with the freeze, the commission refused to say whether it accepted the Paramount/United Paramount split as total. Until it did decide, it would continue to assume that DuMont and the two Paramounts were one organization that owned five TV stations and was not entitled to any more.

The FCC's slow pace in sorting out technicalities placed broadcasters in a squeeze between their day-to-day business reality and the commission's decision process. Without the expansion of television into new markets, the smaller networks found themselves consistently lagging behind as NBC and CBS solidified their hold in TV. Potential station applicants and investors across the country were forced to scuttle their television plans because they had no idea when the freeze would end. Yet during the freeze period, important growth did take place within the areas already served by television. Set sales continued to climb and the size of the home audience expanded. Both advertising and production budgets increased. Producers worked out some of the rough spots in such formats as variety and drama. The networks tried out programs in other time periods such as the morning and early afternoon. Through all this, work on the cross-country coaxial cable continued, bringing the industry closer to live, nationwide TV.

In September 1948, a Midwest coaxial cable network began operations, connecting Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, Milwaukee, Toledo, Buffalo, and Cleveland. On January 11, 1949, the Philadelphia-Pittsburgh-Cleveland link connected the Midwest cable with the East Coast network (Boston to Richmond) so that, for the first time, one quarter of the nation's population was within reach of live network programming. One of the first shows on the East-

Midwest hookup was the inauguration of President Truman. Ninety-one-year-old Luther Parsons, who had seen the March 4, 1889, inauguration of Benjamin Harrison, watched the Truman ceremony on television and declared that seeing it from his home in Philadelphia was "the much more comfortable way."

One month after the inauguration broadcast, NBC took over control of its nightly news show, bringing in a live on-camera announcer, John Cameron Swayze, a comparatively fancy set, and a new title, *Camel News Caravan*. The new program soon passed Douglas Edwards and became the number one network news show, remaining so for seven years. At heart, though, both Edwards and Swayze were doing essentially the same thing and neither program could match the depth of network radio news coverage. Television still relied on the newsreel organizations for films of news events that were more visual than newsworthy. There was very little on-the-spot reporting. Important but more complex stories were usually left for sketchy summaries by the news anchors. In his reports, Swayze would chirp, "Let's hop-scotch the world for headlines!" and then read a few bulletins taken from the wire services.

While news was still regarded as the domain of radio, much was expected of live television drama. New York based critics—surrounded by theater—viewed drama as one of the best forms television could present. Yet in 1948 and 1949, television drama was still far from their expectations. Original stories were rare and producers still needed to develop their production techniques. The biggest problem, however, was the sheer bulk of material required. Each week there were eight or nine programs, with no reruns.

Television writers turned to previously written plays, books, and short stories for scripts, but even these required a great deal of work. Everything had to be adjusted to television's limitations and cut down to fit a sixty- or thirty-minute format. In addition, the Hollywood studios applied as much pressure as possible to try and keep television away from hot Broadway property that was under consideration for film. Hollywood lawyers even argued that the studios' exclusive rights to film adaptations of some shows meant that the television kinescope recordings could not be allowed because they were really *films* of the productions. Just to be safe, TV producers usually concentrated on material that the Hollywood studios either had no legal claim to or did not care about.

CBS had assigned its top producer, Worthington Miner, the task of developing a major dramatic program for the fall of 1948 and he responded with a TV version of *Studio One*. The program consisted of the usual book and theater adaptations, but Miner's production skills transformed the material into high quality television drama. He adapted most of the first season's stories himself and used both theater veterans and fresh talent (including young Charlton Heston) in the casts. In his adaptation of William Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar," Miner demonstrated just how effective television drama could be. Using *Studio One*'s tight budget to his advantage, Miner staged the story in modern dress, an approach successfully used on stage by Orson Welles and the Mercury Theater Company in 1937. As a result, the television production had an immediate, eye-catching punch that made the story instantly accessible. The Roman legions, dressed in pseudo-Nazi attire, clearly suggested the recent battle against fascism in World War II and brought the themes of totalitarian oppression and political conspiracy from ancient Rome to contemporary society. In one very effective sequence, Miner moved the camera into a tight closeup on the eyes of one of the Roman conspirators and played the actor's prerecorded voice to reveal his inner thoughts. Viewers experienced the unnerving but exciting sensation that they had jumped inside the man's mind as he thought about the assassination of Caesar. That was something even Broadway could not do!

Viewers who had considered Shakespeare too highbrow and inscrutable found the program comprehensible and exciting. Critics praised the production as an example of the high quality television drama they had been hoping for.

At NBC, the Philco corporation signed on in the fall of 1948 as the first sponsor for the network's three-year-old Sunday night drama showcase, which became *The Philco Television Playhouse*. Producer Fred Coe's first efforts for Philco were adaptations of Broadway productions and classic plays. In the second season he shifted to adapting books and presented the program as a novel-a-week. Gradually, as Coe turned more and more to original scripts rather than adaptations, the program improved and eventually became known as the most innovative drama series on television.

The obvious solution to the adaptation problem was original material. In 1948, however, TV writers felt it was tough enough just turning out the adaptations on a weekly basis. Soon, out of

September 19, 1948

Stained Glass Windows. (ABC). Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish faiths alternate in this Sunday afternoon religious show. It is joined two months later by *Lamp Unto My Feet* on CBS, as the networks quickly settle on obscure weekend slots as the place for less profitable "cultural" fare. Soon Sunday afternoons become known as "egghead" time.

September 20, 1948

The Midwestern television coaxial cable network begins operation connecting Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, Milwaukee, Toledo, Buffalo, and Cleveland.

October 3, 1948

The National Football League becomes the first professional sports organization to allow regular weekly network television coverage. As with radio, the Sunday afternoon NFL contests are on ABC, because both NBC and CBS do not consider professional football worth covering. On this first Sunday telecast, Joe Hasel does the play-by-play as the Washington Redskins defeat the New York Giants, 41 to 10.

October 22, 1948

Break the Bank (ABC). Radio's big money quiz show fad is transplanted to television by ABC, the network that started the trend on radio. Bert Parks is emcee of what becomes ABC's first top ten television show.

November 22, 1948

Columbia Records releases the first *I Can Hear It Now* album, an audio montage of news events between 1933 and 1945. CBS's Ed Murrow narrates and NBC Radio's Fred Friendly produces.

December 17, 1948

The Morey Amsterdam Show. (CBS). Amsterdam brings his comedy-variety format to television from CBS Radio, playing the smart-mouthed emcee of the "Golden Goose" nightclub. He is aided and abetted by his bumbling doorman (played by Art Carney) and a dumb cigarette girl (played by Jacqueline Susann).

December 24, 1948

Supper Club. (NBC). Perry Como pioneers late night television as host to a fifteen-minute music show aired Friday nights at 11:00 P.M.

practical necessity, the thirty-minute anthology programs were forced to come up with original scripts. Adaptations used on the thirty-minute anthologies such as *Chevrolet on Broadway*, *Colgate Theater*, and *Actor's Studio* required extensive, time-consuming editing anyway and usually the finished product barely resembled the original work. The producers realized it could be cheaper and faster to use original scripts. Most of these vanguard efforts were horrible, but it really did not matter. Critics, who could barely keep up with all the television drama, had quickly dismissed the thirty-minute form and devoted most of their attention to the sixty-minute anthologies. There were fewer hour shows, they had bigger budgets, and they seemed more worthwhile and important. Though the thirty-minute showcases sometimes featured high quality productions, they remained practically unnoticed by critics and instead served as unheralded television training for aspiring writers such as young Paddy Chayefsky.

The thirty-minute dramas were also in the vanguard of the use of film. A few anthology series such as *Your Show Time* and *Fire-side Theater* either began as all-film operations or turned to film after a brief live stint. The networks were still a bit leery about putting filmed shows on the air, and the hour dramas were restricted to just a few film clips for transitions and for some outdoor action shots that could not be staged in the studio. Producers learned that combining live action and film always held a danger of an embarrassing technical flub. For example, one script called for a quick cut from an actor jumping through a studio prop window live to a film of a figure falling to the ground. Instead, the film clip came in two seconds too late and viewers saw the actor hit the safety of the studio floor and scamper away.

The networks generally favored live action over cheap-looking film formats because, from a practical viewpoint, live television emphasized the networks as a source of original programming. The programs themselves seemed more intimate and immediate, pre-



The popular ethnic humor of *The Goldbergs* came to television with (from left) Eli Mintz as Uncle David, Gertrude Berg as Molly Goldberg, and Philip Loeb as her husband Jake. (CBS Photo Archive © 2003 CBS Worldwide, Inc. All Rights Reserved.)

senting the home viewers the opportunity to follow the action as it happened. For instance, in the Chicago-based *Stand By for Crime* on ABC, a fictional police homicide chief would narrate a story in flashback, list the suspects, and then ask home viewers to call in with their guesses as to who was guilty.

In spite of television's progress, with the freeze in effect network radio remained the only means for advertisers to reach consumers throughout the country at once, and it was still the main entertainment force in television cities as well. The major comedy and variety performers shied away from any serious commitments to television, and radio was still regarded as the main stage for the continuing battle for network primacy between NBC and CBS.

Since World War II, CBS Radio had been engaged in a concerted drive to break from its perennial number two status. The network chipped away at NBC's radio lead with a string of lightweight situation comedies such as *My Friend Irma* (with Marie Wilson as the archetypical dumb blonde) and *My Favorite Husband* (with Lucille Ball as the archetypical scatterbrained housewife), but NBC still had the top comics. With its virtual monopoly on popular big name humor, NBC seemed well insulated from even the most imaginative CBS program strategy. Determined to move his network into the top spot, CBS chairman William Paley came up with an ingenious ploy to lure NBC's comedy talent to CBS.

In September 1948, Paley convinced *Amos 'n Andy*'s creators Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll that by selling CBS the rights to the characters of Amos and Andy (for \$2 million), they could substantially reduce their taxes. By treating the program as a business package, which they happened to perform in, Gosden and Correll declared much of the income from the show's sale as a capital gain on an investment, and their tax rate dropped from 77% to 25%. NBC doubted the legality of Paley's maneuver and failed to make equivalent offers to its other stars. Soon Jack Benny, Ed-

gar Bergen, Groucho Marx, Burns and Allen, and Red Skelton rode "Paley's Comet" to the opposition.

It was the biggest programming coup in radio history. CBS had captured the core of NBC's big name star roster and seemed ready to take over as number one after two decades of effort. CBS radio was the immediate beneficiary of the shift but, as Paley later recalled in an interview with the industry magazine, *Broadcasting*, "I was not only thinking of radio, where I wanted to bolster our standing and please our audience ... I wanted people who I thought would be able to transfer from radio to television."

Development of television vehicles for the new CBS stars would take a few years, especially with situation comedy formats such as *Amos and Andy*. In the meantime, CBS brought its reliance on situation comedy over to television with a strong video version of another popular radio show, *The Goldbergs*. CBS's ace producer, Worthington Miner, developed the program for television and it became the network's first major TV situation comedy.

Since 1929, *The Goldbergs* had run as a popular radio show presenting the members of a Jewish immigrant family as they grew up and adjusted to life in their new home, the East Side of New York City. Gertrude Berg, who played Molly Goldberg, wrote, produced, and directed the radio program, which was one of several very successful "ethnic" comedies that thrived during the 1930s and 1940s, including *Lum and Abner* (Arkansas hillbillies), *Amos and Andy* (blacks in Harlem), and *Life with Luigi* (Italians in Chicago). The characters in these shows obviously reflected ethnic stereotypes, usually in their dialect and misspoken English ("It's time to expire" for "Let's go to sleep"), but within their settings, they were natural and homey.

In its transition to television in January 1949, *The Goldbergs* retained its rich ethnic flavor and concern for everyday family problems. Unlike the brash, snappy vaudeo shows of the time, the program drew its humor from the complications that evolved as the characters faced generally realistic working class situations. Molly managed the household while her husband, Jake (Philip Loeb), ran a small clothing business. Though they worried about keeping the family solvent, their chief concerns were domestic. Jake was a strong father who loved his children yet did not hesitate to punish them when they deserved it. Molly served as both peacemaker and family gossip, always on the lookout for a "perfect match" for either their teenage son, Sammy (Larry Robinson), or daughter, Rosalie (Arlene McQuade). Molly's Uncle David (Eli Mintz) also lived with the family, tossing in homey aphorisms. For the latest in neighborhood news, Molly leaned out the window and summoned her upstairs neighbor by yelling, "Yoo-hoo, Mrs. Bloom!"

While drama programs at the time followed the anthology-adaptation format, the situation comedy of *The Goldbergs* presented viewers with slices of life involving familiar characters they could return to week after week, like old friends. Within six months, CBS added another warm family comedy to its schedule, *Mama*, which caught on and ran for eight years.

Mama presented the growing pains and light humor in the lives of a Norwegian immigrant family in San Francisco during the first years of the twentieth century. The series was based on the book by Kathryn Forbes, *Mama's Bank Account*, which had been turned into a play and theatrical film earlier in the decade (both called "I Remember Mama"). Each episode of the series opened with the family's oldest child, Katrin, looking at the family photo album, thinking back to her childhood and the people and places she had known so well. She remembered many things: "I remember the big white house ... and my little sister Dagmar, and my big brother Nels, and, of course, Papa. But most of all, I remember Mama."

Like *The Goldbergs*, *Mama* focused on down-to-earth problems

January 12, 1949

Kukla, Fran and Ollie. (NBC). After two months on the midwestern network, Chicago's first major contribution to network television arrives on the East Coast.

January 21, 1949

Your Show Time. (NBC). The first all-film series on network television dramatizes one-act plays, with Arthur Shields as narrator. Naturally, this venture comes from Los Angeles.

January 25, 1949

The first Emmy awards are handed out by Walter O'Keefe at the Hollywood Athletic Club. *Pantomime Quiz*, a local Los Angeles show, is named "Most Popular TV Program."

January 31, 1949

These Are My Children. (NBC). Television's first daytime soap opera airs weekday afternoons from Chicago, radio's soap capital.

April 9, 1949

The telethon is born. Milton Berle stays on the air for fourteen hours to raise \$1.1 million for cancer research.

May 5, 1949

Blind Date. (ABC). Arlene Francis transfers her successful radio game show to television. Anxious bachelors, hoping to be picked for a night out, take turns trying to woo a beautiful female hidden from their sight by a studio wall.

May 5, 1949

Crusade in Europe. (ABC). Time-Life produces the first television documentary series, studying World War II.

July 7, 1949

Dragnet. (NBC Radio). Jack Webb dramatizes real life police cases, presenting policemen not as glamour boys or boobs, but as dedicated professionals.

faced by an immigrant family, and both series extolled the family as the most important force in a decent society. "Mama" Hansen (Peggy Wood), like Molly Goldberg, kept a watchful eye on the household while "Papa" Hansen (Judson Laire) worked to support his family. Neither the parents nor their children were always right and members of the family occasionally grew frustrated, angry, and confused with each other. Though the turn-of-the-century pacing was sometimes extremely slow, *Mama* lasted longer on television than any of the other ethnic series of the 1940s and 1950s, as viewers followed it almost like a soap opera. Its Broadway-based cast performed each episode live until the series was canceled in 1956.

Television grew a great deal during the first year of the freeze, establishing important foundations in comedy, drama, and variety. Nonetheless, there was still very primitive programming through most of the broadcast day and, as the networks expanded into new time periods, they ran anything they could.

Two fifteen-minute programs designed to showcase model railroads premiered in the fall of 1948. *Roar of the Rails*, on CBS, used a model railroad train going around and around the same track to illustrate stories told by a narrator about the railroads.

ABC's *Tales of the Red Caboose* ran films of a model railroad train going around and around the same track while a narrator told stories about the railroads. They were sponsored by the makers of American Flyer and Lionel model trains, respectively.

In November, DuMont tried expanding its schedule to run from 10:00 A.M. until 11:00 P.M., with a daytime line-up aimed primarily at housewives (chiefly cooking and fashion shows). This caused Jack Gould, television critic for the *New York Times*, to quip, "the idea of a nation of housewives sitting mute before the video machine when they should be tidying up the premises or preparing the formula is not something to be grasped hurriedly. Obviously it is a matter fraught with peril of the darkest sort."

The nation was saved for a while because DuMont's daytime schedule was an utter failure and served to give daytime television a bad name for years.

In January 1949, NBC unveiled television's first daytime soap opera, *These Are My Children*, which used blackboards as cue cards, giving the performers a far-away look in their eyes as they strained to read their lines.

In March, ABC brought the violent cheesecake of Roller Derby contests to the air. This gimmick sport consisted of teams of women on roller skates going around and around a roller rink shoving and punching each other trying to score game points. It had been around (and around) since 1935, but attracted very little popular attention until the summer of 1946, when WNBT in New York City used some live telecasts to fill out its local schedule. ABC looked at DuMont's success with theatrical-style wrestling matches and decided to try the same stunt with Roller Derby. The sport was the same sort of constant mindless theatrical action. Even though there were complicated rules, everyone essentially ignored them. ABC's Ken Nydell did the skate-by-skate description and Joe Hasel did the color, as such healthy young women as Midge "Toughy" Brashun and Ann "Red" Jensen threw football- and wrestling-style blocks and punches against their opponents. ABC's strategy succeeded and Roller Derby became a national fad.

When summer arrived, the networks were further pressed. Summer was traditionally the time when the top performers took vacations, along with much of the home audience. With very few filmed series and no reruns available, the networks used the period to experiment. Hollywood's boycott of television prevented most American movies from reaching the air, so CBS dug up somewhat dated British product for *The CBS Film Theater of the Air*. This was the first of many early network movie series that relied on obscure foreign or cheap domestic films to fill out holes in the broadcast day. DuMont used *Program Playhouse* to test pilots for possible series. ("Hands of Murder" earned a spot in the fall 1949 lineup.) NBC's *Theater of the Mind* anthology featured psychological drama, while ABC's *Stop the Music* game show (with Bert Parks) tried to duplicate its radio success.

Yet summer proved to be a rich viewing time for those who stayed indoors and sorted through the filler. In addition to *Mama* and *Cavalcade of Stars*, there were offbeat new programs for both children and adults.

Worthington Miner was the producer of *Mr. I Magination* on CBS, which starred Paul Tripp as a magical engineer who took ideas from children's letters and staged them as skits in which the suggestions came true. DuMont's *Captain Video* series, featuring the "guardian of the safety of the world," brought to life Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers style adventures on an absurdly minuscule budget. Despite the constraints, the series worked and became a hit as children realized that Saturday afternoon movie adventure

serials were available five nights a week at home. Young viewers also eagerly tuned to NBC to see decade-old Hopalong Cassidy movies starring William Boyd as the virtuous Western cowboy.

Perhaps the most unusual and innovative show of the summer was NBC's unsponsored *Garroway at Large*, placed in a bleak Saturday slot (10:00 P.M.), then still considered television's Siberia. Dave Garroway ran the program as a variety show, only it did not look like one. He had no studio audience or elaborate backdrops. Instead, he calmly meandered about the studio, working with his guests and talented family of regulars, including Jack Haskell, Cliff Norton, and Connie Russell. They sang, told stories, and performed in short skits, always at a very casual pace and usually with the cameras, mikes, and cables in sight. In one sequence, Garroway and Jack Haskell walked onto a simple outdoor set consisting of a few fake trees, some tools, a shovel, and a bucket. As they discussed the song Haskell was about to sing, the studio crew walked on camera and took the props away, one by one, leaving the set bare as he began his song. Another time, the show went for two minutes without any words or music. First, the camera panned the studio, following Cliff Norton as he hid behind boxes and trunks, occasionally mugging to the camera. Connie Russell joined him and silently the two sneaked into a room with a printing press that was turning out counterfeit money. All this served as the lead-in to the duo's rendition of a popular hit tune, "Counterfeit Love."

More than any other variety host then on TV, Garroway understood how important visual imagery was to the new video art. Even with a bare-bones budget, he realized that a few simple actions in the intimate medium of television could produce a program that was visually entertaining to the home viewer. Reviewers were not quite sure exactly what Garroway had in mind, but they liked it, seeing him as NBC's equivalent to the casual Arthur Godfrey.

The key to Garroway's program was its location, Chicago. Television shows from Chicago always had much less money than those in New York and therefore the people working there had to innovate. They were also generally outside the rigid traditions of network radio and Broadway, the two cultures that dominated New York TV, and so were more inclined to take a fresh approach to production. For instance, instead of staging a big finale, Garroway would smile and say "Peace," adding some unusual description of Chicago as his closing line, such as: "This program came to you from Chicago, where even pigs can whistle."

In spite of all the progress in television, it was still losing money. In 1948, the entire TV industry lost \$15 million. None of the networks, and none of their O&Os, made money. The profits in network radio kept television afloat. Yet, sponsors could barely contain their attraction to the glowing tube. By the summer of 1949, they had begun to shift their attention toward television, and, wherever possible, they began cutting back the radio budgets to more "cost effective" programs. Even with the freeze in effect, television was demonstrating its ability to produce popular entertainment in the best radio tradition. Besides, the cheaply produced quiz shows on radio offered a perfect alternative to the high-budget, high-class radio series. No matter how good the ratings were for prestige comedy, variety, and drama programs, those shows could not match the commercial value of radio quizzes, which attracted a large audience at only a fraction of the price.

As radio and television approached a fateful head-to-head battle for audience support, radio was losing its best weapon—a high level of program quality. And that just drove more people into the arms of the waiting television set salesman.

1949-50 SEASON

9. Behind the Ion Curtain

WHILE GIVEAWAY QUIZ SHOWS DOMINATED network radio in 1949, it was generally assumed that the bulk of these programs would fade away just like any other format craze, with a few of the better ones hanging on to become stable hits as the next gimmick appeared. During the summer of 1949, however, the FCC decided that it did not want to wait.

On August 19, 1949, the FCC ruled that giveaway quiz shows such as *Stop the Music* violated the federal law prohibiting lotteries and that stations which carried the programs after October 1 would not have their licenses renewed. The commission claimed that the shows met the legal definition of a lottery because they required radio listeners to expend something of value (the time it took to listen to a program) in order to be able to win if called at home. Technically, the FCC's rule applied only to shows that telephoned people (such as *Break the Bank*, *Winner Take All*, and *Stop the Music*), but the point was clear: The FCC wanted to rid the airwaves of quiz shows.

The networks took the issue to court, saying that the FCC had no business sticking its nose into programming decisions. They might not like the quiz shows themselves, but the sponsors wanted them and so did the audience, according to the ratings. In court, the networks managed to block the FCC's new rule from going into effect while the case dragged on. During the court presentations, it became increasingly clear that the FCC was on very shaky legal footing because its charter specifically prohibited program censorship. Even if the giveaways were illegal, the issue was probably outside the commission's jurisdiction. Eventually, in 1954, the Supreme Court knocked down the FCC ruling, but by then most of the giveaway shows had been taken off the air. The FCC's charge had given the giveaway shows a taint of illegality which drove away listeners and scared off sponsors. By November 1949, ABC's *Stop the Music* had lost one-half of its radio audience and CBS Radio had taken four quiz shows off the air. Nonetheless, producers still felt games and quizzes were viable, so they temporarily turned away from the brash come-ons of the big money giveaways and focused on more restrained formats such as celebrity panels.

Most of the new television quiz shows in the 1949-50 season followed a similar strategy, emphasizing guest celebrities (*What's My Line?*), funny antics (*Beat the Clock* and *Pantomime Quiz*), and revamped parlor games (*Twenty Questions*). Still, giveaway shows did not completely disappear. *Stop the Music* continued to run on both television and radio until 1952 and, just weeks after the

FCC's August 1949 quiz ruling, ABC came out with one of the most blatantly exploitative television giveaways yet, *Auction-Aire*. Libby Foods sponsored this weekly live auction in which contestants both at home and in the studio bid on merchandise, not with cash but with labels from Libby products. On the second week's show, bidding had reached the astounding level of 20,000 labels when an anonymous viewer called and said, "I'll give you 30,000 labels if you take this show off the air." This generous offer was refused but it raised an obvious question: What sort of person would have 30,000 Libby labels lying about the house? Whatever the explanation, it was clear that the something-for-nothing illusion of the giveaway shows struck a responsive nerve and a campaign by the FCC would not kill this interest.

In some ways, the FCC's heavy-handed attempt to purge the airwaves of giveaway shows merely reflected its frustration over the proliferation of what it viewed as a particularly "crass" format. Since the 1920s, culture-minded citizens and profit-oriented businesses had fought over the content and effects of the new forms of popular entertainment: movies and radio. Businesses produced what sold, explaining that they were giving the public what it wanted. At the same time, special interest groups worked to remove what they viewed as dangerous and offensive material (no matter how popular) and tried to promote uplifting high quality culture instead. However, not everybody agreed on what was uplifting, proper, or offensive, so the battle never ended and the self-appointed guardians of the public morality remained ever alert for new dangers.

Just as the FCC's crusade against giveaway shows was driving most of the big radio quizzes off the air, television began to supplant radio as the focus for popular entertainment trends. During 1950, television viewing matched radio listening in New York and other major cities and, in this first year of real head-to-head competition, radio ratings plummeted. Though network radio continued to make money (in 1949 radio made \$56 million while television lost \$25 million), it was clear that, once the FCC lifted its freeze on television's growth, thereby putting an end to radio's monopoly in many markets, the older medium would not be able to match the allure of television. The radio networks joined advertisers in adapting radio to a new marketplace. Instead of high program ratings (which, relative to television, were increasingly irrelevant) they began to emphasize sales effectiveness (the cost-per-listener). To this end, the networks turned to less expensive musical disc jockey shows (using prerecorded music). By the

FALL 1949 SCHEDULE

| | 7:00 | 7:30 | 8:00 | 8:30 | 9:00 | 9:30 | 10:00 | 10:30 | |
|-------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|------------------------------|--------------------|
| M O N | local | Author Meets The Critics | local | Science Circus | ABC Barn Dance | MR. BLACK | Roller Derby | | ABC |
| | Roar Of The Rails | PAUL ARNOLD | CBS News | Sonny Kendis | SILVER THEATER | Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts | Candid Camera | The Goldbergs | Studio One |
| | Captain Video | Manhattan Spotlight | Vincent Lopez | Newsweek Views The News | AL MORGAN SHOW | And Everything Nice | Wrestling From Sunnyside Arena With Dennis James | | CBS |
| T U E | Kukla, Fran And Ollie | Morton Downey | Cam. News Caravan | Chevrolet Tele-Theater | VOICE OF FIRESTONE | Lights Out | BAND OF AMERICA | Quiz Kids | local |
| | local | On Trial | local | | | Tomorrow's Champions (to 12 Midnight) | | ABC | |
| | PRIZE PARTY | CBS News | Sonny Kendis | SUGAR HILL TIMES | | Actor's Studio | Suspense | THIS WEEK IN SPORTS | Blues By Bary |
| W E D | Captain Video | Manhattan Spotlight | Vincent Lopez | Court Of Current Issues | | THE O'NEILLS | FEATURE THEATER | | local |
| | Kukla, Fran And Ollie | Roberta Quinlan | Cam. News Caravan | Texaco Star Theater | | Fireside Theater | THE LIFE OF RILEY | Original Amateur Hour | |
| | local | Wendy Barrie Show | PHOTO CRIME | YOUR WITNESS | Wrestling From The Rainbo In Chicago | | | | ABC |
| T H U | STRICTLY LAUGHS | PAUL ARNOLD | CBS News | At Home Show | Arthur Godfrey And His Friends | | Dunninger & Winchell Bigelow Show | Tournament Of Champions | |
| | Captain Video | Manhattan Spotlight | Vincent Lopez | Flight To Rhythm | local | THE PLAINCLOTHESMAN | Famous Jury Trials | local | |
| | Kukla, Fran And Ollie | Morton Downey | Cam. News Caravan | CRISIS | The Clock | Kraft Television Theater | | Break The Bank | local |
| F R I | local | THE LONE RANGER | Stop The Music | | STARRING BORIS KARLOFF | THE RUGGLES | Roller Derby (to 11:15) | | ABC |
| | Dione Lucas On Cooking | CBS News | Sonny Kendis | FRONT PAGE | INSIDE U.S.A. THEATER OF ROMANCE | ED WYNN SHOW | local | Blues By Bary | local |
| | Captain Video | Manhattan Spotlight | Vincent Lopez | MYSTERY THEATER | | Morey Amsterdam Show | Boxing From Sunnyside Arena With Dennis James | | DUM |
| S A T | Kukla, Fran And Ollie | Roberta Quinlan | Cam. News Caravan | HOLLYWOOD PREMIERE | Mary Kay And Johnny | Fireball Fun-For-All | | MARTIN KANE. PRIVATE EYE | local |
| | local | TOUCHDOWN | MAJORITY RULES | Blind Date | AUCTION-AIRE | Fun For The Money | Roller Derby | | ABC |
| | STRICTLY LAUGHS | PAUL ARNOLD | CBS News | AMAZING POLGAR | Mama | MAN AGAINST CRIME | 54th Street Revue | People's Platform | CAPITOL CLOAKROOM. |
| S U N | Captain Video | Manhattan Spotlight | Vincent Lopez | HANDS OF MURDER | THE FAMILY GENIUS | FISHING AND HUNTING CLUB OF THE AIR | Program Playhouse | AMATEUR BOXING FROM CHICAGO | |
| | Kukla, Fran And Ollie | Morton Downey | Cam. News Caravan | ONE MAN'S FAMILY | We, The People | VERSATILE VARIETIES | THE BIG STORY Believe It Or Not | Gillette Cavalcade Of Sports | Greatest Fights |
| | local | Hollywood Screen Test | Paul Whiteman's TV Teen Club | | Roller Derby | | | | ABC |
| S U N | Lucky Pup (from 8:45) | local | Quincy Howe | Blues By Bary | Winner Take All | local | Premiere Playhouse | local | |
| | local | Nature Of Things | Leon Pearson | TWENTY QUESTIONS | SESSIONS | STUDS' PLACE | Who Said That? | Meet The Press | The Black Robe |
| | local | PAUL WHITEMAN'S GOODYEAR REVUE | COMEDY THEATER | Think Fast | THE LITTLE REVUE | LET THERE BE STARS | Celebrity Game | YOUTH ON THE MARCH | |
| S U N | Tonight On Broadway | This Is Show Business | Toast Of The Town | | Fred Waring Show | Week In Review | local | | ABC |
| | local | Front Row Center | CHICAGOLAND MYSTERY PLAYERS | CINEMA VARIETIES | Cross Question | local | | | DUM |
| | Leave It To The Girls | THE ALDRICH FAMILY | Supper Club | Colgate Theater | Philco Television Playhouse | Garroway-At-Large | HANK MCCUNE SHOW | | NBC |

summer of 1950, almost all of radio's superstars decided it was time to jump ship and they made plans to switch to television by the fall. Advertising agencies, which had been easing out of the more expensive radio programs whenever possible for more than a year, eyed the expansive postwar baby boom and marked their calendars for 1955—when these offspring would become new TV consumers. Television was the marketplace for the future.

During the 1949-50 season, television also became the new scapegoat for the ills of society. With seventy new TV stations on the air (approved before the FCC freeze went into effect), there were sixty-five cities in the country with at least one television station. More and more people had sets, making television an established part of society. Some saw the tube as the ultimate way to reach out and touch people, while others considered it a disruptive force which was already getting out of control.

Throughout the country, ad-hoc commissions sprang up to study the problem of television, focusing on what they saw as instances of excessive and unnecessary sex and violence. Some blamed

television for an increase in juvenile delinquency, pointing to the violence on TV cop shows as a bad influence on children. Dr. Daniel L. Marsh, president of Boston University, told his 1950 graduating class: "If the television craze continues with the present level of programs, we are destined to have a nation of morons."

Others warned of the potential danger to unstable adults lured by the urge to "make a big splash" on television. One such offbeat act of television violence took place in Texas where, on June 11, 1950, Sanford B. Twente boasted to a waitress, "just watch me at the end of the fifth inning." Later that day, he barged into the announcing booth during KLEE-TV's telecast of a Houston versus Dallas minor league baseball game, at the end of the fifth inning. Viewers heard Twente exclaim, "I've got something to tell you!" Announcer Dick Gottlieb replied, "Not now, this mike is live." Seconds later, there was the sound of a gunshot. The camera focused on the players and fans turning to stare at the announcing booth; then the cameraman swung around to show the inside of the booth and Twente, slumped dead, in the arms of an engineer.

Coroner Tom Mays, who happened to be watching the game at home, turned in his preliminary verdict of suicide without ever going to the hospital. The game continued after a short break.

Protests over sex settled on more symbolic connections and issues because there was not any sex, per se, on television in 1950. Instead, people focused on actions that seemed to suggest an erosion in moral attitudes and the encouragement of irresponsible behavior. Two of the first symbols were women's necklines and Arthur Godfrey's tongue.

Arthur Godfrey's natural broadcasting style occasionally resulted in a few bawdy stories and suggestive "blue" jokes, which went over the air uncensored. What upset some people even more than the jokes themselves, however, was the fact that Godfrey was never reprimanded by CBS. It appeared that nobody at the network felt capable of telling him to "clean up his act" because he was too important and powerful. Godfrey was practically a one-man network on CBS, doing eight hours and forty-five minutes of radio and TV broadcasting per week. His two TV programs never left the top ten that season and he was directly responsible for thousands of dollars in advertising. Wayne Coy, chairman of the FCC, drew attention to this turnaround in authority, noting, "when a comedian gets so big that his network can no longer handle him, then I think we have a case of the tail wagging the dog ... it seems to me, that the question of just how bad poor taste can get before it merges over into downright obscenity or indecency may be settled one of these days."

Performers such as Faye Emerson and Ilka Chase upset some people in a different way. They were attractive women who frequently wore lowcut gowns as part of their image as television "glamour girls." For years, such beautiful women had appeared on TV wearing mildly suggestive costumes, usually in background roles on "sophisticated" nightclub formats. Emerson and Chase merely stepped to the forefront as individual stars who dressed in slightly more daring outfits as part of their overall promotion strategy, and they were quite successful at it. Emerson was a regular on three different panel shows and in April 1950 won her own prime time variety program on NBC. Chase appeared in her own interview show for CBS in February, *Glamour-Go-Round* (with Durward Kirby). Both Emerson and Chase capitalized on creating the impression of introducing viewers to the ultimate in witty, sophisticated society.

As women such as Ilka Chase and Faye Emerson became popular stars, they attracted both approving stares and outraged criticism. In doing so, they sparked animated discussions on the proper attire for women in public and the issue soon became a national *cause celebre*. Most viewers did not care one way or the other about such supposedly scandalous behavior, though, and merely used the controversy as an excuse to look at beautiful women and to talk about looking at beautiful women. The issue served as a perfect springboard for routines and one-liners by television comedians and punsters. On the humorous panel show *This Is Show Business*, which featured Clifton Fadiman, George S. Kaufman, and Abe Burrows as "problem consultants" to famous celebrity guests, French actress Denise Darcel asked if her sisters should come and work in the United States amid the lowcut controversy. Abe Burrows quickly said "Yes!" suggesting that "LS/MFT," the slogan of the show's sponsor, Lucky Strike cigarettes, did not stand for "Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco" but really meant: "Let's See More French Tomatoes."

The most important aspect of the interest in sex and violence on television in 1950 was that it vividly demonstrated the medium's tremendous growth. All of the networks were expanding, but NBC, as the number one network, expanded the most. NBC was reaping

the rewards of being the first to begin network television broadcasting. It had the longest association with the older, established TV stations, giving it the best collection of network affiliates and the best showcases for its network programming. By early 1950, NBC had sold out almost all of its available commercial slots in the popular evening hours, or "prime time" (approximately 8:00-11:00 P.M.), so it began looking for new periods to sell. In studying viewer habits, the network noticed a shift from the patterns of radio. Previously, people had listened to their favorite radio shows between 7:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M., then turned off the set and read the paper or cleaned the dishes. With television, families finished the housework first, tuned in about 8:00 P.M., and watched until it was time for bed. NBC concluded that they might be induced to stick around another hour (11:00 P.M. until midnight) with just the right program. After a very careful search, the network selected twenty-six-year-old Los Angeles comic Don "Creesh" Hornsby to host *Broadway Open House*, a casual mixture of comedy-variety and talk. The day of the scheduled May 22, 1950, premiere, Hornsby died of a sudden attack of polio.

NBC delayed the show for a week, then filled in with guest hosts, including Tex and Jinx, Pat Harrington, and Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. By June, a new format was ready. The *Broadway Open House* slot was split between two performers: Morey Amsterdam handled Monday and Wednesday, while Jerry Lester took Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Amsterdam was a borscht-belt vaudeville comic who was already a TV veteran from his own



The Lone Ranger was one of the first important filmed TV series, with Clayton Moore (right) as the Lone Ranger and Jay Silverheels (left) as his companion, Tonto. (The Lone Ranger and Tonto are trademarks of and copyrighted by Classic Media, Inc.)

September 5, 1949

Pat Weaver becomes NBC's programming chief.

October 10, 1949

RCA at last unveils a totally compatible color television system.

October 24, 1949

"Battleship Bismarck" plays on *Studio One* and provides young Charlton Heston his first starring role. He portrays a conscience-troubled Jewish gunnery officer on a large Nazi ship.

November 11, 1949

John Daly leaves CBS News for ABC.

November 26, 1949

Studs' Place. (NBC). Another off beat high-quality (rarely sponsored) television series from Chicago. Writer-philosopher Studs Terkel acts as barkeep, sharing stories and songs with his "regulars," including a folk singer and a jazz pianist. The show is relaxed and loose, with a blue and lonesome tone.

January 1, 1950

Mark Woods, ABC's first president, becomes vice-chairman of the board. Forty-year-old Robert Kinter moves up to become the youngest network president in television.

January 30, 1950

Robert Montgomery Presents. (NBC). The first major defection from Hollywood's closed ranks. Montgomery directs and occasionally stars in this fancy, top-class drama showcase.

April 9, 1950

"Star Spangled Revue." (NBC). Max Liebman produces a vanguard big-budget television special. Host Bob Hope makes his first major television appearance and is the first important radio comic to take the plunge into video.

prime time series and a string of guest spots on panel shows. Lester had spent a few months hosting DuMont's *Cavalcade of Stars*, replacing Jack Carter. In the new form, the late night program quickly became a hit. The number of television sets in use after 11:00 P.M. increased dramatically and the show registered ratings as high as many prime time shows.

Broadway Open House was loose and had no formal script. There was light chat, strains of comedy and variety, a family of regulars, and some guests. Above all, the program ran on the personality of its hosts. Though Amsterdam did a good show, Lester quickly attracted the more devoted following. He was described as "a middle-aged Mickey Rooney, a walking seltzer bottle who never runs out of fizz." Lester cultivated the image of *Broadway Open House* as a late night private party and viewers picked up the spirit, latching onto his catch phrases and in-jokes. A detractor once labeled him a bean bag, so Lester immediately formed the fictitious Bean Bag Club of America, naming himself as president. Seventy thousand people wrote in to join.

In addition to his own offbeat humor, Lester used a family of regulars including dancer Ray Malone, the Milton Delugg Orchestra, and Dagmar. Jennie Lewis, who used the stage name Dagmar, was a tall, buxom blonde who delivered dry spicy one-liners, somewhat in the style of Mae West. Her deft, often suggestive,

comments frequently stole the show, though some sensitive viewers described Dagmar as "nothing more than a walking pin-up picture," apparently even more dangerous than Faye Emerson and Ilka Chase. Nonetheless, Dagmar's wit and figure made her the most popular member of Lester's supporting crew.

Broadway Open House lasted only one year as first Amsterdam, then Lester, left the program. Lester tried to bring his style of late night zaniness to prime time but there his offbeat personality worked against him as the much larger and more diverse evening audience found his oddities harder to accept. Dagmar hosted a brief late night show of her own, *Dagmar's Canteen*, but it folded after only four months. NBC used a few other hosts for *Broadway Open House*, but none seemed to have a similar rapport with the home viewers. Reluctantly, the network turned the time slot back to the local affiliates. NBC had demonstrated the viability of late night TV, but had also discovered the importance of finding just the right personality for the slot.

Broadway Open House was only one of NBC's television innovations in 1950. Though the network had lost some of its top radio comedy talent to CBS in the Paley's Comet raids of 1948, NBC was determined to maintain its momentum in television. It pressed to develop not only new time periods but new programs and formats uniquely suited to TV. In August 1949, NBC hired Sylvester "Pat" Weaver, who had been vice president for radio and television at the powerful Young & Rubicam ad agency. Weaver became chief of programming and almost immediately began testing creative new ideas.

Weaver's first project was a two-and-one-half-hour concept he called *Saturday Night Revue*. The previous season, DuMont's *Cavalcade of Stars* had demonstrated that viewers were willing to stay home on Saturday night to watch television, so Weaver planned a full night of special entertainment that could realistically compete with feature films and live theater. As first conceived, *Saturday Night Revue* consisted of an hour-long film or play done especially for television, followed by an hour of Broadway revue material, and ending with a thirty-minute nightclub variety segment. Weaver's grandiose plan faced staggering financial and casting problems, as well as strong opposition by the other networks.

In early 1950, AT&T still had only a few coaxial cable links connecting TV stations in the East and Midwest, and the networks fought with each other for use of these cables on a show-by-show basis. NBC, with the largest number of popular shows and the most affiliates, consistently grabbed the choice slots on the cable. ABC, CBS, and DuMont quickly realized that the proposed *Saturday Night Revue* would tie up the East-to-West cable all night and, in effect, prevent any of their Saturday night programming from being aired in the Midwest. DuMont was particularly incensed because the NBC show would directly affect its *Cavalcade of Stars*, which had broken the ground for Saturday night broadcasting. DuMont complained to the FCC, which, after complicated legal maneuvering, forced NBC to make two concessions: The first hour of the *Saturday Night Revue* would originate in Chicago (thereby freeing one of the East-to-West cable lines), and NBC was forbidden to insist that stations take the entire two-and-one-half hours as a package. Instead, the show was to be offered in thirty-minute blocks so that local programmers—especially in those crucial one-station markets—could run fare from other networks as well.

Ironically, the forced partitioning of *Saturday Night Revue* made the entire project economically feasible by allowing NBC to institute a revolution in sponsorship. Previously, there had been three ways to sponsor a show: sustained (paid for by the network), co-op (no national advertising, but local stations inserted commercials from local sponsors), or, the most common form, direct spon-

sorship (one sponsor paid for an entire program). Weaver conceived a new form, participating sponsorship, which allowed a number of national sponsors to carve a program into separate blocks of time, each considered its own segment. With the costs of television rising rapidly, such a move was inevitable because there were few sponsors that could continue to bankroll an entire program alone. *Saturday Night Revue*, for example, cost \$50,000 a week to produce. Multiple sponsorship eventually became the norm for television, and sponsors never attained the overall level of control in video that they had enjoyed on radio.

Besides devising a method to encourage sponsorship for NBC's expensive new show, Weaver also revised its structure. He dropped the costly idea of an original film or play every week and broke *Saturday Night Revue* into just two programs: *The Jack Carter Show* (one hour of standard vaudeo from Chicago) and *Your Show of Shows* (ninety minutes of comedy-variety from New York). Nonetheless, Madison Avenue agencies played it cozy, waiting to see if NBC could make the two and one-half hour format work. Consequently, when the two shows premiered at the end of February 1950, not one of their fifteen commercial slots was sold.

The Jack Carter Show was fairly funny, but nothing special. Carter had recently departed from DuMont's *Cavalcade of Stars* and did not change his act much for the new program. In contrast, *Your Show of Shows* marked a major improvement by producer Max Liebman and headliners Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca over their previous series, *Admiral Broadway Revue*. This time, their television comedy-variety act worked perfectly. Part of the improvement was a reflection of more polished writing. At the same time, the Broadway-based Liebman adjusted his techniques to meet television's demand for intimacy, bringing the camera "up on stage," which managed to convey to the viewers at home the humor and excitement of the wide-open production. Above all, Caesar blossomed. Previously his best moments had been in rapid-fire solo monologues, as in describing details of a \$5 date. Now, he was cooler, more controlled, and better suited to carry a wide range of skits not only solo but when teamed up with Coca. Though *Your Show of Shows* included fine supporting crews of singers and dancers, as well as a weekly guest star host (Burgess Meredith the first two weeks), the comedy sketches featuring Caesar and Coca transformed the show into truly exceptional entertainment.

The most obvious vehicles for the two were man and woman settings, and these ranged from starry-eyed lovers on a first date to an unhappy couple trying to put some romance back into their tired marriage. In these sketches, Caesar and Coca conveyed the humor and drama of everyday life, yet they functioned just as well in more abstract settings such as a pair of lions looking out at the visitors to the zoo. Both could also handle solo spots. Coca excelled in comic dance and singing while Caesar demonstrated remarkable versatility in monologues, pantomime, and crazy dialects. They were soon joined by sidemen Carl Reiner and Howard Morris, and the ensemble of four was able to tackle virtually any comedy routine concocted by the writers (including then-unknowns Neil Simon and Mel Brooks). They reached heights of gleeful frenzy in parodies of movie and television titles including *This Is Your Life*, "Shane," "The Mark of Zorro," and "From Here to Eternity." With such a strong basic cast, *Your Show of Shows* became a long-lasting hit and it quickly sold all of its ad slots.

Your Show of Shows was better than almost anything else then on TV, so Jack Carter's merely adequate program suffered in comparison. Yet Carter's presence infuriated the Chicago television community, which felt that the town's reputation for innovation was being hurt. Instead of drawing on the still unsponsored home-

grown talents such as Dave Garroway and Studs Terkel, NBC had used a New York flavored, New York run program for its required telecast from Chicago. The network seemed to consider Chicago's own creative talent irrelevant, while national sponsors treated the city like a cowtown that did not warrant a business trip.

Chicago received such cavalier treatment because ultimately the city was not important to the networks' future expansion plans. It was merely an O&O city that, by circumstance (the route of the coaxial cable construction), became a convenient location for some stopgap TV production. Once the coast-to-coast cable was completed, Chicago programs would become largely expendable. Television, like radio and the movies, would operate from the two coasts.

New York and California had been battling for control of American popular culture since the early 1900s, when Hollywood replaced Long Island as the nation's movie capital. In the late 1930s, Los Angeles had supplanted New York as the main locale of network radio programming. New York TV people prepared for another conflict as the theater-oriented East Coast and the Hollywood-based West Coast faced off over television production. Network television was oriented toward live performances, so the technical limitations facing Los Angeles in 1950 gave New York City the upper hand for the moment. The West Coast was not connected to the coaxial cable and, going into the 1949-50 season, the networks carried very few filmed series. Some Hollywood production was inevitable, though. New York studio space was already tight and the network schedules were still expanding. CBS bought land out in Los Angeles for a future television city and also launched the first important use of Los Angeles-made kines, *The Ed Wynn Show*.

Kinescope recordings were films of live shows shot directly off a picture tube monitor as they played. They were grainy, lacked

June 4, 1950

The Steve Allen Show. (CBS Radio). While *Our Miss Brooks* is gone for the summer, twenty-eight-year-old Steve Allen gets his first network comedy series.

June 26, 1950

The Garry Moore Show. (CBS). After a few years as junior partner to Jimmy Durante on radio, Garry Moore gets his own weekday evening comedy-variety series on television, with Durward Kirby as his sidekick.

July 10, 1950

Your Hit Parade. (NBC). A video version is added to a fifteen year radio smash. Dorothy Collins and Snooky Lanson sing the top seven songs of the week, plus three up-and-coming "extras." On this first program, "My Foolish Heart" is number one.

July 20, 1950

Arthur Murray Party. (ABC). Part variety, part dance instruction, this is the perennial summer replacement show. By the fall of 1953, it will have been on all four television networks, the first show to achieve such a distinction.

August 19, 1950

ABC becomes the first television network to begin Saturday morning programming for children, offering the informational *Animal Clinic* and the Western circus setting of *Acrobat Ranch*.

definition, and were generally a poor substitute for live television. Viewers in cities not connected to the East Coast coaxial cable watched them because there was no other way to receive the New York-based network shows. *The Ed Wynn Show* reversed the process and originated live in Los Angeles, sending kines to the East Coast. Wynn staged a revue show, mixing variety, comedy, and his own low-key mimicry and whimsy. He drew on the talent based in Hollywood for guest spots. In December, he sang a duet with Buster Keaton and, in January, did a great pantomime bit with Lucille Ball, who was making her television debut. Viewers out East liked the program, but they hated the kines. Accustomed to high-definition live telecasts, they were appalled by the gray grainy quality of the picture and the poor sound reproduction. Although other series such as *The Alan Young Show* (another comedy revue) and *The Ruggles* (a sitcom) were staged live in Los Angeles and shipped out as kines, negative viewer reaction made it obvious that live West Coast productions would have to wait for the cable connection.

Film was an obvious way around the cable problem and, in the 1949-50 season, the concept of filming shows for television received important boosts. At the time, the networks generally regarded film as inferior to live presentations and most filmed efforts seemed designed to prove the point. The *Fireside Theater* drama anthology, produced by the Hal Roach studios, consisted of low budget episodes churned out in just a few days each. Both *The Life of Riley* (starring Jackie Gleason) and *The Hank McCune Show*, two filmed sitcoms, were stilted and cheaply produced. Ed Wynn quipped, "In the beginning, a television set cost hundreds of dollars and you could see a few bad shows. In a couple of years, you'll be able to buy a television set for a few dollars and see hundreds of bad shows."

Apart from these, there was a dramatic exception in the fall of 1949, the wide open Western adventures of *The Lone Ranger*.

In looking at the TV success of Hopalong Cassidy, the struggling ABC saw that Saturday matinee-style heroics on television were very popular with children. The network was searching for any sort of hit, so it decided to take a chance on brand new filmed-for-television adventures of a popular radio cowboy hero, the Lone Ranger. The TV series was pure pulp adventure, following the radio legend of a daring masked lawman (played by Clayton Moore) and his faithful Indian companion, Tonto (Jay Silverheels), who fought for law and order in the amorphous old West of the 1870s. The Lone Ranger helped anyone in need, never accepted payment for his services, and always defeated the bad guys. Unlike previous filmed series, *The Lone Ranger* was treated like a medium-budget adventure movie and the first season's fifty-two episodes (there were no reruns) cost \$1 million to produce. The money was well spent. Kids found the outdoor action and scenery a thrilling release from the "cooped up" New York studio productions and they made *The Lone Ranger* one of ABC's first TV hits.

Several months after the masked man appeared, TV film pioneer Jerry Fairbanks unveiled a cheaper but more efficient way to produce filmed TV series, the multi-cam system. In February 1950, the previously live New York based *Silver Theater* moved out West and became the first to use the multi-cam process, which was designed to combine the feel of live TV with the perfectibility and permanence of film, without a large increase in budget. Three film cameras with thirty minutes of film in each were positioned in the studio and used like regular TV cameras. All three operated continuously and the director could monitor what they were shooting. Like live shows, a program could be done in one smooth take, from start to finish. Like filmed shows, the action could be stopped to correct mistakes or to change lighting, and then resumed. When

editing time was added, an average half-hour show took three days to complete, while its live equivalent took five, including rehearsals. The multi-cam made West Coast filmed series a viable alternative to live shows from New York City, and the focus of East Coast objections shifted from technical limitations to the programs themselves.

The New York branch of the TV industry had seen Hollywood assume control of movies and radio, and some executives feared that if the same happened with television the medium would soon be reduced to mindless fluff. They criticized California productions in general as flashy, light, and empty, pointing to the first wave of West Coast filmed TV sitcoms as confirming their worst apprehensions. *The Hank McCune Show*, for instance, was just like Hollywood's theatrical "screwball" comedies that featured empty-headed adventures of lovable, inoffensive bumbler. The series even "faked" its laughter by dubbing the sound of an audience onto the audio track of the film (creating a "laugh track"), though no audience had been present at the filming. Another program, *The Life of Riley*, was an all-around loser with terrible scripts, cheap sets, and a weak supporting cast. However, the show did have one saving grace: Jackie Gleason in the lead role of Chester A. Riley.

For six years on radio, William Bendix had played Chester Riley as yet another simple-minded, lovable middle class bumbler who could turn the most innocent task into a silly crisis. Though Riley would frequently sputter and moan ("What a revolting development this is!"), it was all show. He was really a pushover and the problems, which were inevitably just simple misunderstandings, melted away every week. Under Bendix, Riley never really got angry and his chief appeal was a predictable soft heart and forgiving nature.

In 1949, William Bendix was under an exclusive film contract which prevented him from continuing the role on TV, and Jackie Gleason got the job instead. Gleason played Riley a bit differently from the image Bendix had cultivated on the radio. Though Gleason's Riley was also a simple man with a soft heart, his anger was more threatening and he seemed capable of really popping off in a situation. This made the moments of forgiveness and resolution more believable. However, Gleason's expressive interpretation went against the public's image of Riley and there was some resistance to it. Gleason was good, but he was not Chester A. Riley! More important, the writing and overall production on the show was exceptionally weak, so Gleason did not have the support to build a following for his version of Riley. After six months, the program was off the air.

Though a failure itself, *The Life of Riley* provided Gleason with important television exposure as he demonstrated his ability to shine in a show despite weak writing and production. When Jerry Lester left DuMont's *Cavalcade of Stars* to do *Broadway Open House*, the network signed Gleason as the new host, beginning in July 1950. Under Gleason, *Cavalcade of Stars* came closest to DuMont's dream of a hit comedy-variety show and, in September, the network helped it along by moving the program to Friday night, against NBC's boxing matches and away from *Your Show of Shows*.

On *Cavalcade of Stars*, Gleason was surrounded by the usual variety trappings of music (the Sammy Spear Orchestra) and dancing (the June Taylor Dancers), but the revamped program worked because of his energy and versatility. His characters ranged from a down-and-out bum to an arrogant playboy, and his facial expressions could carry a scene without a word of dialogue (only Sid Caesar could top Gleason's contortions of pain). For his sidekick Gleason chose Art Carney and the two developed into smooth comic foils. Carney served as an especially effective

balance to Gleason's more boisterous characters, playing a stern father to haughty Reginald Van Gleason III or the prim but caustic Clem Finch to loudmouth Charlie Bratten. In 1951, they introduced what soon became their most popular character sketch, "The Honeymooners," featuring Gleason as a blustery Brooklyn bus driver, Ralph Kramden; series regular Pert Kelton as Kramden's wife, Alice; and Carney as Ed Norton, an obliging sewer worker who was Kramden's best friend. By 1952, Gleason had blossomed into a first rate television star and, in the fall, he jumped to CBS—taking Carney and the June Taylor Dancers with him. As always, DuMont's *Cavalcade of Stars* had been merely a stepping stone to a better salary and a bigger budget.

At the same time that Jackie Gleason was toiling on the ill-fated *Life of Riley*, other stars-to-be were working in the hinterlands of broadcasting, also in search of their lucky break. Future talk show host Mike Douglas was a singer on *Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge* (a musical quiz show); Jim McKay, later a renowned sportscaster, arrived in New York to host *The Real McKay* (a local chit-chat variety show set on his patio); and actor Jack Lemmon played "a brash young lad from Kalamazoo" who was trying to break into show business by serving as houseboy to a famous drama critic (played by Neil Hamilton) on ABC's *That*

Wonderful Guy. At the New Jersey state fair, Trenton disc jockey Ernie Kovacs failed in his effort to break the marathon radio broadcasting record of one week, while in nearby Camden, Ed McMahon played a red-nosed circus clown on CBS's *Big Top*.

Despite the many successful new programs and emerging stars, television was still losing money at a disturbing rate. ABC's president Mark Woods explained that his network had expanded too fast to meet expenses and announced major cost-cutting moves: ABC cut 20% from its TV budget in the winter of 1950 and canceled all of its Monday and Tuesday programming. These actions saved the network from total collapse. By the fall of 1950, ABC's five O&Os were nearing the black, but in the tight freeze market the network still had serious problems attracting viewers and selling its shows to sponsors. Even number one NBC was beginning to feel the squeeze. Though it was actually selling more commercial time than ever, costs for programs had shot up. More important, the networks could not yet charge advertisers premium rates because the FCC freeze limited television coverage across the country. Established markets might reach a higher saturation of TV sets, but there were still millions of people who had never seen a television program. The nation had settled into a peculiar social division: One half of the country was going TV crazy while the



On June 25, 1950, Communist forces invaded South Korea, and the U.S. was drawn into war. (U.S. Army)

other half, "behind the ion curtain," had to imagine what everybody else was talking about. Though the FCC had instigated the freeze in 1948 merely to investigate signal interference and channel separation, the commission soon found the issue mired in the more complicated questions of UHF frequencies and color. The promised six month halt in processing new station applications had already extended for one and one-half years, and there was no sign that the freeze would be ended in the foreseeable future.

Apart from the stagnation of the freeze, darker shadows tainted American television that season. Since World War II, Americans had become increasingly concerned about the safety of the United States as Communist forces seized control of governments in both Europe and Asia. Congressional committees such as HUAC and private organizations such as *Counterattack* had assumed the task of identifying Communists, Communist sympathizers, and so-called fellow-travelers throughout American society. In response, the Hollywood film industry had begun blacklisting writers and actors charged with having suspicious ties to leftist organizations, usually without ever corroborating the accusations. By 1948, blacklisting had become an established but rarely discussed practice in network radio as well. After examining the programming and the personnel files of the four radio networks, *Counterattack* evaluated each one, concluding that, "NBC and Mutual are the least satisfactory to the Communists ... ABC is about halfway between most satisfactory and least satisfactory, and CBS is the most satisfying network to the Communists."

At first, television had been dismissed as unimportant, but, as the medium grew, so did concern over its potential for misuse by Communist subversives. Through 1949, television sponsors and network executives also quietly adopted the practice of blacklisting as protection against charges of helping the Communist cause.

Blacklisting was a vague process. There were no lists as such, only individual campaigns and reports published by self-proclaimed Communist investigators who would tout every rumor and innuendo as fact. A brave network or sponsor could decide to ignore such accusations and hire the "suspicious" talent anyway. Ed Sullivan chose to do just that by scheduling dancer Paul Draper for an appearance on *Toast of the Town* in January 1950. Reluctantly, the network and sponsor went along, even though Draper had been blacklisted from network television for more than a year.

On Sullivan's show Draper danced to, of all things, "Yankee Doodle Dandy." Benson Ford, of the Detroit Ford family (who owned Sullivan's sponsor, Lincoln Mercury) happened to be in the audience that night and was shown clapping when Draper finished. In spite of this apparent corporate approval, a concerted letter writing and phone campaign produced hundreds of complaints about Draper's appearance. At first Sullivan defended his decision to have Draper on the show, but after intense pressure from the

American Legion, the Catholic War Veterans, and banner headlines in the *New York Journal American*, Sullivan backed down, agreed to clip Draper from the kine being sent to the nonconnected stations, and issued a public apology, saying he was opposed to "having the program being used as a political forum, directly or indirectly." Draper's dismissal was the first public acknowledgement that television had begun blacklisting writers and performers. A network talent chief candidly complained, "Now we spend our time trying to satisfy our top brass that the actors have never been on the left side of the fence. If one of them has even had his picture taken with a known Communist, even if it was several years ago, he's a dead duck as far as we're concerned."

Two weeks after the Draper incident, an obscure senator from Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy, gave a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, in which he stated, "I have here in my hand a list of 205 [State Department employees] that were known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and are still working and shaping the policy of the State Department."

McCarthy, in fact, did not have any such list, but his bold accusations brought him national attention. Within weeks, McCarthy had been embraced by crusaders against Communism as the popular new leader of the movement. Others had said much the same thing, but McCarthy, a dramatic and crafty individual who did not bother with corroboration or offer the opportunity for rebuttal, went further with his charges. He knew how to appeal to people's gut feelings and fears. Adopting the theory that nobody was too high to accuse, McCarthy offered the public reasons for the rise of Communism: American traitors. Russia had the atomic bomb and some American scientists confessed to passing secrets to the Russians. If the scientific world was rife with traitors, why not the world of government, the military, or, for that matter, the world of broadcasting?

On June 22, the publishers of *Counterattack* issued a special pamphlet, *Red Channels* ("The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television"), which was designed as a handy reference source for blacklist-minded networks and sponsors. It contained the names of 151 entertainment personalities said to have ties with the Communist Party. Among those listed were Leonard Bernstein, Lee J. Cobb, Ben Grauer, Pert Kelton, Gypsy Rose Lee, Philip Loeb, Burgess Meredith, Arthur Miller, Zero Mostel, Pete Seeger, Howard K. Smith, and Orson Welles. Like previous efforts by *Counterattack*, many of the listings were based on rumor and hearsay information. In less paranoid times, the audacity of such sweeping accusations without substantiation might have been dismissed outright.

Instead, three days later, the eternal vigilance called for by *Red Channels* seemed completely vindicated as Communist forces invaded South Korea.

1950-51 SEASON

10. What's My Crime?

THE KOREAN WAR WAS NOT a television war. Film cameras were too bulky to allow the extensive on-the-spot battlefield reporting that would mark coverage of the war in Vietnam more than a decade later. In 1950, TV news crews barely covered events at home, so there was no reason to expect them to turn up in Korea. More important, the networks saw no need to supplant the official information supplied by the government. A month after the invasion of South Korea by Communist forces from the north, NBC was the only TV network there with a technical crew, and that consisted of merely three cameramen and one reporter. Instead, most television coverage of the Korean War consisted of live pick ups of debates at the United Nations and frequent one-minute battle summaries. The little film footage shown at home came largely from the U.S. Signal Corps.

The idea that television news could be an independent force, like newspapers, had not occurred to most people. Both the government and the networks regarded television as an entertainment medium which, in special cases, could be used by officials to communicate directly with the voters. In this spirit, NBC created a weekly series, *Battle Report Washington*, which was designed for administration spokesmen who wished to address the nation on war-related questions. The government controlled the show and said whatever it wished, without any second-guessing or cross-examination from NBC reporters. To debunk propaganda emanating from Moscow and Beijing, DuMont contributed *Our Secret Weapon—The Truth*, a weekly panel show produced by Freedom House. CBS, in its part to promote civil defense, aired a timely forty-five minute documentary in September, "What To Do During an A-Bomb Attack," hosted by a thirty-three-year-old reporter the network had just picked up from United Press International, Walter Cronkite.

The news from the battlefield was rather grim during the summer of 1950. By the end of August, the North Koreans controlled most of the peninsula; the U.N., American, and South Korean forces held only a small enclave in the south near Pusan. At home, the question of Communist influence in the United States was no longer restricted to the theoretical level. The nation was at war. With American boys "being felled by Red bullets," no sponsor wanted to be charged with "satisfying the Communists" by putting one of their fellow-travelers on national television. Publications such as *Red Channels* became unofficial Madison Avenue bibles on performers with alleged Communist connections and soon the practice of blacklisting again broke out into the open.

At noon on August 27, 1950, the cast of *The Aldrich Family* (a frothy TV situation comedy that had been transferred from radio a year earlier) assembled in NBC's New York studios for a final rehearsal for that night's season premiere. The only news expected to come from that day's broadcast was the response to the performances of two new members of the cast: Richard Tyler who replaced Bob Casey as Henry, and Jean Muir who replaced Lois Wilson as Henry's mother, Alice. The rehearsal never took place. A spokesman from the Young & Rubicam ad agency announced that Jean Muir was being temporarily suspended from the program because of protests the agency had received about her background. Muir, it was learned, had been listed in *Red Channels*. She was cited as one of twenty actors named in grand jury testimony in August 1940 as a member of the Communist Party (an association she denied and an association never proved). She was also said to have been a member of such leftist groups as the Artists' Front to Win the War and the Congress of American Women, and was a subscriber to *Negro Quarterly*. Muir denied knowing about many of the groups and publications, but it did her no good.

On August 29, the show's sponsor, General Foods, dropped Muir permanently from *The Aldrich Family* cast, saying that it made no difference whether she was guilty or not: Muir had become too controversial and her presence on the program could hurt sales. This reasoning became a model for other blacklisting cases. It did not matter how truthful the charges of Red tainting were. The very fact that somebody had been accused at all made them guilty of being too controversial. Muir, like most blacklisted people, spent her energies trying to disprove the charges without realizing that it was already too late.

The extensive news coverage given to Muir's firing combined with the bad battle news from Korea to produce a sharp upswing in the number of sponsors who agreed to let publications such as *Red Channels* be the final arbiter of TV employment. Before the Muir case, a few well-known broadcasting figures had withstood the pressure from the blacklist lobby and defended the rights of their associates. Robert Kinter, the new president of ABC, had rejected demands that he fire Gypsy Rose Lee (a *Red Channels* target), who hosted an ABC radio show, *What Makes You Tick*. Gertrude Berg had persuaded General Foods to allow Philip Loeb (who was also listed in *Red Channels*) to continue to appear as Molly Goldberg's husband, Jake, on *The Goldbergs*. After the Muir firing, even having a friend "upstairs" meant nothing for all but the most popular celebrities.

FALL 1950 SCHEDULE

| | 7:00 | 7:30 | 8:00 | 8:30 | 9:00 | 9:30 | 10:00 | 10:30 | |
|------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-----|
| M O N | Club Seven | Hollywood Screen Test | TREASURY MEN IN ACTION | DICK TRACY | COLLEGE BOWL | On Trial | ABC Feature Film | | ABC |
| | Stork Club | CBS News | PERRY COMO | LUX VIDEO THEATER | Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts | HORACE HEIDT SHOW | The Goldbergs | Studio One | CBS |
| | Captain Video | local | Susan Raye | Visit With The Armed Forces | Al Morgan Show | Wrestling From Columbia Park With Dennis James | | | DUM |
| | Kukla, Fran And Ollie | Roberta Quinlan | Cam. News Caravan | THE SPEIDEL SHOW WITH PAUL WINCHELL | Voice Of Firestone | Lights Out | Robert Montgomery Presents | Who Said That? | NBC |
| T U E | Club Seven | BEULAH | ALL-AMERICAN FOOTBALL GAME | Buck Rogers | BILLY ROSE'S PLAYBILL | CAN YOU TOP THIS? | Life Begins At 80 | Roller Derby | ABC |
| | Stork Club | CBS News | Faye Emerson | PRUDENTIAL FAMILY THEATER | VAUGHN MONROE CAMEL CARAVAN | Suspense | DANGER | We Take Your Word | CBS |
| | Captain Video | local | Joan Edwards | Court Of Current Issues | Johns Hopkins Science Review | Cavalcade Of Bands | | STAR TIME | DUM |
| | Kukla, Fran And Ollie | Little Show | Cam. News Caravan | Texaco Star Theater | Fireside Theater | Armstrong Circle Theater | Original Amateur Hour | | NBC |
| W E D | Club Seven | CHANCE OF A LIFETIME | FIRST NIGHTER | DON McNEILL'S TV CLUB | | Wrestling From The Rainbo In Chicago (to 12 Midnight) | | ABC | |
| | Stork Club | CBS News | PERRY COMO | Arthur Godfrey And His Friends | TELLER OF TALES | The Web | Blue Ribbon Bouts | SPORTS SPOT | CBS |
| | Captain Video | Manhattan Spotlight | Susan Raye | local | Famous Jury Trials | The Plainclothesman | Broadway To Hollywood | local | DUM |
| | Kukla, Fran And Ollie | Roberta Quinlan | Cam. News Caravan | FOUR STAR REVUE | Kraft Television Theater | | Break The Bank | STARS OVER HOLLYWOOD | NBC |
| T H U R | Club Seven | The Lone Ranger | Stop The Music | Holiday Hotel | Blind Date | COVER TIMES SQUARE | Roller Derby (to 11:15) | ABC | |
| | Stork Club | CBS News | Faye Emerson | BURNS & ALLEN SHOW | The Show Goes On | ALAN YOUNG SHOW | BIG TOWN | TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES | CBS |
| | Captain Video | Manhattan Spotlight | Joan Edwards | local | ADVENTURES OF ELLERY QUEEN | Boxing From Esatern Parkway With Dennis James | | DUM | |
| | Kukla, Fran And Ollie | Little Show | Cam. News Caravan | YOU BET YOUR LIFE | Hawkins Falls | Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge | Martin Kane, Private Eye | WAYNE KING SHOW | NBC |
| F R I | Club Seven | LIFE WITH LINKLETT | Twenty Questions | NEW YORK GIANTS FOOTBALL HUDDLE | PULITZER PRIZE PLAYHOUSE | PENTHOUSE PARTY | Studs' Place | ABC | |
| | Stork Club | CBS News | PERRY COMO | Mama | Man Against Crime | Ford Television Theater Hour | STAR OF THE FAMILY | Beat The Clock | CBS |
| | Captain Video | Manhattan Spotlight | Susan Raye | local | HOLD THAT CAMERA | Hands Of Mystery | Roscoe Karns, Inside Detective | Cavalcade Of Stars | DUM |
| | Kukla, Fran And Ollie | Roberta Quinlan | Cam. News Caravan | Quiz Kids | We, The People | Versatile Varieties | The Big Story | The Clock | NBC |
| S A T | SANDY DREAMS | LIFE WITH THE ERWINS | Paul Whiteman's TV Teen Club | Roller Derby | | | | ABC | |
| | Big Top (from 6:30) | Week In Review | Faye Emerson | Ken Murray Show | FRANK SINATRA SHOW | SING IT AGAIN | | CBS | |
| | Captain Video | Country Style | | SATURDAY NIGHT AT MADISON SQUARE GARDEN | | | | DUM | |
| | Hank McCune | One Man's Family | Jack Carter Show | Your Show Of Shows | | Your Hit Parade | | NBC | |
| S U N | Paul Whiteman's Goodyear Revue | SHOWTIME U.S.A. | HOLLYWOOD PREMIERE THEATER | SIT OR MISS | Marshall Plan In Action | Falth For Today | OLD FASHIONED REVIVAL HOUR | Youth On The March | ABC |
| | Gene Autry Show | This Is Show Business | Toast Of The Town | | Fred Waring Show | Celebrity Time | What's My Line | CBS | |
| | Starlit Time | | RHYTHM RODEO | local | Arthur Murray Show | They Stand Accused | | | DUM |
| | Leave It To The Girls | The Aldrich Family | COLGATE COMEDY HOUR | | Philo Television Playhouse | Garroway-At-Large | TAKE A CHANCE | NBC | |

In the wartime atmosphere of Communist expansion into Korea, sponsors and networks were determined to avoid controversial performers at any cost. In December 1950, CBS, still stinging from the charge of being "the most satisfying network to the Communists," went so far as to announce that it would require all 2,500 of its employees to take a loyalty oath. In May 1951, General Foods dropped *The Goldbergs* because of the continued presence of Philip Loeb, even though the program had increased the sales of Sanka coffee an amazing 57% among TV viewers and had occasionally been a top ten TV show. No other sponsor stepped forward and CBS soon took the popular series off the air. NBC picked up options to the program, but also could not find a sponsor willing to accept the show with Loeb. In January 1952, Gertrude Berg gave in and agreed to dismiss Loeb (who was unable to find work elsewhere and later committed suicide). Within a month the show was back on (with Harold J. Stone as Jake) but it never recaptured the following or feeling of its CBS run. The united front put up by sponsors in forcing Loeb off *The Goldbergs* was dramatic proof

that blacklisting had become firmly established as an unofficial but iron-clad rule that advertisers, networks, and performers had to accept as part of the broadcasting business.

Networks and ad agencies established elaborate procedures for checking the acceptability of individuals under consideration at writers, directors, and performers. They funneled the names of all prospective talent through a company executive in charge of personnel "security," who would, in turn, consult self-appointed authorities on Communist subversion such as Vincent Harnett, who had helped write *Red Channels*.

Using as a base the single issue of *Red Channels* (published in June 1950), such consultants provided up-to-date information on further charges of Communist infiltration. The clearance procedure on talent was usually conducted by phone and consisted of little more than the agency or network security chief ticking off a list of names and being told "Yes" or "No" by the consultant after each one. Just as in *Red Channels*, the consultants often relied on hearsay evidence as well as words and actions twisted out of context.

The blacklisting process was well insulated from criticism and rebuttal because the people identified as suspicious were never confronted with the charges. Instead, they were merely told that they were "not right" for the job (too tall, too short, and so forth). It was only after being consistently turned down that individuals realized they had probably been blacklisted, but they faced a nearly impossible situation. There were no formal charges to dispute and no accusers to face. As a result, dozens of people were added to blacklists and effectively denied employment without a word of explanation or formal accusation. The networks viewed this system as a distasteful, but necessary, procedure forced upon them by the sponsors and by the paranoid state of the country. Blacklisting was seen as the networks' way of policing themselves in a wartime situation, when it was wise to be extra cautious anyway.

Though the practice of blacklisting proved to be a traumatic experience for those affected, the viewing public found it only vaguely disturbing. Only a few incidents, such as the Philip Loeb firing, ever received general press coverage. Most Americans simply assumed that people would not be accused of Communist connections unless there was some truth to the charges. Because blacklisting usually only affected second-level TV personalities (the superstars were generally left alone), the general public found the situation easy to ignore. Viewers turned to television for entertainment, not disturbing news, and blacklisting remained a behind-the-scenes internal problem that would have to be resolved by the people within the industry. Even the news of the Jean Muir firing in August 1950 was soon superseded in the public's mind by the glittering events of the new season premieres.

In September, viewers were treated to the most exciting fall season since Milton Berle's first appearance, as the nation's most popular radio stars made the plunge into video. With a great deal of advance publicity, NBC unveiled *The Colgate Comedy Hour* and *Four Star Revue*, two lavishly furnished comedy-variety hours staged live, in huge New York theaters, with flashy sets, music,

dancing, and skits. The two shows were the network's vehicles for bringing to TV nine of its top comedy acts: Eddie Cantor, Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, Fred Allen, Bob Hope, and Bobby Clark on *The Colgate Comedy Hour*, and Jimmy Durante, Ed Wynn, Danny Thomas, and Jack Carson on *Four Star Revue*. In order to avoid the wear and tear of a week-in, week-out routine, each of the nine had a separate production staff and was scheduled to appear as host only about once a month, rotating the chores with the other headliners. This was thought to be the perfect solution to the pressures that frequently faced such performers as Sid Caesar and Milton Berle, whose writers had to come up with material for an entire program every week. Even though the rotating procedure was very expensive (\$50,000 a week), NBC felt this was the best way to produce comedy blockbusters and the network confidently slotted the programs against the two most popular shows on CBS: *The Colgate Comedy Hour* aired on Sunday versus the number three rated *Toast of the Town*, while *Four Star Revue* took on the number two ranked *Arthur Godfrey and Friends* on Wednesday.

In September and October, as the stars each made their first appearances, ratings were high and reviewers were ecstatic in their praise of the two shows. It looked as if NBC had pulled off a minor miracle. Though the network had lost a slew of big comedy names to CBS Radio in 1948, NBC appeared to be on the verge of locking up the field of TV comedy. Week after week, viewers saw top-notch material that had taken the stars years to polish and perfect.

Eddie Cantor's first program showcased a "Cavalcade of Cantor," reprising his many hits and ending with Cantor in blackface singing "Ain't She Sweet" and "Ma, He's Making Eyes at Me." Cantor made it a point to give exposure to new talent and during the season he featured the TV debuts of Eddie Fisher and sixteen-year-old Joel Grey, son of veteran borscht-belt comedian Mickey Katz. Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, who had become big radio and film stars by 1950, brought back to television their highly polished combination of Martin's romantic crooning and Lewis's zany



Studs' Place embodied the "Chicago School" of television with improvisational innovation on a tight budget: (from left) front: Studs Terkel, Beverly Younger, and guest John Barclay; back: Chet Roble and Win Stracke. (Courtesy NBC, Chicago)

"swell nonsense." Comedy newcomer Norman Lear usually wrote many of their segments. Ed Wynn came in from the West Coast and used the cavernous Center Theater in New York as a TV playground, staging such show-stopping routines as bicycling French singer Edith Piaf around on top of a movable piano. Bob Hope added hilarious visual double takes to his radio style of sharp one-liners and clever skits, while Jimmy Durante drew on his electric personality and unbeatable charm with lady guests.

There were some problems. Danny Thomas, one of the youngest of the nine, did not click at first. His opening monologues were good (Thomas assumed the pose of belligerent underdog), but the rest of the show emerged as static and bland. Instead of projecting his personality to the folks at home, Thomas began to play to the studio audience. He frequently lapsed into wartime flag-waving that came over only as bad corn. By March, though, Thomas gained more confidence and the show improved tremendously. He was helped by better writing and the adoption of the more cohesive "book show" style. In this process, an hour-long comedy-variety show tied together its sketches and music with a thin continuing thread, such as Thomas and his crew taking a train ride to Miami.

The three other stars had more serious problems. Los Angeles comic Jack Carson's shows were replete with bad timing and insufficient planning. Bobby Clark, whose appearances were produced by famed showman Mike Todd, was lost amid a bevy of beautiful legs (a Todd trademark), sloppy slapstick routines, and erratic production work. The big failure, though, was Fred Allen. After being away from audiences for a year (following his radio banishment by *Stop the Music*), Allen seemed rusty, spiteful, and uncomfortable in the role of emcee. He had not performed on the open stage for eighteen years, yet NBC placed him, like the others, in a huge Manhattan theater that often swallowed up guests and hosts that did not come on brash and brassy. Allen was a humorist used to the close, relaxed atmosphere of a radio studio and he never hid his disdain for television, which added an unwanted Scrooge-like element to his already acerbic character. For Allen's long-time radio fans, one of the big letdowns in the television show was the treatment of Allen's Alley. Instead of using talented character actors to flesh out the residents of the famed fictional street, the program presented Ajax Cassidy, Titus Moody, Mrs. Nussbaum, and Senator Claghorn as puppet characters, turning the program into some bizarre sort of Kukla, Fred, and Ollie show.

Of the September array of NBC comedy celebrities, Allen was the first to fall. He left the show in December, citing high blood pressure and issuing a parting blast at the network, which he said had forced the revue format on him. "I'm through with this kind of television," Allen said, adding that if he returned it would be in a low-key thirty-minute format closer to the style used by Chicago's Dave Garroway.

CBS also brought a number of radio stars to TV in the 1950-51 season, including some that had been lured to the network in the Paley's Comet talent raids of 1948. Edgar Bergen, Jack Benny, and Bing Crosby did occasional specials, while Frank Sinatra had a weekly series running against *Your Show of Shows*. Despite the big budget variety shows in its schedule, though, CBS felt that situation comedy was a more stable television form that would be easier to exploit in the long run. The network felt such programs could overcome some of the weaknesses of the variety format by presenting viewers with continuing characters, settings, and stories, rather than week after week of unrelated skits, which often looked like sixty minutes of random activity. Consequently, CBS, as it had previously done in radio, concentrated on sitcoms, trying to give its programming a different "feel" from NBC and hoping to develop a blockbuster hit that could push it ahead of NBC in the TV

ratings race. In the fall of 1950, however, the network had only one new sitcom ready, *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show*. Even that aired only on alternate Thursdays, live from New York.

George Burns and Gracie Allen performed an effortless transition into television, bringing to the new medium the characters they had developed through twenty-five years in vaudeville and on radio. They were a real life husband and wife comedy team and they played themselves in a domestic setting. George was the long-suffering straightman and Gracie was the mistress of malapropism who seemingly was on a different plane of reality from the rest of the world. The structure of the series was simple: Using a very thin plot line to hold each episode together, George and Gracie interacted with each other and various members of the supporting cast, in effect staging their familiar comedy routines throughout the program. George described the show as having "more plot than a variety show and not as much as a wrestling match."

The Burns and Allen Show drew elements from both *Jack Benny* and *Ozzie and Harriet*. Like Benny, George and Gracie portrayed performers who put on a weekly comedy show, but while they often talked about their fictional television program, they never got near the studio. Instead, like *Ozzie and Harriet*, they used their showbiz identities as a springboard for behind-the-scenes homelife escapades. In these, George and Gracie were joined by their announcer, Harry Von Zell, and their next door neighbors, Blanche Morton (Bea Benaderet) and her straight-laced C.P.A. husband, Harry (played by a succession of actors: Hal March, John Brown, Fred Clark, and Larry Keating). Each week's complications were very simple, inevitably the result of some household or showbiz misunderstanding by Gracie. Though in some ways the program's plots were very much like Hollywood's "screwball" theatrical comedies and the first wave of West Coast filmed TV sitcoms, the excellent writing and emphasis on the comic characters and routines raised the show far above such routine fare. Even when the program became a weekly series in 1952, moving out West and onto film, it retained its high quality production and unique point of view. Gracie Allen was not a dumb blonde or a two-faced schemer. She merely followed her own illogical logic to its nonsense conclusions, leaving everyone who crossed her path totally confused. "If she made sense," George quipped, "I'd still be selling ties."

While Gracie was the comic center of the program, George's special outlook added extra flavor. Going beyond the simple role of straightman to Gracie, George took mischievous delight in confusing people himself because, of all the characters in the show, George alone acknowledged that they were all doing a comedy program and that ultimately none of the complications were meant to be taken seriously. Looking directly into the camera, he made frequent witty asides to the audience, delivering both comic monologues and comments on the story to that point. George usually knew what everybody else in the show was doing, occasionally getting this information just as the home viewer did, by watching the program on TV while it was still in progress. He became a special confidant to the audience at home, acting as both a character and an omniscient observer. As a result, *The Burns and Allen Show* emerged as a relaxed, leisurely visit with some very funny people.

Though the show did well in its time slot against tough competition, the program was not a runaway hit in its early years. CBS's sitcom strategy had yet to be proved for television. In fact, by January 1951, there was not one sitcom listed among TV's top ten rated shows. According to the A.C. Nielsen Company (which had taken over the Hooper ratings service in early 1950), NBC dominated the television ratings chart with comedy-variety hours, dra-



George Burns and Gracie Allen, successful radio stars since 1932, made an effortless transition to CBS television in 1950. (Courtesy George Burns)

ma anthologies, and Friday night boxing. CBS was represented at the top of "the Niensens" with a few of its own variety, drama, and sports shows, but the network continued to bank on sitcoms for the future. In the summer of 1951, when most of the comedy-variety stars were on vacation, CBS presented a new show that it felt would usher in the age of sitcom supremacy on television: *The Amos 'n Andy Show*.

Since May 1949, CBS had been scouring the country in search of an all-black cast for the TV version of radio's *Amos 'n Andy*, building as much interest and anticipation as possible. With its proven success and viewer loyalty from radio, the series seemed a good choice by CBS for a possible breakthrough in television situation comedy.

Created by Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, two white men, *Amos 'n Andy* had been one of radio's first nationwide sensations, becoming a national obsession soon after arriving on the NBC network in 1929. People planned their lives around the 7:00-7:15 P.M. weekday radio broadcasts. Movie theaters altered show times and some piped in the program for patrons.

Amos 'n Andy had begun as the humorous adventures of two black men, focusing on their home lives, friends, and the funny situations they got into. Amos Jones (portrayed by Gosden) was the respectable straightman, a hard-working, church-going solid citizen, happily married with two children. Andy Brown (Correll) was the good natured comic foil, a pudgy adlebrained bachelor. They lived in the Harlem area of New York City and operated the "Fresh Air Taxi Cab Company, Incorporated," which consisted of one rundown old car that did not even have a windshield. Amos did most of the work while Andy loafed or chased women. They

both socialized with George Stevens, nicknamed the Kingfish, who was the head of the Mystic Knights of the Sea Lodge and a fast talking conniver. The Kingfish (also played by Gosden) was always ready to fleece Andy with some new get-rich-quick scheme and, as the series evolved in the 1930s, he began to supplant Amos, whose character was a bit too straight for many comic situations and misunderstandings. Governor Huey Long of Louisiana, a great fan of the show, even adopted the nickname Kingfish for himself.

Though the Kingfish put on a boastful front as a big-time operator, his schemes were generally penny ante manipulations and he was caught as the fall guy almost as often as Andy. Over the years, the Kingfish became the main character of the series, with more and more attention given to his home life. There the Kingfish was just a hen-pecked husband, dominated by his wife, Sapphire (Ernestine Wade), and hounded by his sour mother-in-law (Amanda Randolph). As a result, the Kingfish emerged as an earthy, uneducated, but lovable conniver rather than as a cruel and malicious schemer. The only chance he ever had to show off was down at the lodge where he could always talk Andy into another hair-brained venture or berate Lightnin', the lodge's shuffling dim-witted janitor.

Like most hit radio comedies of the era, *Amos 'n Andy* had its share of stock phrases. During the program's heyday in the 1930s, many of these became part of the nation's vocabulary, including "I'se regusted!" "Ow-wah, ow-wah, ow-wah!" "Now ain't that sumpin'!" and "Holy mackerel, Andy!" Even into the 1940s when it became a half-hour weekly series, *Amos 'n Andy* was still a top ten radio show with a strong following. The program was a logical first choice for CBS's famed Paley's Comet talent raids of 1948 and the network had high hopes that a TV version of *Amos 'n Andy* would be just as successful and long-lasting as the radio show. Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, who did their radio show from Los Angeles, personally supervised the long casting process and they produced the TV pilot film for the series, on the West Coast, at the then expansive cost of \$40,000.

Amos 'n Andy was the first important television situation comedy filmed in Los Angeles, and it used a program formula that was identical to the vanguard West Coast filmed sitcoms of the previous season, only with a bigger budget and better overall production. These filmed series, like Hollywood's theatrical "screwball" comedy films, relied on simple cardboard characters placed in silly situations that could be easily repeated and endlessly exploited. In this form of comedy, the situation became all important. The stereotyped characters ran through the paces of the plot as if it were an obstacle course, serving as mouth-pieces for one-liners as they reacted to the absurd events. This formula had worked well for movie and radio comedies and CBS thought that *Amos 'n Andy* could produce television's first smash hit sitcom with this style.

Like the formula screwball comedies, the TV series relied on misunderstood situations and misfired schemes, ploys that allowed even the most trivial actions to become the basis for an outlandish story. In one episode, the Kingfish (Tim Moore) discovered that Andy (Spencer Williams) was in possession of a rare coin (a nickel worth \$250) and tricked him into giving it up. However, the Kingfish then mistakenly used that nickel at a public pay phone to call a rare coin dealer, so he talked Andy into helping him to break open the coin box with a crowbar to retrieve it. The two were caught and taken to court, but were soon rescued by their level-headed friend, Amos (Alvin Childress), who helped convince the judge to release them. Another week, the overage Kingfish received a draft notice intended for another, much younger, George Stevens. He felt honored to serve his country at middle age and proudly reported for the Army physical. When the Army turned him down, the Kingfish

September 7, 1950

Truth or Consequences. (CBS). After ten years on radio, Ralph Edwards brings his popular audience participation show to television, intact. "Consequences" on the first video episode include a wife throwing trick knives at her husband, and the sentimental reunion of a wounded G.I. and his mother (after a thirty-one-month separation).

September 18, 1950

NBC Comics. (NBC). Animated cartoons come to network television in a fifteen-minute late afternoon weekday program made up of four three-minute cartoon series: "Danny Match" (a young private eye), "Space Barton" (interplanetary adventures), "Johnny and Mr. Do-Right" (a school boy and his dog), and "Kid Champion" (a young boxer).

September 25, 1950

The Kate Smith Show. (NBC). NBC succeeds with the first major venture in afternoon network television: an hour of music and variety.

October 6, 1950

Pulitzer Prize Playhouse. (ABC). Alex Segal directs ABC's first major dramatic series. The acting and writing are top-notch, with scripts from a number of Pulitzer Prize winning authors such as Maxwell Anderson, Thornton Wilder, and James Michener.

October 16, 1950

Following the lead of NBC and Kate Smith, CBS jumps into afternoon television with two hour-long variety shows. Garry Moore (moving from evenings) and Robert Q. Lewis are the hosts.

December 15, 1950

Hear It Now. (CBS Radio). Ed Murrow is reunited with Fred Friendly (recently signed to CBS) and together they create "a document for the ear."

felt ashamed and had Andy hide him at the lodge, where he wrote postcards "from training camp" and sent them to Sapphire.

Inevitably, a few words of explanation cleared up such situations, and the characters were ready to do it all again the following week. These simple stories were silly but funny, and the actors were good in their comic roles. (Ernestine Wade as Sapphire and Amanda Randolph as Sapphire's Mama came directly from the radio version.) However, instead of giving CBS its first important sitcom success, *Amos 'n Andy* created nothing but problems once it hit the air.

Because *Amos 'n Andy* was the first major television sitcom series from Los Angeles, the inherent weaknesses of the screwball style were painfully evident. Characters in West Coast comedies were exaggerated comic caricatures living in a fantasy world of formula humor. Even though *Amos 'n Andy* was much better than such dismal TV vehicles as *The Hank McCune Show*, East Coast critics still had serious reservations about the form. However, *Amos 'n Andy* faced an additional problem. Because the series was also the first television program to deal exclusively with blacks, the underlying silliness of the characters was interpreted by some as a putdown directed specifically against blacks. Protests began almost immediately after the program premiered. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) blasted the series, complaining that it "depicts the Negro in a stere-

otyped and derogatory manner ... it strengthens the conclusion among uninformed or prejudiced people that Negroes and other minorities are inferior, lazy, dumb, and dishonest."

Though there had been a great deal of ballyhoo over the search for an all-black cast for *Amos 'n Andy*, the fact that the performers were black was almost secondary to the types of plots and characters in the series. Both were, in fact, totally interchangeable with scores of "white" sitcoms that both preceded and postdated *Amos 'n Andy*. Gosden and Correll had never used the incongruity of white men playing black roles as a source of laughs, and the approach in the television version also avoided situations that might have been staged as cheap racial putdowns. *Amos 'n Andy* was set up in an essentially all-black world, where whites were rarely seen. If the Kingfish was outsmarted, it was by a black con artist, not a white one. There were black lawyers and black doctors to balance off black stooges. As in any screwball comedy, the stories depended on misunderstandings and crazy antics by such tried and true stereotypes as a money-hungry bumbler, a slow-witted second banana, a shrewish wife, and a battleaxe mother-in-law. In *Amos 'n Andy*, these familiar comic caricatures just happened to be black. Nonetheless, the NAACP was outraged that the first major television program to feature blacks prominently was a screwball situation comedy, a form which included as a matter of course comic caricatures that the organization was particularly sensitive to seeing identified with blacks. For example, the minor supporting character of Lightnin' (Horace Stewart), the janitor at the lodge, was shiftless, lazy, and dumb. Worse yet, he spoke with a high-pitched drawl ("Yazzah") and walked with a lazy shuffle.

Reacting to the characters and the stories, the NAACP urged a boycott of the show's sponsor, Blatz beer. The boycott never caught on, but then again neither did the show. Television's *Amos 'n Andy* never attracted anywhere near the loyalty and support of the radio version, and for CBS it was an expensive disappointment. Instead of dethroning Milton Berle and comedy-variety, *Amos 'n Andy* secured only marginal ratings and, after two years, the show was taken off the air. Fifteen years later, in response to continued sensitivity over the program's perceived racial tone, CBS even withdrew *Amos 'n Andy* from circulation as an off-network rerun.

In a way, *Amos 'n Andy* was kicked off the air for the wrong reason. Though its black stereotyped characters were gone, the underlying assumptions for West Coast screwball sitcoms remained. In that light, *Amos 'n Andy* was merely the harbinger of a successful trend, with its black characters no more nor less demeaning than their white equivalents. Throughout the decade that followed, similar screwball series flourished featuring white performers, while a generation of black talent was rarely offered another opportunity to helm a broad comedy.

Instead, if cast at all, black performers often found themselves in domestic roles, such as in the setting for another new West Coast filmed sitcom with a black character in the title role, ABC's *Beulah*. Arriving in October 1950, six months earlier than *Amos 'n Andy*, the series received far less attention, even though it, too, dealt in old-fashioned stereotypes. While *Amos 'n Andy* presented an essentially all black world that included business professionals as well as sitcom schemers, *Beulah* cast blacks almost exclusively as servants in a suburban setting that was barely removed from the antebellum world of "Gone With the Wind."

Beulah's taint of racial deprecation had begun on radio. The character of Beulah was created by a white man, Marlin Hurt, and had first appeared in 1944 as part of *The Fibber McGee and Molly Show*. In 1945, ABC Radio gave Beulah "her" own show, with Hurt continuing the character in the new series. Each week, he got

his first big laugh by exploiting the incongruity between his radio character and his physical appearance. After an introduction by the studio announcer leading up to Beulah's first appearance, Hurt, previously unseen by the studio audience, jumped into place and yelled, in character, "Somebody bawl for Beulah?" The sight of a small white man with the voice of a large black woman never failed to touch off a roar of laughter from the studio audience. When Beulah shifted to CBS Radio in 1947, a real black woman (Hattie McDaniel) took the title role, but the program never lost its condescending attitude, even in the transfer to television.

In the television version, McDaniel played Beulah for only a few episodes in the middle of the run, with Ethel Waters (followed by Louise Beavers) taking the lead. No matter the performer, Beulah remained the much put-upon "Mammy" for a bland suburban white middle-class family, running their day-to-day domestic lives as "queen of the kitchen." Beulah was presented as a reassuringly warm and non-threatening woman who often rescued the "masters of the household" from their own simple misunderstandings and complications. Still, Beulah was ultimately just hired help, whose path came through the back door. In the program's supporting cast, there were no noticeable black professionals; instead, Beulah had a nondescript shiftless boyfriend, Bill (Percy Harris), and a scatter-brained girlfriend, Oriole (Butterfly McQueen). Unlike *Amos 'n Andy*, *Beulah's* bland stories and setting saved it from being an obvious target for harsh racial criticism at the time. Yet, the program did little to advance the range of television roles for black comic performers as it reinforced safe but still stereotypical images, relegating even the title character to a subservient position.

The Los Angeles-produced filmed sitcoms introduced in the 1950-51 season were, at best, only marginally successful. Yet there would be more. As the coast-to-coast coaxial cable neared completion, television executives prepared to link the operations of the two centers of popular entertainment in America, New York and Los Angeles. Increased Hollywood production was inevitable as the East and West branches of television moved into a new phase of their battle for dominance in the medium.

With the final hookup of the East-West cable targeted for the fall of 1951, the networks eliminated practically all of their remaining Chicago-based productions. Executives found that it made more sense to draw on the resources of the two coasts instead. New York-based producers had tremendous expertise with complicated in-studio productions, especially live drama, plus a rich stock of Broadway performers to draw from. Los Angeles had talent proficient in filmed productions and was also the home of the top stars in radio comedy and variety (many of whom had temporarily relocated out East for the move to television). Chicago programming was totally expendable. Throughout the season, most of the Chicago-based variety programs (usually unsponsored anyway) were replaced by more easily sold programs live from New York or on film from Los Angeles. Even *Garroway at Large*, the most popular of the Chicago television stable, found itself without a sponsor at the end of the season.

One of the last successful network programs to come out of Chicago was a low-key new game show, DuMont's *Down You Go*, hosted by a professor of English from Northwestern University, Bergen Evans. Even though it was created by Louis G. Cowan, who had conceived such flashy vehicles as *Stop the Music*, *Down You Go* had a distinctively different flavor from other network programs, chiefly because of its Chicago-based production. Using fresh, unknown talent rather than a panel of familiar big name celebrities, *Down You Go* emerged as one of the wittiest, most relaxed game shows on television. The mechanics of the game were simple: Using clues provided by Evans, the four panelists had

to guess a slogan, sentence, word, or phrase, filling in each word, letter by letter. For "I don't want to set the world on fire," Evans suggested that this was "the usual excuse for those who have no burning ambition." Evans and the panel members obviously enjoyed working with each other and their personal charm and effortless good humor consistently came through to the home audience. The program stood out favorably against the competition and ran on DuMont for four years, subsequently appearing briefly on each of the other three networks as well.

Though the top rated programs in the 1950-51 season were variety shows, drama anthologies, and sports contests, the networks usually selected a game, panel, or quiz show format to fill holes in their schedules. Such programs were easy to stage, inexpensive, and practically interchangeable. Only a few ever stood out. Besides *Down You Go*, there were two other distinctive game shows that season, *You Bet Your Life* and *Strike It Rich*.

Strike It Rich began on television as a CBS daytime offering and was soon added to the network's nighttime schedule as well. Hosted by Warren Hull and occasionally by Monty Hall, *Strike It Rich* described itself as "the quiz show with a heart," though critics claimed it merely exploited the weaknesses of contestants in order to garner high ratings. The program featured people in need, including such unfortunates as someone who needed money for an expensive operation, a childless couple looking for an orphan to adopt, and a widow needing funds to start a new life. After answering a few simple qualifying questions, the contestants had to stand in front of the audience, tell their stories, and plead for assistance.

December 25, 1950

The Steve Allen Show. (CBS). "Steve Allen" shifts to television (weekday evenings) with a simple format that will serve him well for years: He plays the piano, interviews guests, and talks to the audience. The following May, Allen is moved to noontime and his show expands to an hour.

December 25, 1950

"One Hour In Disneyland." (NBC). Walt Disney's first television special. He quickly displays a great blend of television showmanship and commercialism, incorporating plugs for upcoming Disney films in a "best of Disney" retrospective.

January 20, 1951

The Cisco Kid. Duncan Renaldo plays a Mexican equivalent to the Lone Ranger in a syndicated adventure series distributed to the local stations by Ziv. Just to be prepared, the episodes are filmed in color.

April 23, 1951

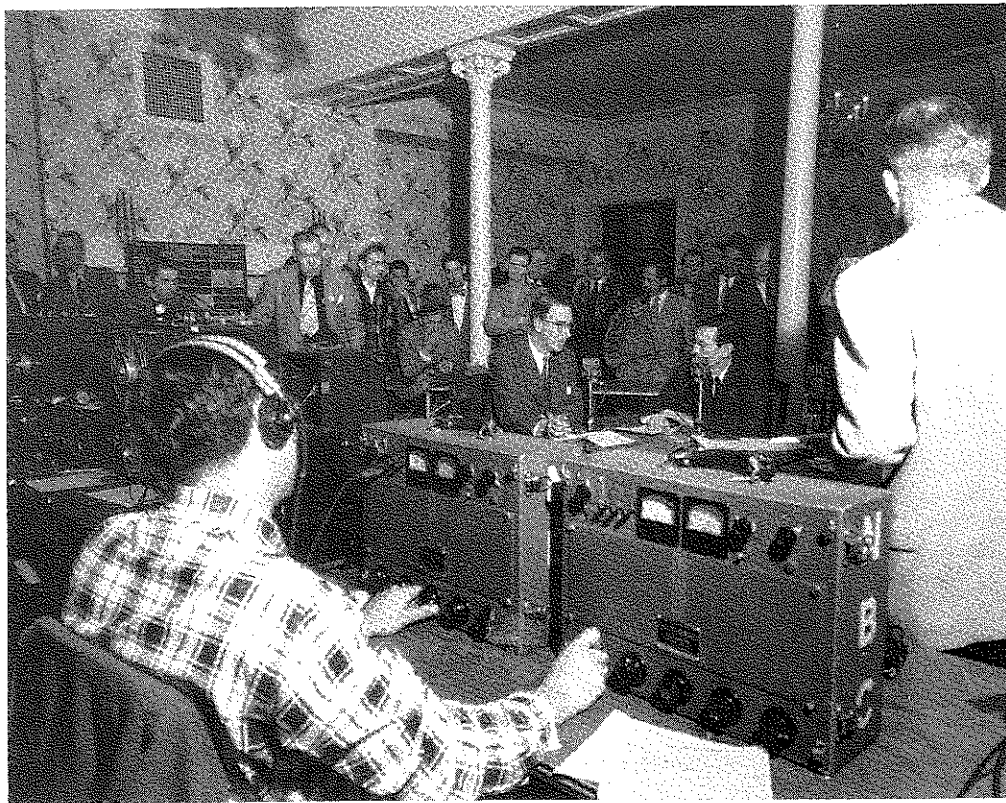
Ed Thorgensen and the News. (DuMont). The second of DuMont's three attempts at its own nightly news show. This version uses a top newsreel announcer, but settles for a very cheap set (even by DuMont's standards). One month later, the program is gone.

May 14, 1951

Time for Ernie. (NBC). Ernie Kovacs makes it to network television in a brief afternoon series. In July, he is moved into the *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* time period.

August 24, 1951

After two months under the leadership of Jack E. Leonard, *Broadway Open House* is closed, ending (for the moment) NBC's experiment in late night television.



Senator Estes Kefauver (seated, left) campaigning in the 1952 New Hampshire presidential primary. He used the notoriety gained from televised crime hearings in 1951 to mount a serious bid for the Democratic nomination. (National Archives)

The loudness of the applause by the audience in response to their presentations determined who received the most money. Afterward, home viewers were invited to phone in pledges for those who still needed additional help.

Strike It Rich regularly crossed the line between entertainment and exploitation. Reacting to the absurd mechanics of the program, humorist Al Capp proposed that the show use a Misery Meter which would measure the strength of each tale of woe. The scale began with "sad," and worked its way through "depressing," "heartbreaking," "sickening," and "sickeningly heartbreaking" before reaching the ultimate: "unbearably tragic." The program was regularly criticized for its maudlin tone, but the most dramatic expression of outrage took place in the studio control room one day when the show's director was ordered to broadcast a tight closeup of the legs of a crippled person attempting to walk. Instead, the director silently stood up, walked out of the control room, and never returned.

You Bet Your Life, the season's most successful new game show, was far removed from such tactics. The program had begun on radio as a vehicle for the ad-lib wit of Groucho Marx, and continued unchanged in the move to television. Prior to *You Bet Your Life*, Groucho had been a flop on radio in four short-lived scripted programs. In 1947, John Guedel, the creator of Art Linkletter's audience participation shows *People Are Funny* and *House Party*, talked Groucho into trying the quiz show format. At first Groucho resisted, feeling that the role of quizmaster was beneath his professional dignity. Once the program started rolling, it quickly became apparent that Guedel had found the perfect setting for Groucho's wit. The quiz portion of *You Bet Your Life* was unimportant; it served as the excuse to have pairs of contestants brought out to be interviewed by Groucho before "playing the game." Groucho did not see the contestants before they were introduced by announcer George Fenneman, so Groucho's comments once they met were spontaneous.

In order to assume control over such a potentially volatile for-

mat, the show's producers carefully selected the contestants, looking for people that could play well against Groucho. For further control, one hour of material was recorded live before a studio audience, then edited down to a thirty minute program. This allowed the producers to assemble a tight package and to discard unsuccessful exchanges and exceptionally risqué comments. The format clicked and *You Bet Your Life* became a top ten radio show for NBC. When the program came to television, the producers merely added a camera. Television viewers could then see Groucho's leering eyes whenever a beautiful woman appeared, and the flustered attempts at composure by any contestant whom fate had saddled with a funny-sounding name—a favorite target of Groucho's quips. *You Bet Your Life* continued on television virtually unchanged until the early 1960s, a monument to Groucho's creativity and Guedel's insight.

While *You Bet Your Life* shot into the top ten for NBC, Groucho's brother, Chico Marx, bombed in *The College Bowl*, an odd musical comedy on ABC. Cast as the owner of a campus malt shop, Chico played essentially the same type of character as he did in the successful Marx Brothers feature films, singing nonsense songs at the piano and cracking horrible puns in Italian dialect. He was surrounded by a crew of young singers and dancers (including eighteen-year-old Andy Williams) who played the local "campus types" that hung around the malt shop. There was constant singing, dancing, and light humor, but the scripts were terrible, the staging lackluster, and the program never caught fire.

Another major disappointment for ABC was the performance of a TV film version of Chester Gould's comic strip crimefighter Dick Tracy. The show was unable to duplicate the success of ABC's only big hit, *The Lone Ranger*, even though it possessed many of the same pulp adventure elements in an urban crime setting. From its beginning in 1931, the Dick Tracy comic strip presented a violent world of clearcut good guys, bad guys, crime, and punishment. Tracy joined the police force as a plainclothes detective following the murder of his fiancée's father, and his pursuit of

bizarre criminals such as Flattop, Prune Face, and Pouch inevitably included a graphic, fatal shoot-out. Through the 1930s and 1940s, the comic strip inspired a successful radio show and a series of theatrical films starring Ralph Byrd. Yet the television series, which even had Byrd repeating the title role, never took off.

One unexpected problem the producers faced was that when the series began filming in early 1950, Congress was going through one of its first seizures against television violence. Word was flashed to Los Angeles to tone down Tracy's escapades. Consequently, the first two episodes of *Dick Tracy* shown in September were very mild. The third and fourth episodes, filmed after the congressional heat had cooled, brought Tracy back to his more familiar tough guy stature. The fifth show featured two murders, a gun fight, and a fist fight. The sixth show opened with a hanging. Even so, the program failed to make a dent in Arthur Godfrey's Monday night audience.

ABC's poor showing in the fall served to compound the network's shaky financial position. While NBC and CBS battled for ratings points at the top, ABC was fighting for its life. The network had saved some money the previous season by substantially cutting back its schedule, but when ABC resumed seven-day-a-week programming, it found the money and ratings problems worse than ever. Though ABC had a few hits such as *The Lone Ranger* and *Stop the Music*, the rest of its programs were regularly trounced by the other networks. Worse yet, all through 1950, TV production costs multiplied at a staggering rate and, for the first time, the networks' television budgets surpassed their radio budgets. All the other networks pumped money into TV broadcasting from other, more profitable, parts of their corporate setup. NBC was part of RCA, CBS owned Columbia Records, and DuMont made TV sets. ABC had to sink or swim with its radio and TV operations alone.

ABC saw no hope for a quick upswing in either the number of viewers or the number of affiliates. The outbreak of the Korean War had forced a sharp reduction in TV set production, and the FCC's unending freeze on new TV station construction had halted such expansion. ABC decided that if a new source of income was not found, the network would not be able to continue. In May 1951, after flirting with a merger offer from CBS, ABC announced plans to merge with United Paramount Theaters. United Paramount had been formed when Paramount Pictures was ordered by the Supreme Court to divest itself of the ownership of movie theaters while the studio continued to produce films. Besides offering ABC much-needed cash, United Paramount had a number of officials steeped in Hollywood techniques and tradition. It was felt that such an influx of West Coast showmanship could give the young and struggling ABC a distinctive flair, contrasting with the New York orientation of the other three networks.

The parties asked the FCC to approve the merger before September to allow ABC to begin the next season on a new footing. Perhaps they should have specified which September they intended, because two seasons slipped by while the FCC sat on the merger request. The FCC was still struggling with the comparatively simple decision of whether or not to accept the Paramount Pictures-United Paramount split. Because the FCC repeatedly had contended that Paramount Pictures controlled DuMont, the ABC request would go nowhere until the FCC decided whether to accept United Paramount as a separate entity. Only then would the commission get into the question of whether a theater chain should own a television network. As the bureaucrats at the FCC chewed on these questions, ABC watched its financial reserve sink lower and lower.

Though the FCC postponed a decision on ABC's merger request, during the 1950-51 season the commission ended, for the

moment, ten years of deliberation on another topic: color. In October 1950, the FCC voted to approve CBS's noncompatible process as the country's official color television system. The Korean War and the freeze on station construction had temporarily halted the growth in TV set sales but, even so, when the decision was announced there were nine million black and white sets in use that would have to be scrapped and replaced by new color models. Even though RCA had, in the fall of 1949, produced a working, totally compatible color system, the FCC justified its decision by pointing out that CBS's was better in quality and ready at the moment. The RCA system appeared to be a few more years from commercial viability.

RCA appealed the FCC decision, taking the battle all the way to the Supreme Court. The legal wrangling delayed CBS's commercial color debut for more than seven months and, during that time, RCA decided to carry the fight into the public sector. In December 1950, RCA called in television critics from the major newspapers for a demonstration of its compatible color system. The improvement from the previous RCA public exhibitions was substantial and the critics noted that there was only a slight difference in quality between the CBS and RCA systems. This effectively changed the nature of the color debate. Some people observed that the FCC had chosen noncompatible color just as a compatible color system was nearing completion. They questioned the wisdom of asking the nation's viewers either to invest in expensive new color sets or to miss out on important chunks of color TV programming that could not be picked up by black and white models. In May of 1951, however, the Supreme Court turned down RCA's legal appeal and it appeared that CBS had won. Most TV set manufacturers said they would go along with the decision and produce the new color sets when there was an evident public demand for them.

At 4:30 P.M. Monday, June 25, 1951, Arthur Godfrey walked onto the stage of CBS's Grand Central Station studios and was seen in lovely, spinning disk, noncompatible color by the 400 guests watching on eight color sets at CBS, and by other viewers gathered around the thirty color receivers then available in the New York City area. The program was broadcast in color to Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, though it is doubtful that anyone outside the control rooms of those CBS affiliates saw anything but jumbled static. Sixteen sponsors (such as the makers of multicolored automobiles and vibrantly colored lipsticks) paid \$10,000 for the privilege of being seen by a handful of people. CBS felt color would follow the progression of black and white television the previous decade: Early test programs would be seen by next to nobody, a few brave sponsors would stake out some turf in this goldmine of the future, and eventually a few hit shows would lure the reluctant public into the color TV showrooms.

Following the opening day special, no hit shows turned up. No brave sponsors presented themselves. The war-conscious public refused to give up its old black and white sets and showed complete apathy toward color television. CBS soon realized that the FCC approval had come too late. The network had a multi-million dollar lemon on its hands. In October 1951, National Production Authority chairman Charles Wilson (whose top aide was CBS chairman William Paley) politely asked CBS to cease all color television operations for the duration of the national emergency resulting from the war in Korea. Before the print was dry on Wilson's request, CBS graciously agreed to this virtual death sentence for the government-ordered monopoly it had fought so long for. Everybody said publicly that the halt in color operations was just temporary and the FCC continued to limit tests of compatible color to outside regular broadcast hours. Within the television industry, however, it was felt that noncompatible color was dead.

The public's indifference to color television had nothing to do with its feelings toward TV in general. Viewing levels were greater than ever. In fact, three months before color's inauspicious debut, interest in a new television programming event swept the country. Alternately labeled "What's My Crime" and "Underworld Talent Scouts," this program had everything a hit TV show needed: a cast Hollywood could not beat, an ad-libbed script better than any drama, and free publicity from the morning papers. There was suspense, personality conflict, suspicious motivation, and real life human drama. The program was the traveling road show staged by the Senate Crime Committee, Senator Estes Kefauver, chairman.

The committee's investigation into organized crime began to attract attention in early February 1951, when local Detroit TV coverage of the proceedings pulled in top ratings. The story broke into the headlines later that month in St. Louis when nationally known betting expert James J. Carroll refused to testify if television cameras were present. Carroll's lawyer called such television coverage "an invasion of privacy," and observed that his client, "may be ridiculed and embarrassed as a result." When the hearings moved to New York City in mid-March, all the TV networks decided to run them live, during their nearly empty daytime hours. Over the course of the broadcasts, daytime viewing reached twenty times its usual level. TV viewing parties sprang up and people suddenly became aware of the previously untapped power that television had for conveying and even creating events.

Committee Counsel Rudolph Halley and Senator Kefauver became instant celebrities as they probed into the shady activities of such underworld bigwigs as Frank Erickson, Frank Costello, and Joe Adonis before millions of television viewers. One of the most dramatic and damaging of the sessions took place when Frank Costello, like James Carroll, said that he would not testify with television cameras present. Unlike Carroll, Costello then modified his stance and agreed to a compromise: the network cameras could show only his hands during the testimony. In a strange way, this arrangement backfired for Costello because it attracted much more attention than if his face had been routinely shown like the others. Instead, viewers were given an eerie contrast between a calm voice seeking exoneration and the fidgeting hands of a clearly nervous

man. After hours of intense questioning under the hot TV lights, Costello said, "I am not going to answer another question!" and walked out of the committee room. Thirty million viewers saw him leave and the committee cited Costello for contempt.

In spite of the publicity and increased daytime viewing from the hearings, the networks were happy when they came to an end. Extended broadcasting without commercial sponsors meant losing money. In fact, when a night session was held, NBC and CBS stuck with their regular programming and only ABC and DuMont, both with few sponsored shows, continued the broadcasts.

Television's coverage of the Kefauver hearings was called the advent of electronic journalism. Had the hearings been reported only in the newspapers and on the brief nightly TV news shows, they would not have received such wide public attention. Instead, the issues and personalities involved became household topics simply because they had been on live TV. One reviewer marveled that "[Television] has shown that it can arouse public interest to a degree which virtually beggars immediate description." With the next presidential election little more than a year away, politicians with foresight realized that television could be something more than a mute conveyor of convention hoopla.

The Kefauver hearings had other peculiar forms of fallout. The networks saw that there was a tremendous audience waiting for daytime broadcasting and they prepared to exploit it. They also increased the number of crime dramas about the mob throughout the prime time schedule. Senator Kefauver decided to use his newly acquired national celebrity status to run for the Democratic presidential nomination the following year. Though he lost that bid, Kefauver was a serious contender right up to the party's nominating convention.

Perhaps the man who made the best use of his association with the televised hearings was Halley, the committee counsel. In September he became host of the network show *Crime Syndicated*. Even though he appeared only at the beginning and end of the program, laboriously reading cue cards, the exposure was enough to help secure his election in November as president of the New York City Council. Now, *this* was a facet of television that politicians could really understand.

1951-52 SEASON

11. The Thaw

AT 10:30 P.M. (EASTERN TIME), September 4, 1951, coast-to-coast network television became a reality. In the fifty-two cities joined by the coaxial cable, 94 of the 107 television stations then on the air in the United States broadcast the same event: President Harry Truman's address to the opening session of the Japanese Peace Treaty Conference at San Francisco's Opera House.

Before the completion of the Western cable hookup, only 45% of the American homes with a television could be reached by live network TV. Afterward, 95% of the TV homes, from Atlanta north to Boston, west to San Francisco, and south to San Diego, could all watch the same thing at the same time. By the opening of the political conventions in the summer of 1952, only one TV station (KOB in Albuquerque, New Mexico) was not hooked in with the national networks.

All four television networks carried President Truman's speech from the West Coast and, at the end of September, regular commercial coast-to-coast programming began with a string of star-studded variety hours from Hollywood. Still, the most effective demonstration of the electronic magic of transcontinental sight did not take place until Sunday afternoon, November 18, on the premiere broadcast of CBS's *See It Now* (a television version of Edward R. Murrow's respected *Hear It Now* radio news documentary series). On that first show, Murrow sat before two television monitors in CBS's New York City Studio 41 and asked director Don Hewitt to punch up a live signal from the West Coast on one monitor, while showing a scene from New York City on the other. Instantly, a panorama of the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz, and the San Francisco skyline appeared alongside the view of the Brooklyn Bridge, Manhattan, and New York Bay. For the first time, Americans could see both coasts of their vast continent at once, live and instantaneously. Murrow, a man not easily moved, said he was "very impressed" with this technical miracle, and that he expected a lot from TV.

The biggest change in programming caused by the coast-to-coast link was the immediate availability of Los Angeles as a live origination point. Performers who had moved East to host the top variety shows on NBC and CBS immediately transferred back to the West Coast, where their film and radio careers had long been centered. Television was at last ready for coast-to-coast operation. More big money sponsors began to buy television commercial time because there were, via cable, enough markets capable of receiving the networks' signals to justify the investment. With more people tuning in and more sponsors interested in purchasing spots, the

cost of advertising on a prime time show shot up. On NBC and CBS, the two most successful networks, prime time was soon filled with sponsors and, by the end of 1951, their network TV profits exceeded those of their network radio operations for the first time. Television also registered an overall profit in 1951, with 93 of the 108 TV stations on the air finishing in the black.

Yet even amid this expansion there was disappointment. Though DuMont and ABC also saw their network television incomes increase, they were far behind CBS and NBC. The continuing FCC freeze on new stations still kept many cities without television at all, or limited to just a few stations. Pacific residents, who for years had endured the low quality kines of live East Coast fare, found themselves inconvenienced even with the live cable connection. Due to the difference in the time zones, the top live prime time hits began at 5:00 P.M. out West so that the East Coast viewers could see the shows at 8:00 P.M.

The biggest disappointment voiced by many viewers was that, aside from the technical magic of bridging the cross-country chasm, there was very little excitement over the approach of the 1951-52 season. For the first time since the arrival of Milton Berle more than three years before, the networks' fall line-ups consisted primarily of familiar shows returning for another season. Compared to the avalanche of superstar talent that had descended upon TV for the first time during the 1950-51 season, the upcoming season seemed very dull. With most of radio's top talent on television, the period of continuous innovation and expansion appeared to have come to an end.

Television reviewers, bemoaning the absence of any exciting new headliners on the horizon, pointed out that prime time had become too valuable for experimentation, especially at NBC and CBS. The problem was that television had automatically adopted radio's rigid approach to the time period. Programmers assumed that the best way to keep an audience was with the same format, week-in and week-out. With ad slots in the evening sold out, they saw no reason to risk upsetting this rhythm with out-of-the-ordinary fare. As a result, newcomers went through try-outs as second bananas, in fringe hours, and, ironically, on network radio. In these settings, new and different personalities could attempt to carve out a niche for themselves and spring into prime time as headliners.

In 1951, there were many such stars-to-be still toiling in relative obscurity, waiting for their lucky break. Steve Allen was host of a ninety-minute daytime TV variety talk show on CBS, and also

FALL 1951 SCHEDULE

| | 7:00 | 7:30 | 8:00 | 8:30 | 9:00 | 9:30 | 10:00 | 10:30 | | |
|---|--------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|--|--|--|---|--|-----|-----|
| M | local | Hollywood Screen Test | MR. D.A. AMAZING MR. MALONE | Life Begins At 80 | CURTAIN UP! | | Bill Gwinn Show | Studs' Place | ABC | |
| | local | CBS News | Perry Como | Lux Video Theater | Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts | I LOVE LUCY | It's News To Me | Studio One | CBS | |
| O | Captain Video | local | Stage Entrance | Johns Hopkins Science Review | Wrestling From Columbia Park With Dennis James | | | | DUM | |
| | Kukla, Fran And Ollie | Roberta Quinlan | Cam. News Caravan | Paul Winchell And Jerry Mahoney Show | Voice Of Firestone | Lights Out | Robert Montgomery Presents Somerset Maugham Theater | Who Said That? | NBC | |
| T | local | Beulah | Charlie Wild, Private Detective | How Did They Get That Way? | United Or Not | On Trial | ACTOR'S HOTEL | CHICAGO SYMPHONY CHAMBER ORCH. | ABC | |
| | local | CBS News | Stork Club | Frank Sinatra Show | CRIME SYNDICATED | Suspense | Danger | local | CBS | |
| U | Captain Video | local | What's The Story | KEEP POSTED | COSMOPOLITAN THEATER | | Hands Of Destiny | local | DUM | |
| | Kukla, Fran And Ollie | Little Show | Cam. News Caravan | Texaco Star Theater | Fireside Theater | Armstrong Circle Theater | Original Amateur Hour | | NBC | |
| W | local | Chance Of A Lifetime | FROSTY FROLICS | | Don McNeill's TV Club Arthur Murray Party | The Clock | CELANESE THEATER KING'S CROSSROADS | | ABC | |
| | local | CBS News | Perry Como | Arthur Godfrey And His Friends | Strike It Rich | The Web | Blue Ribbon Bouts | Spots Spot | CBS | |
| E | Captain Video | local | Adventure Playhouse | | GALLERY OF MADAME LIU-TSONG | Shadow Of The Cloak | International Playhouse | | DUM | |
| | Kukla, Fran And Ollie | Roberta Quinlan | Cam. News Caravan | KATE SMITH EVENING SHOW | | Kraft Television Theater | Break The Bank | Freddy Martin Show | NBC | |
| T | local | The Lone Ranger | Stop The Music | | HERB SHRINER TIME | GRUEN GUILD THEATER | Paul Dixon Show | At Home Show Red Grange | ABC | |
| | local | CBS News | Stork Club | Burns And Allen Show Garry Moore Show | Amos And Andy | Alan Young Show | Big Town | Racket Squad Crime Photographer | CBS | |
| H | Captain Video | local | Georgetown University Forum | | Broadway To Hollywood Headline Chas | Adventures Of Ellery Queen | local | Bigelow Theater local | DUM | |
| | Kukla, Fran And Ollie | Little Show | Cam. News Caravan | You Bet Your Life | Treasury Men In Action | Ford Festival | | Martin Kane, Private Eye Wayne King Show | NBC | |
| R | local | Life With Linkletter Say It With Acting | MARK SABER MYSTERY THEATER | Stu Erwin Show | CRIME WITH FATHER | Tales Of Tomorrow Versatile Varieties | DELL O'DELL SHOW | Industries For America | ABC | |
| | local | CBS News | Perry Como | Mama | Man Against Crime | SCHLITZ PLAYHOUSE OF STARS | | Live Like A Millionaire Hollywood Opening Night | CBS | |
| I | Captain Video | local | Twenty Questions | | You Asked For It | Down You Go | Front Page Detective | Cavalcade Of Stars | DUM | |
| | Kukla, Fran And Ollie | Roberta Quinlan | Cam. News Caravan | Quiz Kids | We, The People | The Big Story | The Aldrich Family | Gillette Cavalcade Of Sports Greatest Fights | NBC | |
| S | The Ruggles | Jerry Colona Show | Paul Whiteman's TV Teen Club | | LESSON IN SAFETY | HARNESS RACING | | | ABC | |
| | Sammy Kaye Show | Beat The Clock | Ken Murray Show | | Faye Emerson's Wonderful Town | The Show Goes On | Songs For Sale | | CBS | |
| A | local | THE PET SHOP | local | | | | Wrestling From The Marigold In Chicago With Jack Brickhouse | | | DUM |
| | ASSEMBLY VI | One Man's Family | All Star Revue | | Your Show Of Shows | | | Your Hit Parade | | NBC |
| S | Paul Whiteman's Goodyear Revue | BY-LINE | Admission Free | | In Our Time | Marshall Plan In Action | BILLY GRAHAM'S HOUR OF DECISION | Youth On The March | ABC | |
| | Gene Autry Show | This Is Show Business # Jack Benny Program | Toast Of The Town | | Fred Waring Show | | | Celebrity Time What's My Line | CBS | |
| U | local | Peritagon: Washington | | Rocky King, Inside Detective | The Plainclothesman | | They Stand Accused | | DUM | |
| | SOUND-OFF TIME | YOUNG MR. BOBBIN | Colgate Comedy Hour | | Goodyear/Philco Television Playhouse | | RED SKELTON SHOW | Leave It To The Girls | NBC | |

served as one of the network's favorite panel show substitutes. Jack Paar, who had starred in a few unsuccessful comedy series on network radio, was host of the NBC radio quiz, *The \$64 Question*. Even in this simple setting, his fiery personality proved unnerving to network executives. When the quiz show's sponsor pulled out and NBC asked all involved to accept a pay cut, Paar promptly walked off the show (a dramatic action that became a Paar trademark). Buff Cobb and her husband, Myron (Mike) Wallace, were brought by CBS from Chicago to New York, where they became hosts of an endless series of afternoon TV chit-chat shows, some of which aired during CBS's brief and unreceivable color run. Merv Griffin was a lead vocalist on *The Freddy Martin Show*, one of the numerous unsuccessful attempts to bring the big band sound to TV. Soon thereafter Griffin had a solo hit record, "I've Got a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts," and he began to appear as a TV guest on his own.

Going into the 1951-52 season, the few new prime time series that evoked any anticipation featured as headliners performers who

had served similar warm-up stints in previous late night or afternoon programs. Industry insiders watched to see whether stars such as Kate Smith, Jerry Lester, and Garry Moore would be able to transfer their magic to prime time competition. Yet, what would prove to be the most popular and important new show of the season was barely considered in the preseason projections. Critics did not expect anything more than run-of-the-mill Hollywood TV production from a new filmed series, *I Love Lucy*.

Through the 1940s, Lucille Ball had pursued a career as a Hollywood film star, but never had any big hits. In 1948, she began a more successful venture, playing the part of a scatterbrained suburban housewife on the CBS Radio sitcom, *My Favorite Husband*. That series ended in 1951 just as her real favorite husband, Cuban band leader Desi Arnaz, was involved in his own radio show for CBS, *Your Tropical Trip*. Each week, Arnaz mixed his bouncy, infectious Latin "babaloo" rhythms with a hokey giveaway segment—for instance, a contestant who could guess how many bags of coffee Brazil produced the previous year would win

a trip to South America. The program was a disaster and vanished in April 1951, after only a three-month run.

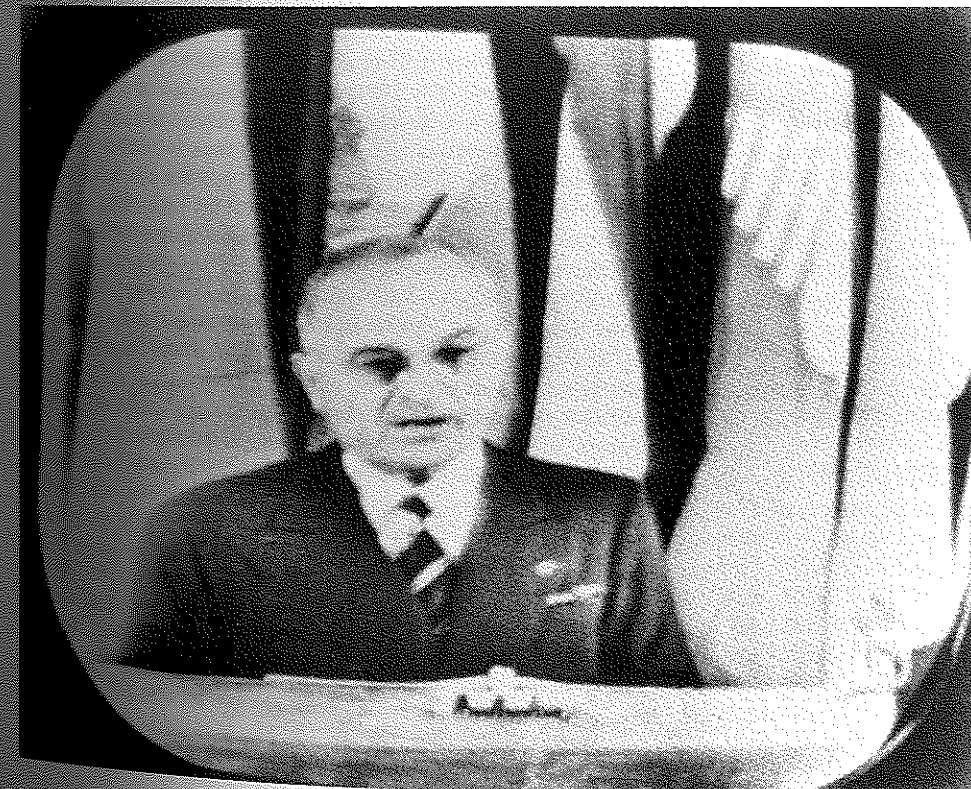
The two were then able to try their hands at a television comedy vehicle and CBS, still eager to develop the TV sitcom form, encouraged them. Lucy and Desi had made several competent guest appearances together on TV variety shows and, with Lucy's radio mentor, Jess Oppenheimer, serving as producer and writer, they developed a domestic sitcom premise and submitted it to the network. Immediately, several points of disagreement arose. CBS wanted them to do the show live from New York, like George Burns and Gracie Allen. Lucy wanted it on film from Los Angeles, so she could be at home with her husband. CBS also balked at the suggestion that Desi Arnaz play her husband in the series. Network brass doubted that he could carry the acting for the comic role. Though a competent band leader and talented song and dance man, Desi was also a foreigner with a heavy accent, and the network feared that audiences would not accept him. Lucy held firm on both points, which CBS agreed to only after some horse trading. CBS demanded that Lucy and Desi take a pay cut, to help make up for the added expense of film production. The couple went along with the cut, as long as CBS allowed them to retain ownership and total production control over the series. After both sides approved the arrangement, Lucy and Desi formed their own TV film production company, Desilu, which would produce the show, and they set about assembling a cast and turning out the first filmed episodes.

At the time, Los Angeles TV films were usually produced by small independent filmmakers because the big studios still refused to become involved with television production. Most of these filmed series adhered to a predictable formula and suffered from inadequate scripts, cheap sets, and weak acting. Though there were a few good Los Angeles productions under way, most were considered inferior to live East Coast shows. In their series, Lucy and Desi stuck with the basic screwball comedy formula, but unlike the others they carefully fashioned it into a delicate balance of exaggerated domestic farce and believable comic characters.

The setup for *I Love Lucy* was an intriguing variation of the "mirror of reality" formula successfully used by Jack Benny, Burns and Allen, and Ozzie and Harriet for years on radio, focusing on both professional and domestic situations. Desi Arnaz played Ricky Ricardo, a Cuban band leader who worked in a Manhattan nightclub, the Tropicana. Lucille Ball played his showbiz-starved wife, Lucy. This combination allowed Arnaz to, in effect, play himself while Ball took off as the comic center for the show, using her talents for slapstick and comic timing that were matched only by Sid Caesar and Jack Benny.

Though the series was filmed in Hollywood, the action was set in New York City, and—in an important break from many previous filmed comedies and radio sitcoms—the two stars were not presented as an already successful suburban couple. Instead, Ricky Ricardo was an up-and-coming, but still struggling, nightclub performer who lived in a middle class Manhattan brownstone within a comfortable but not extravagant family budget. The characters of Lucy and Ricky were especially believable because they resembled the real life Lucy and Desi in a setting that viewers found easy to relate to and accept. The apartment building itself was owned by a down-to-earth middle-aged couple, Fred and Ethel Mertz (William Frawley and Vivian Vance), who were the landlords, upstairs neighbors, and best friends to Lucy and Ricky.

I Love Lucy was set in this essentially real world with three normal characters and one zany but lovable madcap: Lucy. This effectively combined the best of two strains of comedy. From the warm and natural style championed by *The Goldbergs* came a concentration on character interaction. From the Hollywood screwball comedy style exemplified by *Amos 'n Andy* came absurd coincidences and misunderstandings as the basis for the plots. Ball played the Lucy character as a sharp but scatterbrained housewife who inevitably misunderstood conversations and events, turning everyday complications into comic disasters. The other three reacted as basically normal people caught up in a screwball situation. Together they formed a strong performing ensemble that could



With the completion of the AT&T coaxial cable, coast-to-coast network television became a reality. Using this link, President Truman's address at the opening session of the Japanese Peace Treaty Conference was seen throughout the country. (Property of AT&T. Reprinted with permission of AT&T.)

September 3, 1951

Search for Tomorrow and, three weeks later, *Love of Life* lather up the soap opera suds for television, giving CBS the lead in developing this daytime radio staple for TV.

September 10, 1951

The CBS "eye," designed by William Golden, becomes the CBS logo.

September 29, 1951

Television coverage of NCAA collegiate football is reduced to a single national "game of the week" carried by one network (NBC) on Saturday afternoons.

September 30, 1951

The "fourth" television network, DuMont, steals the Sunday afternoon NFL professional football games from the "third" network, ABC.

October 3, 1951

Celanese Theater. (ABC). Alex Segal directs ABC's second major drama series, showcasing material by the "Playwrights Company" (including Maxwell Anderson, Robert Sherwood, Elmer Rice, and Eugene O'Neill).

October 4, 1951

After four years of "pooled" coverage, baseball's World Series begins twenty-six years as the exclusive property of NBC.

November 27, 1951

The Dinah Shore Show. (NBC). NBC's female equivalent to Perry Como eases into a relaxed fifteen-minute weekday show.

December 24, 1951

"Amahl and the Night Visitors." (NBC). Gian-Carlo Menotti presents the first written-for-television opera, a gentle Christmas fantasy of a twelve-year-old boy who befriends the three kings searching for Jesus. The opera becomes a Yuletide tradition on NBC for sixteen years.

handle practically any comedy situation, no matter how silly it might appear on the surface.

In one of the first episodes of the series, Lucy, engrossed in a lurid murder novel, overheard Ricky talking on the telephone and became convinced that he was trying to kill her. She asked Ethel to help her avoid Ricky's clutches while a confused Ricky turned to Fred for suggestions on what could possibly be wrong with Lucy. Like any misunderstood situation, the mix-up took only a few words of explanation to clear up at the end, but the sharp script and strong performances by each character turned such silly fluff into engaging comedy.

Other stories focused on deliberate schemes by Lucy, especially as she tried to follow Ricky into the glamorous world of show business. Ricky always insisted that Lucy stay home as a loving wife, but she used any outlandish disguise and complicated lie to end up on stage or to just meet famous stars and directors. Ethel inevitably acted as Lucy's accomplice, slightly scared of Lucy's schemes but eager underneath to give them a try. Usually, Lucy's hard-fought-for tryouts turned into hilarious failures.

Often, the program avoided show business completely and focused on domestic complications. Sometimes the Ricardos argued with the Mertzes. Other times, the wives and husbands teamed up

against each other. In other situations, all four neighbors took on a common problem. Through all the settings, the energy between the Ricardos and the Mertzes served as the driving force behind the show. They faced situations together as believable, humorous people. Even with Lucy's zany schemes, the farce never completely overshadowed the characters and the characters never got in the way of the humorous situations. As a result, *I Love Lucy* emerged as a perfect combination of sharp comic writing and acting.

The production style used in filming *I Love Lucy* also represented a careful mix of techniques, combining the best traits of both Hollywood films and live TV staging. As in a theatrical film, there was full screen action, effective editing, and well-planned direction. As in live sitcoms, character movement was generally continuous and compact, staying within a few basic sets: the Ricardo apartment, Ricky's nightclub, and one or two special "location" scenes. There was also a studio audience present for the filming, so the comedy was staged for real people responding to the energy of the players.

I Love Lucy premiered on CBS on October 15, 1951, in a choice time slot: Monday night, following the number two rated *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts*. Reviewers marveled at how well the Ricardos and Mertzes walked the tightrope between character and caricature, and how well producer-writer Jess Oppenheimer had made use of the standard screwball elements. Within four months, *I Love Lucy* deposed Milton Berle's *Texaco Star Theater* as television's top-rated show, and *Lucy* stayed there for the next four years. In the process, the Ricardos became the first TV family to be taken to heart by the entire nation, becoming just as real and alive as the characters of radio's *Amos 'n Andy* had been to a previous generation.

For CBS, *I Love Lucy* accomplished what the network had hoped television's *Amos 'n Andy* would do. It proved the strength and acceptability of TV sitcoms, giving the network a strong weapon against NBC's flashy comedy-variety hours. Sitcoms presented viewers with continuing characters, settings, and stories, rather than a mixed bag of skits, and CBS planned to bring others to the schedule as soon as possible.

It quickly became evident that many of the new sitcoms would be quite a letdown from the careful craftsmanship of *I Love Lucy*. Radio's *My Friend Irma* began a live TV version in January 1952, featuring Marie Wilson as a female even more scatterbrained than Lucy Ricardo. (Irma was once convinced that her cat was a missing friend, reincarnated.) Though adequate, the series had nowhere near the energy of *I Love Lucy*. *My Little Margie*, the summer replacement for *I Love Lucy*, had terrible scripts and a cast of characters that seemed designed to embody as many offensive Hollywood stereotypes as possible. Produced by the Hal Roach studios, *My Little Margie* featured Gale Storm in the title role of a bratty, know-it-all young girl; Charles Farrell as her dad, Vernon Albright, an emasculated, mushy widower; Clarence Kolb as George Honeywell, Albright's boss, a stuffed-shirt, blustery capitalist; Gertrude Hoffman as the eighty-three-year-old Mrs. Odettes, who gave senility a bad name; and Willie Best as Charlie, the black elevator operator, who made *Amos 'n Andy*'s Lightning look like a Rhodes scholar. Yet even this series became a big enough summer hit to be picked up as a winter replacement the following season. It was clear that while there might be many successful *I Love Lucy*-inspired sitcoms, few would match the quality of the original.

A summer sitcom that achieved success with a radically different style was *Mr. Peepers*, a low-key live NBC series produced by Fred Coe. Wally Cox portrayed Robinson J. Peepers, a quiet show



The first TV sitcom superstars: (from left) Lucille Ball, Vivian Vance, Desi Arnaz, and William Frawley. (CBS Photo Archive © 2003 CBS Worldwide, Inc. All Rights Reserved.)

tempered high school biology teacher in the small Midwestern town of Jefferson City. Unlike the screwball sitcoms, the humor in *Mr. Peepers* developed from just slightly exaggerated situations that the soft spoken Peepers encountered. His friends Harvey Weskit (Tony Randall), a brash history teacher, and Mrs. Gurney (Marion Lorne), a befuddled English teacher, served as excellent comic foils to his mild manner, and the stories emerged as whimsical visits with friendly, good-natured people. The show was originally scheduled for just a summer run, but viewer response was so strong that NBC used it early in the 1952-53 season as a replacement series. The program ran until 1955 and, at the end of the second full season, the mild mannered Peepers summoned the courage to ask Nancy Remington (Patricia Benoit), the school nurse, to marry him.

One of NBC's first major experiments in filmed TV series was not a sitcom but a crime show, *Dragnet*, which the network brought in as a winter replacement in early 1952. Under the direction of producer-narrator-star Jack Webb, *Dragnet* had begun in the summer of 1949 on radio, featuring Webb as Sergeant Joe Friday of the Los Angeles police department and Barton Yarborough as his partner, Sergeant Ben Romero. The series broke from radio's romanticized image of crime fighting and emphasized instead the mundane legwork necessary for success by real policemen. Stories were based on "actual cases" from the Los Angeles police department and each week, following the opening theme ("Dum-De-Dum-Dum"), the announcer reminded the audience,

"The story you are about to hear is true. Only the names have been changed to protect the innocent." Webb's clipped narration described each case step by step, introducing to the general public the jargon and methodology of police work as well as his own catch phrases such as "Just the facts, ma'am." Listeners, who did not know any more about the cases than Friday and Romero did, followed the painstaking investigations clue by clue and became caught up in the excitement of piecing together the solutions to real life urban crimes. Each show tied everything together at the con-

January 6, 1952

Hallmark Hall of Fame. (NBC). Actress Sarah Churchill (daughter of Winston) serves as host of a Sunday afternoon drama anthology. Later, as a series of floating specials, the *Hall of Fame* productions serve as one of television's classiest series.

January 7, 1952

Arthur Godfrey Time. (CBS). A television simulcast of Godfrey's morning radio variety show pushes CBS-TV up to a 10:00 A.M. starting time.

April 26, 1952

Gunsmoke. (CBS Radio). William Conrad plays marshal Matt Dillon in a Western that takes dead aim at adults.

June 19, 1952

I've Got a Secret. (CBS). Garry Moore hosts another of Mark Goodson and Bill Todman's celebrity panel quiz shows, emphasizing the sharp banter of its regulars. The format is simple: Each contestant has a secret which the panel attempts to guess.

June 30, 1952

The Guiding Light. (CBS). CBS adds this veteran fifteen-year-old radio soap opera to its afternoon television lineup.

July 7, 1952

The Republican National Convention opens in Chicago. CBS has a new anchor, Walter Cronkite.

July 21, 1952

The Democratic National Convention program book ominously warns delegates "Television will be watching YOU!" citing the eight cameras that might catch them unawares in closeup while "covering every inch" of the hall.

clusion with a crisp report on the trial and punishment given to the apprehended criminal. Without resorting to the sounds of excessive violence, *Dragnet* turned investigative police work into exciting and popular radio entertainment.

The television version of *Dragnet* continued the methodical style of the radio show and its dedicated support for the average cop on the beat. *Dragnet* first appeared at Christmastime in a special "preview" episode featuring Webb, Yarborough, and guest Raymond Burr as a deputy police chief. Yarborough died on December 19, so when the show came to the regular NBC television schedule in January 1952, Webb tried out a few new assistants, eventually choosing Ben Alexander as his new partner, officer Frank Smith. Like the radio version three years before, TV's *Dragnet* marked a major change from the standard crime shows proliferating on television. In series such as *Martin Kane*, *Private Eye*, the hero was a loner detective so the police were presented as fumbling fools who would probably trip over a dead body before they realized that a crime had been committed. Series such as *Dick Tracy*, *Mr. District Attorney*, and *Racket Squad* consisted entirely of character stereotypes. The bad guys wore slouch hats and needed a shave while the smooth know-it-all heroes relied on third-degree grillings and coincidence to break a case. *Dragnet*, on the other hand, pictured police neither as boobs nor glamour boys, but as dedicated human beings who solved crimes by careful deduction, using brains rather than brawn.

Dragnet was a tremendous success and, like *I Love Lucy*, set a program style that would be imitated for years. Both shows also made filmed television series respectable. While most of the programs emanating from Los Angeles were still live, the television networks ceased considering filmed series as simply filler. The major Hollywood studios continued to treat television as a leper, but smaller, independent studios were more than happy to fill the new demand for filmed product.

The *I Love Lucy*-inspired boom in sitcom development served as a direct challenge to NBC's emphasis on comedy-variety giants. Even Milton Berle, the network's biggest star, felt the pressure. Though he began the season by knocking off his first serious Tuesday night competition in years (CBS's *Frank Sinatra Show*), Berle dropped as *I Love Lucy* climbed. After being dethroned by *Lucy*, Berle began changing his program's tone, aiming the show more and more toward the kids, adopting a new cognomen, Uncle Miltie. In mid-season, large numbers of adults began to turn from the *Texaco Star Theater* to a new, unexpected source of competition: God. DuMont, which prided itself (out of financial necessity) on producing "sensibly priced" entertainment, threw up against Berle a concept considered too ridiculously simple for the other networks to take seriously: a sermon. For thirty minutes each week on *Life Is Worth Living*, Roman Catholic Bishop Fulton J. Sheen delivered a strong but sensitive religious presentation. He was not plugging a particular doctrine, but rather was discussing everyday problems and the help a faith in God could bring. He even had a sense of humor, often joking about his competition with Berle. One quip had it that both worked for the same boss, Sky Chief.

Even with the challenges to Berle, NBC stuck with its big name variety shows — highlighted by *The Colgate Comedy Hour* and *All Star Revue* (the renamed *Four Star Revue*) — because overall they were still producing top ratings. Throughout the 1950-51 season, *The Colgate Comedy Hour* had regularly defeated its Sunday night competition, Ed Sullivan's *Toast of the Town*. For the new season NBC came up with another TV winner, Red Skelton.

Red Skelton's television act centered on little hats, big grins, his rubber face, and a ready-made roster of already familiar characters from radio including Clem Kadiddlehopper, Willie LumpLump,

Bolivar Shagnasty, and the infamous Mean Widdle Kid. Each week, Skelton merely stepped on stage in front of a curtain and performed, vaudeville style. His decade-long success on radio carried over to television and he shot straight into TV's top ten.

NBC also tried to expand comedy-variety into a new, earlier time period that season, in an attempt to duplicate the early-evening radio success of Jack Benny. For years, Benny had led off CBS's Sunday night radio line-up with his top-rated 7:00 to 7:30 P.M. program, so NBC slotted *Chesterfield Sound Off Time* for the same period, which was unusually early for TV variety. Once again, there was a rotating format, with Bob Hope, Fred Allen, and Jerry Lester taking turns as the show's host. Hope was just as good as always; Lester, who had quit the late night *Broadway Open House* in May, failed with a mix of bland scripts and racy ad-libbed humor; and Allen was once again saddled with hosting a vaudeville show, a task unsuited to his nature. *Sound Off Time* vanished by Christmas, only to be replaced by another variety show, *Royal Showcase*. This was also unable to snare a large audience, though it did feature Fred Allen's best TV performances ever. Appearing as a guest two times in the spring, Allen at last brought to life the characters of his famed Allen's Alley. If this had been done eighteen months earlier, Allen might have become the TV star everyone expected him to be, using his familiar stock of characters in much the same way as Red Skelton.

NBC's experiment with early evening variety achieved only occasional success. However, there was a much more serious problem beginning to show in the network's comedy-variety showpieces, *The Colgate Comedy Hour* and *All Star Revue*. Nightclub and film commitments of the original regulars disrupted the smoothly balanced rotating schedule that had been set up for the two shows and, as the major headliners decreased the number of their appearances, NBC was forced to rely increasingly on less popular substitute hosts. These included Donald O'Connor, Martha Raye, Ezio Pinza, Ben Blue, Tony Martin, the Ritz Brothers, Jack Paar, Spike Jones, Abbott and Costello, and Jerry Lester. *Colgate* was sinking \$100,000 per week into its show (which totaled \$1 million per year, then the highest budget in television) and desperately wanted only the familiar big names as headliners. But the top stars were getting tired of the routine. They found their backlog of material used up very quickly and were forced to fall back on writers who could turn out only so much greatness on a week-to-week basis. At the end of the season, Danny Thomas quit the grind, exploding, "TV is for idiots! I don't like it ... it has lowered the standards of the entertainment industry considerably. You ... work years building routines, do them once on TV, and they're finished. Next thing you know, you are, too ... When and if I ever do my own TV show, I'd like it to be a half-hour on film."

Eventually most of the other major headliners echoed the criticisms of both Danny Thomas and the previously departed Fred Allen. Television comedy-variety used up routines at an incredible rate and performers quickly had to settle for presentations that were just average, frustrating themselves and disappointing viewers. Their shows began to look the same, with the same guests, the same format, and the same material.

As *The Colgate Comedy Hour* turned more frequently to lesser light substitute hosts, Ed Sullivan's show began to nibble away at NBC's hold over the Sunday at 8:00 P.M. slot. After being consistently beaten in the 1950-51 season, Sullivan had decided to give his show a new wrinkle in the hope of drawing even with the celebrity-studded variety hour on NBC. In September 1951, the budget for *Toast of the Town* was increased and Sullivan began doing elaborate special tribute shows. Throughout the season, entire programs were turned over to salutes to Oscar Hammerstein,



Television coverage of the 1952 Democratic convention gave home viewers the best seats in the house. (National Archives)

Helen Hayes, Bea Lillie, Cole Porter, and Richard Rodgers, with the featured artist as headliner and well-known friends as the supporting cast. These tribute shows were, in effect, floating specials that aired within the *Toast of the Town* framework. When stars such as Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis were on *The Colgate Comedy Hour*, NBC still came out on top. However, when viewers were faced with headliners such as Spike Jones or Abbott and Costello, Sullivan's specials provided an attractive alternative on CBS.

NBC's programming chief, Pat Weaver, learned a lesson from Ed Sullivan's success against *The Colgate Comedy Hour* and, late in the fall of 1951, he proposed that NBC adopt the idea of regularly scheduled specials as part of its network strategy. Weaver felt such programs, which he dubbed "spectaculars," could be used to keep NBC's TV schedule vibrant by breaking the weekly routine that too many shows had fallen into. He suggested that a two-hour spectacular could be scheduled to appear about once a month, financed by the regular sponsor of the time slot. Television's big advertisers, as well as NBC itself, were not receptive to this idea. They believed that week-in, week-out regularity in programming was the best way to keep an audience, with Christmas specials such as "Amahl and the Night Visitors" the only exception. Their resistance meant that Weaver had to hold off implementing his "spectaculars" idea for a little while, but he was able to get another

of his pet projects on the air more quickly: *Today*, a two-hour news and information series broadcast in the early morning.

At the start of 1952, daytime TV programming was still sparse. A few stations signed on at about 10:00 A.M., but nothing of any importance took place until about 4:00 P.M. One exception was in Philadelphia where, each weekday morning from 7:00 A.M. to 9:00 A.M., WPTZ ran *Three to Get Ready*, a loose show led by former radio disc jockey Ernie Kovacs. The program had begun in late November 1950 and featured some live music, records, time-and-weather checks, and great doses of Kovacs's own peculiar television humor. He read fan letters on the air, performed skits he had written himself, shot off toy guns after puns, picked his teeth, and even held an audition for goats. *Three to Get Ready* did unexpectedly well in the local ratings and the success of Kovacs apparently convinced NBC that Weaver's idea for an early morning show might attract network viewers as well.

Chicago's Dave Garroway, who had been without a show for a few months, was chosen as the low-key host for the new program, originally dubbed *Rise and Shine* but retitled *Today* before its premiere. NBC budgeted the concept at \$40,000 per week and took out full page ads in trade magazines, declaring the show to be "a revolution in television," and that, via *Today*, "the studio becomes the nerve center of the planet." When the program began in January 1952, though, such proclamations could only be regarded as

promises for the future. Skeptical advertisers withheld support and there was only one sponsor for the premiere.

On the home screens the first *Today* broadcast appeared as an almost meaningless hodge-podge. The cast and crew were squeezed into a tiny street-front New York City studio that had originally been a public display showroom for RCA TV sets. There, viewers could see three teletype machines, weather maps, wire photo displays, clocks set to the times of various world cities, record players, newspapers, the crowd outside the studio, and, oh yes, the show's regular cast of Dave Garroway, Jim Fleming, and Jack Lescoulie. Throughout the program there were frequent cuts to live reports from the Pentagon, Grand Central Station, and the corner of Michigan Avenue and Randolph Street in Chicago, as well as live phone reports describing the weather in London, England and Frankfurt, Germany. Viewers were bombarded with data and they reacted to *Today* with confused indifference. *Today* did not seem to have any point other than to show off fancy gadgets. Before long, NBC toned down the video tricks and adopted a news, reviews, features, and interviews format more suited to Garroway's relaxed nature. By May, the show was in the black.

Today was so successful that WPTZ, in order to carry it, was forced to shift the Ernie Kovacs *Three to Get Ready* program to noon, a move soon followed by his departure to New York City. There, Kovacs did a few daytime network shows for NBC, but soon found himself on the CBS local New York affiliate doing a morning show against his old nemesis, *Today*. His new show continued the loose and off-beat style of *Three to Get Ready*, with such features as visits from Tondelayo, an "invisible" cat that was visible to everybody, and Yoo-Hoo Time. Kovacs noticed that most members of a studio audience began waving as soon as a camera was pointed in their direction, so he generously set aside Yoo-Hoo Time for just such activity. A display card showed the name of a person in the audience who was invited to stand up and wave to his heart's content, egged on by Kovacs. Actor Peter Boyle also made guest appearances, often appearing as either a rotund Irish cop on the beat or a rotund uncle-figure who urged the kiddies to "Eat up like Uncle Petel!" When the makers of *Serutan* ("Natures spelled backwards") took over five minutes of his morning slot, Kovacs insisted for weeks on referring to himself as Ernie Scavok. Above all, Kovacs constantly ribbed the effusive wall gadgets and world-wide air of the competing *Today* show. He hung up signs on his set with such helpful descriptions as: "London," "Cloudy," "Frown," and "Trenton."

On the other side of the broadcast day, the networks were experimenting with new late night telecasts, but these were far less successful than the early morning *Today*. One of the worst shows was CBS's gauche attempt at sophistication, *The Continental*, which aired Tuesday and Thursday nights, 11:15 to 11:30 P.M. Renzo Cesana played a TV gigolo who sat in an apartment setting, trying to look like a swank European mélange of Charles Boyer and Ezio Pinza. Cesana sipped fancy drinks, puffed expensive cigarettes, sang, and pitched woo to the presumably palpitating housewives at home. The camera was supposed to be their eyes and ears, so Cesana acted as if the viewers were really in the room with him. He handed cigarettes and drinks to the camera, gushing sweet nothings such as "Don't be afraid, darling, you're in a man's apartment!" Trying to tickle romantic fantasies, Cesana went on and on that he loved the marvels of a woman's smile, that he valued champagne that did not tickle your nose, and that his ladies looked great in Cameo stockings. Inevitably this led to a plug for women's stockings, revealing the great lover as a pitchman in a rented tuxedo. One critic labeled this extended commercial "the most needless program on television."

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The expansion by the television networks into the fringe operating hours reflected the increasing growth in the country's economy, despite the fighting in Korea. The war had settled into a peculiar state in July 1951 as cease-fire and armistice talks began. Though these dragged on for two more years while thousands of American soldiers remained in Korea, the level of fighting toned down sufficiently for domestic production facilities to be returned to civilian use. Manufacturing and consumer buying picked up and it was against this background that television programming and sponsor support took off with the coast-to-coast cable connection and the success of shows such as *I Love Lucy*. Though the FCC freeze still prevented television from touching many areas, viewer interest in television cities was greater than ever. Competing magazines listing the week's TV fare hit the stands, giving the home viewer a choice of *TV Preview*, *TV Review*, *TV News*, *TV Views*, *TV Forecast*, *TV Digest*, *TV Today*, and an early version of *TV Guide*. Besides the program listings, these magazines usually featured short puff piece articles on individual shows, star biographies, and ads. The program listings sometimes served as plugs themselves with the sponsor's name as part of the title in such shows as *Texaco Star Theater*, *Pabst Blue Ribbon Bouts*, and *Chesterfield Sound Off Time*. Most TV magazines and newspapers drew the line, though, at an ABC Sunday night adventure show whose official title was *Your Kaiser-Frazer Dealer Presents "Kaiser-Frazer Adventures in Mystery" Starring Betty Furness in "By-Line."* Despite the sponsor's determined effort to squeeze in an extra plug while taking as much column space as possible, the title in print was inevitably shortened to *By-Line*.

As television's popularity grew, those concerned about the medium's persuasive effects on others became increasingly vocal. Aspiring politicians discovered that they could catapult themselves into the headlines by claiming that sex and violence on television was corrupting the nation and that such programming should be halted by federal fiat. Those who wanted to clamp down on television pointed to seemingly ominous incidents such as one that took place in Detroit on January 22, 1952. There, John R. Sikron, a forty-six-year-old deputy sheriff in Macomb County, had been arguing with his wife over whether the family should watch CBS's thriller series, *Suspense*, claiming that the show was too violent for her and their six children to see. During the argument, Sikron's fifteen-year-old son, Jerry—who later explained that he could not stand to see his father push his mother around—picked up his father's shotgun and shot his dad through the back, killing him.

In the early days of motion pictures, there had been similar charges that violence on the silver screen translated into violence in real life. When governmental intervention appeared imminent in the 1920s, the major studios called in a respected former postmaster general, Will Hays, to help draw up a morality code which would govern the content of all Hollywood films. With a self-regulating code in effect, the demand for federal censorship abated. In 1951, the self-appointed guardians of the public morality began looking askance at examples of television sex and violence, such as Dagmar's cleavage and Dick Tracy's mayhem, and TV moguls decided to adopt a Hollywood-style code of ethics. The networks hoped that their declaration of support for industry self-regulation would assuage the vocal critics, prevent federal intervention, and prove that television was doing its part to keep the country square with God. There were four basic rules laid down to guide all producers of television programs:

1. Shows will not sympathize with evil.
2. Shows will not degrade honesty, goodness, and innocence.
3. Figures exercising lawful authority should not be ridiculed.
4. Law breakers must not go unpunished.

In October, the proposed television code was adopted by the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), which asked its members to voluntarily agree to abide by it. On the day the code went into effect, March 1, 1952, television industry publications proudly proclaimed that 77 of the 108 American television stations had taken the pledge. The airwaves had been cleansed and the nation could sleep in peace.

That may have been enough for the television industry, but it was not enough for U.S. Representative Ezekiel C. Gothings, a Democrat from Arkansas. He induced the House Interstate Commerce Committee to hold public hearings on the morality of TV programs. One witness, conservative radio commentator Paul Harvey, complained that television had become an outlet for comics schooled in the "bawdy night life" of New York City, who were disseminating their "purple" jokes to the nation, thereby imposing "their distorted views on the rest of the forty-seven states." Representative Gothings himself presented the committee with a more specific bill of particulars. One night, he announced, he had viewed a network variety show in which "... a grass-skirted young lady and a thinly-clad young gentleman were dancing the hootchie-kootchie to a lively tune and shaking the shimmy!"

In spite of such shocking observations, the committee at large accepted the explanations and assurances of the network presidents who testified at the hearings. The TV executives admitted that much of what was on television was bad, but quickly pointed out that many books and many plays were also bad. Television was just another mass medium which was trying to appeal to a mass audience. Some banality had to be expected with so many hours to fill. Besides, they concluded, the public was not forced to watch everything on television and, in fact, if a viewer chose carefully, there were many good shows throughout the schedule. In its final report, the committee stated that there was too much crime and suggestiveness on television, but government control would be worse than the moments of poor taste. The committee also commended intra-industry self-regulatory measures, such as the NAB code, which, it pointed out, was already having a beneficial effect. Dagmar's neckline had gone up.

Interest in the effects of television on the public became more intense during 1952 because, in April, the FCC at last ended its freeze on processing station applications and cleared the way for television to eventually reach nearly every home in America. The commission had first ordered the freeze in 1948 to study and revise frequency allocations in order to solve problems of cross-station interference. After three and one-half years of deliberation, the FCC announced a comprehensive new set of rules. First, the commission squeezed 220 additional stations into the VHF band, raising that system from its previous maximum of 400 to a new level of 620. It also opened seventy channels (14 to 83) on the UHF spectrum for television broadcasting, making 1,400 new UHF stations available nationwide. Both systems combined permitted more than 2,000 TV stations in 1,291 cities. This meant that, theoretically, television at last had enough channels to allow operations by four (or more) national TV networks. In a bold step, the FCC also reserved 242 channels (mostly in the UHF spectrum) for independent noncommercial educational stations. By July, less than three months after "the thaw" took place, almost 600 station applications had been received by the FCC, many for the new UHF band.

The chief flaws in the new television status quo were in the setups for both the UHF system and the noncommercial stations. None of the eighteen million TV sets in use in 1952 were able to receive the UHF frequencies, and set manufacturers saw no reason to spend extra money to include the feature unless their customers

demanded it. With plenty of entertainment available on VHF, the public ignored the new system. Few people purchased UHF converters for existing sets or asked for UHF capabilities on new sets. Almost immediately, fierce battles began over the more accessible VHF frequencies as applicants realized their competitive value. In launching the new system, the FCC might have unofficially declared certain cities as all-UHF, giving manufacturers a captive audience for UHF sets, but this did not occur. Instead, the commission decided to let the subtle pressures of supply and demand solve the UHF problem.

Most of the newly created noncommercial channels were on the UHF band, so their future hinged on the success of the new system. Yet, they also faced an additional, fundamental problem of their own: funding. The FCC had left this important aspect of noncommercial television unsettled. It was not clear where the money was to come from if the stations were to be both noncommercial and independent of the government. San Francisco's KQED (one of the few educational stations located on the VHF band) soon hit upon the concept of a yearly on-air auction to raise operating funds, but the UHF stations, with far fewer potential viewers, could not do even that. The only major source of revenue for noncommercial TV came from the Ford Foundation, which donated \$11 million to establish the Educational Television and Radio Center (forerunner of the National Educational Television Network) to produce and distribute educational programs. However, through poor organization and faulty funding, both of the major TV cities, New York and Los Angeles, did not have an educational station at all. Without them, noncommercial television remained, for all practical purposes, a very expensive television laboratory.

The failure of UHF and the lack of major market outlets for educational TV prevented the noncommercial system from having any influence on American TV programming for more than a decade. Commercial television experienced no such delay. At the time of the thaw, there were only 108 stations (all VHF) on the air in sixty-three cities, and thirty-seven of those cities—places such as St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, New Orleans, Houston, and Indianapolis—still had only one TV station each. Within a year, the number of TV stations on the air increased from 108 to 200, and another 200 were in the process of construction.

The birth of live coast-to-coast television and the surge in TV station growth assured by the thaw made television a much more important factor in the 1952 presidential campaign. The politicians remembered the amazing effects of television during the 1951 Kefauver hearings and prepared to exploit it. At the same time, CBS and NBC decided to build some much-needed television news respectability with early and extensive coverage of the 1952 electoral process.

In March, for the first time, CBS and NBC film crews descended upon New Hampshire, turning the state's previously unimportant presidential primary into a vital national bellwether. Among the Republicans, General Dwight Eisenhower scored a surprise write-in victory and the wide play this received on TV made "Ike" a credible candidate. The quality and depth of the two networks' coverage of New Hampshire showed that television could cover news on its own, independent of radio and newsreels. Candidates soon discovered that they had to augment their speech writing staffs to have new catchy phrases ready for the ever-present TV cameras. As with the comedy-variety shows, television quickly used up political material. Without new lines, candidates ran the risk of turning off the public with "the same old stuff."

The most important breakthrough in television's news stature came in June when Eisenhower held his first big campaign press conference. Though the event marked the beginning of his active

run for the Republican nomination (after leaving military service), Eisenhower's press aides—in collusion with the newspaper and newsreel reporters—announced that television crews would be barred from covering the press conference. This practice was not at all unusual in those days, but CBS's William Paley decided to take a stand. He boldly announced that CBS was sending a camera crew anyway and Eisenhower would have to throw it out. Fearing bad publicity, Eisenhower's people let CBS (and the late-coming NBC) into the conference. This marked milestone in TV journalism. For the first time, TV news had stood up for itself, and won.

At the Republican National Convention in July, the Eisenhower aides showed that they had learned their lessons well. When the

forces of Eisenhower's chief rival, Ohio Senator Robert Taft (who controlled the convention machinery), tried to sneak through an important delegation challenge out of sight of the cameras, Eisenhower's people suddenly appeared all over television talking about "convention rigging," "the big steal," "smoke-filled rooms," and "steam-rollered conventions." Incensed viewers sent telegrams to the convention and the public outcry that resulted from the charges on television swayed enough delegates to put Eisenhower over the top, landing him the presidential nomination. Television news coverage had been proved even more powerful than many people had imagined. TV had not only come of age, it was also affecting who was chosen to lead the country.

1952-53 SEASON

12. Grade-B TV

IN SPITE OF THE GREAT STRIDES made in television coverage of politics in the spring and summer of 1952, the real beginning of political television took place at 9:30 P.M. (Eastern time), September 23, 1952, when, live from NBC's El Capitan studio in Hollywood, California Senator Richard M. Nixon faced the nation, and won. Nixon had made a name for himself as a congressman a few years before by "getting" Alger Hiss, an accused Soviet spy in the State Department, and, in 1952, Republican presidential nominee Dwight Eisenhower chose Nixon as his running mate. Soon thereafter, stories began circulating that a group of California businessmen were supplying Nixon with a secret slush fund. Republican leaders, primarily concerned with ensuring Eisenhower's election, urged him to drop the young senator from the ticket, but Eisenhower gave Nixon a few days to clear himself. Nixon talked the Republican National Committee into buying a half-hour of radio and television time so that he could explain his side of the story. With pressure mounting for Nixon's ouster, tension on the day of the broadcast was quite high, because nobody knew what Nixon was going to say.

Nixon's presentation that night demonstrated that he was one of the first major politicians to grasp fully the impact and nature of television as a political tool. His performance was a playwright's dream. The young star (with his devoted wife, Pat, at his side) faced the allegations on his own, trying to save his honor in a world turned cruel and hard. The charges concerning the \$18,235 in supplementary expenditures fund were quickly dismissed. Yes, Nixon admitted, he received the money, but he denied any sinister or illegal motives. It was not an under-the-table gift, Nixon said, but merely a fund to help him better serve his constituents. Then almost immediately, Nixon left the original topic behind and launched into a brilliant "Just Plain Bill" portrait of himself as simple, down-home folk. He told a tear-jerker story of his impoverished background and minimal current financial holdings. He described his war record, the two-year-old car he drove, the mortgage on his home, and his repayments of loans, with interest, to his parents.

The Horatio Nixon story culminated in the ultimate heart-tug, a little dog. He had used such sure-fire gambits as mom, the family hearth, the poor-boy-makes-good, and the story of a struggling young couple, so all that remained were cute little puppies and young children. Near the end of the speech, Nixon disclosed that, yes, he had received a gift from a supporter after all:

One other thing I probably should tell you, because if

I don't, they'll probably be saying this about me too. We did get something—a gift ... A man down in Texas heard Pat on the radio mention the fact that our two youngsters would like to have a dog and, believe it or not, the day before we left on this campaign trip, we got a message from Union Station, saying they had a package for us. We went down to get it, and you know what it was? It was a little cocker spaniel dog in a crate that he sent all the way from Texas. [It was] black and white and spotted, and our little girl—Trisha, the six-year-old—named it Checkers, and you know, the kids love the dog, and I just want to say this right now, that regardless of what they say about it, we're gonna keep it.

What a scenario! All it needed was some organ music underneath and the nation would have been awash in bathos. Who could resist such a presentation? Nixon correctly assumed that television (which everyone had said was an intimate medium) was the perfect way to get to people's hearts for an emotional response. The "little people" came to Nixon's defense and flooded the Eisenhower campaign headquarters with telegrams urging Nixon's retention on the ticket. Television industry people, while admiring the showmanship in Nixon's presentation, were vaguely disturbed by its implications. It was an implied declaration that a clever politician could, via television's immediacy, reduce politics to personalities, issues to emotions, and complexities to simplifications. Certainly this was not a new trend in politics. President Franklin Roosevelt's references to "my little dog Fala" on radio back in the 1940s were close to Checkers in such intent. However, television had elevated this to a much higher level of effectiveness.

The rest of the campaign was dull by comparison. Eisenhower, always uncomfortable in front of television cameras, relied chiefly on ad agency-produced short spots, many of which featured cartoon marching bands endlessly repeating "I Like Ike! You Like Ike! Everybody Likes Ike!" Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic nominee, stuck to the more traditional half-hour speech format.

Election night itself was not all that dramatic, either. It was evident early on that Eisenhower and Nixon would win, and NBC and CBS's much-touted Univac computers made little difference in the speed of calling the races. The only news about the news coverage was the surge in popularity of CBS, which decided to stick with its successful new convention anchor man, Walter Cronkite. The CBS sponsor, Westinghouse, also stuck with its anchor, commercial spokeswoman Betty Furness.