ry Castleman *and* Walter J. Podrazik

Watching TV

t Decades of American Television

an American invasion of Cambodia. Following the speech, the networks offered almost no commentary at all. A wave of student protests (punctuated by the killing of four students at Kent State University) could not be ignored for long, though, and all three networks did prime time wrapups of a major Washington demonstration on May 9, which marked the culmination of the reaction to the invasion. The TV reports presented speakers from both sides and went to extraordinary lengths to appear balanced and nonbiased. However, as if to "balance" the very coverage of such an event, CBS (after some outside pressure) agreed to also do a similar prime time wrapup of a pro-administration rally held in Washington on Honor America Day, July 4. NET, also feeling pressure from the White House, gave Honor America Day extensive air time. During all the public reaction to the invasion, both the electronic and print press generally accepted the administration's assertion that the invasion be referred to as the Cambodian "incursion."

Nearly two years after he had vowed to bring the country together, Richard Nixon presided over a highly divided nation, torn apart by the war in Indochina. The television networks were also in a very difficult position, facing pressure from all sides. The government wanted them to "go along" with the official line and was not hesitant to use its muscle. Affiliates were critical and nervous. Yet there was a reawakened conscience in the network news departments and, even in the face of general viewer apathy, they produced incisive news specials and daily reports on the war which only further piqued the administration's anger.

The born-again news team at CBS was especially effective, gathering first hand reports from the war front itself. John Laurence's sixty-minute portrait of an American infantry unit (called C-Company) revealed that there were clear anti-war feelings present even among America's fighting men. Another CBS special, "Where We Stand in Indochina," presented unflattering interviews with Vietnamese generals as CBS's correspondents concluded that, at best, the American invasion of Cambodia was a mistake. Yet in spite of the networks' attempts to reassert their journalistic integrity in covering the important events of the year, all of the season's Vietnam and public affairs specials found their usual place at the very bottom of the ratings tabulations, with the special "Ethics in Government" coming in, somehow appropriately, dead last.

1970-71 SEASON

30. Totally Committed and Completely Involved

"WE'RE PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER this fall on CBS!" "Let's get together on ABC!" "It's happening on NBC!" That's what the networks told their viewers again and again through the summer of 1970. Campus revolt and the rock generation were reaching a high water mark and youth-oriented shows, which had been bubbling under the surface for about four seasons with increasing success, seemed to hold the key to the new ratings emphasis on audience demographics. The type of person watching had become increasingly important because the total television audience often included a great number of viewers who were judged to be too old or too rural for advertisers' tastes. Determined to win the attention of those in their late teens and twenties, all three networks decided to cast their lot with the kids and they proclaimed the arrival of the new season as heralding something completely different. Everything would be "Now"! Variations on phrases from then-current teen slang such as "getting it all together" and "what's happening" filled the networks' ads and show descriptions. This effusive commitment to "telling it like it is" led to one of the shortest format cycles in television history, "relevancy."

Despite all the rhetoric, the networks' self-proclaimed dedication to relevancy in programming really meant TV relevancy, a far cry from anything in the real world. It consisted of grafting the head of topical issues onto the body of standard grade-B drama and restocking familiar forums such as hospitals and court rooms with different, preferably youthful, characters. ABC had attracted lightning with this formula in *The Mod Squad* and *Marcus Welby, M.D.* and each of the networks rushed to include as many hip phrases, committed characters, and timely conflicts as possible. CBS in particular pursued the trend with a vengeance, apparently out to prove that it was no longer the network of the fuddy-duddies. To the god of youth it offered *Headmaster, The Interns,* and *Storefront Lawyers.* All three received "thumbs down."

Headmaster was a well-intentioned but poorly executed comedy-drama that cast veteran Andy Griffith as Andy Thompson, headmaster at a small private high school in California. In many ways, Griffith was a perfect choice for making relevancy work. He had spent eight years cultivating an image as a warm, level-headed folksy sheriff who was respected by old and young alike, and it was a short step to his new role as a Welby-ish father-confessor. In a setting reminiscent of ABC's moderately successful high school sitcom of the previous season, *Room 222,* Griffith took on the timely concerns of his troubled wards, trying to guide them through brewing campus revolt and drug overdoses. Unfortunately, the scripts and supporting cast generally lacked the control and subtlety of *Room 222* and the relevant problems clashed with the stock sitcom humor of such characters as the school's athletic coach, played by the slapstick-oriented Jerry Van Dyke. As a result, *Headmaster* emerged as a mish-mash of emotion that made the program appear a cheap vehicle simply attempting to cash in on "today's headlines."

The Interns presented the lives, loves, and labors of five sparkling clean doctors-in-training (three white, one black, one blonde) at a major Los Angeles hospital, and brought the relevancy angle to a format that was quite well suited for soapy topical melodrama. The program religiously adhered to the traditional *Ben Casey-Dr. Kildare* structure including a wise elder statesman and three guest patients each week, but the new divinities of youth and relevance raised their unwieldy influence at every turn. As a result, the show was not merely heavy-handed, it was often ludicrous in its emphasis. In their spiffy attire and perfectly set *coiffures,* the interns looked more like hairdressers than medicos. Their supposedly wise mentor (played by that old highway patrolman, Broderick Crawford) was presented as being no match for the wisdom of youth and he alternated between sagacity and surliness. Above all, the patient ailments were absurd. On one show, they included: a go-go dancer who was bedridden with a twisted foot; a former girlfriend of one of the wavy-haired interns who begged for the mercy killing of her sick husband; and a meditative monk who not only needed his physical illness cured but his political consciousness reawakened (a task handled by the black intern). For added topicality, this very same episode included a subplot that focused on a bearded orderly who was arrested for peddling pornographic movies. Through it all the happy-go-lucky interns, like their comrades in the Mod Squad, stood by the traditional rules and routine, determined to help trendy youth come to grips with the flawed but ultimately manageable establishment.

The mixed bag of topical drama, youth, and good old American tradition in these relevant shows aimed at scoring the TV hat trick of *The Mod Squad:* Bring in the oldsters with exciting all-American action; win praise for presenting topical drama; and capture the youth market with stories the kids could relate to. In this approach, *Headmaster* and *The Interns* were merely indelica-

FALL 1970 SCHEDULE

Day	Network	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30
MON	ABC	local	THE YOUNG LAWYERS		THE SILENT FORCE	ABC NFL MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL (to 12 Midnight)			
MON	CBS	local	Gunsmoke		Here's Lucy	Mayberry R.F.D.	Doris Day Show	Carol Burnett Show	
MON	NBC	local	Red Skelton Show	Rowan And Martin's Laugh-In		NBC Monday Night At The Movies / # Bob Hope Show		# NBC Specials	
TUE	ABC	local	The Mod Squad		Movie Of The Week			Marcus Welby, M.D.	
TUE	CBS	local	The Beverly Hillbillies	Green Acres	Hee-Haw		To Rome With Love	CBS News Hour / 60 Minutes	
TUE	NBC	local	DON KNOTTS SHOW		Julia	NBC Tuesday Night At The Movies / # First Tuesday			
WED	ABC	local	The Courtship Of Eddie's Father	Make Room For Granddaddy	Room 222	Johnny Cash Show		DAN AUGUST	
WED	CBS	local	STOREFRONT LAWYERS		The Governor And J.J.	Medical Center		Hawaii Five-O	
WED	NBC	local	The Men From Shiloh			Kraft Music Hall		FOUR-IN-ONE (McCLOUD; S. F. INT'L AIRPORT; NIGHT GALLERY; THE PSYCHIATRIST)	
THU	ABC	local	MATT LINCOLN		Bewitched	BAREFOOT IN THE PARK	THE ODD COUPLE	THE IMMORTAL	
THU	CBS	local	Family Affair	Jim Nabors Hour		CBS Thursday Night Movies			
THU	NBC	local	FLIP WILSON SHOW		Ironside		NANCY	Dean Martin Show	
FRI	ABC	local	The Brady Bunch	Nanny And The Professor	THE PARTRIDGE FAMILY	That Girl	Love, American Style	This Is Tom Jones	
FRI	CBS	local	THE INTERNS		THE HEADMASTER	CBS Friday Night Movies			
FRI	NBC	local	The High Chaparral		The Name Of The Game			Bracken's World	
SAT	ABC	local	Let's Make A Deal	The Newlywed Game	Lawrence Welk Show		THE MOST DEADLY GAME		local
SAT	CBS	local	Mission: Impossible		My Three Sons	ARNIE	MARY TYLER MOORE SHOW	Mannix	
SAT	NBC	local	Andy Williams Show		Adam-12	NBC Saturday Night At The Movies			
SUN	ABC	THE YOUNG REBELS		The FBI		The ABC Sunday Night Movie			
SUN	CBS	Lassie	Hogan's Heroes	Ed Sullivan Show		Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour		TIM CONWAY HOUR	
SUN	NBC	Wild Kingdom	The Wonderful World Of Disney		Bill Cosby Show	Bonanza		The Bold Ones (The Doctors; The Lawyers; THE SENATOR)	

cies. *Storefront Lawyers,* however, was downright rude and insulting. It epitomized the glaring and obvious contrast between the relevant, realistic world touted in the network ads, and the sugar-coated Neverland in the programs themselves. The series presented Robert Foxworth, Sheila Larkin, and David Arkin as three young pretty white kids from the safe, liberal suburbs who worked for a law firm uptown but who also set up a storefront office in the ghetto ("where the action is") to aid the poor there for free. The hackneyed scripts never ventured beneath the Naugahyde surface of these 100% plastic kids or into anything even resembling the more sordid side of life among the lowly. Instead, the three legal Samaritans remained oblivious to even the hint of evil or a shred of characterization. In the show's opening credits they blissfully skipped hand-in-hand into the halls of justice, accompanied by a sorry excuse for a contemporary rock theme. Though they battled the establishment, the only motivation ever suggested for their actions came from CBS's incessant plugs that presented the members of the trio as "totally committed and completely involved." Or was it "completely committed and totally involved"?

Storefront Lawyers was easily the worst of the relevancy shows though, ironically, many of the problems with the series reflected problems of the 1960s youth movement itself. Both were based on a philosophy that merely bringing together "nice" people with "nice" ideas could solve everything: Powerful, entrenched bogeymen of the establishment would roll over and die and some hip jargon would topple a decade of fantasy on television. To this end, *Storefront Lawyers* deliberately oversimplified any complex problems and created a sanitized version of the ghetto populated by evil ogres, helpless po' folk, and noble youth. However, CBS was not alone in the pursuit of relevancy, with both NBC and ABC also offering their own exercises in revolutionary fantasy. To varying degrees, though, nearly every entry suffered from the same problems as *Headmaster, The Interns,* and *Storefront Lawyers.*

NBC's two major relevant offerings were segments in rotating series: *The Senator* in *The Bold Ones* and *The Psychiatrist* in *Four-in-One. The Senator,* starring Hal Holbrook as Senator Hays Stowe, was a commendable effort to treat topical and controversial issues that became bogged down in television's mugwump philosophy on most issues: everybody to a degree is guilty, therefore nobody in particular is guilty. Stowe had won his seat by taking a bold and forthright stand against pollution but, once in office, he emerged as a fuzzy-thinking middle-of-the-road befuddled moderate. The stories therefore could not hold together because it was hard to understand why unscrupulous radicals of both the left and right would bother attacking him. Even treatment of issues such as a Kent State-type incident was nothing more than calculated, camouflaged ambiguity.

The Psychiatrist was similar to *The Interns,* presenting a premise that was traditional Hollywood melodrama featuring forced relevant angles that were almost laughable. Roy Thinnes played a young, semi-hip psychiatrist who used controversial new techniques to bring the day's strung-out acid heads to their senses and guide them to the barber shop for that inevitable haircut. As proof of his success, he was assisted by a former patient-junkie, played by Peter Duel. ABC's *Young Rebels* was even sillier. It modestly rewrote American Revolutionary War history as if it were a free-speech revolt at Berkeley. The youthful members of the Yankee Doodle Society (two white, one black, one gal) acted as spies behind the British lines, specializing in sabotage and harassment.

Of all the relevant shows presented that fall, ABC's *Young Lawyers* came closest to reaching the touted goal of dealing with contemporary themes through moderately realistic characters. Though its premise was virtually the same as *Storefront Lawyers,* the scripts avoided the tired murder-arson-dope trilogy and centered solely on the learning pangs of two young barristers trying to deal with people caught in the era's uncertainties. For example, in one episode they fought a malpractice suit filed against a young medical intern who had decided to "get involved" and help an auto accident victim. To add further credibility to the series, the team (one white guy, one black gal) received sound but not condescending advice from their mentor, played by veteran Lee J. Cobb. Overall, the stories were much more believable than the fairy tales usually dished out by the other relevant shows and, in a departure from the typical vast expanse of clichéd California adventureland, the action was set in historic Boston.

Ultimately, though, even *The Young Lawyers* fell victim to the essential deception of the entire television relevancy movement. Though ads for the new shows implied the presentation of strongly pro-radical positions, the networks had no intention of taking bold and forthright stands on controversial issues every week in a time of genuine national division; and certainly not on their entertainment programs. This was the soft white underbelly of TV relevancy. Important social problems and contemporary jargon were simply churned into standard television format drama wrapped in love beads. Stories and issues were stacked in advance so that the establishment, aided by clear-thinking moderates, always won. At heart the establishment was right, though occasionally it needed a slight kick to uncover one or two bad apples. Anti-establishment figures usually had some axe to grind and, even if their points were justified, their methods were all wrong. Consequently, the villains in the stories were inevitably demonic bearded hippies or corrupt, longhaired radicals who were, at best, overzealous reformers. The new breed of hero was the former outsider won over to help the establishment correct its own shortcomings in dealing with overly suspicious communities and individuals. Such characters dressed respectably, worked on the side of justice, and, most important, had gotten that haircut.

There was certainly nothing new about presenting fantasy as reality on television, nor was there anything morally wrong with exploiting news events and popular fads in television entertainment programming. Such policies had been pursued for years in both good and bad shows. In promoting the 1970–71 season, though, network flaks had presented wholly unrealistic claims that their relevant shows were to be truly different from the past in both substance and image, knowing full well that was not to be the case. By promising a new era in television realism after nearly a decade of escapism and fantasy, but then delivering the same old goods, the networks' new shows had to be judged, however harshly, by a different set of rules. By these rules, the half-hearted almost schizophrenic programs of television's relevancy craze were artistic failures.

More important, the structure of the "relevant" programs demonstrated that even with an interest in young adult demographics, the networks had not decided to alienate the silent majority of older viewers overnight. Grownups were still the bread-and-butter of the Nielsen ratings points, so relevancy had been tempered for establishment consumption. By mid-season, it became clear that, in trying to attract two opposite segments of society, the watered-down relevant programs had failed to excite anyone. The ratings were dismal. In January 1971, ABC dropped its *Young Rebels,* and CBS hurried in face-saving format changes on *Headmaster* and *Storefront Lawyers. Headmaster* became *The New Andy Griffith Show* in which Griffith played a town mayor who was a former sheriff, a carbon copy continuation of his old Mayberry series. The storefront lawyers gave up the ghetto, got haircuts, and moved uptown permanently, becoming *Men at Law.* Under the tutelage of sagacious Devlin McNeil (Gerald S. O'Loughlin), they defended more affluent clients such as innocent collegians under attack from the lawyers for the nasty radicals in the Students for a Free America (a barely concealed copy of the real-life Students for a Democratic Society). Both of these permutations, as well as *The Young Lawyers, The Senator, The Interns,* and *The Psychiatrist,* expired at the end of the season.

Television's loud and sloppy foray into contemporary drama was a total flop. Yet, almost lost amid the ballyhoo of the 1970 fall premieres, there appeared a saner and more realistic solution for the medium's sudden desire to update its own image. In September of 1970, after half a decade of bland sitcoms that became hits, good sitcoms that flopped, and horrible sitcoms that just hung on, CBS introduced a worthy successor to its comedy classics of the past, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show.* The program was the first out and out hit in a new wave of situation comedies that effectively combined more contemporary attitudes and outlooks with the basic elements of the *I Love Lucy, Honeymooners,* and *Dick Van Dyke* schools. These past sitcoms had used good writing, tight central and supporting casts, and the simplest of sets to present memorable, hilarious comedy. To this strong base, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* added an important new element: The lead character was an intelligent, unmarried career woman who faced humorous complications and situations that real people often faced.

Mary Tyler Moore played Mary Richards, a small-town girl who came to the big city (Minneapolis-St. Paul, not Los Angeles) to make it on her own. She landed a job in a local TV station (WJM) as an associate producer for the evening news, working behind the scenes in the newsroom with producer Lou Grant (Edward Asner), newswriter Murray Slaughter (Gavin MacLeod), and anchorman Ted Baxter (Ted Knight). There she began to build her confidence and skills as a single woman on her own with a responsible job and personal career goals. The mix of characters and personalities in the office, ranging from generally realistic to broad stereotype, balanced almost perfectly and gave the "young working woman" hook the opportunity to catch on. Very quickly viewers accepted both the novel premise and the first rate cast because they combined to produce a very funny show.

Lou Grant and Mary Richards were presented as the two most realistic characters. Mary obviously took her job as newsperson-producer seriously and was very conscious of her professional manner, though she was often a bit too straight, soft-hearted, and trusting for her own good. In some respects, Lou Grant began as the typical blustery sitcom boss who was really soft as Jello inside, but he soon developed into the nearest thing to a real life boss that might be expected in a television comedy. His bravado character was tempered and became a more complex mix of emotions so that he tossed in funny cracks even when he was sad and radiated genuine warmth through his anger. Both Lou and Mary certainly delivered their share of punch lines, but overall they usually carried off

The six main performers of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show: (from left, front)* Valerie Harper, Mary Tyler Moore, and Cloris Leachman; *(back)* Ted Knight, Ed Asner, and Gavin MacLeod. *(The* Mary Tyler Moore Show *© 1970 Twentieth Century Fox Television. All Rights Reserved.)*

their humor as people trying to deal with realistic but confusing situations.

Ted Baxter and Murray Slaughter served as the focus of the more traditional office sitcom barbs. Murray delivered sharp one-liners and putdowns that were primarily directed at Ted, though he departed from these often enough to develop his character beyond the quick-witted wisecracker type in the style of *Dick Van Dyke*'s Buddy Sorrell. Ted, on the other hand, was all stereotype, but a perfectly marvelous stereotype. Only in Jack Cassidy's Jetman role (in the all-too-brief run of *He and She)* had television ever poked fun at itself so openly. In an era that elevated the blow-dried "happy talk" local newscaster to the forefront (making him the rule, not the exception, in the major markets), the self-obsessed Baxter was a wonderful lampoon of the trend. His rich silver hair and deep-voiced resonance barely camouflaged the near vacuum behind his empty grin.

In the program's third season, a new character was added to the office setting, WJM's "Happy Homemaker," Sue Ann Nivens (Betty White), and she provided yet another frontal attack on television's glossy self-image. White, drawing on her background of playing goody-two-shoes characters over the years, portrayed the sweet-talking pure-as-gold "woman's show" star as a forked-tongued dirty old lady who merely used her bill-and-coo voice to mask the venom of her pointed remarks.

Such a corps of performers would have been the envy of any sitcom but, just as *The Dick Van Dyke Show* had been staged as essentially a two-set series (the Petrie home and the office), the action in Mary Tyler Moore's program was also split between two settings: the office and Mary's bachelorette apartment. At home, two other strong supporting characters, Rhoda and Phyllis, helped to carry a wide range of domestic plots. Rhoda Morgenstern (Valerie Harper) was Mary's upstairs neighbor, a New York City transplant and a fast-talking putdown artist whose barbs were often self-directed. Like Sally Rogers in *Dick Van Dyke* and nearly all other female sidekicks in sitcom history, Rhoda was on the prowl for a husband. Unlike most, though, she was not presented as a desexed spinster but as a young, attractive woman who was no dummy. Rhoda was not about to fall for the first clichéd line that came her way and was too intelligent to honestly expect Mr. Right to suddenly walk into her life, but she had not given up hoping, either. Though Mary also went out on dates and vaguely planned on marriage, she was in no hurry. Rhoda looked to Mary as a close friend and confidante (practically a sister) and the two shared their feelings on the hopes and frustrations of single life. Rhoda's sharp wit was frequently directed at the manager of their apartment house, Phyllis Lindstrom (Cloris Leachman). Though Rhoda's character was in the more realistic spirit of Lou and Mary, Phyllis was presented as an effective homebody caricature, the epitome of style conscious egoism, who never hesitated to impose on Mary. She eagerly latched onto the latest trends and, while not really evil, usually acted kind and considerate only when she needed something and could not just take it.

Lou, Murray, Ted, Sue Ann, Rhoda, and Phyllis were just as much *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* as Mary herself and particular episodes sometimes featured a member of this supporting group as the central character, with Mary stepping more to the sidelines. As a true sign of the depth of the individual cast members, it must be noted that all six went on from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* to star in programs of their own, a feat unmatched by any other sitcom.

Even though the talented cast was the driving force behind the success of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show,* the high level of sophistication in the show's scripts lifted the series above the restrictive confines TV sitcoms were proscribed into during the 1960s. While the writers generally avoided obviously topical issues and fads, they managed to capture the feeling of the 1970s in much the same way as *The Dick Van Dyke Show* had done during the 1960s. The three chief characters—Mary, Lou, and Rhoda—were often given the types of problems that real people of the era faced.

Rhoda was caught in the position of many young women at the time: She never tried to hide the fact that she was talented, aggressive, and certainly just as intelligent as many of the men she went out with (probably more so). Though fully aware of the complications in husband hunting that resulted from such a stance, Rhoda had no intention of changing. When she found her ideal candidate for marriage he would have to accept her as she was or not at all. Over the course of the series, Lou became divorced and, as a chunky, middle-aged man whose children had already grown and left home, he really did not feel like starting to date again. This development added a sensitive edge to his sometimes cantankerous office demeanor because Lou was just as lonely as any former family man, but he did not want to expose his feelings to strangers or in public.

Mary's image as an unmarried career woman with a responsible job other than a secretary or a teacher was a major break from television tradition. She was not a widow, had no children, and was working because she wanted to build her own life and career. While by no means a diatribe on women's liberation, the program presented, without fanfare, women as being capable of interesting beyond housework, marriage, and crazy sitcom schemes. As a true business professional, Mary prized her own honesty and integrity

very higly. In one episode she even went to jail in order to protect a news source.

Unlike the heavy-handed plots of the flopped relevancy dramas, these serious, sometimes even topical, aspects of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* never stood out as preachy or phony, but were instead quietly incorporated into the funny scripts and characters, presenting a reality that was tempered by a light and gentle touch that could render it painless, but not forgotten. From the very first episode, the series displayed exceptional production skill and care that set it apart from its competition.

The Mary Tyler Moore Show provided exactly what CBS president Bob Wood had wanted: a new hit show in the traditional CBS groove (a thirty-minute sitcom) that also pulled the network from its old rural rut into new settings that were right for the new decade. Working hand-in-hand with newly chosen program chief Fred Silverman, Wood had made it clear his renovation plans for CBS were serious, including not only a search for new hits, but also the display of new attitudes and strategies in the process of network scheduling as well. In a move considered nothing short of blasphemy for an era that still chiseled network fall schedules in stone in the early spring, Wood approved Silverman's last-minute schedule changes in July 1970, less than six weeks before the season premieres. This gave Silverman the opportunity to display his later renowned talent for counter-programming and thematic flow, and the new *Mary Tyler Moore Show* emerged with a better time slot than originally planned. *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Green Acres* were moved to Tuesday, logically preceding *Hee-Haw,* and *Mary Tyler Moore* was shifted to Saturday, joining the company of the more sophisticated *Mission: Impossible, Mannix,* and another new "urban" sitcom, *Arnie* (starring Herschel Bernardi). There was more to come. In January 1971, the second major program component in Wood's modernization drive arrived, *All in the Family.*

For three years, filmmakers Norman Lear and Bud Yorkin had been trying to sell the networks an American version of the BBC hit, *Till Death Us Do Part.* The British series had been on since 1966, offering an irreverent and boisterous view of a working class family that hinged on a crafty old bigot who dominated his wife and daughter while constantly arguing with his liberal son-in-law. In February 1968, Yorkin and Lear produced a pilot for CBS based on *Till Death Us Do Part,* but CBS turned them down when some moderately innovative domestic sitcoms bombed. Even with the success of the Smothers Brothers and *Laugh-In,* the concept of a lovable bigot tossing off racial epithets and political insults proved too much for the old brass at CBS. In the fall of 1968, Yorkin and Lear approached ABC with a second pilot for the proposed series, called "Justice for All," starring Carroll O'Connor and Jean Stapleton. ABC liked it and scheduled it for January 1969, but then got cold feet and postponed the series to the fall of 1969. The network at last gave up the idea completely, labeling it too controversial. Sensing failure at marketing the concept as a television series, the two producers prepared to turn it into a film instead but, at the last minute, CBS, under new management, extended some positive feelers. In March 1970, a revised pilot, "Those Were the Days," was secretly tested on a random audience at the CBS studios in New York City. The reaction was favorable, if somewhat guarded. In July 1970, in spite of considerable negative pressure from within the CBS hierarchy, network president Bob Wood scheduled the series, renamed *All in the Family,* to premiere in January 1971. He said in a press release, "It's time to poke fun at ourselves."

Nonetheless, CBS was quite uncertain how to treat *All in the Family.* Was it satire? Comedy? Social comment? Fearful of a public outcry similar to the one that followed the still not forgotten *Turn-On,* CBS gave the series practically no publicity. It was stuck in a perverse time slot, directly following *Hee-Haw* but right before *60 Minutes.* In either case, pro or con, the network expected a huge reaction the night of the show's debut (January 12, 1971). It never came. Only a few calls were received and most of them were favorable. With so little fanfare, the first ratings for *All in the Family* were naturally quite low.

TV critics and the general public were as confused as the network by the program, uncertain how to react because, in many ways, *All in the Family* was unlike anything Americans had ever

With all his faults, Archie Bunker (Carroll O'Connor) never became totally unbearable and could even be kind and considerate, especially to his wife, Edith (Jean Stapleton). *(Sony Pictures Television)*

September 17, 1970
The Flip Wilson Show. (NBC). Young black comic Flip Wilson, for years a frequent guest on variety and talk shows, receives his own comedy-variety hour. Armed with such characterizations as the sassy Geraldine Jones and the hustling Rev. Leroy (from the Church of What's Happenin' Now), Wilson turns his new program into an immediate top ten smash.

September 21, 1970
ABC's NFL Monday Night Football. (ABC). Roone Arledge brings professional football back to prime time after nearly two decades. The Cleveland Browns beat "Broadway" Joe Namath and the New York Jets 31 to 21 in Cleveland. Howard Cosell and Keith Jackson do play-by-play while "Dandy" Don Meredith supplies color.

September 24, 1970
The Odd Couple. (ABC). After successful treatments as a hit Broadway play and a feature film, Neil Simon's story of two divorced men sharing an apartment in New York City becomes a hit sitcom for ABC. Under producer Garry Marshall, the show displays consistently good writing and outstanding character acting, led by Tony Randall as the ultra-clean Felix Unger and Jack Klugman as the incurably sloppy Oscar Madison.

October 5, 1970
PBS, the Public Broadcasting System, takes over the non-commercial functions of NET, National Educational Television. New York's WNDT becomes WNET.

December 7, 1970
After defecting from CBS, Harry Reasoner replaces Frank Reynolds as co-anchor of ABC's nightly news, teaming up with Howard K. Smith.

January 1, 1971
A federally imposed ban on television cigarette ads goes into effect.

seen before. It successfully transferred the spice and life of the controversial British original to an American setting. Archie Bunker (O'Connor) was a "hardhat" racist who disdainfully referred to "Yids, Polacks, Spades, and Spics," with his only comeuppance being the protests of his long-haired son-in-law, Mike (Rob Reiner, son of Carl), derisively nicknamed "Meathead" by Archie. The program also dealt with sex, including both blatant verbal references and, for a change, implications of physical activity. Archie and his wife, Edith (Stapleton), who he referred to as "Dingbat," were shown walking in on their daughter, Gloria (Sally Struthers), and her husband, Mike, just as the two were clearly on the way up to bed to make love. Archie admonished the mini-skirted Gloria, "When you sit down in that thing, the mystery is ended." Because Mike and Gloria lived with Archie and Edith, such ideological and theological clashes were frequent and inevitable. How were viewers to take the racial and sexual references? Blacks in the media were openly split on the *All in the Family* question. Tony Brown, producer of public television's *Black Journal,* called it "shocking and racist," while Loretta Long, Susan the schoolteacher on *Sesame Street,* said it was "unoffensive and realistic," and Pamela Haynes of the black-oriented *Los Angeles Sentinel* said, "His rantings serve a purpose."

The truth dawned slowly. *All in the Family* was not racist, but it was not *The Life of Riley,* either. It was a well-written, superbly acted contemporary farce that painted broad stereotyped characters in the best *I Love Lucy* tradition. The difference was that the producers based the stereotypes on real down-to-earth personalities who argued about topics that real people argued about, using words and phrases real people used. After decades of TV shows populated exclusively with stars who were *very* nice, confronting a central character who was not completely lovable came as a shock to many Americans. The Archie Bunker character, in fact, often was not lovable at all. Nonetheless, the producers of *All in the Family* did not allow Archie to become totally unbearable, operating under the assumption that everybody has his reasons. He might have been a reactionary stick-in-the-mud spouting a perverse sort of malapropism, but there was another part of him that was genuinely likable. Archie was an honestly simple man who talked about his bigotry but rarely did anything else with it. What's more, it soon became clear that Archie never won the arguments. He might remain titular king of his castle (retaining sole rights to his favorite easy chair), but his world of male-WASP domination, simple verities, and America-first-ism was crumbling all about him. Archie fumed and sputtered but always had to concede to the inevitable changes thrust before him by his liberal son-in-law, his feminist daughter, and his black neighbors.

The most amazing aspect of *All in the Family* was that its architects succeeded at what the relevancy show producers had seemed to be trying to do: explaining new attitudes in the country to older Americans. TV reviewers were flabbergasted, though, to see such attempts at social realism in the least likely of all formats for national controversy: the television sitcom. The *Mary Tyler Moore* formula had been taken one step further with current issues injected into the very funny, well-written scripts. The combination worked because the producers never forgot the prime rule of showmanship: keep the audience entertained. By carefully mixing the humor and politics, *All in the Family* avoided heavy-handed preaching and became an almost subliminal national self-examination. Producer Norman Lear explained the program's approach, saying, "*[All in the Family]* holds a mirror up to our prejudices ... We laugh now, swallowing just the littlest bit of truth about ourselves, and it sits there for the unconscious to toss about later."

Though *All in the Family's* underlying premise and lively flavor came from its British roots, the show also drew on important American sitcom basics previously used in series such as *The Honeymooners.* The program was essentially a one-set show, with the action taking place in the Bunker living room (with occasional huddles in the kitchen). In a radical departure from then-current TV scripture, *All in the Family* returned to the concept of recording its episodes before a live audience, just as in *The Honeymooners.* The laughs heard at home were actual laughter by live human beings watching the performance as it was being videotaped. This literal liveliness, combined with the Kramden-like working class atmosphere and the inclusion of topical references, served to create a refreshing sense of reality and to make *All in the Family* an actual revolution in American TV. Yet, it was also a revival (in the literal sense of the word) bringing back the basics that had made previous classics so memorable and, at the same time, updating the content for modern consumption.

All in the Family had a very slow start and, like most out of the ordinary TV shows, had to build an audience gradually. By mid-February it sneaked into the top thirty. The first set of episodes ended in March and Silverman wisely chose to begin a full cycle of reruns immediately in order to hook the growing number of new viewers that had only discovered the series in the previous month. It was during this rerun cycle that the show took off. By late May, just before it went off for the summer, *All in the Family* hit number one. The expected viewer reaction to the innovative, controversial program had developed, but the show had also become a big hit. Its characters were accepted and absorbed into everyday language, even appearing in New York City graffiti. "Archie Bunker for President" somebody scrawled on a subway wall, to which another wit added, "He is."

All in the Family marked a turning point in American television programming and it appeared at a time of major change throughout the industry in both commercial and noncommercial broadcasting. In October 1970, the noncommercial television network structure was reorganized, changing NET into PBS, the Public Broadcasting System. More important, public television continued to move away from original domestic productions, increasing its reliance on imports from Britain. That fall, PBS presented the thirteen-week BBC series, *Civilisation,* hosted by Kenneth Clark and funded by Xerox. The program took viewers on a world-wide tour of Western culture tracing its development over 400 years by focusing on great works of art and architecture. In January, *Masterpiece Theater* picked up where *The Forsyte Saga* left off and offered British-made historical dramas every Sunday night. As delightful as these British imports were, they began to spark complaints that PBS was showing signs of practically becoming a BBC subsidiary. Though British programs meant instant class they also discouraged efforts at homegrown productions. In the winter, PBS presented its last major domestic program for years to come, *The Great American Dream Machine,* hosted by the corpulent Marshall Efron. *Dream Machine* was similar to *PBL,* but humor and satire were added to the "straight" segments (such as a report on FBI-paid provocateurs in radical groups) and, under Efron's guidance, the show reached great heights of wit and irreverence. Levity had always been noticeably absent on public television and this infusion of humor was welcomed by many, though it made the series unpopular with both the Nixon administration and Congress. Poking fun at commercials for frozen pies and Kool-Aid was all right but, when guests such as Woody Allen began ribbing Henry Kissinger, and regular contributor Andy Rooney parodied Nixon's volunteer Army proposal, *Dream Machine* became a walking target for the government. It was shot down in mid-1972. Efron departed with a stinging blast at PBS and New York's WNET, calling them, "A tight club of relatively rich guys, putting cameras on the poor and asking the middle class for money. What do they say when the middle class asks what channel 13 [WNET] is doing for them? 'We've got some wonderful acquisitions from the BBC!'"

The commercial networks were also happy to soak up the prestige from British imports. In the summer of 1971, CBS took the unusual step of slotting the six-part British miniseries, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII,* into its Sunday night schedule. It was the only program to eventually air on *Masterpiece Theater* that first found its way to America through a commercial network. NBC previewed and promoted the *Civilisation* series when it ran on PBS in the fall of 1970. At the same time, the network also gave the British limited run series concept a thorough testing in its *Four-in-One* program from Universal Studios. Unlike *The Bold Ones,* in which three separate series alternated in the same time slot, *Four-in-One* ran all six episodes of each series before moving on to the next. This was just the style adopted by *Masterpiece Theater* in its presentations.

British limited-run series were usually just that: one premise carried over a set number of episodes and then ended. *Four-in-One* was set up as an extended pilot program for testing new series ideas in prime time against regular shows. At the time, studio pilots were usually aired as single episodes stuck into the movie nights during the spring lull and so rarely faced any strong competition. *Four-in-One* provided a more challenging but realistic face-off. Two of the series failed their tryouts, the silly relevancy of *The Psychiatrist* and the "Airport"-type melodrama of *San Francisco International Airport* (starring Lloyd Bridges and Clu Gulager). *Night Gallery,* a watered down version of *The Twilight Zone,* caught on and became a regular series in 1971 that lasted two seasons. Rod Serling was the host and occasional writer, though he actually had very little control over the choice of material used. The most successful of the miniseries was *McCloud,* starring Dennis Weaver as a Western sheriff somehow assigned to the New York City police force. This series survived for six years, though always remaining a segment in some permutation of *Four-in-One.* Beginning in the 1971–72 season, *Four-in-One* changed to the rotating segment style of *The Bold Ones* and was retitled *The NBC Mystery Movie.*

Though the testing of British concepts from *All in the Family* to miniseries signaled the possibility of important new developments in programs and programming, the government was responsible for the most dramatic changes facing broadcasters. In early 1970, after pressure from Congress, the networks accepted a plan to ban all TV cigarette advertisements. Beginning January 1, 1971, the largest single source of revenue in broadcasting was cut off and television profits were squeezed. To further complicate the situation, a 1970 FCC ruling was put into effect and, starting in the fall of

April 19, 1971
National Public Radio (NPR), a national non-commercial radio network set up by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, begins with live coverage of a U.S. Senate committee hearing on the Vietnam War. Two weeks later, on May 3, *All Things Considered*, a daily news and features program, becomes the network's first hit. In the beginning, NPR has ninety affiliates in thirty-six states.

June 6, 1971
After twenty-three years of "really big shows," Ed Sullivan is axed. Guests on the final program: Sid Caesar, Carol Channing, Robert Klein, and Gladys Knight and the Pips. "Say goodnight, Eddie."

July 26, 1971
Apollo 15, America's fourth lunar landing mission, sends back the first color television signals from space, using the CBS "spinning disk" system the FCC discarded eighteen years before.

August 16, 1971
John Chancellor becomes the sole anchor on *NBC Nightly News* as Frank McGee leaves the show to replace Hugh Downs on *Today* while David Brinkley is reduced to the post of commentator.

August 29, 1971
After one final season on NBC, Red Skelton ends eighteen years of network television, wishing all "Good health, good life, and may God bless. Goodnight."

September 4, 1971
ABC pulls the plug on Lawrence Welk's bubble machine. The sixteen-year television veteran has the last laugh, though, as his program shifts effortlessly into syndication, continuing with new episodes for another eleven years on a strong line-up of local stations.

1971, the networks were required to slice thirty minutes from prime time each night of the week.

Since the mid-1950s, the FCC had conducted hearings on ways to decrease, if not eliminate, the networks' legal and financial control over programs. Over the years, the networks had voluntarily cut back on the degree of such lucrative control temporarily in order to mollify the FCC, though they returned to near total control as soon as it seemed the commission would not notice. In March 1965, the FCC drafted a proposed rule that would have limited the networks to 50% control of their prime time schedule, and also virtually banned their profits from domestic and foreign syndication of old shows. This 50–50 proposal was roundly criticized by the networks and bandied about for five years until, in May of 1970, the FCC embraced compromise proposals suggested by Westinghouse's Group W stations and issued a series of rules that boldly reshaped the TV business landscape. One set of rules, the Financial Interest and Syndication Rules ("Fin-Syn" rules) nearly eliminated network profit from the rerun syndication of programs. Another new rule flatly limited to three hours the amount of prime time broadcasting a network could do in one evening. This rule was labeled the "access rule" because it proposed to grant access to the airwaves to independent producers who would be able to go directly to the affiliates to slot their programs in what had previously been network prime time.

The networks, naturally, were aghast at the new FCC rules and CBS filed suit to block the access rule. The Justice Department and the courts, however, upheld the FCC, thus giving legal sanction to the first major inroad in direct governmental control of programming in television history. The FCC's aim, greater access, was quite commendable and the commission no doubt believed the access rule served a wholesome purpose, but the fact was that the rule represented direct governmental control of programming, something the FCC was specifically forbidden to engage in by law. With the precedent set, it was feared that additional interference could only follow.

The Fin-Syn rules did not fully go into effect until 1973, but then they wound up cutting off one formerly significant source of network revenue. CBS, for example, was forced in 1973 to spin off its successful TV syndication division, which took the new name Viacom International. The money that had previously rolled in from the reruns of series such as *I Love Lucy* and *The Andy Griffith Show* now went to the independent Viacom company, not to CBS. In time, it was Viacom rather than CBS that became one of the first to invest significantly in the developing field of cable TV.

On the other hand, the FCC's new access rule was set to go into effect in the fall of 1971. Faced with the reality of having to cut three and one-half hours of prime time each week, the networks tried to make the best of it. ABC, which had always had more than its share of dead weight, found the access rule a godsend and in January 1971, jumped the gun by adding two and one-half hours to the half-hour of prime time it already ceded to the local affiliates each week. Freed of the albatross of some of its losers, including remnants of the relevant cycle (*Young Rebels*) and a few flopped crime shows (*Silent Force* and *Most Deadly Game*), ABC's ratings shot up and, in mid-January, the network won one week of the ratings war. It was ABC's first such victory in more than six years.

The second season surge by ABC further tightened the network competition. CBS had been unable to break away from the incessant challenge by NBC and the two had spent the season locked in a see-saw ratings battle. At the end of the 1970–71 season, CBS and NBC were in a dead heat, with both claiming victory. To the CBS leadership, it was clear that more drastic measures had to be taken to ensure supremacy. With the success of two new "urban" sitcoms, president Wood swallowed hard and in one swoop canceled eight stalwarts of the CBS zodiac: *The Ed Sullivan Show* (23 years), *Lassie* (17 years), *Mayberry RFD* (11 years), *The Beverly Hillbillies* (9 years), Jim Nabors (5 years as Gomer Pyle, 2 years as a variety host), *Hogan's Heroes* and *Green Acres* (6 years each), and *Hee-Haw* (2 years). Many of these shows were still very successful but some slots had to be cleared and this was as good a time as any to complete Wood's previously stated plan to steer CBS away from the oldster-yokel image. Wood's purge of so many net vets was the symbolic confirmation that, with the public's acceptance of new shows such as *Mary Tyler Moore* and *All in the Family,* the government's forced ban on cigarette commercials, and the appearance of the access rule, 1971 would mark a seismic shift in the equilibrium of American television.

1971–72 SEASON

31. Not Just Another Pretty Face

ON SEPTEMBER 13, 1971, PRIME TIME SHRUNK. The FCC's access rule had taken effect and the nightly schedules of all three networks reflected a shakeup far greater than the usual fall season reorganization. The new rules stipulated that the networks could not present more than three hours of prime time fare between 7:00 P.M. and 11:00 P.M. However, the FCC had not specified which three of the four available hours should be used, leaving the choice to the networks themselves. As the traditional domain of news shows (except on Sunday), the 7:00–7:30 P.M. slot was sacrosanct, so the network programmers had to decide between a prime time that would run 7:30–10:30 P.M. or 8:00–11:00 P.M. Though such a minor shift might have seemed a trivial difference at first, the choice was vitally important because it would determine the tone of network schedules not only for the 1971–72 season but for many seasons to come. If 7:30–10:30 P.M. were selected as prime time, the networks would place even more emphasis on kiddie-oriented productions, and the independent producers would have to develop adult material to fill the resulting late night access time (10:30–11:00 P.M.). The situation would be reversed with 8:00–11:00 P.M. as prime time; the networks would lose a half-hour of kidvid and the earlier access time could be filled with less somber fare such as frothy game shows.

Throughout the spring of 1971, the programming chiefs at CBS, NBC, and ABC engaged in a perverse form of high-level "chicken," using compliance with the access rule as a means to psyche out their competitors and to gain some slight advantage in what promised to be a tight ratings battle in the fall. At first, NBC and ABC seemed to be set on an 8:00–11:00 P.M. prime time so CBS, seeing an irresistible chance for a head start on its competitors, said it would opt for a 7:30 P.M. starting time in which it would schedule sixty-minute shows to kick off every evening. Such a move would have forced the other two to follow suit and change their schedules in order to prevent CBS from nailing down a large audience at the start of each night's viewing. Rumors, tentative plans, and revised proposals filled the air as the networks jockeyed back and forth for two months. Then CBS, which said it really favored the choice of the 8:00–11:00 P.M. slot all along but had suggested 7:30 P.M. only out of competitive zeal, asked the FCC to "suggest" that the networks consider 8:00 P.M. as the start of prime time. The commission went along, issued the proposal, and all three quickly complied. This did not end the pre-fall wrangling, however.

NBC applied for and received a waiver of the access rule so that it could continue sending out three and one-half hours of programming every Sunday night. This exception was granted so that *The Wonderful World of Disney* could continue to provide high quality family entertainment at its usual time. The FCC agreed that *Disney* deserved special treatment, though as penance NBC agreed to cut an extra half-hour from its Friday night schedule. ABC applied for and received a similar waiver for Tuesday night, based on the convoluted reasoning that because Tuesday was its strongest night, cutting part of it out would render the network impotent. In return for an untouched Tuesday line-up, ABC gave up another half-hour on Monday.

Following these Byzantine negotiations, which placed an inauspicious reliance on federal umpiring and even invited governmental judgments on program quality, the fall schedules were set. The new boundaries for prime time were from 8:00 P.M. to 11:00 P.M. Wednesday through Saturday and on Monday, and from 7:30 P.M. to 11:00 P.M. (with appropriate gaps) on Sunday and Tuesday. In one final exercise of network brinkmanship, CBS's chief programmer, Fred Silverman, upset the networks' plans again in August, just before the start of the season, by announcing another of his infamous last-minute schedule shifts. *All in the Family,* which had done well in an abominable slot the previous winter, was to be tucked away at 10:30 P.M. Monday, against an NBC movie and ABC's pro football coverage. Playing his trump card, Silverman shifted the proto-hit to the lead-off slot on Saturday night, against very weak competition, in the hope that it would help build Saturday into a CBS sitcom blockbuster night. It worked. *All in the Family* quickly returned to the number one slot in the Nielsen ratings, becoming a solid fall smash and not just a spring fad hit.

Though the boundaries of prime time, and therefore access time, had been established, the question of just what would fill the newly liberated slots was still left up in the air. In announcing the access rule, the FCC had conjured up visions of locally produced public affairs shows, programs offering something nice and wholesome for the kiddies (perhaps a commercial version of *Sesame Street*), and even independently produced serious drama that the networks would not dare touch. Instead, there were game shows. Lots of game shows. Old game shows. Syndicated game shows. Cheap game shows.

Actually, game show producers had begun sliding into syndication five years earlier as they found prime time on the networks, for the most part, closed to them. In September 1965, *Truth or Consequences,* a veteran of both daytime and nighttime network

FALL 1971 SCHEDULE

Day	Network	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30
MON	ABC	local		Nanny And The Professor	local	ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)			
MON	CBS	local		Gunsmoke		Here's Lucy	Doris Day Show	My Three Sons	Arnie
MON	NBC	local		Rowan And Martin's Laugh-In		NBC Monday Night At The Movies			
TUE	ABC	local	The Mod Squad		Movie Of The Week			Marcus Welby, M.D.	
TUE	CBS	local	Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour		Hawaii Five-O		CANNON		local
TUE	NBC	local	Ironside		SARGE		THE FUNNY SIDE		local
WED	ABC	local		Bewitched	The Courtship Of Eddie's Father	The Smith Family	SHIRLEY'S WORLD	THE MAN AND THE CITY	
WED	CBS	local		Carol Burnett Show		Medical Center		Mannix	
WED	NBC	local		Adam-12	NBC Mystery Movie (McCloud; COLUMBO; McMILLAN AND WIFE)			Night Gallery	
THUR	ABC	local		Alias Smith And Jones		LONGSTREET		OWEN MARSHALL, COUNSELOR AT LAW	
THUR	CBS	local		BEARCATS		CBS Thursday Night Movies / # 60 Minutes		# CBS News Hour	
THUR	NBC	local		Flip Wilson Show		NICHOLS		Dean Martin Show	
FRI	ABC	local		The Brady Bunch	The Partridge Family	Room 222	The Odd Couple	Love, American Style	
FRI	CBS	local		CHICAGO TEDDY BEARS	O'HARA, U.S. TREASURY		THE NEW CBS FRIDAY NIGHT MOVIES		
FRI	NBC	local		THE D.A.	NBC World Premiere Movie / # Chronolog				local
SAT	ABC	local		GETTING TOGETHER	MOVIE OF THE WEEKEND			THE PERSUADERS	
SAT	CBS	local		All In The Family	FUNNY FACE	NEW DICK VAN DYKE SHOW	Mary Tyler Moore Show	Mission: Impossible	
SAT	NBC	local		THE PARTNERS	THE GOOD LIFE	NBC Saturday Night At The Movies			
SUN	ABC	local		The FBI		The ABC Sunday Night Movie			
SUN	CBS	local	CBS Sunday Night Movies				CADE'S COUNTY		local
SUN	NBC	local	The Wonderful World Of Disney		JIMMY STEWART SHOW	Bonanza / # Bob Hope Show		The Bold Ones (The Doctors; The Lawyers)	

TV runs, was booted from NBC. One year later, the producers turned down an offer from ABC to revive the show and instead decided to return the program to the air by syndicating new episodes to local stations throughout the country. Most of these stations were not affiliated with a network, had the time to fill, and were more than happy to broadcast new, first run-episodes of a proven hit in place of their usual diet of reruns of old network series. *Truth or Consequences* was soon back in the groove, reuniting long-lost sisters and the like on a jerry-rigged chain of stations throughout the country. Other former network quizzers such as *What's My Line* (fall 1968), *Beat the Clock* and *To Tell the Truth* (September 1969), and *This Is Your Life* (January 1971) followed the lead of *Truth or Consequences* and were resurrected, usually with the word "new" stuck in front of the old title. The appearance of access time in the fall of 1971 opened new vistas for the syndicators as hundreds of network affiliates searched for programs to plug the new gaping holes in their schedules. To serve the expanding market, *Let's Make a Deal* and *Hollywood Squares,* still enjoying successful daytime network runs, joined the fray and began producing additional episodes for evening syndication.

For the most part, local stations chose the syndicated game shows to fill the Monday through Friday access slots. Other material was available such as new syndicated episodes of former network series including *Lassie, Lawrence Welk, Wild Kingdom,* and *Hee-Haw,* but these did not offer the quick, cheap solution to the weeknight program gap that the quizzes provided and so were usually scheduled for the weekends. Nonetheless, as shows that had been dumped by the networks merely for appealing to the wrong audience (either too rural or too old) they were eventually picked up because, like the quiz shows, they supplied familiar entertainment. (*Hee-Haw,* in fact, thrived in syndication.) Completely new shows, however, faced an almost insurmountable barrier. Group W, which had pressed the concept of local access with the FCC in the first place, offered a number of its own new entertainment shows in syndication including the satirical *David Frost Revue* and *The Smothers' Organic Prime Time Space Ride,* only to see them die. These programs required larger budgets which made them more expensive to the locals. Consequently, neither the Frost program nor the Smothers show was ever ordered by enough stations to justify the costs involved and both ceased production by the end of the year. More important, they could not compete for a mass audience with the plebian appeal of the ever-resilient game show format. With the broadcast day largely filled with network programs, the local stations were not about to sacrifice a potentially lucrative new local time period for material that might not turn a maximum profit. They were even less receptive to innovative concepts than the three networks, a commercial reality that had escaped the FCC's planners. Creative high-quality television might emerge in the long run from the FCC's access rule, but in the short run it just brought more junk.

While the individual stations were filling local access time with game shows, the networks were filling prime time with gumshoes. The most recent movement against television sex and violence had brought to the forefront the less violent figures of doctors, lawyers, and legislators who could act as cop surrogates until the wave of public and governmental pressure lost momentum. While two new Marcus Welby clones did turn up in the fall of 1971, the heat from Washington had sufficiently abated to allow real cops and private eyes to make a comeback. They still avoided violence as much as possible, though, with watered-down settings either in traditional Jack Webb-produced sagas or in equally nonviolent gimmick series featuring a new wave of inside-outsiders.

The Welby imitations came from the good doctor's own executive producer, David Victor, who adapted the soapy but successful doctor format twice, emerging with one failure, *Man and the City,* and one success, *Owen Marshall: Counselor at Law.* The pilot episode for *Man and the City* cast Anthony Quinn as the mayor of a medium-sized Southwest desert city in a gritty setting that contained innovative touches of reality as part of the mayor's life: a tacky office, an estranged wife, and a devil's advocate for an aide. Once the regular series began, however, the unique desert feel and realistic setting were eliminated and the aseptic Welby world of spiffy offices and beautiful people was substituted instead. Quinn, one of the best tough guy actors of the era, ended up fighting soapy emotional causes such as the right of deaf parents to adopt a child who could hear. As a result, the program became merely a lame attempt to create a governmental *Father Knows Best* with pat answers and silly caricatures. *Owen Marshall: Counselor at Law,* with Arthur Hill as a widower-solicitor, was far more successful. Like Welby, Marshall was an idealized professional who lived in a fancy town and who dealt with problems of the upper middle class, assisted by such gorgeous "hunks" in the supporting cast as Lee Majors and David Soul. The series was awash in bathos as it joined its companion professions in bringing topics previously considered "for soaps only" into prime time. In contrast to the others, though, *Owen Marshall* sometimes attempted a more evenhanded treatment of its subjects, such as lesbianism.

The new cops and detectives dispensed with such indulgences and resumed the clear-cut direct pursuit of justice in the never-ending war against crime, albeit still without the physical gusto of the past. Jack Webb's two new entries for the fall continued to follow his standard nonviolent format, emphasizing tight-lipped personalities and the mechanics of crime detection, but neither *The D.A.* nor *O'Hara, U.S. Treasury* proved successful. In an unusual move, Webb used two celebrities that were known for exuding emotion on the screen in the series (Robert Conrad in *The D.A.* and David Janssen in *O'Hara*), but their animated character traits put them in direct conflict with the basis of Webb's unyielding dour format. Consequently, in both shows, the lead character seemed to be visibly straining against the role of tight-lipped hero. Neither program survived the season. Webb was much more successful with a mid-season replacement, *Emergency,* which returned to his standard character types while increasing the instances of urban style visual action. In fact, *Emergency* could be considered the perfect Jack Webb program, taking his philosophy of routine, but real-life, crime and crime detection and stretching it to the limit. For one hour each week, a succession of unrelated gas explosions, helicopter crashes, arson blazes, bomb threats, and even mundane car crashes bombarded the viewer. It resembled nothing so much as a sixty-minute compilation of short film clips from the very visual disasters local television news directors inevitably featured in their nightly news programs. The show's premise tying the events together was simple: A squad of paramedics from the Los Angeles fire department's rescue division was dispatched to aid the victims, and in each show they drove from disaster to disaster. As with all Jack Webb productions, interspersed in this mayhem were a few moments of everyday personal conversation among the hard-working public servants (including paramedic regulars Robert Fuller, Bobby Troup, Julie London, Kevin Tighe, and Randolph Mantooth). Though the personalities of the paramedics were usually lost in the deadly inferno of disasters each week, *Emergency* was generally well done, entertaining, and its success in the spring of 1972 began to put the "action" back into crime adventure shows. The program also added immeasurably to the image of Los Angeles as the setting of every horrendous natural or manmade cataclysm ever conceived.

The networks' attempts to be hip the previous season had proven an abysmal failure, so no true outsiders turned up among the new crop of law enforcers in 1971. Instead, there was a collection of characters more acceptable to TV viewers; characters only slightly out-of-synch with mainstream society, usually personified as loner cops. Lone guns had thrived in the 1950s (Martin Kane, Peter Gunn, Paladin) but the advent of *77 Sunset Strip* signaled the advance of a more conformist troika-type system. For a decade, law enforcers worked in well-polished teams, sometimes borrowing from the medical format of a young man and his veteran mentor. The success of *Mannix* in the late 1960s began to bring the loner back into vogue and, in the fall of 1971, more than a half dozen such law enforcers appeared. Following in the footpath of the TV Westerns of the late 1950s, many of the new cop shows seemed almost laughable in their desperate search for attractive gimmick characters. George Kennedy played a policeman turned activist-priest on *Sarge;* James Garner was a reluctant local sheriff in an early twentieth-century Western setting on *Nichols;* and James Franciscus was a blind crusading insurance investigator on *Longstreet.* Several other programs with equally gimmicky characters, though, managed to catch on with viewers and develop into finely crafted adventure series. *Cannon* and the three rotating segments of *The NBC Mystery Movie* (*McCloud, McMillan and Wife,* and *Columbo*) had slightly stronger setups which allowed a wider set of story lines, better scripts, and more effective humor. They could present touches of reality within the ever present fantasy world of television lawmen. At heart, these series were identical in purpose to *Nichols* or *Longstreet,* only they happened to be more successful in overall execution and ratings.

McCloud (a holdover from the previous season's segments of *The NBC Mystery Movie,* then called *Four-in-One*) featured Dennis Weaver as a straight-talking, horse-riding marshal from New Mexico attached to the New York City police force. By using his Western sagacity and common-sense knowledge of people, McCloud regularly broke cases that stumped the locals, thereby exasperating yet amazing his Manhattan precinct chief, played by J. D. Cannon. Weaver was already familiar to viewers as a Western hero from his long stint as Chester, the sidekick in *Gunsmoke,* so he brought some credibility to the task of showing up the smart aleck city bureaucrats (always an appealing notion to beleaguered urban dwellers). Astride his horse and wearing a cowboy hat, McCloud was a literal outsider to the urban New York setting, but his shrewd perception of people's motivations made him a law enforcement insider to be reckoned with. The program thus emerged as a very clever mix of Western and cop formats.

Another segment in *The NBC Mystery Movie* slot, *McMillan and Wife,* drew on the old *Mr. and Mrs. North* stories for inspiration. The series presented a pleasant combination of mystery, humor, and police action by the unusual team of Stu McMillan (Rock Hudson), the police commissioner of San Francisco, and his

In the 1968 made-for-TV movie "Prescription: Murder," Peter Falk *(left)* first portrayed Lieutenant Columbo. Gene Barry played Dr. Roy Flemming, a suave psychiatrist who murdered his wife. *(Courtesy of Universal Studios Licensing, LLLP)*

wife, Sally (Susan Saint James). Saint James transferred her wise-cracking character from *Name of the Game* to the new setting, mixing her domestic detective work with lighthearted household antics, usually planned with the couple's busybody housekeeper, played by Nancy Walker. Hudson's McMillan was also down-to-earth and, even though he was the top cop in San Francisco (about as "inside" as possible), he inevitably took to the streets himself in the best loner cop tradition. He and his wife generally discovered and solved most cases themselves with only nominal help from the San Francisco police department, usually represented by McMillan's good-natured aide, Sergeant Enright (John Schuck). *McMillan and Wife*'s emphasis on likable characters and humor was a carefully planned technique used by each of the successful gimmick series. It allowed them to deemphasize violence and also to stand apart from the more traditional police shows which took themselves so seriously in the war against crime.

Still, McCloud and McMillan and his wife were only slight deviations from traditional crime fighters compared to the unlikely characters of Cannon and Columbo, the season's biggest (and sloppiest) successes. *Cannon* brought to the forefront the long-deserving William Conrad, whose rich deep voice had served him well in radio (playing Marshal Dillon in the radio version of *Gunsmoke*) and as a voice-over announcer for television (as in Quinn Martin's *The Fugitive*), but whose stout appearance relegated him to playing criminal heavies on camera. As detective Frank Cannon, Conrad starred in a new series by Quinn Martin that broke two unwritten rules about television heroes: Cannon was fat and he was old. Obviously pushing fifty (if he had not already pushed it over), Cannon could never win the hearts of the much-sought-after female audience in the same way as the svelte heroes portrayed by stars such as Craig Stevens, Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., Dennis Weaver, and Rock Hudson. With his heavy gait, Cannon was also not quite the ideal candidate for a frenzied police chase. Since the inception of television cops, such traits were, at best, left to the self-deprecating sidekick and never featured in a leading character. Nonetheless, Conrad, like most of the year's wave of loner cops, played his character strongly but with a slightly humorous touch, keeping the focus on personalities over incidents and appearance. He, too, never let the war on crime overshadow the people most affected by it.

The most visibly eccentric inside-outsider crime fighter introduced that season was Columbo, played by another veteran character actor, Peter Falk, who had been working for years to gain public acceptance for such a hero. In the fall of 1965, Falk starred in the CBS crime show, *The Trials of O'Brien*. In an era of pretty boy heroes (populated by such good lookers as Richard Chamberlain and Robert Vaughn), Falk's interpretation of attorney Daniel O'Brien as a seedy-looking disheveled little man proved an enigma to most television viewers, who were unable to take the character seriously. When he was not in the courtroom, O'Brien was more than likely to be found at the race track playing the horses. How could such a man be a counselor at law? He was even divorced! The mix of humor and drama in *Trials of O'Brien* found little appreciation, and the series was canceled at mid-season, a good show that was unfortunately ahead of its time.

A year later, Universal Studios began producing made-for-TV films for NBC, many of which served as pilots for projected new series. In February 1968, NBC-Universal presented "Prescription: Murder," written by Richard Levinson and William Link. The story traced the elaborate scheme of a wealthy psychiatrist (played by Gene Barry) who murdered his wife, but was eventually unmasked by a polite and deceptively deferential detective from the Los Angeles police department, Lieutenant Columbo. That character had previously been used by Levinson and Link in a 1960 NBC summer anthology, then in a stage play, and they had first envisioned Bing Crosby for the TV movie, but Peter Falk instantly made it his own. With a creditable rough-hewn style, Falk's Columbo appeared to be little more than a sloppy, unsophisticated gumshoe who chewed on cheap cigars, sported a well worn raincoat, and drove a beat up old car. A supremely self-confident murderer would easily dismiss the lieutenant as no threat at all. In fact, Columbo was actually an alert, perceptive investigator whose meticulous eye for detail helped him spot the guilty party quickly. Then, it was a matter of building a case, step by step, with an ingratiating manner that even invited the suspect to offer explanations for particularly nagging points. This approach to a murder mystery seemed appealing and a second film, a full-fledged pilot, "Ransom for a Deadman," was produced in 1971.

In the fall of 1971, the *Columbo* series was quietly added to the *Mystery Movie* rotation, offering about half a dozen stories each season. Slowly, very slowly, the program built a following, though it did not achieve wide public acceptance until well into its second season. Times had changed, though, since *The Trials of O'Brien* and the television audience now seemed willing to accept a short fuzzy man in a wrinkled raincoat as a detective capable of cracking schemes conceived as the "perfect murder." The series attracted a wide range of guest stars as the murderers (Richard Kiley, Donald Pleasence, and Patrick McGoohan were among the best), usually casting them as rich, powerful, and influential, occupying social circles far above Columbo. As in the two TV movies, each episode followed an "inverted murder" structure: At the beginning of the story the audience was shown the crime as it was committed, so there was never any question of who was guilty. Rather than being a traditional "whodunit," *Columbo* was a "howzecatchem," focusing on *how* the lieutenant would trap the guilty party, and it played out as an elaborate cat-and-mouse game between the shuffling detective and the overconfident suspect. Every episode of *Columbo* adhered to this formula but, as in the old *Perry Mason* series, the repetition increased viewers' involvement by making them think, alertly searching for the inevitable fatal error by the villain and the casual, but oh-so-devastating, off hand remark by Columbo, who inevitably returned to each suspect to ask "just one more thing."

The success of these slightly off-beat new shows, as well as the steady number one status of CBS's *All in the Family*, was more tangible economic proof that the American television audience was willing to embrace programs that were somewhat out of the ordinary. Mindful of this, NBC offered at mid-season the first follow-up attempt to the successful style of *All in the Family*, *Sanford and Son*, another Norman Lear and Bud Yorkin production with British roots and a long history.

In January 1962, the BBC anthology program *Comedy Playhouse* presented "The Offer," a situation comedy featuring the antics of Albert Steptoe (Wilfrid Brambell), a garrulous and possessive curmudgeon who ran a junk dealership with his son, Harold (Harry Corbett). Albert Steptoe was the archetypical lovable grouch who spent most of his time scheming to break up any plans (such as marriage) his son might have to leave the family business. The public response to the two characters was so strong that in June 1962, a *Steptoe and Son* series began on the BBC and, by early 1964, it was the number one show in Britain. That same year, excerpts from the program were shown in the United States on *The Jack Paar Show* and NBC and Embassy Pictures put together a pilot for an Americanized version of the series that was intended to begin in 1965. The pilot, however, was rejected and plans for the series shelved. The British original itself went off the air in November 1965. Though *Steptoe and Son* was still a highly rated show, its producers admitted frankly that they had run out of ideas and decided to quit while on top. Four and one-half years later, giving in to public demand, the original cast was reassembled and *Steptoe and Son* returned to the BBC with new episodes. Though the series did not reach the number one slot in this new run, it was successful enough to once again attract American attention. In March 1971, Norman Lear and Bud Yorkin, who had just finished a long struggle to bring *All in the Family* to television, acquired the rights to produce an American version of *Steptoe and Son*. In September, NBC agreed to put the show into its schedule in January 1972. By this time, Lear and Yorkin had ceased working as a pair, so while Lear kept his eye on *All in the Family*, Yorkin took control of the new series, called *Sanford and Son*. Like *All in the Family*, *Sanford and Son* was essentially a one-set show recorded on tape before a live audience. In transferring the junkyard world of *Steptoe and Son* to an American setting, Yorkin kept everything the same as in the original with one major exception: father and son (Fred and Lamont Sanford) were black.

Just as the Bunkers liberated television from the bland stereotypes of white suburbia, the Sanfords led the way in upsetting television's then-current stereotypes of blacks as middle class whites in blackface (such as Julia) and Olympian supermen (such as Linc in *The Mod Squad)*. Instead, *Sanford and Son* presented blacks in a working class situation set in the ghetto, and used race as a peg for a number of jokes. And yet, just as *All in the Family* was highly derivative of *The Honeymooners, Sanford and Son* was, in many ways, a modern version of *Amos 'n Andy*, which in the 1950s had cast blacks in a standard wacky *I Love Lucy* style of comedy. Both *Amos 'n Andy* and *Sanford and Son* presented comic characters who happened to be black living in an essentially all-black world. Within such a setting, the presence of whites was more an emotional feeling than an everyday reality so the programs could put aside any awkward preaching and instead thrive in the all-black world with the strengths, stereotypes, and outlandish humor of any other first class American sitcom. Redd Foxx, a patriarch of black vaudeville halls (the so-called chitlin' circuit), portrayed the hypochondriac scheming bumbler, Fred Sanford. Foxx was a master at overacting and, since this was exactly what the character called for, it seemed as if he had spent his entire

September 18, 1971
The New Dick Van Dyke Show. (CBS). Dick Van Dyke returns to television in a new, but familiar, sitcom setting, directed by Carl Reiner and slotted immediately before the increasingly successful *Mary Tyler Moore Show.* Van Dyke plays Dick Preston, host of a local television talk show in Phoenix, Arizona.

October 1, 1971
Frank Stanton, president of CBS, Inc. since 1946, moves up to become vice chairman of the CBS board of directors.

October 6, 1971
This Week. (PBS). Bill Moyers, former press secretary to President Lyndon Johnson, begins a weekly documentary essay series. In its second season, the program is renamed *Bill Moyers' Journal.*

October 10, 1971
Upstairs, Downstairs. Britain's London Weekend Television network begins an extended drama series focusing on the social life of Edwardian England. The action is centered at the Bellamy townhouse in a well-to-do district of London. Upstairs: the rich Bellamy family. Downstairs: their servants. The show makes it to the U.S. on *Masterpiece Theater* beginning in January 1974.

October 13, 1971
The Pittsburgh Pirates beat the Baltimore Orioles 4 to 3 at Pittsburgh in the first World Series night game. NBC urged the later starting time in order to register higher ratings for the contest in prime time and, within a few years, most of baseball's championship games are staged "under the lights."

December 12, 1971
Brig. General David Sarnoff, the father of American television and honorary chairman of the board of RCA, dies in New York at the age of eighty. He worked at the company for sixty-five years.

February 14, 1972
The CBS Late Movie. (CBS). After failing to catch Johnny Carson with Merv Griffin, CBS switches late night formats from talk shows to movies (beginning with "A Patch of Blue"). On March 13, Griffin, still headquartered in Los Angeles, returns to television in afternoon syndication for Metromedia.

April 30, 1972
Arthur Godfrey Time goes off CBS Radio after exactly twenty-seven years.

May 1, 1972
After making numerous West Coast trips over the years, NBC's *Tonight* show moves permanently to Los Angeles.

July 1, 1972
Facing tough new afternoon competition from Merv Griffin's return to syndication, David Frost's syndicated talk program for Group W goes off the air.

July 8-9, 1972
"The Democratic National Telethon." (ABC). On the eve of its nominating convention, the Democratic Party stages an 18½ hour telethon to help cut the party's debt.

July 12, 1972
Thirty-seven-year-old Arthur Taylor becomes president of CBS, Inc., taking Frank Stanton's old job.

career preparing for the role. Son Lamont (Demond Wilson) served the role of believable straightman who, like Jed Clampett in *The Beverly Hillbillies,* was an oasis of sanity necessary to bring the flights of fancy back from the stratosphere. Foxx and Wilson were perfect needles to each other and their love-hate relationship gave the show a secure foundation of humor. The usual sitcom supporting characters rounded out the cast, including a dull-witted accomplice (Whitman Mayo as Fred's pal, Grady) and a female battleaxe (LaWanda Page as Fred's sister-in-law, Esther). At heart, then, *Sanford and Son* was not so much a racial show, but rather a very basic, well-produced contemporary sitcom set in a black ghetto. In fact, all but one of the first year's episodes were simply rewritten *Steptoe and Son* scripts, though in later years Yorkin made a determined effort to use black writers. Fred Sanford might assert his blackness but, more often than not, it was only as part of some scheme or con using his race in much the same way as he used his feigned heart attacks. This television portrayal of working class blacks who were conscious of their race and the problems of ghetto life, but who were also strong humorous characters facing funny situations, was the most important aspect of the success of *Sanford and Son.*

With the American audience softened up after a year of *All in the Family, Sanford and Son* found it much easier to shoot to the top of the Nielsen ratings and managed to place sixth in the compilation of the season's top shows, even though it first appeared in January. Viewers were beginning to understand that *All in the Family* and *Sanford and Son* were not revolutionaries per se, but rather up-to-date continuations of great sitcom traditions of the past. Noting the public's acceptance of the innovative new series, producers and the networks grew bolder both in pursuing new formats and reworking old ones. In the process, the formulas for success in the 1970s seemed to be falling into place. Phasing in more contemporary adult concerns, CBS managed to stay on top in the ratings, closely followed by NBC. As usual, ABC was bringing up the rear, though it also joined the movement toward more experimental network ventures.

Miniseries appeared on all three networks, following the success of the CBS presentation of *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* the previous summer. NBC broadcast the BBC's six-part *Search for the Nile,* ABC imported a four-part adaptation of *War and Peace* (produced in Russia), and CBS presented the five-part Italian production of *The Life of Leonardo da Vinci.* Overall, the emphasis on special network programming increased and even the Pat Weaver notion of regularly scheduled specials made a comeback with NBC devoting most of Tuesday night to specials and ABC offering the weekly *Monday Night Special.* ABC also registered impressive success with its expanded schedule of made-for-TV movie presentations. Of the top twenty-three movies aired in the 1971–72 season, eighteen came from ABC's made-for-TV *Movie of the Week* slot. (In fact, only nine of the year's top thirty-two films were traditional theatrical features.) ABC's made-for-television hits included such blockbusters as the spooky crime-tinged "Night Stalker," and the solidly sentimental black-white sports camaraderie of "Brian's Song."

This boldness in entertainment programming was slowly sliding into the news departments as well, especially at CBS. With occasional, but dramatic, bursts of independence even in the face of government irritation and affiliate uneasiness, the network became the unquestioned leader in brave news presentations, particularly after its early 1971 *CBS Reports* episode, "The Selling of the Pentagon." The report examined the American military's public relations efforts that ranged from Pentagon propaganda films (some narrated by nationally known news commentators such as Chet Huntley and CBS's own Walter Cronkite) to elaborate and costly fireworks displays of new battle weapons shown to junketing VIPs. Though the Pentagon claimed the cost of these activities was only $30 million per year, CBS implied that $190 million of the taxpayers' money was a more accurate estimate of the yearly expenses. "The Selling of the Pentagon" did not follow the "on the other hand" tradition of television reporting, adopting instead the best aspects of the subjective muckraking style of journalism newspapers had long practiced. Produced and written by Peter Davis (who later won an Oscar in 1974 for "Hearts and Minds," an admittedly subjective view of the war in Vietnam), the program did not claim to be an objective study, but rather a hard-nosed TV expose that examined an issue and reached a conclusion. The program directed criticism not so much at the concept of Pentagon public relations, but at the incredible waste of taxpayer funds on extravagancies. The military and its congressional friends blasted the show as a "vicious piece of propaganda." Representative Harley O. Staggers, chairman of the House Investigations Subcommittee, kept the issue alive for months by attempting to have CBS executive Frank Stanton cited for contempt because he refused the committee's demand for outtakes from the program. In July 1971, though, the full House turned its back on Staggers and refused to press the contempt issue, and even President Nixon supported CBS in the battle. A few months later, however, the president and CBS were again at loggerheads, this time over a CBS report, "Under Surveillance," that documented FBI spying and wire tapping on domestic radicals.

At the same time, in the fall of 1971, the simmering warfare between the White House and public television at last broke into the open as officials from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) publicly complained that Clay Whitehead, chief of the White House's Office of Telecommunications Policy, was trying to inject partisan political considerations into the administration of American public television. In January 1972, Whitehead went on record as saying that, "there is a real question as to whether public television . . . should be carrying public affairs, news commentary, and that sort of thing." With an election year beginning, the White House preferred a weak, unobtrusive public broadcast system and Whitehead's statement virtually corroborated the charges of administration pressure on public TV. The battle intensified in the summer and, in July, President Nixon vetoed the CPB funding bill that would have granted public television $155 million over the next two years. In August, Nixon forces staged a coup d'etat and the chairman and president of CPB, both appointed by President Johnson, agreed to resign. Public television was rapidly becoming, in effect, the Nixon network. As a result, it offered no commentary at all in its gavel-to-gavel coverage of the August Republican convention in Miami Beach. The cameras simply focused on the podium and followed the scheduled activities, one after another. Recently hired PBS newsmen Robert MacNeil and Sander Vanocur (both formerly of NBC) refused the meaningless wooden role of convention anchor (though they did participate in the nightly convention wrapups), so the job fell to former Johnson press secretary, Bill Moyers. The convention itself, however, was so well planned (it was literally scripted) that only a few aspects stood out anyway: the fanatically cheering young Nixon supporters and the one vote cast for David Brinkley for vice president.

In contrast, the Democratic convention, held a month earlier in Miami, was extremely disorganized, even for Democrats. Long, rancorous debates on controversial issues such as Vietnam and gay rights filled prime time television and constantly forced the sessions to run overtime. Even on nomination night the delegates failed to restrain themselves and presidential nominee South Dakota Senator George McGovern was forced to deliver his acceptance speech at 3:00 A.M., when all but the most ardent supporters had already gone to bed.

On the eve of the convention, however, the Democrats managed to coordinate and stage a unique political fund-raising event, an eighteen and one-half hour national telethon, carried on ABC. It was a novel way to erase part of the party's outstanding $9 million debt (from the 1968 campaign) and at the same time reduce the image of dependence on the traditional "fat cats" of politics by appealing directly to millions of "little people." The program was packed with stars and, as such events go, reasonably well produced and entertaining. It contained humorous partisan "commercials" including a *Mission: Impossible* take-off with a self-destructing tape that instructed Republican agents to bug the Democratic headquarters in Washington. By the end of the telethon, the Democrats had raised $4 million, enough to pay for the network time and still leave a profit of $2 million.

Some of the top names in broadcasting (including CBS's Walter Cronkite and Eric Sevareid) were part of the press corps reporting on President Nixon's February 1972 trip to China. *(National Archives)*

President Nixon, however, was clearly headed for a second term and, all year, the networks were very wary of crossing him. His February trip to China received heavy coverage, but the May protests to his mining of Vietnam's Haiphong harbor were given minimal exposure. Yet despite this generally cautious manner, Nixon and Nixon supporters continued to be irked at even occasional probing by CBS News. At the Republican convention, for instance, Mike Wallace bravely interviewed Nixon campaign money man Maurice Stans on possible connections to a June burglary at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington's Watergate hotel. Previous reports by Daniel Schorr apparently angered the administration enough that an FBI investigation of Schorr was ordered by White House staffer Chuck Colson. When news of this leaked, the government released the patently absurd story that the FBI was checking into Schorr because he was under consideration for an environmental job in the administration. Following the May protests to the Haiphong mining, CBS, the only network to air a prime time special on the activities ("Escalation in Vietnam: Reasons, Risks, and Reactions"), was chastised by the Republican National Committee's publication, *Monday,* which claimed in a headline that: "CBS News accentuates the negative, distorting the facts in reporting Vietnam action." Shortly thereafter, CBS calmly aired films made by Anthony Lewis from the *New York Times* who showed North Vietnamese hospitals, homes, and schools destroyed by American bombs. Ironically, the films were very similar to the Felix Greene footage turned down by the network four years earlier. CBS newsman Don Webster, returning from the war front, said that ever since the American invasion of Cambodia and Laos (which had resulted in some negative comments and reports), the American military displayed open animosity to the press, "especially the radio-TV press and, even more, CBS News."

It was not the Vietnam War, however, that produced the season's most gripping combat coverage but, rather, the Summer Olympics in Munich, Germany, broadcast on ABC. In 1968, ABC had carried both the Summer and Winter Olympic Games, earning merely satisfactory ratings but demonstrating remarkable professionalism in its handling of the events. NBC's coverage of the 1972 Winter Olympics in Japan registered the same "just adequate" Nielsen figures. For the Summer Olympics in late August and early September of 1972, the well-trained ABC *Wide World of Sports* production crew, headed by producer Roone Arledge and announcers Jim McKay and Howard Cosell, again turned the often scattered Olympic events into a tight, comprehensible show. Making extensive use of satellite transmissions, ABC scheduled many segments for prime time viewing. The network once more won critical plaudits but this time, surprisingly, very high ratings as well, averaging a 52% share of the audience on Olympic nights.

On Tuesday morning, September 5, the Olympics were dramatically transformed from a highly rated sporting event to an important news story as Palestinian terrorists captured a group of Israeli athletes inside the Olympic compound and held them as hostages. ABC, of course, had a large, professional staff already on the scene to provide extensive day-long coverage of the Munich events, but the network's coverage of the hostage story went beyond being fortunately at the right place at the right time. ABC displayed a strong professional manner and discipline that suddenly made many Americans aware that ABC was a network to be taken seriously. Jim McKay displayed a depth of insight and emotion he had never revealed on *Wide World of Sports* as the events unfolded, live, before the cameras. Newsman Peter Jennings reported from within the cordoned-off compound itself. The terrorists were shown brandishing their weapons and sticking their heads out the window while German paratroopers surrounded the compound and prepared for a possible assault. The possibility that open warfare could erupt at any moment was painfully clear, and undeniably exciting. Both sides waited, tensely, all day. Near 5:00 P.M. (New York time), the terrorists emerged from the compound with their hostages in tow, stepped into the fuzzy street light, then entered a special bus they had demanded be brought to take them all to the local airport. As the bus disappeared, both the ABC commentators and the home audience could only wait and speculate. At about 9.00 P.M. McKay wearily but joyfully announced that, according to the first reports from the airport, all the hostages had been freed. Soon he had to retract this premature happy ending with the ominous phrase, "There will be bad news from the officials." Near 10:30 P.M. McKay, visibly exhausted after his twelve-hour marathon job of anchoring, presented the bad news: All the hostages had died in a violent shoot-out between police and the terrorists. Memorial services were held for the slain athletes and then the games were resumed and completed amid extremely tight security.

ABC's Munich coverage marked an important turning point in the network's image. Not only had it displayed innovation and skill in its excellent production of the Olympic events themselves, it also revealed tremendous adaptability in facing unexpected developments with its presentation of the hostage story. The events in Munich served as a highly visible "coming of age" for what had been derisively labeled for years as "the third network."

1972–73 SEASON

32. Ideological Plugola

IN 1973 THE FCC AT LAST got around to holding hearings on the first complaints registered against implementation of the 1970 prime time access rule. Despite the howls of protest that had originally greeted the proposal three years earlier, when the hearings began no one spoke out in favor of scrapping the new system. The three networks privately confessed that it would take them years to develop a new batch of 7:30 P.M. lead-in programs should the time be returned to them. Independent syndicators and local station owners, who were prospering with profitable game shows in the access slots, had no intention of giving up their newfound bonanza without a fight. In a very short time, a new status quo had taken hold in television. The exemptions granted to ABC and NBC for the 1971–72 season expired and were not renewed. ABC broke up its Tuesday night block while NBC shaved an additional thirty minutes from its Sunday night schedule. For the 1972–73 season, each network adhered to the prescribed three-hour limit on prime time broadcasting every night. At the FCC hearings, NBC publicly conceded that access might actually be a good idea, while ABC had no qualifications; it was ecstatic about the plan. Though still number three, ABC had used the access rule to cut dead weight from its schedule and found itself in a good competitive position, registering a small but healthy ratings jump in the 1971–72 season. Even number one CBS had weathered the storm well, dropping the last of its rural-based programs in its compliance with the commission's access rule.

At the same time, CBS looked to its new smash hit, *All in the Family,* to set the style of comedy for the new decade, and had begun to cultivate the development of similar programs. The network had drawn on sitcoms for ratings success throughout the 1950s and 1960s and prepared to exploit the rejuvenated format again for the 1970s. *All in the Family* was fresh, exciting, provocative, and a rich source to tap for the new wave of humor. The series had expanded its scope from racial themes to deal with other controversial topics such as menopause, impotency, homosexuality, and the Vietnam War. Producer Norman Lear did not just milk the topical issues for a few cheap laughs, but used them as realistic complications faced by generally believable character types. (Lear, in fact, said that he had modeled the Archie Bunker character after his own father.) The popular success of Lear's sitcom style had, within a very short time, effectively changed the focus of situation comedy from the silliness of pure escapist fare to the presentation of human mini-dramas that had a strong base in comedy.

Irwin Segelstein, one of CBS programmer Fred Silverman's top aides, described this approach to comedy in *Variety,* calling it the first major change from the *I Love Lucy* "obstacle course sitcoms." Those had presented lovable and wacky characters in absurd situations such as trying to fly a plane without a pilot or falling down a laundry chute. In contrast, Segelstein said, "The new comedy always grows out of an identifiable situation, and it involves realism in both life style and dialogue style. It still involves jokes, but the jokes are being made on a different level than before ... Where it really departs from the old is that the comedy grows out of the characters themselves rather than out of plot or farcical incidents. The writers start with a serious theme and then develop a comedy about it."

Television drama series had long before melted into a panoply of cops and doctors in soap opera-type action-adventures, so sitcoms had unexpectedly become the driving force in the examination of real-life issues by the medium. Such a development worked because the framework of comedy defused the omnipresent stench of exceeding seriousness and glib solutions that had too often pervaded and ultimately undercut attempts to deal with real life in the so-called relevant dramas such as the defunct *Storefront Lawyers.* In those series, current headlines had merely been grafted onto cliché-ridden plots, shallow characters, and cardboard settings in order to appear up-to-date and topical. Though the characters in sitcoms such as *All in the Family* often fell into stereotypes themselves, the world they were placed in was very real. Consequently, controversial, topical, and realistic issues did not appear as heavy handed intrusions but, rather, as reasonable developments in that particular setting.

All in the Family had opened its second season with Archie trying to wiggle out of paying for the funeral of a bothersome relative who had died (off camera) in his house. Such a plot twist was unique to television because characters in traditional TV sitcoms simply did not die. It worked because the Bunker family faced the situation in character and handled it with humor. This was the key to the continuing success of the series as Norman Lear constantly updated *All in the Family* to reflect the shifts of popular controversy in the 1970s, duplicating the arguments that took place in many homes across the country throughout the decade. Originally Archie and son-in-law Mike had passionately disagreed on religious morals, race, and the conduct of the Vietnam War. This expanded to include the ethics of President Nixon's reelection campaign and the investigation into the break-in at the Democratic headquarters in the Watergate. Some episodes went even further

FALL 1972 SCHEDULE

Day	Network	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30
MON	ABC	THE ROOKIES		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)			
MON	CBS	Gunsmoke		Here's Lucy	Doris Day Show	THE NEW BILL COSBY SHOW	
MON	NBC	Rowan And Martin's Laugh-In		NBC Monday Night At The Movies			
TUE	ABC	TEMPERATURE'S RISING	Tuesday Movie Of The Week			Marcus Welby, M.D.	
TUE	CBS	MAUDE	Hawaii Five-O		The New CBS Tuesday Night Movies		
TUE	NBC	Bonanza		The Bold Ones (The Doctors)		NBC REPORTS / # First Tuesday	
WED	ABC	PAUL LYNDE SHOW	Wednesday Movie Of The Week			JULIE ANDREWS HOUR	
WED	CBS	Carol Burnett Show		Medical Center		Cannon	
WED	NBC	Adam-12	NBC WEDNESDAY MYSTERY MOVIE (BANACEK; COOL MILLION; MADIGAN)			SEARCH	
THR	ABC	The Mod Squad		THE MEN (ASSIGNMENT:VIENNA; DELPHI BUREAU; JIGSAW)		Owen Marshall, Counselor At Law	
THR	CBS	THE WALTONS		CBS Thursday Night Movies			
THR	NBC	Flip Wilson Show		Ironside / # Bob Hope Show		Dean Martin Show	
FRI	ABC	The Brady Bunch	The Partridge Family	Room 222	The Odd Couple	Love, American Style	
FRI	CBS	Sonny And Cher Comedy Hour		CBS Friday Night Movies			
FRI	NBC	Sanford And Son	THE LITTLE PEOPLE	GHOST STORY		BANYON	
SAT	ABC	Alias Smith And Jones / # KUNG-FU		STREETS OF SAN FRANCISCO		The Sixth Sense	
SAT	CBS	All In The Family	BRIDGET LOVES BERNIE	Mary Tyler Moore Show	BOB NEWHART SHOW	Mission: Impossible	
SAT	NBC	Emergency		NBC Saturday Night At The Movies			

Day	Network	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30
SUN	ABC	local		The FBI		The ABC Sunday Night Movie			
SUN	CBS	local	ANNA AND THE KING	M*A*S*H	Sandy Duncan Show	New Dick Van Dyke Show	Mannix		local
SUN	NBC	local	The Wonderful World Of Disney		NBC Sunday Mystery Movie (McCloud; Columbo; McMillan And Wife; HEC RAMSEY)			Night Gallery	local

and shifted the primary emphasis from comedy to drama. In one such story, the Bunkers and a "Hebrew Defense Association" activist spent the final third of the episode arguing the pros and cons of using violence as a political tool. Neither side convinced the other. At the conclusion of the argument, the HDA member left the Bunker house and (off camera) stepped into his car, turned the ignition key, and was instantly killed by a bomb planted under the hood. The episode ended with a silent shot of the stunned Bunkers looking through their doorway at the wreckage.

By 1973, as American involvement in the Vietnam War began to end, the series slowly shifted its topicality to women's liberation causes. The conflicts between Archie and Gloria, his feminist daughter, were obvious and practically unavoidable. Even though she was a grown woman in her twenties with a job and a husband, to Archie, Gloria would always be his "little girl." It pained him to see her display the independence that signaled not only her rejection of his traditional values but also her inevitable departure from the home roost. A less expected but equally important development was the change in the largely decorative character of Edith. She came forward to demonstrate that older women deserved respect as well. Previously used as a squeaky-voiced butt of all the dumb-Dora housewife jokes ("Stifle it, Dingbat!" Archie would admonish), Edith was emboldened enough to demand consideration of her own needs for love and self-fulfillment. Edith truly cared for Archie and consequently wanted not only his respect for her daily activities but also a little more of the affection he thought years of married life had made unnecessary.

By the mid-1970s the national mood had returned to one of practicality, leaving polemics behind, and *All in the Family* changed again as well. In a television world then filled with *All in the Family* style imitations, it stood as almost a traditional sitcom that focused on such familiar themes as parenthood and grandparenthood. Gloria had a child and she and Mike at last moved out of the Bunker house and set up housekeeping next door. There was still controversy, though it was usually much less strident than in the past. Over the objections of Mike and Gloria, for instance, Archie took their baby, Joey, to a church and baptized him. Lear also kept up the topical flavor of the series with such realistic developments as Archie's getting laid off from his plant (he eventually quit anyway) and Edith fending off a rapist. Archie himself even became a small businessman, mortgaging his house in order to buy his neighborhood bar (allowing the eventual change of the series name to *Archie Bunker's Place*). Eventually, a mellower and shorter-haired Mike Stivic, like much of his generation, "settled down." He accepted a teaching job in California, taking Gloria and Joey to the other end of the country and leaving Archie and Edith alone in New York. Like much of *their* generation, Archie and Edith carried on in a greatly altered world with their own new interests. To the end, even after Edith's death, Archie still colorfully griped about whatever was in the headlines.

All in the Family became an American institution of the 1970s, yet at the beginning of the decade its success in dealing with controversy was viewed with amazement. Still, its acceptance should not really have been a complete surprise because over the years viewers had been growing accustomed to seeing more sensitive themes on television through the increasing number of adult-oriented prime time movies. The all-too-obvious double standard between movies and weekly series had to crack eventually as the public became more tolerant of such material. In the fall of 1972, CBS, embracing this new form of sitcom as the key to its continued primacy, launched its first major followups to *All in the Family*: *Maude* and *M*A*S*H*.

Norman Lear's *Maude* was a direct spinoff from *All in the Family* and, on the surface, appeared to be merely a vehicle for an archliberal version of Archie Bunker. The character of Maude Findlay (Beatrice Arthur) had been presented in several episodes of *All in the Family* as Edith's cousin whose left wing slant and abrasive manner put her in direct opposition to the outspoken Archie. Maude was quick tempered, rich, and an ardent believer in the right of women to control their own lives. She defended all the planks of liberal dogma and strongly supported freedom of action, freedom of speech, and a big benevolent government that helped others to help themselves. Archie hated her and she despised him. Maude was the perfect focus for a spinoff series and the character was awarded her own program for the 1972–73 season, set in her home environment of a liberal, worldly, upper middle class New York suburban neighborhood. It immediately hit the top ten, joining *All in the Family* and *Sanford and Son,* which had become ensconced at the top of the Nielsen ratings lists (occasionally taking the number one and two slots together). Unlike series such as *Petticoat Junction* in the 1960s, *Maude* was not a bland cash-in on a successful hit formula. Lear used the different setting and liberal characters to tackle a whole new range of topics in treatments that matched *All in the Family* in daring and sensitivity.

Perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of *Maude* was that it freed middle-aged women from the TV stereotype of addlebrained spinsters, just as Mary Tyler Moore's program had upset the traditional TV image of a young woman. Though certainly not a raving beauty, Maude was an attractive woman with an active sex life and apparently boundless self-confidence. Despite three unsuccessful marriages that had ended in divorce, she had married again. Her latest husband, Walter (Bill Macy), possessed an intelligent pragmatism and he recognized that Maude needed not only love and reassurance but the opportunity to assert herself, so he usually bowed to her wishes. Walter's business was successful enough that Maude did not have to work, so she devoted her time to myriad liberal and women's causes, leaving basic household chores to her maid, Florida (Esther Rolle). Carol (Adrienne Barbeau), Maude's daughter from a previous marriage, and her son, Phillip (Brian Morrison), also lived with Maude and Walter.

Maude was one of the first programs to take advantage of the networks' grudging acceptance of divorce as a fact of life and to successfully incorporate it into a series premise. In 1970, ABC's *The Odd Couple* (produced by Garry Marshall), featuring a pair of divorced men living together, had marked the beginning of the end of television's parade of widows and widowers, but Maude outdid them both. She had been divorced three times herself and daughter Carol had been divorced once as well.

Despite her exaggerated liberal tendencies and loud-mouthed caricature, Maude was a strong complex character who faced very difficult and very realistic problems. When the issue of personal freedom hit her in areas close to home (such as the possible involvement in premarital sex by her grandson and some obvious affairs by her daughter), she found herself falling into the traditional role of overbearing suspicious mother. She tried to control her instincts, often to no avail. When a series of business mishaps pushed Walter, a normally heavy drinker anyway, into a fling with alcoholism, she fought her own panic and his depression to help them both weather the crisis. Perhaps the most painful personal decision she ever faced took place in one of the first episodes of the series, a two-part story on abortion, shown in November 1972. Maude discovered that she was pregnant at an age in which she had no intention of becoming a mother again, and had to decide whether or not to have an abortion. After an agonizing soul search, she concluded that an abortion was the only realistic alternative open to her, but despite her liberal philosophies, this was not presented as an easy choice. The program was the strongest pro-abortion statement made on network TV at the time and it set off a brief public controversy in which a number of CBS affiliates refused to air the episodes. Such actions had formerly been taken only in reaction to documentaries, dramas, or an occasional topical variety format. The Maude protests were a symbolic confirmation of the full-fledged serious status being accorded sitcoms.

CBS's other new wave hopeful, *M*A*S*H,* also successfully combined drama with comedy, though it took several years to refine and develop its presentation. The series was based on the popular 1970 Robert Altman film that followed the adventures of two merry playboy combat surgeons (played by Elliott Gould and Donald Sutherland) assigned to an overseas American *M*obile

In *Maude*, Beatrice Arthur played a strong and independent middle-aged woman. *(Sony Pictures Television)*

The "second generation" of *M*A*S*H* included: *(from left)* Mike Farrell as B. J. Hunnicutt, Alan Alda as Hawkeye Pierce, Harry Morgan as Sherman Potter, and Gary Burghoff as Radar. *(M*A*S*H © 1973 Twentieth Century Fox Television. All Rights Reserved.)*

*A*rmy *S*urgical *H*ospital (MASH) unit during the Korean War. Altman used the twin shock tactics of excessive blood and explicit language to set his film apart from typical war comedies and to stress the cruelty of combat. The television adaptation toned down both the language and obvious bloodletting but, within the limits of television, kept both the gore of war and the joy of sex as major themes. In its first season, though, TV's *M*A*S*H* was, for the most part, a traditional war-is-funny comedy that owed as much to *Hogan's Heroes* and *Sergeant Bilko* as Altman's film. Alan Alda (as Hawkeye Pierce) and Wayne Rogers (as Trapper John McIntyre) emphasized the playboy-surgeon aspect of their characters, drinking too much and perpetually chasing nurses. They were excellent medicos (and knew it) who constantly manipulated their nominal commander, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Blake (McLean Stevenson), while thumbing their noses at military regulations and discipline. Such themes and characters were basic to every war comedy film since World War II, and the initial TV treatment offered little evidence that the series was in the same league as Norman Lear's comedies.

*M*A*S*H* did very poorly in the fall of 1972. It was stuck in a hell-hole of a slot: Sunday, between the anemic *Anna and the King* and *The Sandy Duncan Show*, and against ABC's *The FBI* and NBC's *Wonderful World of Disney*. Yet, premiering as it did at the tail end of the Vietnam War, its mocking of military regimentation and futile war strategies were timely and close to home. The program's demographics indicated that while the overall ratings were terrible, *M*A*S*H* was very popular among young adults. CBS executives therefore decided to allow the show time to build an audience. In January, *M*A*S*H* was given slightly more respectable company (*Dick Van Dyke* and *Mannix*), and it broke into the top thirty, winning renewal for a second season. CBS program chief Fred Silverman gave it the royal treatment in the fall of 1973 and placed *M*A*S*H* between two comedy blockbusters on Saturday, *All in the Family* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. The series rocketed to the top ten and remained there until it ended in 1983.

Along with its new ratings success, *M*A*S*H* began displaying a remarkable improvement in content. Alan Alda took on added duties such as occasional script writing and directing, and members of the supporting cast began to develop their characters into more complex individuals. The image of merry doctors on the loose was replaced by the intricate relationships among people thrown together in a unique war situation. The writers began shifting the focus of the scripts from straight sitcom into the world of comedy-drama. By the third season, they hit their stride as *M*A*S*H* developed a dramatic style similar to, yet distinct from, Norman Lear's programs.

While the Bunkers and Maude very often grappled with topical headline issues, the individuals in *M*A*S*H* faced intimate, personal conflicts of a more timeless nature that were set against the equally real backdrop of a hospital unit trying desperately to save as many lives as possible in a war zone. Very often, particular episodes replaced the traditional sitcom structure of rapid-fire punch lines leading to a hilarious denouement with three occasionally interweaving plot threads, of which one or two were usually serious. A device sometimes used to tighten these stories was the composition of a letter home. In effect, this allowed a member of the cast to act as narrator of recent developments at the base, which were shown in flashback as the note bound for the States took shape. Besides serving as a convenient plot hook, these "letters" also allowed the individual cast members to tell the story from their own point of view, adding depth to the character traits already familiar to the viewers.

Character development became the most impressive feature of *M*A*S*H* and the cast soon raised the TV series far beyond the meat-axe humor and caricatures of the feature film, in a rare instance of the TV copy surpassing the film original. Gary Burghoff, the only performer from the film that made the crossover to television, fleshed out his role of Corporal Radar O'Reilly, Colonel Blake's young aide with an extraordinary sixth sense. (He anticipated events moments before they took place.) Though Radar

possessed an instinctive understanding of the intricate twists in military bureaucracy, and his knowledge of procedure actually kept the base running, in many respects he remained the terribly naive Iowa farm boy who sometimes found himself a bit jealous of the swinging lifestyle of Hawkeye and Trapper. Larry Linville and Loretta Swit assumed the roles of Major Frank Burns and chief nurse Major Margaret "Hot Lips" Houlihan, two officers carrying on a torrid affair with each other but determined to follow "proper procedure" whenever possible in the meatloaf surgery world of Korea. They both suffered mercilessly as foils to Hawkeye and Trapper, but they also displayed more humanity and depth than their feature film counterparts (Robert Duvall and Sally Kellerman). Two characters substantially upgraded in the move to television were Father Mulcahy (William Christopher), the company chaplain, and Henry Blake. As camp commander, the TV Henry Blake realized that it was not worth the aggravation involved to try to stop the pranks of Hawkeye and Trapper, so he wisely chose to ignore them in the interests of company harmony (and his own peace of mind). The TV Blake was a pushover but he realized it and knew when it was really important to draw the line. Altman's Blake had been just plain stupid. His Mulcahy had been even worse, set up as an ignorant sissy priest. Christopher portrayed the character as a realistic Army chaplain, just as likely to be found in an all-night poker party as in a formal chapel setting. Each of these characters could step in with complications, conflicts, and problems of their own, thus breaking up the strain of constantly focusing on Hawkeye and Trapper.

Good as this cast and the show were by 1974, both aspects improved even further in the fourth season as *M*A*S*H* revitalized itself with two important cast changes. McLean Stevenson decided to quit the program and move into the comedy-variety field on his own, so his character was written out of the series. The final episode of the 1974–75 season featured a happy farewell party for Henry Blake, who had received his orders shipping him back to the States. A short postscript ended the episode: the death of Henry Blake. In one brilliant stroke, the simple departure of a series regular was transformed into a tragic, ironic twist of war – one of the main themes of the show anyway. After months at the front lines, Blake was killed on the way home in an offshore crash as his plane was struck by random enemy fire. A tearful Radar announced the news in the operating room and, between stitches, the doctors and nurses cried.

Before production for the next season began, Wayne Rogers also decided to depart. He had found himself trapped in a character almost identical to Alda's and had been severely limited by the duplication (there was room for only one super-intelligent Yankee anarchist in Korea). As a result, in the fall of 1975, *M*A*S*H* was practically a brand new program with two-thirds of its central cast altered. Both replacements turned out to be even stronger characters than their predecessors and the quality of the series once again increased dramatically.

Veteran series actor Harry Morgan portrayed the new C.O., Colonel Sherman Potter, an experienced soldier, surgeon, and a much more creditable Army figure than Colonel Blake. Unlike Blake, Potter not only grew angry at his charges, he occasionally disciplined them. This made his role as benign ruler, inclined to overlook harmless pranks and unnecessary procedure, much more believable. Mike Farrell played Hawkeye's new sidekick, Captain B.J. Hunnicutt, a pure product of the San Francisco way of life. Unlike Trapper, B.J. was different from Hawkeye, yet the two still became fast friends. B.J. was a cool West Coast high-liver with a wife and family and no desire to upset his stable home with promiscuous behavior in Korea. Their personalities complemented each other perfectly, giving both characters plenty of room to shine.

With its basic cast further strengthened, *M*A*S*H* grew even bolder in its departure from standard sitcom structure. One episode centered solely on the crew trying to watch a film (the old horse opera, "My Darling Clementine") that constantly jammed in the camp projector. To continue the entertainment while the projector was being fixed, they launched an impromptu sing-along talent show. The program reached no dramatic climax; the party simply ended with the inevitable arrival of the new wounded. Another episode brought the series to a level of visual, lyrical poetry as it recreated Ed Murrow's legendary 1952 *See It Now* show from Korea. The performers were allowed to ad-lib in character when responding to questions from the traveling "newsman" and never was their grasp of their roles more evident. Radar blushed at the opportunity to say "hello" to the folks back home. Colonel Potter called the whole Korean escapade stupid. Hawkeye nearly broke down trying to explain how he dealt with keeping a measure of sanity through the war. Father Mulcahy gasped at the recollection of doctors fighting the cold Korean air by subconsciously warming their hands from the heat of open body wounds.

With such powerful descriptions, complex characters, and the very real terror of dealing so closely and continuously with death, *M*A*S*H* became one of the best sitcom-drama combinations ever on television. It joined *All in the Family* and *Maude* in focusing dramatic interest on character development, not slam-bang action and cheap slapstick.

In the fall of 1972, along with the appearance of *M*A*S*H,* CBS applied this same respect for characters to a new dramatic program as well, in an attempt to revive the moribund format of family drama with *The Waltons*. Series such as *Mama* and *One Man's Family* had flourished in the early 1950s, but had vanished with the development of filmed series and Westerns. With film, action became the goal and Western drama had led to crime drama, adventure drama, war drama, and so forth. In these, "drama" really meant "action" (itself a euphemism for "violence"), and producers saw no place for what they regarded as the comparatively dull, extremely limited action in family drama. After a numbing decade of cops, cowboys, and killings, the simple peace of personal family conflict began to appear quite attractive, at least for an occasional contrast. CBS gave *Playhouse 90* graduate Martin Manulis and writer Earl Hamner the go-ahead in 1969 to try such a theme and, in October 1969, *CBS Playhouse* presented "Appalachian Autumn." The story was set in modern times but focused on the experiences of a government agency volunteer working with a close-knit family in a poor Virginia mountain town. Watching the family deal with a devastating coal mine disaster, the volunteer learned that even though they were poor, the members of the mountain clan still retained enough strength and dignity to refuse to beg for help. Reviewers at the time praised the play and its theme, but pointed out that the dialogue was somewhat hokey. The criticism was tempered with encouragement; one reviewer observed, "All it needs is practice."

Just before Christmas 1971, CBS presented another play with a strong Appalachian family theme, "The Homecoming." Earl Hamner was again the writer and another live drama great, Fielder Cook, served as the director. Hamner based the play on his own autobiography and set the scene in the time period of his own boyhood, the day before Christmas, 1933, in the home of a large poor family from rural Virginia, the Waltons. John Boy (Richard Thomas), the oldest son in the clan, acted as narrator for the story, which took the form of his personal reminiscence of that Depression-era Christmas. The gathering was very important to his own

September 16, 1972
Bridget Loves Bernie. (CBS). Meredith Baxter is Bridget, a rich Irish-Catholic. David Birney is Bernie, a poor New York Jew. The two fall in love, get married, and have to overcome opposition from both sides of the family. Placed between *All in the Family* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show,* the program registers good ratings, but also stirs the ire of some religious groups objecting to the positive portrait of inter-marriage. As a result, CBS axes the show after only one season. Life, however, triumphs (temporarily) over art. Baxter and Birney later marry each other in real life, but then are divorced.

November 8, 1972
Time-Life's Home Box Office (HBO) cable television network begins operations with a New York Rangers hockey contest from Madison Square Garden followed by a movie, "Sometimes a Great Notion." At first, HBO is limited to just 365 cable subscribers in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

November 24, 1972
In Concert. (ABC). Don Kirshner produces a late Friday night special of live rock acts, taped in concert. First up is shock-rocker Alice Cooper. After about twenty minutes of Cooper's mock horror tactics and gyrations with a snake, WPRC in Cincinnati pulls out of the show, saying, "This stopped being music and art and had turned into pornography." On January 19, *In Concert* becomes a regular, once-every-other-week ABC late night series.

January 4, 1973
CBS sells the New York Yankees to George Steinbrenner.

personal growth because it was the first time the family members faced the real possibility of losing John Walton (Andrew Duggan), the head of the family, who was the provider for seven children, his wife Olivia (Patricia Neal), and his own parents (Edgar Bergen and Ellen Corby). John had been caught in a bus wreck fifty miles from home, but that was all the news the rest of the family had received. As the play unfolded, each member came to grips with the significance of the potential tragedy and its far-reaching aftershocks. If the father was dead or even badly injured, it would be more than just the loss of a loved one; already financially pressed, the family would be pushed into a severe economic pinch. John Boy became acutely aware of his own responsibilities as the oldest son and went to the site of the accident to see if he could help his father, while the rest of the family waited, gripped by fear and trepidation. The story ended happily with the father, safe and sound, reunited with the family in a tearful, heartfelt welcome.

The straightforward, unembarrassed sentimentality of "The Homecoming" touched a responsive nerve in the American psyche and the play was judged successful enough to be turned into a series. In spite of several major cast changes (Ralph Waite took the role of John Walton, Michael Learned the role of Olivia, and Will Geer the role of Grandpa Walton), *The Waltons* retained the strength of the Christmas special. The program was sometimes overly sentimental, but the characters carried their emotions well and a strong strain of reality woven through each episode tempered this tendency. Rather than degenerating into a maudlin tear-jerker soap opera, *The Waltons* emerged as a nostalgic re-creation of a much simpler era. Within this world, the strong cast presented their characters as proud, realistic people struggling through hard times.

Even the Walton children were believable and, during the long run of the series, they grew up, became young adults, and began to move out on their own as America turned from a depression to a world war.

At its premiere in the fall of 1972, *The Waltons* was nearly buried by the competition. The program contained no action-packed gunplay, screeching tires, crime czars, or murder. Few viewers gave it a chance, preferring instead the flashy humor of black comedian Flip Wilson on NBC and the popular but routine gunplay of ABC's *Mod Squad.* Encouraged by some ecstatic reviews and hopeful demographic data, CBS stuck with *The Waltons* even though the program barely nudged the top fifty through the fall. Then slowly, very slowly, it began to catch on. By the spring, it beat Flip Wilson's show for the first time. Just before it went into reruns, the program reached the top ten.

Both *The Waltons* and *M*A*S*H* had been saved by demographics. With the networks beginning to focus on the makeup of the audience that a program attracted rather than merely the total number of viewers, they allowed some shows more time to develop a following. Though shows that appealed to the *wrong* audience (too old, too rural) faced the prospect of a much quicker cancellation than before, the new priorities opened up television to the whims of affluent young adults and allowed the introduction of more daring themes to network entertainment programming. Previously, trying to reach the greatest number of people possible had precluded shows containing anything that anyone might have found offensive. The networks now dared to risk a few unusual themes designed to appeal to a particular segment of the audience. They were surprised to discover that sometimes these gambles paid off in high ratings as well.

On November 1, 1972, ABC's *Wednesday Movie of the Week* offered one of these innovative programs, the first straightforward, sympathetic portrayal of homosexuality on American television, the made-for-TV film, "That Certain Summer." Hal Holbrook played a building contractor and Martin Sheen a sound engineer, two very masculine figures, who became homosexual lovers. "That Certain Summer" avoided all the usual clichés and stereotypes of homosexual behavior and focused instead on the personal struggle of Holbrook's character as he tried to explain his lifestyle to his teenage son (by his former wife). Despite the complications the father decided to follow his own feelings and, while his son tried very hard to understand the radical alteration in his father, he could not quite accept it. There were no simple solutions offered nor glib putdowns presented. The program was simply a sensitive slice of life featuring normal people caught in a difficult situation yet trying to make the best of it. The program was also a ratings smash.

The networks could "get away" with such innovative entertainment fare because, as the ratings indicated, the public seemed more willing to accept it. At the same time, governmental watchdog Senator John Pastore had faded from view so, for the moment, there was no major anti-sex and violence advocate on the public scene to crusade against the networks. However, the situation was far different in the realm of public affairs. There, the Nixon administration carefully monitored the output from all the networks and was ready to pounce on any item that presented something disturbing to the White House. Such situations seemed to occur more and more often as the Nixon administration, fresh from a landslide victory over Senator George McGovern in November 1972, stepped up its attack on both commercial and public television. Richard Nixon was at the peak of his power and appeared ready to make the most of the situation.

Just one month after the election, Nixon aide Clay Whitehead

delivered a stinging anti-network speech to the executives of local TV stations, spelling out the theories Vice President Spiro Agnew had only implied in his attacks three years before. Whitehead called for more pressure by local affiliates against the networks, especially in the area of news, urging them to delete the segments of the network feed that they did not care for (which would, presumably, be the same segments the administration did not like). He labeled the networks' news and public affairs presentations as consisting chiefly of "elitist gossip" and "ideological plugola." In exchange for more aggressive action, Whitehead dangled the prospect of affiliate station licenses that would be much more difficult to take away and also remain valid for five years (two years more than the law then allowed). Even ABC's Howard K. Smith, long a supporter of President Nixon, began to worry, saying, "It begins to look like a general assault on reporters."

With such a concerted campaign against them, it was understandable that the networks began to retreat from their aggressive pre-election news style. Nixon was clearly playing for keeps. Consequently, CBS announced the elimination of the well-publicized practice of "instant analysis" that usually followed presidential addresses and delayed its commentary until the next regularly scheduled news program. All three networks failed to present any news specials at all on the controversial Christmas bombings of North Vietnam that took place just a few weeks after Whitehead's speech.

Early in 1973, the administration negotiated a face-saving treaty with the North Vietnamese which ended direct American involvement in the war and secured the release of American prisoners of war. Yet the end of the combat did not mark an end to the pressure on the networks. Almost immediately, both the government and the public indicated that they wanted to put the memories and effects of the war behind them, instantly. Responding to this mood, CBS postponed the television adaptation of a timely new Broadway play concerning the return to the States of a blinded Vietnam veteran, David Rabe's "Sticks and Bones." The production was a flawed but well-crafted and effective treatment of the gap between the returning soldier (ruined both mentally and physically by the war) and his peaches and cream family (unable to accept the way the war had changed him). Despite his desperate need for help and understanding, the soldier's family chose to virtually ignore him, vainly hoping that he would just disappear from their lives.

"Sticks and Bones" had been scheduled for Friday, March 9, as the second production in a series of thirteen specials for CBS by Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare company (the first, "Much Ado About Nothing," had played in February), but then the network realized in horror that the program would air in the middle of the return of the real-life POWs from Vietnam. The drama was a far cry from the image the administration had cultivated for the men coming home and CBS decided its placement was inappropriate and rescheduled it for a later date. After all, President Nixon had billed the return of the POWs as a joyful celebration of the conclusion to the war and it seemed foolish to risk antagonizing him with the downbeat theme of the play. Papp was furious at the delay and canceled his four-year agreement with CBS, charging the network with censorship. CBS did air the play months later, stuck in the summer viewing ghetto (August 17) and without any commercials. Only 94 of the usual 200 CBS affiliates chose to air it and some delayed their telecast until late at night.

The situation was even worse over on public television, which found itself almost swallowed whole by the Nixon administration. The top two posts in public TV were held by Nixon appointees after the previous officials had been forced from office. Former Representative Thomas Curtis of Missouri was installed as chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the organization that served as the liaison between the Public Broadcasting System and Congress, and Henry Loomis, a former deputy director of the U.S. Information Agency, was appointed president of CPB. Loomis seemed particularly insensitive to the concept of an activist approach to public broadcasting. During Congressional confirmation hearings, Loomis acknowledged that he had never seen an episode of *The Great American Dream Machine,* PBS's most important recent production, and could not even pick up the PBS affiliate in Washington because his set could not receive its UHF signal. His concept of "vital programming" topped even the uninterrupted coverage of the Republican convention in 1972. He announced that PBS would offer twenty-one hours of live coverage of the *Apollo 17* moonshot in December of 1972, an expensive project that could only duplicate network broadcasts of a fairly dull expedition and would probably serve as nothing more than a good source of pro-administration publicity. Loomis was talked out of this particular proposal, but it was clear that public broadcasting's priorities had been hopelessly distorted as it was placed firmly under the thumb of the administration. It was at this stage that the Watergate scandal broke into the news and things began to change.

The break-in at the Democratic National Committee's Washington offices in the Watergate building had taken place back in June 1972, but through the summer and beyond election day, most people had accepted the administration's dismissal of it as a "third rate burglary." Although Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern had tried to make it a campaign issue by contending

January 8, 1973
Wide World of Entertainment. (ABC). Revamping its late night schedule after failing to catch Johnny Carson with Dick Cavett's talk show, ABC institutes a complicated new format arrangement and brings in a former late night giant, Jack Paar. Each month, *Jack Paar Tonight* appears for one week, Cavett runs for one week, and the remaining two weeks are filled with movies, specials, and concerts.

February 2, 1973
The Midnight Special. (NBC). Network television's first late late night show, running from 1:00 A.M. till 2:30 A.M. Friday nights. Hosted by legendary rock DJ Wolfman Jack, the program is NBC's answer to the ABC *In Concert* show.

March 31, 1973
Frank Stanton, president of CBS, Inc. for twenty-five years and, since 1971, vice chairman of the CBS board, retires upon reaching the age of sixty-five.

May 4, 1973
Bruce Jay Friedman's play "Steambath" is shown on PBS's *Hollywood Television Theater,* but only a few stations are brave enough to carry it. The story offers an unusual portrayal of the afterlife, with God presented as a Puerto Rican steambath attendant. Bill Bixby plays a man who refuses to admit that he has died, and Valerie Perrine becomes one of the first women to display her nipples on American network television.

August 6, 1973
Following a tremendous publicity campaign, CBS unveils its new morning news line-up consisting of veteran television newsman Hughes Rudd and newspaper reporter-TV neophyte Sally Quinn.

that the Nixon administration was tied in with the burglars, most people dismissed that as a desperate political ploy by a candidate hopelessly behind in the polls. *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein had turned out a steady stream of stories also suggesting a tie-in between the White House and the burglary but, without substantial documentation, no one cared. Television virtually ignored the story. CBS was the only network to do anything important with Watergate before the election, scheduling two fifteen-minute reports on the topic for Walter Cronkite's evening news show during the last week of the campaign. Most Americans were indifferent to the story but, after viewing the first report, presidential aide Charles Colson tried to pressure CBS chairman William Paley into canceling the second report. The second story aired anyway, despite Colson's efforts, though it was cut in half.

In March 1973, the Senate set up a select committee, under Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina, to look into the numerous charges of impropriety that had been raised by then. The committee scheduled public hearings for the spring and summer and the networks were faced with a familiar, perplexing problem: What was the best way to cover congressional hearings on a topic that was suddenly very important? They feared that the procedure might drag on for months and gavel-to-gavel coverage would cost a small fortune in lost revenue, estimated at $300,000 per network per day. All three broadcast the opening week's sessions in May and then they agreed to a simple but practical solution: They would rotate coverage. Each day, one network would take its turn showing the hearings while the other two maintained their normal schedules-though they both had the option to carry the session as well if they wished to. This wonderfully obvious solution satisfied nearly everybody. People who did not care about Watergate could find a soap opera or game show on another network. No one network was backed into a corner and forced to carry the burden alone. Viewers who were interested in the hearings were guaranteed that one network (at least) would have the story. For public television, however, the problem was not so easily resolved.

As soon as the hearings were announced, the administration put strong pressure on PBS stations, discouraging live coverage. For a while it looked as if the tactic might succeed, but the audacity of the action struck some of the larger stations as going too far. WETA in Washington, WGBH in Boston, WNET in New York, KCET in Los Angeles, and KQED in San Francisco staged their own counter-revolution and formed the so-called salvation network, a group determined to oppose White House efforts to control public television. In April, forces from the salvation network seized control of the PBS board and immediately launched an attack on the Nixon-controlled CPB parent organization. This counter-pressure led to an attempt to reach a compromise, with Tom Curtis acting as chief negotiator, but the CPB board rejected the truce proposal. Curtis resigned as CPB chairman, charging that his efforts had been undermined by administration interference. Board member James Killian, who had been appointed by President Johnson, assumed the post of CPB chairman as an official with no obvious ties to the White House. In spite of continued administration pressure to prevent coverage of the hearings, the newly rejuvenated PBS decided instead to provide extensive coverage, using its Washington-based production agency, NPACT, the National Public Affairs Center for Television (responsible for such programs as *Washington Week in Review*). Via NPACT, PBS sent out both gavel-to-gavel daytime coverage and, more important, taped replays in prime time. The evening rebroadcasts, hosted by Robert MacNeil and Jim Lehrer, allowed millions of working people the opportunity to see the actual hearings virtually intact and to judge for themselves the importance of what had taken place that day.

Just as in the Army-McCarthy hearings of 1954, interest in the Watergate hearings was low at first, but picked up as the public became familiar with the personalities involved and began to appreciate the gravity of the charges. All through the summer, major figures from the administration appeared before the committee. Some confessed to minor infractions while others "stonewalled" and denied any wrongdoing whatsoever. At the end of June, former Nixon counsel John Dean testified for five consecutive days, laying out the most detailed, damaging charges of the summer in which he stated his belief that President Nixon had not only known of the cover-up, but had probably directed it. All three commercial networks chose to cover his testimony and the public was inundated with Watergate stories. The continuing characters of the Ervin committee became national celebrities, with the Bible-quoting Southern drawl of Senator Ervin himself the biggest hit of all. Catch phrases such as "At that point in time," "To the best of my recollection," and "Deep-six" wound their way from the witnesses' testimony to become common slang across the nation.

Much to the amazement of the networks, the usual drop-off in summer TV viewing never took place. People could not seem to get enough of Watergate. In response, NBC began to include a weekly two-hour Watergate wrapup in prime time every Friday. CBS averaged three sixty-minute prime time wrapups each week, covering the days the other networks handled the daytime rotation. The prime time PBS coverage brought in staggeringly high ratings for public television stations across the country, with some almost reaching the level of a low-rated commercial network show. Daytime coverage regularly topped the game shows and soap operas offered by the other networks, which turned out to be no competition to the real-life drama unfolding every day as the committee (and the public) tried to answer the question: What did the President know and when did he know it? On July 16, the investigation reached a dramatic high point as former Nixon aide Alexander Butterfield revealed that an elaborate secret taping system had been set up in the White House and that there were probably recordings of the many meetings and conversations that had been cited throughout the committee's hearings. The committee requested access to the tapes. President Nixon refused to release them. One month later, after hearing from almost everyone involved in White House affairs, the Ervin committee adjourned for a fall vacation. The networks returned to their normal broadcasting schedules and prepared to launch the 1973–74 season.

Technically, the months of testimony had produced no tangible results or hard evidence. Those who ardently believed in Nixon's innocence remained unconvinced by the testimony. Even those who felt that the entire administration, from Nixon on down, had been proved guilty many times over acknowledged that there did not appear to be enough clear evidence that could be used to support a vote for impeachment by the House and a trial by the Senate. In reality, though, the testimony resulted in a monumental change in attitude among the American people. Public confidence in the president had plummeted during the televised hearings. The Ervin committee had presided over a struggle for the hearts and minds of the American public similar to the Army-McCarthy hearings two decades before. Once again, television had expanded the forum and allowed the entire nation, as one, to examine a vital issue. Though it still seemed that Nixon would be around for "four more years," he had lost his most powerful tool, the confidence of the nation. He might still be President of the United States, but he was no longer in a position to make the press jump.

1973–74 SEASON

33. The New Centurions

THE TIMING OF THE SENATE Watergate hearings in the summer of 1973 had been perfect for the networks. Not only did the proceedings end just in time to avoid interfering with the fall premieres, they also helped fill the void in a summer schedule that was leaner than usual. As the result of a three and one-half month strike by television writers in the spring of 1973, program production had ground to a halt. There was an obvious absence of new material for the summer months, and the networks relied on news specials and reruns of old series to carry them through to the fall. The major effect of the strike, though, was felt in September.

Most programs airing in September normally began preproduction work in March, immediately after the networks announced the next fall's schedule. Filming followed in June and most series were ready well before the early September premiere week. The writers' strike did not end until June, so the entire process was thrown off. Despite the frantic work by the writers and crews all through the summer of 1973 once the strike was settled, there just was not enough time. Consequently, the networks were forced to ease into the 1973–74 season and, for the first time in a decade, their season premieres had to be strung out over a month. The new series and new episodes of returning programs were aired as they came in. Hastily assembled specials and more reruns filled the remaining gaps. Amid this confusion, CBS was pleasantly surprised with the high ratings scored by *Dan August,* a loner cop series starring Burt Reynolds, which had flopped on ABC in 1970. CBS had picked it up as just another writers' strike filler for the summer, but the program outscored not only the other summer reruns but even some new fall series as well. *Dan August* remained on the air long enough to serve as a strong warmup for the program that was delayed the longest by the writers' strike, another cop show, *Kojak,* which did not premiere until October 24, the last new series of 1973–74 to arrive.

There were high hopes for *Kojak* among critics and programmers, based in large part on the quality of the feature-length pilot that had aired the previous March, "The Marcus-Nelson Murders." The three-hour TV film, based on the real life Wylie-Hoffert murder case in New York City, introduced Telly Savalas as Lieutenant Theo Kojak, a radiantly bald, fiercely independent Greek plainclothes detective on the New York City force who fought the establishment he worked for, and lost. Savalas had spent the better part of his career playing an assortment of criminal roles, and he brought a gritty edge to his portrayal of the tough realistic cop. In the pilot, Kojak saw the methods the police had used to railroad a black Brooklyn kid, falsely accused of rape, into confessing to a completely unrelated crime, a double-murder, and he set about to prove the confession baseless. After tedious legwork by Kojak and a lengthy trial, the youth was exonerated of the murders and Kojak joined the happy family to celebrate. Their triumph was short lived. Determined to salvage some "law and order" publicity, the police and prosecutors resurrected the original rape charge and forced the boy back into court to defend himself. Though technically a different case, it was really the same trial all over again, only the prosecution had refined its presentation while the boy, shocked at the turn of events, had lost his confidence and composure. Stunned, Kojak watched helplessly as a new jury delivered a verdict of guilty. The boy was sent to jail and, this time, there was no last minute reprieve. Kojak had been outmaneuvered and could not do anything to change things. Even his own resignation would have been meaningless. He remained at his post, keenly aware of his own limitations but determined to continue the sometimes hopeless fight for justice.

"The Marcus-Nelson Murders" set very high standards for the series and it soon became apparent that the exceptionally late premiere date reflected time well spent in production. Though it made concessions to the reality of the weekly TV grind (Kojak usually *won* his new cases), the program was the best scripted, directed, and acted cop show on TV, and it maintained the spirit of the highly praised pilot. Kojak remained the people's champion, confident, tough, and willing to defend neighborhoods and individuals battered by crime and injustice. In addition, the writers expanded on some themes implicit in the pilot: In the 1970s, the easily understood and clearly identified mobsters and crime czars of the past had been replaced in the public's mind by more amorphous, but equally frightening, forces. Criminals were often violent delinquents or madmen with no stake in society, who attacked randomly for no discernible reason. Even worse, the machinery of justice itself seemed to break down with increasing frequency, often looming as a greater threat than the criminals it was supposed to punish. Kojak was presented as a reassuring figure capable of taking on both of these elements. He was cool under pressure, streetwise, and always in control. At the same time, he was too smart to let his distrust of the bureaucracy blind him to the most effective ways to use it. Kojak could confront a self-serving bureaucrat and a trigger-happy punk with the same unflinching determination, never wasting his anger on meaningless macho stunts. He out-maneuvered his opponents, waited for the perfect moment,

FALL 1973 SCHEDULE

Day	Network	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30
MON	ABC	The Rookies		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)			
MON	CBS	Gunsmoke		Here's Lucy	New Dick Van Dyke Show	Medical Center	
MON	NBC	LOTSA LUCK	DIANA	NBC Monday Night At the Movies			
TUE	ABC	New Temperature's Rising Show	Tuesday Movie Of The Week			Marcus Welby, M.D.	
TUE	CBS	Maude	Hawaii Five-O		The New CBS Tuesday Night Movies / SHAFT / HAWKINS		
TUE	NBC	CHASE		THE MAGICIAN		POLICE STORY	
WED	ABC	BOB & CAROL & TED & ALICE	Wednesday Movie Of The Week			Owen Marshall, Counselor At Law / # DOC ELLIOT	
WED	CBS	Sonny And Cher Comedy Hour		Cannon		KOJAK	
WED	NBC	Adam-12	NBC Wednesday Mystery Movie (Banacek; TENAFLY; FARADAY AND COMPANY; SNOOP SISTERS)			LOVE STORY	
THUR	ABC	TOMA		Kung-Fu		The Streets Of San Francisco	
THUR	CBS	The Waltons		CBS Thursday Night Movies			
THUR	NBC	Flip Wilson Show		Ironside / # Bob Hope Show		NBC FOLLIES	
FRI	ABC	The Brady Bunch	The Odd Couple	Room 222	ADAM'S RIB	Love, American Style	
FRI	CBS	CALUCCI'S DEPARTMENT	ROLL OUT	CBS Friday Night Movies			
FRI	NBC	Sanford And Son	THE GIRL WITH SOMETHING EXTRA	NEEDLES AND PINS	Brian Keith Show	Dean Martin Comedy Hour	
SAT	ABC	The Partridge Family	ABC SUSPENSE MOVIE / # THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN			GRIFF	
SAT	CBS	All In The Family	M*A*S*H	Mary Tyler Moore Show	Bob Newhart Show	Carol Burnett Show	
SAT	NBC	Emergency		NBC Saturday Night At The Movies			

Day	Network	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30
SUN	ABC	local	The FBI		The ABC Sunday Night Movie				local
SUN	CBS	local	NEW ADVENTURES OF PERRY MASON		Mannix		Barnaby Jones		local
SUN	NBC	local	The Wonderful World Of Disney		NBC Sunday Mystery Movie (McCloud; Columbo; McMillan And Wife; Hec Ramsey)				# NBC News Presents (10:00-11:00)

and then exploded. When Kojak let loose, his personal energy crackled. He obviously enjoyed both his verbal and physical confrontations because they sometimes provided the only opportunity for justice to triumph. Savalas infused Kojak with a saucy independent personality that dominated the program and gave the scripts added punch. His portrayal of the confident bald man who brandished a lollipop instead of a cigar turned him into a very unlikely national sex symbol and attracted viewers that otherwise had only mild interest in cop shows.

The most controversial aspect of *Kojak,* however, was its use of violence, and some people brushed aside the excellent acting, writing, and directing to denounce the show as dangerous and harmful. Actually, there was a noticeable upswing in violent action throughout the networks' crime formats this season, reflecting the popularity of violent theatrical cop films such as "The French Connection." *Kojak* admittedly contained its share of violence, but the writers and producers handled it well. Just as *The Untouchables* had used violent shoot-outs to underscore the brutality of gangland activity in the 1930s, *Kojak* used violence as an artful illustration of the frustration of the 1970s. The entire program was as carefully controlled as Kojak himself, with violent interludes used to punctuate the conflicts and emotions. To ignore violence in a program that attempted to present a gritty, realistic picture of New York City urban crime contradicted its very premise. Nonetheless, over the years the level of violent action in the program was reduced somewhat in response to protests from organized pressure groups strongly opposed to TV violence in any form, no matter how artistically effective. In order to restore some of that lost energy in later years, the producers tried to compensate in other ways, such as filming on location in New York City to accentuate the urban atmosphere of the program.

Kojak became an immediate hit in the fall of 1973 and the newest star in a solid line-up of crime programs on all three networks. For decades, such shows had served as basic bread-and-butter programming, occasionally slumping due to overexposure or claims of excessive violence, but inevitably returning with some slight twist, unusual setting, gimmick hero, or outstanding performer as a new draw. Network number one, CBS, for instance, always liked to mix in a few crime dramas with its sitcom strategy because while hit sitcoms scored very well, flopped sitcoms were equally big losers, landing at the very bottom of the ratings charts. Crime shows usually hugged the middle positions in the ratings, turning in a generally stable if not outstanding performance. There were ten new crime shows in the fall of 1973 and, as evidenced by *Kojak,* the loner cop format was still on the upswing that had begun in the 1971–72 season. Many of the new entries were obvious imitations of the latest gimmick variations to the form. In the 1972–73 season, veteran Buddy Ebsen had taken his down-home country charm into the fight against urban crime in Quinn Martin's *Barnaby Jones,* and the show had become a second season CBS hit. In the fall of 1973, veteran low-key charmers Jimmy Stewart and Lorne Greene tried their hands in, respectively, *Hawkins* (a common sense criminal attorney) and *Griff* (an L.A. private eye), but they both flopped. *Banacek,* another hit show from the previous season, had featured a confident ethnic hero, a dapper Polish insurance company detective played by George Peppard. In the usually WASP world of TV cops, such a character was a rarity and, sure enough, several other ethnic detectives appeared along with Kojak in the fall of 1973. With the exception of *Kojak,* however, most of these programs had serious inherent flaws and floundered in the ratings despite the ethnic hook.

There was already an obvious model for the new black TV detectives in the wildly successful black Superman-type that appeared in such theatrical films as "Superfly" and "Shaft." NBC's *Tenafly* consciously avoided this image while CBS brought Shaft himself to network television. Both interpretations left viewers with the uncomfortable feeling that something was missing. In the case of *Shaft,* it seemed obvious. Despite the fact that the film's star, Richard Roundtree, repeated the title role of New York City private detective John Shaft for the TV series, he had to leave his violent, sexy world behind. Instead, *Shaft* was given a carbon copy of *Columbo's* structure in which, at the beginning of each episode, the crime was shown as it took place and the rest of the story focused on Shaft's investigation. Unlike Columbo, who talked the villains to death, Shaft had always depended on direct, explicitly violent, methods of persuasion, with an undercurrent of legitimate distaste for manipulative whites in positions of power. Revenge and retribution were acceptable options through the three theatrical features ("Shaft," "Shaft's Big Score," and "Shaft in Africa"), but all the tough talk, blazing gun battles, and beautiful women had to be sanitized for television. As a result, TV's *Shaft* seemed a pale imitation of the real thing.

NBC's *Tenafly* tried so hard to avoid the image of a black superdude that it went too far in the other direction. Richard Levinson and William Link, the team responsible for *Columbo,* presented private detective Harry Tenafly (James McEachin) as just a regular Joe, an average family man with few exciting or distinguishing characteristics. Each episode of the series devoted nearly as much time to his middle class home life and family (a wife and two children) as to the case at hand. It ended up as just plain dull.

One ethnic series that did manage to bring the world of violent exploitation movies to television with some success was ABC's *Toma,* loosely based on the exploits of Dave Toma (played by Tony Musante), an actual undercover Italian policeman from Newark, New Jersey. Though the stories made superficial nods to real life drama (Toma had a home life and was shown in bed with his wife), they had none of the class of *Kojak* and instead embraced some of the worst features of the era's violent films by focusing on violence, brutal sex, and Toma's foul mouth. This was accomplished within the confines of television through implication; the audience was shown everything except the violent acts themselves. For example, one episode featured a kinky rapist with a talcum powder fetish. His frenzied attacks were conveyed by vivid closeups of each victim's face, flashes of talcum powder, and screams, grunts, and gasps which built to a ferocious climax. Without focusing on anything more explicit than the look of terror on the woman's face, these scenes could satisfy a viewer's voyeuristic fantasies nearly as well as the more explicit brutality of the theatrical films. *Toma* also captured the spirit of the abusive language of these films with snarling putdowns such as "If that hooker of yours doesn't shut her mouth, I'll stuff it full of dead fish." *Kojak* proved that television violence could be done artistically and used it to reinforce generally realistic themes and settings. *Toma* did not bother with such complexities and lasted only one season, though some of its core elements would be revamped and handled more effectively the following season with *Baretta.*

Ethnic detectives were, of course, just another strain in the continuing crime format boom. As in most fads, a rash of them appeared over a few seasons, a few outstanding ones survived, and then another gimmick surfaced. The crime genre was so resilient because, within the gimmick setups, countless minor variations could be incorporated into the same plots. Innovations that led to an entirely new approach to crime were rare. Jack Webb's presentation of policemen as intricate professionals using brains, not brawn, had been such a dramatic departure in the 1950s. Its aftereffects were still being felt in television twenty years later when it stood as a television staple. In 1973–74, a successful innovation away from the Jack Webb school of policework arrived from the hands of Joseph Wambaugh, a Los Angeles policeman who moonlighted as a very successful writer. (His police novel, *The New Centurions,* had been turned into a feature film.)

Over the years, the incessant repetition of Webb's stock characters had turned his innovation into a cliché of its own. Cops in programs such as *Adam-12* had become monotonous automatons that talked in clipped phrases and never seemed to entertain an evil thought. Wambaugh knew better. There were bad cops, good cops who made terrible mistakes in judgment, and outstanding officers who performed brilliantly under tremendous pressure. He felt each of the categories offered the potential for rich drama, so he created an anthology series for NBC, *Police Story,* in order to exploit these possibilities. By adopting the anthology format, Wambaugh freed himself from the limitations of one central character that could not possibly incorporate every nuance of police action and remain credible. Instead, he used different guest celebrities in weekly stories that dealt with every aspect of policework. They all shared a sharp, realistic style of dialogue (in contrast to Webb's officialese) as well as an affection for the common cop on the beat who, despite his faults, was usually presented as doing the best job possible. *Police Story* opened a rich new field of police drama that focused on more realistic characters who also faced personal problems that sometimes affected their on-the-job performance. As with many innovative series, *Police Story* caught on very slowly. Though it never became a big hit, it continued in the tradition of TV's best cop shows, delivering dependable ratings in its time slot while inspiring a number of spinoffs and imitations such as *Police Woman, Joe Forrester,* and *David Cassidy: Man Undercover.*

Even as he launched his anthology series, Wambaugh was hard at work on another innovative project, a four-part miniseries focusing on the career of one cop, Bumper Morgan (William Holden), who was rapidly approaching retirement age. *The Blue Knight* ostensibly traced the investigation following the murder of a prostitute, but the crux of the story was Morgan's battle with advancing age. He painfully acknowledged that he was too old to do all the legwork necessary to the case, but he insisted that, mentally, he was just as sharp as ever. In any case, he feared retirement because he knew he was not ready to cope with such a drastic change in his life. The program was an extended display of Wambaugh's cop philosophy and could have easily played on consecutive weeks of *Police Story* as a series within the series. Instead, NBC ran the four-hour drama on four consecutive nights beginning Tuesday, November 13, in a bold experiment that marked a breakthrough in television programming. Reactions ranged from mild surprise to outright ridicule. Some snidely suggested that such a schedule demanded too much attention from home viewers to succeed. The ratings from the miniseries proved inconclusive. *The Blue Knight* averaged a 30% share of the audi-

August 15, 1973

Man About the House. Britain's Thames Television network presents a new sitcom featuring Richard O'Sullivan as a young man who moves into an apartment with two cute young women (played by Paula Wilcox and Sally Thomsett). Though the set-up sounds racy, the three actually maintain a very innocent household, which puzzles their apartment landlord (played by Brian Murphy) and his sex-starved wife (played by Yootha Joyce).

September 8, 1973

Star Trek. (NBC). With syndicated reruns of the old series more popular than the show ever was on NBC, the original *Star Trek* crew is reunited to supply voices for a Saturday morning animated cartoon series that continues the "five year" mission of the starship *Enterprise* for another two years.

September 10, 1973

Diana. (NBC). Diana Rigg breaks from her adventurer image and stars in a sitcom about a gorgeous young British divorcee trying to make it in the New York fashion world, but the program folds within a few months. One highlight: a guest appearance by former *Avengers* cohort Patrick Macnee.

October 15, 1973

Tomorrow. (NBC). With *The Midnight Special* scoring well Fridays in the late late night slot, NBC brings Los Angeles TV newsman Tom Snyder to New York to host an hour-long late late talk show Monday through Thursday.

November 16, 1973

After slipping badly following his great opening ratings in his occasional ABC late night slot, Jack Paar departs network television again.

ence which, while respectable, was no vindication of the concept. It was left to ABC with its two-part presentation of *QB VII* at the end of April to prove the concept could be very successful.

QB VII was a six-hour adaptation of the lengthy Leon Uris novel that followed the post-war life of a Polish doctor who had performed experiments on inmates in a Nazi concentration camp. Part one focused on the war trial of the doctor while part two examined his life through 1972. The first episode attracted a healthy 38% share and the following night's wrap-up did even better, winding up the fifth highest rated show of the week. Buoyed by this success, ABC announced plans for the presentation of multi-part adaptations of other major works such as *Rich Man, Poor Man, Eleanor and Franklin,* and the as-then unpublished *Roots.* The network had been talking about "novels for television" ever since *Peyton Place* and the 1969 Harold Robbins series *The Survivors*, but the success of *QB VII* and *The Blue Knight* convinced ABC that the development of several miniseries could provide occasional boosts to ratings in much the same manner as blockbuster movies such as "Bridge on the River Kwai" and "Airport."

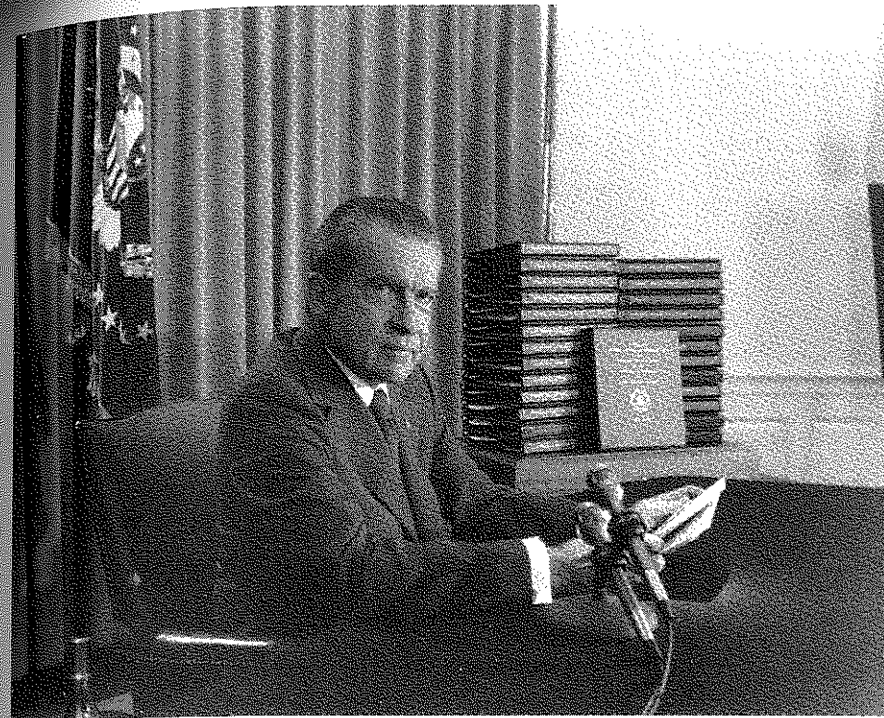
ABC was still patching together a prime time schedule that included practically anything that might hype ratings, even on a one-shot basis, because it had once again begun slipping from contention. In many ways, the situation was reminiscent of ABC's woes in the mid-1960s when it instituted the attention-grabbing concepts of an early premiere week and the second season. The major difference was that few such tactics were left. Even the "third season" (beginning in the spring) that was made possible by the Nielsen company's new "overnight" ratings service did not have the popular impact of the previous gimmicks.

ABC had again repeated one of its most frequent programming sins, loading its schedule with too many spinoffs of a hit gimmick, thus diluting its strength. Made-for-TV movie slots occupied the greater part of three nights of the network schedule, but they were no longer sure-fire ratings winners; the network regularly peppered them with tabloid-style stories on such topics as prostitution, homosexuality, bigamy, and rape. Attempts to exploit the new strain of sitcoms pioneered by CBS flopped in such series as *Adam's Rib* and *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice.* ABC's highest rated show (18th) was its *Monday Night Football* broadcast (now in its fourth season). For the season, ABC's greatest individual successes came with comic book-type heroes and by grafting a topical hook onto an otherwise routine sports event.

ABC realized very early in the season that it might be possible to exploit one of the few areas in which the network was a respected leader, sports, and so it filled one of the writers' strike gaps in September with "Tennis—The Battle of the Sexes." This silly "confrontation" between fifty-five-year-old over-the-hill tennis boor Bobby Riggs and up-and-coming twenty-nine-year-old Billie Jean King was no contest (King won easily), but ABC treated the match with the same intense coverage television usually reserved for such events as the World Series or political nominating conventions. The fluff contest was set, appropriately, in the 100% artificial Houston Astrodome, in prime time, and ballyhooed as the monumental resolution of the perpetual battle between men and women. In order to insure a "balanced" presentation of such an important event, the network assigned one male and one female to serve as color commentators. They supplemented the "play-by-play" reporting by ABC's front line team of Frank Gifford and Howard Cosell, whose convoluted phraseology (such as "making assurance doubly sure") was particularly humorous that night. Despite strong counter-programming by CBS, the tennis special registered lovely ratings for ABC and demonstrated the viability of sexual hooks and pseudo sports events. The show also pointed to a general formula that the network had decided to exploit.

With CBS cornering the audience for programs with more adult, real-world concerns, ABC chose to concentrate on the fantasy world of tabloids and pulp adventure. In that, the network's brightest hopes were two larger-than-life heroic caricatures, Kwai Chang Caine and Steve Austin.

Caine's adventures had begun in the 1972–73 season on a once a month series, *Kung-Fu.* David Carradine played a half Chinese, half American martial arts master who roamed the American West of the 1870s as a veritable Jove of Justice in a premise that mixed bits of *The Fugitive,* "Lost Horizon," and "Billy Jack." Like *The Fugitive* he was on the run, having fled China after deliberately (but in his eyes, justifiably) killing a member of the royal family. His thoughts frequently returned to the rigorous training of his youth in far away China as he attempted to serve the cause of justice in the lawless West. Caine took himself very, very seriously, spouting Oriental wisdom and platitudes of peace (in the preachy self-righteous style of Tom Laughlin's Billy Jack character) and was a bona-fide priest within his obscure religious sect. He preached non-violence and could overwhelm his foes by the sheer force of his character. However, Cain usually did not stop there. Despite his "best efforts" to avoid violent confrontations, Cain was inevitably forced to draw on his physical fighting skills, leading one reviewer to describe the show as "pacifist vegetarian priest beats the holy bejeezus out of frontier bullies." These battles were presented in slow motion, reinforcing a comic caricature style to the program. In early 1973, *Kung-Fu* was promoted to a weekly slot, though it did not become a hit until late in the year. The program displayed enough promise in its first season, however, to encourage ABC to approve development of a somewhat similar project for the 1973–74 season, *The Six Million Dollar Man.*



On April 29, 1974, President Nixon presented his most effective speech dealing with Watergate, using as background props bound volumes of transcripts from his secretly taped conversations. *(National Archives)*

Like *Kung-Fu,* the new series began in the fall as a once a month offering and, as part of a reshuffling of ABC's schedule in January 1974, it was awarded weekly status. The show moved the slow motion battle scenes from the past to the immediate future, featuring the exploits of Steve Austin (Lee Majors), an astronaut who had been horribly crushed in an Air Force jet crash. Rescued from the rubble, he was reconstructed at great government expense (six million dollars) and outfitted with nuclear powered limbs that gave him powers and abilities far beyond those of most mortal men, in an effective update of the ever-popular Superman legend. Unlike *Kung-Fu,* the scripts for *The Six Million Dollar Man* were not burdened with excessive simplistic philosophical preaching. Austin willingly joined the government's Office of Strategic Operations (a CIA-style organization) and fought America's enemies at home and abroad in the best tradition of such wartime comic book patriots as Captain America. The show delivered exciting fantasy and demonstrated that airy comic book television could be done well. When ABC moved Austin into a weekly slot as part of the 1973–74 mid-season shakeup, *The Six Million Dollar Man* became the network's top rated show.

The second season shuffling also resulted in another welcome hit for ABC, the nostalgic *Happy Days* (produced by Garry Marshall, who had adapted *The Odd Couple* for television). As its name implied, *Happy Days* turned from the grim reality of the turbulent early 1970s to the simple rituals of teenage life in the already legendary 1950s. *Andy Griffith Show* veteran Ron Howard played cute-but-shy Richie Cunningham, a very average, very bland teenager living in the very bland city of Milwaukee with his nondescript family: a kind and bumbling father (Tom Bosley), a cheerful and understanding mother (Marion Ross), and a cute-but-devilish younger sister, Joanie (Erin Moran). The sitcom usually focused on the escapades of Richie and his bosom buddy, Potsie Weber (Anson Williams), two struggling high school innocents who shared teenage fantasies about sock hops, girls, and hot rods. The *Happy Days* pilot episode had run on *Love, American Style* in February 1972, and the show's premise was far removed from the new wave of comedy of CBS. Nonetheless, *Happy Days* immediately entered the top twenty, right behind *The Six Million Dollar Man* in the ratings.

Happy Days owed much of its initial success to momentum from the theatrical film "American Graffiti" (the surprise blockbuster of 1973), in which Howard (the only cast member also in the TV series) had played Steve Bolander, a character very similar to Richie Cunningham. Unlike the film, though, the TV series lacked a strong central character (such as Richard Dreyfuss's Curt Henderson). Howard's Richie was made far too weak and Potsie was a klutz. There was a token hood, Fonzie (Henry Winkler), similar to the John Milner character of the film (played by Paul LeMat), but unlike LeMat, Winkler had only a minor role in the stories.

At the same time *Happy Days* offered itself as an entertaining look back at the 1950s, two key figures from the era were passing from the scene. They both owed their success to television and both had continued to use it successfully for two decades. Only one went out in triumph.

After twenty-three years of almost continuous production, Lucille Ball retired from the weekly TV grind. She had taken her character through several different settings, but the format had remained the same for all of them: wacky redhead against the world. The final permutation, *Here's Lucy,* featured her real life children as co-stars (Lucie and Desi Arnaz, Jr.) and it was a highly appropriate way for the original queen of television to depart, alongside the young man whose birth had marked the beginning of modern TV. Lucy ended her sitcom run with style and class. Her contemporary, Richard M. Nixon, had experienced an equally long (though considerably rockier) television career, but he left his profession in shame and disgrace.

The Ervin committee had adjourned in August of 1973 and it appeared that President Nixon would have a breathing spell after months of public inquiry. Instead, a new unrelated scandal rocked

January 31, 1974
"The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman." (CBS). Richard Rosenberg and Robert Christiansen adapt a successful novel into a powerful television drama special spanning black American history from slavery to the civil rights marches. Cicely Tyson portrays Jane Pittman, a proud black woman, in four stages of her life: from young womanhood to the age of 110. The highly praised program wins nine Emmy Awards.

February 1, 1974
Sally Quinn quietly departs *The CBS Morning News,* confessing that she was not really prepared for the job.

April 17, 1974
Frank McGee, fifty-two, host of NBC's *Today,* dies of cancer.

July 4, 1974
Bicentennial Minute. (CBS). The first sixty-second program in television history. Once each night, for more than two years, a celebrity reports on "the way it was" in American history on that date 200 years earlier.

July 29, 1974
Jim Hartz becomes the new host of *Today.*

September 2, 1974
After starring in a CBS television series for twenty-one of the previous twenty-three years, Lucille Ball takes a breather. *Here's Lucy* joins *The Lucy Show* and *I Love Lucy* in the never-ending world of reruns.

his administration, touching the one man who had gone through Watergate unscathed, Vice President Spiro Agnew. An investigation into general corruption in Maryland led to allegations of bribery payments to Agnew going back to the days when he had served as the Baltimore county executive. Determined to meet the challenge to his integrity head on, Agnew embarked upon a nationwide speaking tour in the hope of stirring his supporters into pressuring the Maryland prosecutor to call off his dogs. An old hand at manipulating television, Agnew knew his rhetoric would make news and he convinced NBC to carry, nationwide, a speech before a group of Republican women in California on September 29. Looking straight into the camera without batting an eye (as only an honest person could), Agnew proclaimed, "I will not resign if indicted! I will *not* resign if indicted!" On October 10, Agnew resigned, pleading *nolo contendere* ("no contest," virtually equivalent to admitting the charges were true by not challenging any of them) to charges of tax evasion on the bribery payments made to him by Maryland contractors. He was sentenced to three years' probation and fined $10,000. Five days after Agnew's resignation, all three commercial networks, for the first time in history, gave thirty minutes of free prime time to a felon charged with extortion, bribery, and conspiracy. In this last appearance before the public, Agnew ignored his *nolo contendere* plea and pronounced himself innocent. NBC's legal correspondent, Carl Stern, was incredulous. In the network analysis immediately following the speech, Stern compared Agnew's courtroom admissions of guilt with his TV plea to be judged innocent and pointed out that the facts did not support this stance. CBS allowed Agnew's speech to stand on its own, though, as the network continued to exclude instant analysis from its news operations.

Agnew's case had nothing to do with Watergate, but it furthered the perception of total corruption waiting to be unearthed in the Nixon administration. Ten days after Agnew's resignation, Nixon fired Archibald Cox, the special Watergate prosecutor. This touched off the first serious calls for the president's impeachment.

In mid-November, following publication of an old memo in which Nixon aide Charles Colson bragged of intimidating CBS chairman William Paley, CBS announced it would immediately resume providing analysis following presidential addresses. PBS also exhibited a renewed independence and presented some new public affairs programming such as the excellent "Essay on Watergate" on *Bill Moyers' Journal,* a fair but opinionated one-hour primer on the complex and sometimes confusing events of Watergate. On the evening news shows, new sources of suspicion continued to appear before the public. Seven top White House aides were indicted for their role in the coverup. One of the tapes Nixon was pressured into releasing contained a mysterious 18½ minute gap during a key conversation. The possibility was even raised that Nixon had deliberately claimed illegal deductions on his income tax.

As he had done so often throughout his career, Nixon turned to television as a means of appealing directly to the people and possibly blunting negative sentiment building against him. President Nixon went on a nation-wide speaking tour and the networks covered, live, his appearances before sympathetic audiences and he scored a few minor points. Nixon was obviously feeling the pressure, however, and openly sniped at reporters and the commercial networks during the tour. At one televised press conference he nervously exclaimed, "I am not a crook." At another, he pointed out that he was not really angry at the press because "you can only be angry at those you respect." On April 29, 1974, Nixon at last delivered his first truly effective television speech on Watergate. Pleading with the nation to move on to more important business and put Watergate aside ("One year of Watergate is enough"), he proudly displayed a huge stack of notebooks which contained hundreds of pages of edited transcripts from most of the White House tapes that had been requested by the courts and by the House impeachment committee. Nixon explained that the unprecedented disclosure of private presidential conversations demonstrated his willingness to cooperate in the various investigations and proved he had nothing to hide. It was a very successful speech, but its positive effects quickly dissipated as people examined the text of the transcripts.

Television's treatment of the mountain of material proved particularly devastating. Instead of being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the release, the network reporters who had been covering Watergate for months zeroed in on several very important conversations and all three networks presented specials featuring oral readings of transcript excerpts. The results were devastating to Nixon's image. Even heavily edited, the transcripts revealed Richard Nixon as a petty, self-centered man with little concern for justice and an obvious contempt for those he regarded as his enemies. After carefully studying the conversations, even previously friendly newspapers such as the *Chicago Tribune* (which had rushed to print the transcripts verbatim for free distribution to its readers) sadly but firmly called for the president's resignation. Others called for impeachment, convinced that Nixon would never succumb to the calls that he should step down.

After months of deliberation behind closed doors, the House Judiciary Committee opened its formal impeachment hearings to the public, including television, on July 24 and the reality of impeachment hit everyone in the country. As with the Senate hearings the previous year, the mid-summer timing was perfect for the

Before they boarded the helicopter waiting to take them to Air Force One, President Richard Nixon and Pat Nixon shared parting words with Vice President Gerald Ford and Betty Ford. *(National Archives)*

networks and they once again set up rotating coverage while PBS (through NPACT) presented prime time replays. The sense of jocularity that had often lightened the mood of the Ervin committee's activities was absent. The House Judiciary Committee was engaged in a serious debate that could well lead to the impeachment of the President of the United States.

For three days, the members of the committee debated the pros and cons of the articles of impeachment, and television carried it all. It became clear that the members of the committee were not engaged in the partisan rhetoric that usually marked such televised hearings. Each committee member displayed a deep personal anguish in trying to determine the truth of the charges and the proper course of action. Lacking clear evidence of a specific crime ("a smoking gun"), they were forced to examine cumulative impressions, general attitudes, strategies, and policies of the president. On Saturday, July 27, the debate reached a dramatic climax, the formal vote on the first article of impeachment. In a scene reminiscent of *Studio One*'s "Twelve Angry Men," the TV cameras focused on each member's face for the roll call voice vote. Throughout the country, viewers shared the drama and tallied the score as the camera panned from member to member, each speaking only one word: "yes" or "no." The motion passed, 27 to 11.

Two additional articles of impeachment were voted and it appeared almost certain that the full House would approve the resolution of impeachment, which would lead to a trial in the Senate in the fall unless Nixon stepped down voluntarily before then. At first, it looked as if he would "tough it out" and the networks nervously stood by, ready to cover the lengthy procedure live, fully aware that the process would seriously disrupt their new fall programming.

On August 5, Nixon released an additional tape transcript which served as the long-sought smoking gun and proved to nearly everyone that he had participated in an obstruction of justice. Three days later, Richard Nixon announced his resignation in a prime time address carried live by the networks. They canceled all regular programming for the evening and devoted four hours to the resignation and reactions to it. Nixon's speech was rather restrained and, though lacking both an adequate explanation for his decision to step down and any admission of guilt, it was remarkably free of recrimination. It was so straight that in the analysis that immediately followed, CBS correspondent Dan Rather, a frequent target of Nixon's ire, gushed that the speech contained "nobility" and "a touch of class," before colleague Roger Mudd began to pick it apart. Some die-hard Nixon supporters such as South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond went even further and described Nixon's tenure as president in glowing terms, dismissing Watergate as a minor aberration. Roger Mudd pointedly responded, "Well, Senator, if he was so wonderful, why did he have to resign?"

The next morning Nixon was anything but classy. Before leaving the White House he could not resist allowing the TV cameras in for one last time as he delivered a farewell speech to his staff. With tears in his eyes, he spoke of his family and middle class background. He pleaded for understanding and forgiveness, but never acknowledged that he had done anything wrong. It was the 1952 Checkers speech all over again and, by sharing it via television, Nixon seemed to be offering it as a counterpoint rebuttal to his own resignation remarks the night before. He had come full circle, and, perhaps instinctively, he welcomed television once again as the means to help fix a tough situation. Only that strategy no longer worked. The man who had reached fame and power through a very personal medium could no longer use it to draw support from the people. Nixon still knew the right words but they no longer touched the emotions of the American public in the same way. They had supported him with the greatest popular mandate in American history and he had betrayed their trust and consistently lied to them. The people no longer believed Richard Nixon and in his final TV speech he appeared as an empty, broken man who was not worthy of their support, only their pity.

One-half hour later, President Richard M. Nixon flashed the "double V" victory symbol one more time to the cameras, climbed into a helicopter, and flew away.

1974–75 SEASON

34. Affirmative Access

RICHARD NIXON'S RESIGNATION SAVED the networks from a lengthy impeachment trial that would have thrown their fall schedules into disarray. This reprieve was a welcome relief to executives who had been forced to rip up and redraw their schedules once already that summer in response to official rulings from Washington. Government bureaucrats had decided it was again time to do something that would raise the standards of television and promote the kinds of programs they felt were in the public's best interest. In January 1974, the FCC unveiled Access II, targeted to take effect with the 1974 fall season.

The commission had emerged looking quite foolish following implementation of its 1970 prime time access rule. With a great deal of ballyhoo about increasing the quality of television, it had taken the potentially dangerous step of instigating backhand controls over some prime time programming, only to see an embarrassing proliferation of cheap game shows emerge as a result of Access I. Not taking any chances with its new rule, the FCC moved from merely hoping that producers would gear their new efforts to the commission's taste to a system that demanded it. Two hours each week (7:00–8:00 P.M. Saturday and Sunday) would be returned to network control, but only if the time were filled with news, public affairs, and FCC-approved kidvid. The offer was too tempting for ABC, CBS, and NBC to resist. Even though the networks had frankly admitted in 1973 that it would probably be impossible for them to resume control of all seven nights of access time, they were perfectly willing to attempt to fill the lucrative weekend slots. They quickly agreed to the commission's ground rules and in the spring announced line-ups for the fall that included the necessary quota of FCC sanctioned programs. The independent producers were furious and they took the FCC to court. In June, a U.S. District Court ruled in their favor, declaring Access II illegal on the grounds that the new rule did not allow program producers enough time to prepare for its implementation. (The 1970 access rule had provided sixteen months for industry adjustment.) The court also strongly implied that there were other entire sections of the rule it did not like. Rather than offer to extend the lead-in time to meet the court's stated objection, the FCC took the opportunity to reexamine its entire strategy and to prepare a completely new proposal. In the meantime, with Access II declared illegal, the original access rule was once again in force. Ironically, this left producers and local stations facing an even tighter situation than before. They had only ninety days to fill the two hours suddenly returned to their control. In order to make the September deadline, everyone turned to the quickest, cheapest programs available: more game shows.

The networks faced the opposite task. Each one had to reshuffle its schedule in order to absorb the loss of two hours of programming. The weekend public affairs, news, and kidvid material was all excised. Additionally, six new thirty-minute sitcoms (two on each network) were temporarily shelved, though all of them eventually aired in one form or another later in the season. They included: NBC's *Sunshine* and *The Bob Crane Show,* CBS's *We'll Get By* and *The Love Nest,* and ABC's *Where's The Fire?* and *Everything Money Can't Buy.*

In spite of the last minute legal wrangling and the across the board program purge, the overall tone of the new season's prime time line-up remained unchanged. Though a half dozen sitcoms had been cut from the September schedule, there were still six left among the new fall shows as situation comedy continued to experience a renaissance that had begun in the early 1970s. Success in this "new wave" of comedy, however, eluded all but a handful of producers. Some of the best minds in American TV comedy had already tried and failed to ride this upswing, and the major casualties included Alan King's *The Corner Bar,* Carl Reiner's *A Touch of Grace,* Rob Reiner's *The Super,* and Sam Denoff's *Lotsa Luck.* Many of these vehicles had started with promising concepts, but few had the necessary accompaniment of standout actors and top notch writing to make the premises come alive. They also relied too heavily on all too obvious *All in the Family* production traits such as a live audience, British origin, and proletariat struggle to cover their weaknesses. Most of the producers cited the difficulty of finding good writers for the shows as the major reason for their failure.

Though there was an increasing demand for new wave-style comedy programs, an entire generation of TV sitcom writers had grown up on obstacle-course comedy of the 1950s and 1960s, never dealing with situations such as a lead character's decision to have an abortion. Consequently, when they were asked to deliver scripts for series that were conceived in the Norman Lear-Bud Yorkin mold, the writers drew on the superficial elements of the new shows and inserted as many racial putdowns and topical references as possible. They failed to realize that the so-called new wave of sitcoms was based on the same strains of humor that had worked for decades, from the vaudeville stage to *I Love Lucy.* Though the subject matter and settings might be more realistic than in the past, clever plot twists, funny situations, sharp dialogue, and interesting characters were still essential. Abandoning these in favor of a half-hour of cheap putdowns and racial slurs underscored the fact that many people in the industry still failed to understand the subtle interplay of traditional humor and realistic settings at work in the shows. This combination was very difficult to handle, even by those who championed the trend, and, at first, Lear and Yorkin had found it necessary to write most of their scripts themselves. Yorkin explained, "You can't take those young guys off shows like *Doris Day* and expect them to do this kind of comedy."

By 1974, Lear had groomed an entire stable of writers proficient in this new form of sitcom and he was able to fuel an amazingly successful string of spinoffs and new shows, most of which wore the distinct stamp of *All in the Family.* Though even he could not guarantee a winner every time (Lear's adaptation of the off-Broadway hit "The Hot 1 Baltimore" flopped on ABC in the spring of 1975), he had worked out a very reliable formula for the success that had eluded so many others. Lear carefully selected supporting characters from his established hits and placed them in their own vehicles, building a chain of ratings champs for CBS in the process. Just as CBS president James Aubrey had directed a parade of rural spinoffs from *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *The Andy Griffith Show* in the early 1960s, Lear took race, topicality, and forays into serious issues and ran with them through the 1970s. His techniques were just as blatant as Aubrey's, but a steady supply of top notch scripts maintained a generally high level of quality with each succeeding series. While perhaps not quite as good as the *All in the Family* original, his new programs were certainly well done and, to his credit, Lear tried to give each one its own special focus.

First out of the *All in the Family* mold was *Maude,* begun in the fall of 1972 as a spinoff series for the character of Edith Bunker's cousin, played by Beatrice Arthur. In February 1974, Lear launched *Good Times,* which showcased Maude's black maid, Florida Evans (Esther Rolle), who left New York and settled with her family in the projects of Chicago. As something of a black "heart" comedy in the tradition of *Mama* from the 1950s, *Good Times* emphasized the warm goodness of the hard working parents, Florida and her husband James (John Amos), as they struggled to raise their three children, James Junior "J. J." (Jimmie Walker), Thelma (BernNadette Stanis), and Michael (Ralph Carter). In his update of this once popular form, Lear presented the characters originally as a generally believable realistic black family. There were the obligatory putdowns and insults, but most of these were handled by the children, especially J. J., the oldest son. Florida and James saved their energy for the never-ending problem of family survival in the white man's world.

For his next spinoff (in January 1975) Lear presented the problems faced by a middle class black family that actually "made it," Archie Bunker's next door neighbors, the Jeffersons. The Jefferson family had been introduced in *All in the Family* as a black equivalent to the Bunkers, so a spinoff series was almost inevitable. After all, every important element was already there. George Jefferson (Sherman Hemsley) was a self-centered snob and bigot who intensely disliked whites, Louise (Isabel Sanford) was his long-suffering but forgiving wife, and Lionel (Mike Evans) was his tolerant son who outraged his father (and Archie) by becoming close friends with Mike and Gloria. To launch the new series, the Jeffersons moved from Queens to a fashionable East Side apartment in Manhattan. Though peppered with topical references and characters (an inter-racial couple lived just down the hall), for the most part this new series was far less serious than *All in the Family* and placed more emphasis on the energetic give-and-take and blustery confrontations of its characters. George Jefferson was an even more pigheaded "head of the household" than Archie Bunker, though he was constantly deflated by his business associates and neighbors, the rest of his family, and Florence (Marla Gibbs), their flippant black maid. Nonetheless, as a self-made black businessman he faced racial problems from a perspective totally different from Archie, Maude, and Florida, and the series effectively made use of his particular point of view.

It was no accident that Lear's two new hit sitcoms focused on blacks. Perhaps the one aspect of new wave comedy that everyone agreed on was that it had strong ethnic and racial themes. Unfortunately, some writers and producers frequently used the mere presence of minorities as a lazy shortcut that allowed them to sidestep complicated issues and complex drama and settle instead for stories that were "automatically topical" because they featured blacks. Worse yet, their treatment of ethnic groups frequently degenerated into a string of very old stereotypes. For instance, an Archie Bunker type would be set up as a lovable strawman to be torn down after delivering "unintentionally" funny lines that demonstrated what a close-minded bigot he was. This was a crafty combination that allowed warmed-over racial clichés to be used in the inevitable exchange of putdowns, turning what might have been labeled as racist or insulting in the past into an unmistakable sign that the program was "up to date" and "with it." The line between a sophisticated sitcom and a plastic exercise in name calling was often a fine one and, even on the better shows, it was sometimes unclear whether the scripts drew on the putdowns of the bigot or the cheap racial caricatures for the laughs.

One offender in this regard was, surprisingly, Norman Lear's *Good Times* which, by its second season, began shifting the focus more and more to J. J.'s antics. Walker portrayed J. J. as a hip-talking wisecracker, but when he rolled his eyes and exclaimed "Dyn-o-mite!" it sounded an awful lot like "Holy mackerel, Andy." The original scripts had kept his antics in check, with J. J. appearing as nothing worse than a problem child with an enormous ego (certainly a realistic problem) who even poked fun at himself and his shortcomings. However, J. J. soon became a cult figure among pre-teen youth and the writers began playing up his comic caricature more and more. By the end of the third season, John Amos quit the series in disgust, citing his personal frustration at the degeneration in writing and characterization. One year later, Esther Rolle also quit. Both characters were written out of the series (James was killed in an accident in Mississippi while Florida remarried, "temporarily" relocating in Arizona for her new husband's health) so that, ironically, for one season a warm "family" comedy functioned with no parents at all. Rolle returned in the fall of 1978 when the producers promised to shift back to the original thrust of the show and downplay J. J.'s antics. Even with Rolle back, though, the program could not recapture its initial spirit and it was canceled only a few months after her reappearance.

Jimmie Walker's sudden rise to cult status was the perfect example of the shaky status of television's newly found social conscience. Here was a young black comic who became a national celebrity, especially among black children, by portraying a smart-mouthed, irresponsible hustler—exactly the sort of media character blacks had been complaining about for years. Just because a series centered on a minority group did not guarantee that the characters would necessarily be given enviable and uplifting traits, even within the supposedly sophisticated sitcoms.

No matter what shape they took, though, minority groups were firmly established as the strong hook for television in the 1970s. Despite the many horrible scripts and one-dimensional characters that had appeared in the wake of *All in the Family,* television was slowly absorbing them. After several years of scrutiny, other

FALL 1974 SCHEDULE

Day	Network	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30
MON	ABC	The Rookies		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)			
MON	CBS	Gunsmoke		Maude	RHODA	Medical Center	
MON	NBC	BORN FREE		NBC Monday Night At The Movies			
TUE	ABC	Happy Days	Tuesday Movie Of The Week			Marcus Welby, M.D.	
TUE	CBS	Good Times	M*A*S*H	Hawaii Five-O		Barnaby Jones	
TUE	NBC	Adam-12	NBC World Premiere Movie			Police Story	
WED	ABC	THAT'S MY MAMA	Wednesday Movie Of The Week			GET CHRISTIE LOVE	
WED	CBS	SONS AND DAUGHTERS		Cannon		MANHUNTER	
WED	NBC	LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE		LUCAS TANNER / # Bob Hope Show		PETROCELLI	
THR	ABC	The Odd Couple	PAPER MOON	The Streets Of San Francisco		HARRY O	
THR	CBS	The Waltons		CBS Thursday Night Movies			
THR	NBC	SIERRA		Ironside		MOVIN' ON	
FRI	ABC	KODIAK	The Six Million Dollar Man		THE TEXAS WHEELERS	KOLCHAK: THE NIGHT STALKER	
FRI	CBS	PLANET OF THE APES		CBS Friday Night Movies			
FRI	NBC	Sanford And Son	CHICO AND THE MAN	THE ROCKFORD FILES		POLICE WOMAN	
SAT	ABC	THE NEW LAND		Kung-Fu		NAKIA	
SAT	CBS	All In The Family	PAUL SAND IN FRIENDS LOVERS	Mary Tyler Moore Show	Bob Newhart Show	Carol Burnett Show	
SAT	NBC	Emergency		NBC Saturday Night At The Movies			

Day	Network	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30
SUN	ABC	local		Sonny Comedy Revue		The ABC Sunday Night Movie			
SUN	CBS	local	Apple's Way		Kojak		Mannix		local
SUN	NBC	local	The Wonderful World Of Disney		NBC Sunday Mystery Movie (McCloud; Columbo; McMillan And Wife; AMY PRENTISS)				# NBC News Presents (10:00-11:00)

writers and producers at last began to adapt the Norman Lear formula successfully in their own efforts. In the process, TV completely reshaped its portrait of the world from the aseptic white suburbs of the 1950s, to the new ideal of the 1970s: a totally integrated society with a perfect mixture of every race, color, and creed. This merely reflected changes in the real world, where assorted minority groups were becoming increasingly vocal, demanding additional participation in such diverse fields as politics, labor, and education through programs of "affirmative action" (a term that replaced the buzz word "quotas"). Though such profound social changes might take generations in real life and require government legislated mathematical mixes, for network television it meant that the WASP world was suddenly junked in favor of a new money maker, the increasingly popular world of colorful ethnics who promised high ratings and increased profits. By the 1974–75 season, this new order seemed practically a *fait accompli* (on TV at least) as viewers welcomed *Chico and the Man* and *Barney Miller.* Neither of these shows came from Norman Lear, but both were up to his standards and they signaled that successful, high quality, generally realistic ethnic humor was no longer Lear's exclusive domain.

James Komack's *Chico and the Man* literally followed in the footsteps of *Sanford and Son* and, riding on the strength of such an enviable lead-in, catapulted straight into the top ten. It was a perfect companion show to the story of a father and son junk dealership in the Los Angeles ghetto. In the new show, Ed Brown (Jack Albertson) and his Chicano assistant Chico Rodriguez (Freddie Prinze) operated a run down garage in a decrepit section of East Los Angeles.

Though one of the first programs to slant itself toward Hispanic viewers, *Chico and the Man* was just as much a generation gap comedy as a racial show. Ed ("The Man") was a dyspeptic old coot who one day let a cheerful young Chicano talk him into a job as his assistant at the garage. Very quickly he and Chico became friends, though Ed never publicly dropped his image as a hardnosed quasi-Bunkerish bigot. (He claimed that he did not like anybody, but it was obvious he really loved everybody.) Unlike the structure in many of the other ethnic-based shows, Ed and Chico were not so much characters in conflict as two sides of the same character: one was a buoyant optimistic dreamer who believed anything was possible, and the other was an unreconstructed cynic who had seen too many such hopes turn sour. Neither was set up as an obvious bad guy and both delivered funny one-liners that were closer to vaudeville routines than spiteful putdowns. The energy between the two characters turned merely adequate scripts into highly entertaining encounters as grumpy Ed found himself growing increasingly fond of the enthusiastic Chico, secretly hoping that he would succeed in working his way out of the ghetto.

One reason for the strong chemistry between Ed and Chico was that there seemed to be a touch of real life magic to the setting. Prinze was only twenty when he moved from a brief career as a nightclub stand-up comic to share the lead in a top ten TV show. He seemed remarkably successful at keeping up with veteran trouper Albertson and well on his way to fulfilling his character's optimistic dream of becoming a Chicano superstar. This fusion of images made Prinze's subsequent suicide in January of 1977 especially shocking, and it punctured the show's premise with a grim dose of reality. Though the producers attempted to continue the series by using twelve-year-old Gabriel Melgar as a new Chicano character (orphan Raul Garcia), Prinze's death had robbed the show of its comic tension. The revamped format lasted only one season, unable to duplicate the special energy that had first propelled the series.

If the champions of affirmative action could have selected the cast for a TV sitcom, they could not have done better than the crew of New York City's 12th police precinct as presented in Danny Arnold's *Barney Miller.* Set in the appropriately diverse district of Greenwich Village, the program showcased a kaleidoscope of distinctive character types: Captain Barney Miller, a level-headed Jewish chief of detectives (Hal Linden); Detective Harris, a cool confident black (Ron Glass); Sgt. Wojciehowicz, a beefy hard-working Pole (Max Gail); Sgt. Yemana, a soft-spoken reliable Asian (Jack Soo); Sgt. Chano Amengual, a voluble Puerto Rican (Gregory Sierra); Sgt. Fish, an aging but dedicated man on the verge of retirement (Abe Vigoda); and Inspector Luger, a pure Hollywood B-movie type complete with fedora and raincoat (James Gregory). Each performer drew on the accepted stereotypes of his character but, for the most part, snide putdowns were kept in check and the group evolved into a close knit company facing realistic, if often warped situations. These were a mix of conflicts from the everyday world of New York City (such as an exuberant lottery winner causing a riot by tossing money from a window) to more personal station house situations (such as dealing with the effects of unintentionally consuming brownies spiked with hashish). Despite the very funny plots, *Barney Miller* was a far cry from the pure farce and physical pratfalls of previous "station house sitcoms" such as *Car 54, Where Are You?* Its humor grew out of the characters themselves placed in believable, though exaggerated, situations, rather than from outlandish plots or silly misunderstandings. The program was one of the best new-wave sitcoms to evolve outside the Norman Lear stable, combining topical themes and ethnic concerns with the basics of comedy: a simple set, good acting, and well-written scripts. It was not, however, an instant smash, premiering as part of ABC's second season schedule in January of 1975, slotted against *The Waltons.* Over the years, though, it went through a number of time shifts and became one of the network's steady, reliable shows, even inspiring a short lived spinoff series, *Fish* (featuring Sgt. Fish after his retirement).

CBS was quite pleased with the success of Norman Lear's spinoffs and eagerly looked to its other hot sitcoms for more winners. The network had slated a program created and produced by *M*A*S*H's* Alan Alda, *We'll Get By,* for the fall of 1974, but postponed it as part of the cutbacks resulting from the Access II mess. When it finally aired in the late spring, *We'll Get By* proved a disappointment. Audiences expecting the mixture of madcap humor and serious themes of *M*A*S*H* were let down by the low-key premise of a middle class lawyer and his family living in a New Jersey suburb. The series simply never caught fire. Viewers, as well as the CBS brass, were much happier with the first spinoff from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show, Rhoda,* the most successful new sitcom of the season.

Fans of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* had become quite fond of Mary's wisecracking neighbor with a heart of gold, Rhoda Morgenstern, and they eagerly followed her move from the frozen Midwest back to her home turf of New York City. She was giving it "one last chance." Valerie Harper handled the transition from plumpish second banana to slim, glamorous lead character quite well. She softened Rhoda's slightly out-of-synch personality a bit, giving the character more stability and providing the new supporting crew with opportunities to shine on its own. Rhoda's sister

After splitting with her husband, Rhoda (Valerie Harper) once again became an eligible single woman, often double dating with her sister, Brenda (Julie Kavner). *(From right)* Harper, Ray Buktenica, Kavner, and Ron Silver. *(Rhoda © 1974 Twentieth Century Fox Television. All Rights Reserved.)*

September 10, 1974
NBC presents "Born Innocent" as a *World Premiere Movie.* Linda Blair plays a fourteen-year-old who goes through a rough time in a juvenile detention home.

September 13, 1974
The Rockford Files. (NBC). James Garner and his producer on *Maverick,* Roy Huggins, update their successful adventure formula by one century.

October 6, 1974
Monty Python's Flying Circus begins an unexpectedly successful run on a handful of U.S. public television stations.

October 19, 1974
Weekend. (NBC). Lloyd Dobyns hosts a once-each-month late Saturday night news magazine show. The program wields a much lighter touch than CBS's *60 Minutes,* mixing solid reporting with off-beat features and humorous epigrams.

October 22, 1974
Fred Pierce becomes president of ABC-TV.

January 1, 1975
Dick Cavett, reduced to infrequent appearances in ABC's revamped late night schedule, does his last show for the network after signing with CBS for a brief summer variety show.

January 6, 1975
A.M. America. (ABC). Twenty-three years after the advent of *Today,* ABC at last tries its own early morning version, hosted by Bill Beutel and Stephanie Edwards. Peter Jennings reads the news.

Brenda (Julie Kavner) assumed Rhoda's old role as an over-intelligent but somewhat insecure, chubby young woman, traditional enough to spend much of her time talking about men and dating, but modern enough to joke about it. Their mother, Ida Morgenstern (Nancy Walker), played the perfect Jewish mother: pushy, overbearing, self-deprecating, but with the required heart of gold beneath her tough exterior.

Perhaps the most important change in Rhoda's life was that in the first episode of her own series she met a man and fell in love. Joe Gerard (David Groh) was a nice Jewish guy, handsome, and an eminently respectable young business man on the way up. In short, a "good catch." On October 28, after four years of frustrated single life in Minneapolis, Rhoda got married in a one-hour special that featured the entire crew from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* as wedding guests. The program was the top-rated special of the season and *Rhoda* stayed in the top ten for two years straight. Yet, there were some Rhoda fans who were unhappy.

Critics complained that marriage had taken the edge from Rhoda and trapped her in stories that were severely limited by the dull character of Joe Gerard. In the fall of 1976, the writers took the critics' advice and began to work Joe out of the series. He and Rhoda were first separated, then, a year later, divorced. Joe admitted that he had only consented to marriage because he knew that Rhoda would never have agreed simply to live together (which was all he had really wanted). During the messy transition year between the separation and divorce, the writers were very uncertain what to focus on for the humor. Consequently, *Rhoda* became more a soap opera than a sitcom and the show's ratings dipped dramatically. It was not until well into the 1977–78 season that the program began to regain some of its old stature as viewers discovered that the show once again was funny. Rhoda had returned to the role of an attractive, eligible single woman. She and Brenda (who had lost her chubbiness) were set in the very workable premise of independent young women trying to make it on their own, which was what many people had expected of the show from the very beginning.

With such a strong line-up of freshmen, TV comedy was at a peak virtually unmatched in network history. Nearly a dozen excellent sitcoms aired each week, from veterans such as *All in the Family, M*A*S*H, The Odd Couple,* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* to newcomers *Rhoda, Chico and the Man,* and *Barney Miller.* American television had successfully absorbed the British television style of working class humor while it redeveloped some of its best sitcom characters and settings for the 1970s. Appropriately, it was at this point that British television provided a *new* "new wave" style of comedy that made the American Norman Lear type of sitcom seem almost old hat. It was in 1974 that Americans discovered *Monty Python's Flying Circus.*

The program had begun its run on the BBC in October 1969, as British TV humor began to move away from working class comedy (which had flourished there in the mid-1960s) to its own interpretation of the Ernie Kovacs style of television. *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* was the obvious catalyst for the show, as the BBC gathered a group of talented graduates from a variety of British comedy series (including David Frost's many comedy programs) and offered them the opportunity to write and perform in their own weekly half-hour comedy. Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam (an American), Eric Idle, Terry Jones, and Michael Palin responded with a mad collection of blackouts, outrageous skits, old fashioned physical humor, and rapid-fire editing that surpassed even *Laugh-In* in bringing the Kovacs style to high-quality realization. Sketches were interrupted by other sketches as well as by flashes of music, phony "program announcements," reactions by "outraged government officials," and animated cartoon cutout characters (designed by Gilliam). Being on the BBC, each episode ran without commercials so the dizzying pace never let up. It appeared to be total anarchy, but was actually a very careful mixture of bread-and-butter physical comedy with high class word play, shock-tactic humor, and parodies of television itself. Within the same half-hour, punch lines and sketches were reworked several times, presenting different approaches to the same jokes. As writers and editors as well as performers, the Python crew understood the necessity of setting up contrasts to punctuate the comedy and to help the pacing.

The physical humor was loud and flashy, in the best tradition of Milton Berle burlesque. Characters walked funny, donned ridiculous costumes, dressed in drag, and screamed. Word play ranged from slightly restrained vulgarity ("filthy bastard") to complicated allusions to great works of literature. The animated cutouts included a variety of unlikely subjects: nude women, government leaders, nude men, cricket players, and giant animals. Just for variety, "taboo" subjects such as death, sex, and cannibalism were discussed as casually as royal pronouncements. Biting its own BBC hand, the crew lampooned the mainstays of noncommercial British television: pretentious documentaries and boring talk shows. Participants in the Python permutations were either perversely handicapped (unable to speak English or, worse, simply dead) or stuck in the wrong panel ("Che Guevara" was questioned about obscure local English soccer championship matches). Documentary narrators inevitably missed the obvious and focused on

ridiculous subjects such as flying sheep. The BBC was quite uncertain about the monster it had unleashed, convinced that only a lunatic fringe could possibly enjoy such an eclectic mess. Instead, the program went beyond the fringe and became a big enough success for the BBC to call the Python crew back for three more seasons.

American television would not touch *Monty Python's Flying Circus* at first. Not only was it a censor's nightmare, the humor seemed too idiosyncratic. (Who outside Britain *cared* about their soccer leagues?) The initial reaction by the American public seemed to confirm this judgment. Two record albums and a film ("And Now for Something Completely Different"), consisting of selected sketches from the series, flopped in the early 1970s. Members of the cast made a few U.S. TV appearances but they failed to have any impact on the American market, and *Monty Python* seemed destined for the same obscurity in the United States as Britain's *Goon Show* in the 1950s. In 1974, Time-Life Films sold the Python series to the Eastern Educational Network (a consortium of East Coast PBS stations) and, that fall, five years after its British premiere, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* appeared on a handful of public TV stations. Much to the surprise of everyone, the show took off and became one of public TV's highest rated programs. Viewers simply ignored the occasional inscrutable allusions to obscure British interests and enjoyed the show's fresh, daring style. As a British import on public television, *Monty Python* aired intact the outrageous treatment of topics that American performers would have been booted off the air for even suggesting (such as eating your dead mother). By mid-1975, the group's second film ("Monty Python and the Holy Grail") opened to an enthusiastic Stateside reception. By then, the TV series itself was on 120 stations throughout the country, including KPRC, Houston, the first commercial station to carry it (complete with commercials). *Monty Python's Flying Circus* provided a lively change of pace from the equally funny but fervently realistic sitcoms then on American network television. It allowed viewers the opportunity for a direct dose of a completely different style and the program became a long-running staple of public television. Over the next few years, *Monty Python*-style humor would turn up in some American television shows, most notably in a 1975 venture outside of network prime time, NBC's *Saturday Night Live.*

Though situation comedy served as the networks' primary component for the 1974–75 season, the crime show format was close behind. In exploiting the form, the networks relied on the most successful gimmicks of the previous season: loner ethnic cops and violence. The plots in many of the new shows, however, rarely progressed beyond the obvious and failed to generate much excitement. In fact, most of the new "individualistic loners" were practically dead on arrival. *Archer* (Brian Keith as a 1930s Sam Spade-style investigator) and *Khan!* (featuring perennial *Hawaii Five-O* villain Khigh Dhiegh as an Oriental private eye in San Francisco) ran only four weeks each. *Nakia* and *Caribe* lasted a few months. *Get Christie Love* (Teresa Graves as a sassy, sexy black undercover police agent) eked out nearly one complete season. *Petrocelli* (a Harvard-educated Italian working as a defense attorney in Arizona) and *Harry O* (David Janssen as a disabled former cop turned private eye) managed to hold on for two dull seasons each.

The only instant hit among the new crime shows really was not a new crime show at all. James Garner simply dusted off his old Maverick-style character, moved from the amorphous West of the 1870s to the amorphous West Coast of the 1970s, and became Jim Rockford, a smart-talking ex-con with a wry sense of humor who worked as a private investigator. *The Rockford Files* followed the *Maverick* formula to the letter, downplaying life-and-death confrontations in favor of lighter, less wearisome complications between Rockford and his clients, his dad (played by Noah Beery), and various collection agencies. (He always seemed on the verge of bankruptcy.) It was one of the smoothest crime shows in years, as the writers tailored the scripts to match Garner's relaxed character perfectly, and the program remained one of NBC's most consistent ratings winners for half a decade.

Three other crime shows also became hits that season, but unlike *The Rockford Files,* NBC's *Police Woman* and ABC's *Baretta* and *S.W.A.T.* each took more time to build an audience, not catching on until the spring rerun cycle. They were different from *The Rockford Files* in one other important respect: each was very violent.

Police Woman (which followed *The Rockford Files)* was a spinoff from Joseph Wambaugh's *Police Story* anthology series, but it was not very faithful to the original's concept of focusing on more realistic, human aspects of police work. The "unflinching look at the real world of police women" devoted much of its attention to gratuitous violence such as savage death scenes or closeups of traumatized rape victims. Pepper Anderson (Angie Dickinson) was played up primarily as a titillating sex symbol, with frequent shots of her in revealing costumes, legs apart, pistol pointed. One reviewer described the show as the epitome of the crime genre's new excesses, saying its motto was, "Shoot now, talk dirty later." *Kojak* had demonstrated that violence could be used very effectively in order to underscore the grim reality of urban crime, but the writers on that program generally turned in scripts that gave Telly Savalas excellent material to work with. *Police Woman* rarely offered Dickinson the same opportunity.

January 6, 1975
NBC's eleven-year-old daytime hit, *Another World,* becomes the first soap opera to expand to one hour, five days a week.

January 24, 1975
Hot l Baltimore. (ABC). Norman Lear's first major flop, an offbeat sitcom based on a popular off-Broadway play by Lanford Wilson. Set in a seedy Baltimore hotel (with a permanently burned out light behind the *e* of the "hotel" sign), the program focuses on a wide range of controversial character types (from pimpless hookers to a pair of male homosexual lovers). Some people object to the treatment of such risqué topics in prime time, but, unlike Lear's other ventures, the show does not generate any great following from the protests. One reviewer observes that the so-called "adult" series is really just bad caricature and "as shocking as last week's bread."

April 29, 1975
To mark the fall of Saigon, all three commercial networks present documentary reports. CBS: "Vietnam: A War That Is Finished"; NBC: "7,382 Days in Vietnam"; and ABC: "Vietnam: Lessons Learned, Prices Paid."

August 6, 1975
NBC News Update. (NBC). NBC begins inserting a sixty-second news summary into prime time.

September 1, 1975
The oldest oater of them all, *Gunsmoke,* fades from CBS after twenty years, leaving prime time virtually devoid of Westerns.

Baretta was even worse, presenting stories that could be accurately summarized as: Smash! Bang! Crash! Boom! Screech! Zoom!

Baretta was a new attempt by the producers of *Toma* to cash in, more gracefully, on the violent cop show trend. Robert Blake was cast as an out-of-the-ordinary cop who was streetwise and ready to defend the little people from hardnosed police harassment as well as from violent urban criminals. Blake's interpretation of the role was the high point of the show as he hammered Tony Baretta into an intriguing offbeat character. He took the gimmicks of the premise—Baretta was a master at disguise and owned a talking cockatoo for a pet—and transformed them into engaging traits of the little fellow's personality. Occasionally some interesting plot twists surfaced, but it was usually Blake's energy that carried the overall production, raising *Baretta* to the level of a good, straightforward cop show. This helped to smooth over the excessive violence that formed the nucleus of nearly every episode. Though Tony Baretta might have been engaged in a constant battle against urban crime, he still took the time to care for individual victims and was not afraid to show honest, gut emotions. *S.W.A.T.,* ABC's other late-rising cop show of the season, took a completely different approach, carrying the theme of urban guerrilla warfare to its extreme, depersonalized conclusion.

Producers Aaron Spelling and Leonard Goldberg (of *The Mod Squad* and *The Rookies)* set up *S.W.A.T.* as the ultimate crime-action program, portraying Los Angeles (where else?) as a battleground populated by raving lunatics, crazed maniacs, and helpless citizens. To protect the populace from those poised to ravage the city, a five-man *S*pecial *W*eapons *A*nd *T*actics (S.W.A.T.) squad stood ready, led by Lieutenant Hondo Harrelson (Steve Forrest). Every week, just when it appeared as if the city were doomed, an ominous green truck would come howling into view. As the truck screeched to a halt, a small army of faceless men in flak suits threw open its doors and leaped out, ready to face a threat no average citizen or normal police department could handle. It was a perverse combination of grade-B war and Western films, with the S.W.A.T. team riding in like the cavalry of old to overwhelm the enemy. However, instead of using six-shooters, they rode in with an arsenal of bazooka-type weapons that could demolish a small country. The enemy was not beaten, it was blown away.

Such total war completely eliminated the chance for a slice of humanity and left little room in the field for the personal one-to-one confrontations of such Sam Spade surrogates as Columbo, Cannon, and Mannix or of such hard working outsiders as Kojak and Baretta. *S.W.A.T.* literally turned the war on crime into an all-out war between society and its enemies. In such a war, anything was allowed. Even Jack Webb's fiercely pro-cop series, from *Dragnet* to *Emergency,* had shown more restraint. *S.W.A.T.* celebrated overkill and massive retaliation, briefly touching a sensitive nerve among viewers. The program flashed into the top ten in the summer, but disappeared after its second season. As its legacy, the series left behind an unmistakable sign of television's ability to influence taste and modify values of separate communities across the country simultaneously. In dozens of small, previously peaceful towns such as Bloomington, Indiana, local officials began setting aside huge sums of local revenue to finance their own smartly dressed S.W.A.T. teams. After all, there was more glamour to be found in training for such a squad than merely concentrating on humdrum, routine police work.

S.W.A.T. marked a symbolic peak in television violence, coming as it did at the end of more than a decade of real life uncontrolled violence that television had brought into everyone's living room. Americans had viewed graphic confrontations on the home front and on the war front with increasing frustration at their inability to do anything about them. S.W.A.T., in effect, restaged the Vietnam War and the riots in the streets, but returned ultimate control to the righteous forces of law and order for a satisfying conclusion. It was a bitterly ironic contrast to the confusion and desperation that marked the end of the real war that seemed to have caused so many of the problems in the first place.

Following the 1973 treaty ending direct American involvement, the United States had rushed to sweep the Vietnam War under the carpet. American combat troops were withdrawn by the fall of 1973, and the South Vietnamese army assumed responsibility for keeping order in the countryside and maintaining security. They faced a series of widespread guerrilla attacks which kept the war percolating at a low but constant level. In the spring of 1975, the South Vietnamese forces collapsed, and the American public was given a visual jolt more shocking that the years of combat footage and bombing statistics. As Communist forces swept through the country and assumed control over village after village, the network cameras focused on the stream of refugees fleeing to the south for safety. By the end of April, uncontrolled panic had set in. Supposedly safe enclaves protected by the South Vietnamese forces had fallen in rapid succession and the Communist drive south became a rout. A Communist takeover of the countryside seemed inevitable. Bureaucrats, soldiers, merchants, and thousands of average people who had built their lives around the American presence in Vietnam feared for their own survival. Everyone began scrambling for the apparent safety of the capital city of Saigon itself, determined to get there by any means possible. Near the end, the only way out was by American airplanes.

On the last flight out of DaNang, a CBS camera crew captured the incredible scene. Frightened men (chiefly South Vietnamese soldiers) shoved women and children aside in a desperate bid to climb aboard an already overcrowded airplane. The plane was so jammed with refugees that it had to take off with the stairway ramp still hanging out, open, and the crew had to push people off as the craft taxied down the runway. Some of those who could not make it aboard began shooting at the plane in anger and frustration. Others clung to the stairs even after takeoff, with most falling off once the plane was airborne. Soon after their arrival in Saigon, those who had made it discovered that their escape to freedom was short lived. The collapse of Saigon itself was imminent. Once again, there was a hectic evacuation, starting at the U.S. embassy. Once again, the TV crews focused on the desperate crowds trying to reach safety. At the embassy, they clawed at the gates while helicopters took the last of the staff and press to boats waiting offshore. At the harbor, thousands pressed to climb aboard one of the departing ships. South Vietnamese pilots hijacked expensive American-built Army helicopters and ditched them in the sea near the American carriers, hoping to make it on board. The final hours at the Saigon airport were a repeat of the desperation of DaNang.

No matter what position they had taken on the war, individual Americans found the news clips a sobering, gut-wrenching experience. The United States was leaving behind, defenseless, a great number of people who had staked their lives on America's ultimate success in South Vietnam, either on the battlefield or at the negotiating table. In return, they had been abandoned. The graphic television reports were something of an emotional penance for the country, as Americans watched the traumatic mess of Vietnam conclude right before their eyes, forced to confront at their dinner tables the reality of what their country had done to a small group of people half a world away.

35. Freddie or Not?

ON TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1974, NBC kicked off a new series of made-for-TV movies for the 1974–75 season with "Born Innocent," a tough presentation of the effects of reform school on a naive teenage girl. It was produced by Richard Rosenberg and Robert Christiansen, the team responsible earlier that year for the highly acclaimed civil rights drama, "Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman," a successful vehicle for Cicely Tyson. In "Born Innocent" they cast Linda Blair, the young star of the hit theatrical horror film "The Exorcist," as fourteen-year-old Chris Parker, a gentle and confused child placed in a juvenile detention home by her parents for being an incorrigible runaway. Though Chris had run away six times in two years, it was clear that, with an alcoholic mother and a weak, sadistic father at home, she was an unfortunate victim needing help and understanding, not punishment. Instead, she was made a ward of the state and locked up with drug addicts and child prostitutes in the women's section of a state reform school. There, Chris was cruelly and insensitively handled by the authorities and mercilessly taunted by the other girls. For the most part, the producers managed to handle the entire story with a minimum of graphic horror. The film did not set up any easily identifiable devils or angels but rather concerned itself with the deadend hopeless condition of the prison and its dehumanizing influence on everyone there. At the climax of the story, the innocent Chris was gang raped in the shower by a group of girls using a wooden plunger. They triumphantly cried, "Now you're one of us!"

"Born Innocent" was practically swallowed up amid the fall premiere hoopla. It did not receive much on-air promotion and, up against the season premieres of CBS's hit *Good Times* and ABC's mildly successful *Happy Days,* it registered only fair ratings. Afterward, many TV critics did not bother to review it, though those who did tended to be largely complimentary. Ron Powers of the *Chicago Sun-Times* praised the program as "courageous, honest, and intelligently crafted television drama." The *Hollywood Reporter* called it "a massive, brutal indictment of the juvenile justice system." A few years earlier, the serious topic and brutal setting of "Born Innocent" might have sent shock waves throughout the industry but, by the fall of 1974, even rape scenes were almost passé on television. Still, the clearly adult-oriented film had been particularly accessible to a young audience, airing relatively early in the evening (8:00–10:00 P.M.) and appearing at the start of the new fall season when youthful viewing levels were high.

A few days after the "Born Innocent" telecast, a San Francisco teenage girl was assaulted on a deserted stretch of California beach by a gang of girls, who used a coke bottle to rape her. The parents of the attacked girl sued NBC, claiming the violence on the tube had been the instigator of the violence on the beach. NBC denied any connection or responsibility, but the legal wrangling lasted four years. (NBC eventually won the case.) Even before it ever reached the courts, though, the real life incident of rape provided a very visible rallying point for the small but vocal group of viewers who, for years, had protested what they saw as excessive levels of sex and violence on television. At last, they said, here was proof of the harmful effects of unrestrained television on impressionable minds.

Throughout the previous cycles of public protest that had accompanied the heydays of Western, crime, and action-adventure shows during the 1950s and 1960s, the networks had been able to blunt the criticism and avoid any serious threats of anti-network legislation. In the 1970s, the anti-gore groups grew more sophisticated and organized their scattered interests into a number of dedicated lobbying groups, moving beyond outraged letters to the editor and appearances at inconsequential congressional hearings. They took careful aim at lawmakers, television moguls, and the news media in general. As a result, the protests that followed the "Born Innocent" case could not be brushed aside with a few vague promises by the networks. In the fall of 1974, the intensified protests reached the House and Senate committees that controlled the FCC's purse strings and they ordered the commission to take some sort of action on the complicated matter of the influence of television sex and violence on children.

The FCC was hesitant to impose an outright ban. Access rules that "encouraged" quality programming (however heavy-handedly) were one thing, but an out-and-out veto of sex and violence in programming ventured onto very shaky legal grounds that the commission preferred to avoid. Instead, it passed the buck to the networks, urging them to solve the problem for everyone by coming up with strong self-imposed guidelines to mollify the public protesters. In the meantime, the FCC continued to work on its revised prime time access rules and in January 1975 it unveiled Access III, a complicated set of specific guidelines loaded with exemptions and clarifications, and scheduled to take effect that fall. On a practical level, the complex new rules translated into the return to network control of one hour of prime time each week (Sunday, 7:00–8:00 P.M.), as long as it was filled with FCC-approved kidvid or public affairs. There were the expected chal-

FALL 1975 SCHEDULE

		8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30
MON	ABC	BARBARY COAST		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)			
	CBS	Rhoda	PHYLLIS	All In The Family	Maude	Medical Center	
	NBC	THE INVISIBLE MAN		NBC Monday Night At The Movies			
TUE	ABC	Happy Days	WELCOME BACK, KOTTER	The Rookies		Marcus Welby, M.D.	
	CBS	Good Times	JOE AND SONS	SWITCH		BEACON HILL	
	NBC	Movin' On		Police Story		JOE FORRESTER	
WED	ABC	WHEN THINGS WERE ROTTEN	That's My Mama	Baretta		STARSKY AND HUTCH	
	CBS	Tony Orlando And Dawn Show		Cannon		KATE McSHANE	
	NBC	Little House On The Prairie		DOCTORS HOSPITAL		Petrocelli	
THR	ABC	Barney Miller	ON THE ROCKS	The Streets Of San Francisco		Harry O	
	CBS	The Waltons		CBS Thursday Night Movies			
	NBC	THE MONTEFUSCOS	FAY	ELLERY QUEEN		MEDICAL STORY	
FRI	ABC	MOBILE ONE		The ABC Friday Night Movie			
	CBS	BIG EDDIE	M*A*S*H	Hawaii Five-O		Barnaby Jones	
	NBC	Sanford And Son	Chico And The Man	The Rockford Files		Police Woman	
SAT	ABC	SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE WITH HOWARD COSELL		S.W.A.T.		MATT HELM	
	CBS	The Jeffersons	DOC	Mary Tyler Moore Show	Bob Newhart Show	Carol Burnett Show	
	NBC	Emergency		NBC Saturday Night At The Movies			

		7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30
SUN	ABC	SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON		The Six Million Dollar Man		The ABC Sunday Night Movie			
	CBS	THREE FOR THE ROAD		Cher		Kojak		BRONK	
	NBC	The Wonderful World Of Disney		THE FAMILY HOLVAK		NBC Sunday Mystery Movie (McCloud; Columbo; McMillan And Wife; McCOY)			

lenges to the new regulations, but the courts were more receptive than they had been to Access II the previous year, not even objecting to the mere nine months lead time allowed for industry adjustment. By the spring, the arguments against the new formula for prime time had been turned down and the FCC had a legally approved right to sit as judge and censor over a specific slice of network prime time programming.

That was only one hour from the schedule, hardly enough to assuage the critics of sex and violence. In the face of the tremendous pressure from the FCC, Congress, and the public, the networks needed to do something specific to blunt the criticism and take the sting from the continuing accusations.

In late December 1974, nearly four months after "Born Innocent" aired, CBS president Arthur Taylor proposed that all three networks agree to observe a "family hour" between 8:00 P.M. and 9:00 P.M. each night, during which they would air only material suitable for the entire family. Taylor promised that CBS would lead the way and urged the other networks to follow. One month later, the NAB, the National Association of Broadcasters (the self regulating organization of the television industry), voted overwhelmingly to make the family hour quasi-legal, revising its general code of practices established in the 1950s to include adherence to the concept. Its new rules required that "programming inappropriate for viewing by a general family audience" not be aired in the family hour and, beyond that, shows which "contain material that could be disturbing to significant segments of the audience" would have to be preceded by a warning that the program was intended for mature viewers—no matter what time of day it aired.

Other TV executives were furious but helpless. What network could dare openly say, "No, we are not going to adhere to the family hour. We'd rather fill our time with gratuitous sex and violence." That would be public relations suicide. So ABC and NBC joined CBS in setting up their schedules for the fall of 1975 in light of both Access III and the family hour. Congress was happy. The FCC was happy. Sponsors felt relieved. Adoption of the rule diffused the most intense public pressure, though it did not lay the issues to rest. With the family hour in effect, watchdog groups had very specific criteria by which to judge eight of each network's twenty-two prime time hours every week, as well as the encouragement to scan the remaining time for other offenses. Far from being a final solution, then, the rule created a host of other production and planning problems.

One question was obvious: Just what was appropriate for a general family audience? When dealing with the Sunday night kidvid slot in its access rules, the FCC specifically cited *The Wonderful World of Disney* as the kind of programming it wanted. *Disney*, however, was in a unique situation that really did not offer much help in planning other series. Its producers could draw on more than forty years of studio material, from beautifully photographed nature films to dozens of hit movies specifically aimed at kids to some of the best cartoon animation ever done. For twenty years the networks had tried and failed to generate just one program in this style; they certainly could not produce eight each in one season. A more practical model was CBS's *The Waltons* which offered an obvious hook: programs in the family hour could focus on ... families! Consequently, *Joe and Sons* (the struggles of a widower-sheet metal worker trying to raise his two teenage sons), *Three for the Road* (the travels of a widower-photographer who roamed the country in a motor home with his two young sons), *Swiss Family Robinson* (Irwin Allen's suburban-family-lost-in-space motif shifted back to a desert island), and *The Family Holvak* (the struggles of the Holvak family in a small Southern town during the Depression) appeared in the fall line-up. They were simple, sanitized, and saccharine with obvious heavy-handed morals handed down by preachy adults. None of these programs even made it to January. In fact, the only successful family hour copy of *The Waltons* was NBC's *Little House on the Prairie*, which had begun the previous fall.

Though *Little House on the Prairie* also presented a sentimental view of life (here, in the plains states in the 1870s), the cast was strong and the stories were interesting character studies of the individual members of the Ingalls family, told from the perspective of the second oldest daughter, Laura (Melissa Gilbert). The series was based on the *Little House* books written by the real life Laura Ingalls Wilder and, overall, the program downplayed violent action, presenting it as an aberration rather than the main thread of family life in the Old West. Unlike *The Waltons*, which had started out slowly in its first season, *Little House on the Prairie* popped into the top ten within weeks of its fall premiere and remained a consistent winner for NBC into the early 1980s. The program was given a strong boost from the very beginning by the credibility of Michael Landon in the lead role of Charles Ingalls, the young father. He eased his Little Joe persona from *Bonanza* into the new role of a struggling homesteader in the Minnesota frontier who was loved by his family and respected by his fellow pioneers. Like the Waltons, the Ingalls family had to adapt to the changing demands of life in an uncertain period of American history. They also faced difficult personal crises such as the sudden blindness of daughter Mary in the show's fourth season. Though it had been conceived well before the family hour concept was developed, *Little House on the Prairie* was an ideal show for the time period.

For the most part, however, the networks were extremely unsuccessful not only with new family-oriented programs for the family hour, but with practically all their other new offerings in those slots. Nineteen of the twenty-six new family hour programs from the 1975–76 season were axed by the next fall. Actually, this percentage was not that much worse than the failure rate for most new shows, but these were spectacular failures with extremely low ratings and uninspired episodes. CBS and NBC were particularly uncertain of just what sort of show was suitable for the family hour, and they groped for guidelines that would help sort through the maze of inconsistency. *All in the Family* was moved to a later slot, but *The Jeffersons* was kept in place. The family humor of *Good Times* remained in the family hour, but so did the realistic comedy-drama *of M*A*S*H*. Sex was to be downplayed, yet Cher wore low-cut, revealing outfits on her variety show.

Against such a mish-mash of contradictory interpretations of the new rule, writers and producers struggled to turn out their programs. Some managed to roll with the punches, such as the ever-resourceful crew *of M*A*S*H* who used the de-emphasis on sex as a plot springboard to end the overplayed torrid love affair between Major Burns and Major "Hot Lips" Houlihan. Other shows found their concepts crippled beyond repair, and many in the industry pointed to *Fay* as the best example of a potentially good show done in by the family hour.

Fay was created by Norman Lear graduate Susan Harris, who had written a number of episodes for *All in the Family* and *Maude*, including the two-part story of Maude's abortion. She conceived *Fay* as a free-wheeling realistic comedy about a middle-aged divorcee (Lee Grant) attempting to adjust to life after marriage. Instead, the program was stuffed into the family hour and Fay's adult concerns (such as the pursuit of an active sex life) were reduced to adolescent pap. Grant angrily lashed out at NBC for the change and for supporting the family hour in general, saying that, "they all think the American people have no intelligence whatsoever...the family hour is a form of childish censorship." Following the family hour guidelines, *Fay* became a hopeless bland mess that was canceled by NBC programming chief Marvin Antonowsky after only three weeks. Grant, appearing on the non-family hour *Tonight* show, heard the news backstage and, once on camera, labeled Antonowsky "the mad programmer" and then proceeded to symbolically "give him the finger."

Other people were just as outraged, but they expressed their anger through the courts, hoping to get the rule declared illegal. Right after the family hour took effect, the Writers Guild, the Directors Guild, the Screen Actors Guild, and top producers such as Bill Persky, Sam Denoff, and Norman Lear filed suit, claiming the family hour violated the First Amendment to the Constitution by infringing on free speech and setting up governmental intervention in programming. They pointed to the pressure from Congress and the FCC that had led to the "voluntary" inception of the rule and argued that it was created illegally. More important, they said it "chilled the creative activity" of TV and threatened to "set back television's move toward realism and social importance." They held these goals as more important than "protecting" impressionable children by shielding them from the slightest whiff of controversy. In fact, if violent shows were to be judged as dangerous because they fostered distorted concepts among children (such as violence being an acceptable solution to life's problems), then overly sentimental idealized programs could be accused of the same sin; they, too, presented goals and values out of synch with real life. While filming *Fay*, Lee Grant had touched on this concept: "I think it's dangerous and cruel to tell people that such a [sweet sentimental] world exists. It's simply not true."

In addition to these lofty motives, there was a very important financial threat perceived. The lucrative post-network syndication rerun value for shows such as *Kojak* and *Baretta* would most likely be greatly reduced by the tone set in the family hour rule. If such material was unsuitable in the early evening, could it possibly survive public scrutiny in the later afternoons when many children would certainly be watching?

The family hour case lasted until the end of May 1976, but Judge Warren J. Ferguson withheld ruling immediately, hoping that an out-of-court settlement could be worked out in the meantime. He feared that if he ruled against the family hour, the court would be compounding the problem by sticking its nose into programming decisions. In November 1976, when it became clear that an out-of-court compromise would never be reached, Judge Ferguson issued his ruling. He blasted the FCC, CBS, NBC, ABC, and the NAB for walking all over First Amendment rights, but he did not overturn the family hour rules. Instead, he issued a stern warning to the government to stay out of program control and urged the networks to dismantle the family hour if they wanted to. Despite the strong condemnation of the family hour by the court, the networks were still in the same bind: They could not eliminate the family hour without a great deal of embarrassing negative publici-

September 8, 1975
Harry Reasoner becomes the sole nightly news anchor on ABC, as Howard K. Smith is relegated to occasional commentaries.

September 19, 1975
Fawlty Towers. (BBC). John Cleese (as innkeeper Basil Fawlty) and his real-life wife Connie Booth (as parlormaid Polly) create and star in an intricately plotted comic farce set at a small town British seaside guest house, with Prunella Scales as Basil's domineering wife, Sybil, and Andrew Sachs as the hapless Spanish waiter, Manuel. The six-episode run is an instant hit, but the perfectionist creators take until 1979 to turn out an additional half-dozen. All twelve episodes later come to the U.S. via public television.

September 20, 1975
Saturday Night Live with Howard Cosell. (ABC). Roone Arledge and Howard Cosell team up for a weekly variety hour that unsuccessfully attempts to duplicate the successful Ed Sullivan formula.

September 21, 1975
Space: 1999. A British outer space series rejected by the American networks begins its U.S. run in syndication. Martin Landau, Barbara Bain, and Barry Morse play Earth scientists set adrift in space after a lunar explosion blows their base into the inky deep. After a strong start, the program falters as viewers complain about its wooden characterizations and weak storylines.

September 30, 1975
Home Box Office goes national via a satellite hook-up to cable systems throughout the country.

October 2, 1975
"Fear on Trial." (CBS). Twenty years after firing John Henry Faulk, CBS airs a two-hour docudrama on the famous blacklisting case. William Devane plays Faulk, George C. Scott plays lawyer Louis Nizer, and David Susskind and Mark Goodson appear as themselves. The *real* John Henry Faulk, meanwhile, has returned to television as a storyteller on the syndicated *Hee-Haw.*

October 2, 1975
ABC Late Night. (ABC). In a new move to compete with Johnny Carson, ABC begins airing repeats of old network series, beginning with episodes from its own *Movie of the Week* program and CBS's *Mannix.*

ty. For the rule to disappear, it would have to do so quietly, just fading away due to a lack of public and network interest (which was exactly what eventually happened). For the immediate future, however, the family hour became part of the network status quo, despite its obvious flaws and inherent contradictions.

Perhaps the most noticeable by-product of the family hour was its effect on the remainder of the schedule. Both old and new programs that were deemed too violent, sexy, or controversial for the family slot were all squeezed into the 9:00–11:00 P.M. period every night, prompting one TV critic to label it "Slime at Nine." This was more than just a cute phrase; it served as a cutting reminder of the ludicrous fallacy behind 8:00–9:00 P.M. as an off limits area to supposedly noxious adult fare. Many children were not ushered off to bed at 9:00 P.M. (8:00 P.M. in the Central time zone). The Nielsen audience figures revealed that the number of children that watched *Baretta* was greater than the number that watched *The Waltons.* Before long, the self-appointed guardians of public morality concluded that the family hour was inadequate protection for impressionable children and they began to search for a more effective solution, though for the time being their intense public pressure on broadcasters eased.

Ironically, CBS, the network that had proposed the family hour concept, suffered the most from it. In one swoop, CBS president Taylor had undermined the philosophies and formulas of the sophisticated, generally realistic programs such as *Kojak, All in the Family, M*A*S*H,* and *Maude* which had kept CBS number one through the 1970s. In doing so, he stopped the network's momentum cold and, in effect, completely changed the direction of television for the remainder of the decade. Rather than flourishing with further developments of adult themes, the networks had to redirect one-third of their efforts to kidvid programming. CBS and NBC were caught unprepared for that form. ABC, however, was ready.

Kidvid had been an important cornerstone of ABC strategy for more than twenty years, from *Disneyland* to *The Six Million Dollar Man.* While NBC and CBS foundered trying to devise programs suitable for the entire family for the fall of 1975, ABC quickly realized that its kidvid fare would be perfect for the family hour.

Taylor's tactical blunder had given ABC the opportunity to excel in a format that drew on one of its proven strengths. He then compounded his mistake by letting Fred Silverman, his chief programmer, slip away to ABC. This double stroke of good fortune could not have come at a more opportune time for the perennial third place ABC. In the fall of 1974, Fred Pierce had become president of the ABC network and he immediately launched a shakeup designed to pull ABC from its doldrums. He overhauled the fall schedule only a month after it began, determined to build on traditional ABC strengths and expand the network's horizons.

In the second season reshuffling, Pierce reduced the frequency of made-for-TV movies (which were no longer sure-fire blockbusters), brought forward one of the network's rare new-wave sitcoms (*Barney Miller*), and placed a renewed emphasis on the urban action-adventure format with *Baretta* and *S.W.A.T.* There was no immediate dramatic rise in ABC's fortunes, but Pierce clearly demonstrated that he had strong programming instincts. In the spring of 1975, he and his chief programmer, Martin Starger, put together one of the strongest ABC fall schedules in years. They placed their popular crime-action shows (*S.W.A.T., The Rookies, Baretta, Streets of San Francisco*) in the pivotal post-family hour 9:00–10:00 P.M. swing shift and built around them: crime and medical drama at 10:00 P.M.; variety, kidvid adventure, and sitcoms at 8:00 P.M. It was a solid schedule in theory, but many ABC master plans of the past had looked good on paper, only to fail in the field. Perhaps this one would have failed as well, but, in June 1975, Fred Silverman joined ABC and the new schedule was placed in the hands of one of television's sharpest programmers.

Silverman had written his master's thesis at Ohio State University in the late 1950s on ABC's prime time programming strategy. At age twenty-five he had become the wizard behind CBS's daytime programming success, and in the early 1970s had helped keep the network number one by modernizing its prime time lineup. In early 1975, with his contract about to expire, Silverman asked for an increase in official power at CBS, feeling he deserved the recognition. CBS president Taylor disagreed over this relatively modest request and let Silverman take his talents to ABC instead. One network insider observed that "giving Freddie just one more limousine might have kept him home."

Silverman did not make a single change in ABC's fall 1975 schedule, but his manipulative skills were put to the test immediately. ABC had scheduled its new season premieres for late September while both NBC and CBS had targeted their push to begin right on the heels of Labor Day with special "sneak preview" episodes, so it was possible for ABC to fall behind before one of its programs ever aired. In order to prevent NBC and CBS from developing runaway hits against weak ABC rerun competition, Silverman slotted clusters of flashy specials against these previews. His strategy worked. ABC held on until its own premieres and turned in its best ratings performance in more than a decade. The network jumped into second place, right behind CBS.

Of course, there were some immediate failures, including shows that had "looked good on paper." Mel Brooks had interrupted a string of red hot genre parodies in film to create a TV parody of Robin Hood, *When Things Were Rotten,* but his combination of broad comedy and mild obscenity was forced to fly on television without the obscenity and flopped. Howard Cosell tried to revive the Ed Sullivan combination of a non-performing host and a mixed bag of live variety acts, but he lacked the savvy and restraint to pull it off. And despite the continued popularity of *Star Trek* in syndicated reruns, William Shatner failed to attract a sufficiently large audience to carry the kidvid Western adventure yarns of *Barbary Coast.* For a change, though, ABC found good news mixed with the bad, and its new *Welcome Back, Kotter* and *Starsky and Hutch* joined the revitalized *Happy Days* as new season hits.

Very often in the past, ABC had stumbled upon good programming ideas, but was unable to slot them effectively or cultivate them into major hits. One of Fred Silverman's talents was spotting sometimes hidden potential in marginally successful shows and bringing it out into the open. For the fall of 1975, producer Garry Marshall's *Happy Days* was given a complete body job and began its third season sporting a new, more up-to-date theme song, flashier production, and a live audience. More important, the theretofore minor figure of Arthur "Fonzie" Fonzarelli was promoted to co-star status. When the series had begun in early 1974, ABC had been wary of focusing too much attention on a proto-hoodlum wearing a leather jacket, so Fonzie had been restricted to brief appearances in the stories. When on-camera, he was shown with his motorcycle-which somehow served as an acceptable excuse for the menacing leather jacket. In the revised premise for *Happy Days,* Fonzie was liberated from his bike and moved into the garage apartment of the Cunningham home, becoming, in effect, a member of the family. Fonzie's expanded role provided the series with a sorely needed strong central character to contrast with the bland world that had been set up. To stand out in this setting, Henry Winkler played his Fonzie character as a more exaggerated macho-bravado hero, who was not merely the toughest, sharpest teenager around, but also protector, counselor, and guru to both adults and teenagers in the neighborhood. They naturally turned to him because "the Fonz" always appeared to be on top of things and in control; he was "cool" in the face of virtually any challenge. This dichotomy between cool control and witless confusion charged the series with new energy and gave both the bland teens and hapless adults the motivation to assert themselves in order to win Fonzie's respect and approval. (Ron Howard's character of Richie improved the most in this manner.)

Setting up a dropout auto mechanic as the smartest guy in town was patently absurd, but the show needed such a larger-than-life caricature. The 1950s nostalgia hook that had first served as the basis for the series had worn thin very quickly. There was not any reason to be interested in the unexciting, slightly nerdish characters of Richie and Potsie, nor in the bumbling good intentions of Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham. Besides, *Happy Days* had never been a very good representation of teenage life in the 1950s anyway; it had merely imitated the bland world of 1950s TV sitcoms. With the elevation of Fonzie to the driving force in the *Happy Days* world, the series became the past as people wished to remember it, whether it was the 1950s, 1940s, or even the 1970s. In such memories, Fonzie was the perfect hero: He drew on his natural wits rather than formal schooling and could handle any situation better than stuffy, over-educated adults. Fonzie also became a hero to contemporary teens who were entranced by his cool control, and they turned Henry Winkler into a heart-throb of the 1970s.

The revitalized *Happy Days* registered a strong upsurge in ratings and served as an unexpectedly potent lead-in to a new teen sitcom, *Welcome Back, Kotter.* Stand-up comic Gabe Kaplan played a young teacher (Gabe Kotter) who accepted a post at his old high school in Brooklyn to teach a special remedial class of disruptive juvenile delinquents, nicknamed "the sweathogs." They consisted of an appropriately diverse group of ethnic types, including: Vinnie Barbarino, a dumb but handsome Italian (John Travolta); Juan Epstein, a Jewish-Chicano muscleman with a head full of

October 20, 1975
Robert MacNeil Report. Former NBC newsman Robert MacNeil presents a thirty-minute in-depth study of a top news story of the day. The program begins on the East Coast public television stations, then goes to the full PBS network early the following year (January 5). Later in 1976, Washington co-anchor Jim Lehrer receives co-billing.

November 3, 1975
Good Morning America. (ABC). A complete facelift for ABC's version of *Today,* including new hosts (David Hartman and Nancy Dussault) and a new newsman (Steve Bell).

November 5, 1975
End of the Sarnoff era at RCA as fifty-seven-year-old Robert Sarnoff is deposed as RCA's chairman of the board and chief executive officer.

February 2, 1976
Jackie Gleason brings back the Honeymooners, on ABC, as an occasional special. Audrey Meadows returns to the role of Alice Kramden as she and Ralph celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary.

April 12, 1976
ABC takes over Monday night baseball from NBC.

June 7, 1976
David Brinkley is promoted back to co-anchor (with John Chancellor) of *NBC Nightly News.*

June 14, 1976
The Gong Show. (NBC). Game show whiz Chuck Barris steps in front of the cameras as the last-minute choice for hosting his latest daytime project: a zany update of the *Original Amateur Hour* format. Aspiring amateur talent perform for a panel of celebrity judges, any of whom can eliminate the would-be stars by "giving them the gong."

July 10, 1976
Time-Life's Home Box Office network gets a competitor in the pay-cable television field in the form of Viacom's Showtime.

get-rich-quick schemes (Robert Hegyes); Frederick "Boom Boom" Washington, a confident, jive-talking black (Lawrence-Hilton Jacobs); and Arnold Horshack, a naive, ingratiating kid with a high pitched, squeaky voice (Ron Palillo). Kotter recognized their antics from his days as a class troublemaker ten years before and realized that the special class was their last chance; if he failed to win their trust and cooperation, they would probably leave high school without the basic skills for survival.

Welcome Back, Kotter had all the trappings of an insightful, topical study of ghetto education, only the producer (*Chico and the Man*'s James Komack) had no desire to take the series in that direction. It was intended as light family hour humor aimed at the kids, so the conflicts and crises at James Buchanan High School owed much more to *Our Miss Brooks* than Norman Lear. Occasionally there were a few serious message episodes on such topics as the dangers of drugs, the importance of a high school diploma, and sex education but, for the most part, the show consisted of stand-up comedy exchanges between Kotter and the sweathogs, very loosely tied together by minor plot complications. Of course, Kotter never seemed to teach anything, rarely asking questions much harder than "Who discovered America?" Instead, the sweathogs were always involved in "special educational activities" outside the classroom. The program fulfilled every child's secret fantasy of the perfect class: field trips, a comedian for a teacher, and no work. Yet despite the ancient jokes and simple plots, the series worked. The cast members had an excellent sense of timing and their personal interaction covered the many obvious flaws of the series quite well. After awhile, *Welcome Back, Kotter* produced its own teen idol, as Travolta's sexy Vinnie Barbarino began competing with Winkler's Fonz for pinup space in the teen magazines. Travolta parlayed this attention into an unusually successful transition to feature films, a feat rarely accomplished by TV stars.

With *Welcome Back, Kotter,* ABC showed how an old fashioned kidvid sitcom could handle the family hour requirements quite nicely, leaving the high-gloss violence to thrive after nine. ABC's big new success in this style of post-family hour programming was *Starsky and Hutch,* placed immediately after the increasingly popular *Baretta.* In order to breathe life into the familiar setting of two plainclothes detectives (Paul Michael Glaser as Dave Starsky and David Soul as Ken "Hutch" Hutchinson), producers Aaron Spelling and Leonard Goldberg took the Maverick formula of witty camaraderie under fire and mixed it with the 1970s world of urban crime and violence. Starsky and Hutch needed to be near Supermen to survive the endless car chases and shoot-outs that filled each episode, so their light banter, personal putdowns, and sly sideways glances at beautiful women were necessary to keep viewers interested in their lives. This obvious scenario had been in the ABC schedule for years in various action-adventure series, but it represented a major change by Spelling and Goldberg. They toned down their reliance on the Jack Webb style of super-efficient, flawless, gung-ho cops (their *S.W.A.T.* had been a souped-up version of Webb's *Emergency)* in favor of more casual characters that did not necessarily adhere to the law themselves. Thus, Starsky and Hutch resembled the street punks they fought more than other members of the police force. Though the program proved to be quite popular with many viewers, some critics pointed to the sleazier aspects of the package as the perfect example of "Slime at Nine" programming.

Nonetheless, with *Starsky and Hutch, Welcome Back, Kotter,* and *Happy Days,* ABC coasted through the early fall in second place, well behind CBS but far ahead of NBC. In a panic, NBC tore up its schedule and began making plans for wholesale changes in January. In mid-October, however, it received a welcome but unexpected boost from the World Series. The dramatic battle between the Boston Red Sox and Cincinnati Reds extended over seven games, most played in prime time, and brought in the highest sports ratings in television history at the time. On the strength of those two weeks of baseball competition, NBC jumped back into contention in the cumulative ratings contest. By December, less than one ratings point separated the three networks.

At this critical juncture in the season's ratings competition, Fred Silverman's instincts and expertise came into play as he analyzed ABC's position. Silverman reasoned that with the three networks virtually even, implementing successful mid-season changes was more important than planning the next fall's line-ups. The network that jumped ahead in January would have the momentum to carry it through the next season. After all, finishing first in 1975–76 meant starting the next season at number one. Consequently, Silverman treated January 1976 like a brand-new season. He not only introduced a cluster of second season hopefuls, he also slotted special programming designed to keep the competition constantly off balance.

CBS executives chose to follow the strategy that had worked for twenty years: wait out the competition. They felt that ultimately viewers would return to their old favorites on CBS after the novelty of the new programs wore off. The public had remained loyal to CBS for over two decades; the network still had more than half the shows in the top ten; and there was no reason to assume that ABC, even with Fred Silverman, could keep pace through the winter and spring. Therefore, CBS made only a few minor adjustments in its schedule for the second season. By early February, it was clear that CBS had underestimated the competition, as ABC began winning week after week of the ratings battle.

Silverman fine-tuned the ABC schedule, building strong lead-in shows perfect for the family hour. The biggest new hit of the second season was a spinoff from *Happy Days* featuring two young women, friends of the Fonz, Laverne (Penny Marshall, sister of the show's producer, Garry Marshall) and Shirley (Cindy Williams), who had graduated high school and were striking off on their own. They were aggressive working class characters employed at a Milwaukee brewery, but with a very active social life that frequently put them in conflict with snotty upper-class types. Like Fonzie, they drew on their natural instincts and know-how rather than formal education in successfully facing these situations. Though set in the late 1950s (like *Happy Days), Laverne and Shirley* presented women in a role unheard of in television twenty years before: They were strong, self-sufficient, and in control of their lives—as well as being lovable, wacky, and searching for eligible men. They were just as likely to pull their klutzy male co-workers, Lenny (Michael McKean) and Squiggy (David Lander), from some dumb misunderstanding as to need rescuing themselves. At the same time, the series also marked a return to the 1950s *I Love Lucy* style of physical comedy and slapstick humor, continuing the move from realism precipitated by the family hour.

Practically overnight, the thrust of new comedy shows had changed. Though *Welcome Back, Kotter, Happy Days,* and *Laverne and Shirley* had serious moments, their humor was straightforward, physical, and not very sophisticated or overly concerned with relevant social issues. Comic caricatures and "cool" heroes such as the Fonz and Barbarino became the important new hooks for the plots and laughs. This marked the beginning of the end of the dominance of Norman Lear's style of comedy, and his new entry for CBS, *One Day at a Time,* was his last new network series to become a top ten hit. *Laverne and Shirley* was placed in the hot slot following *Happy Days* (*Welcome Back, Kotter* was moved to lead into *Barney Miller* on Thursday),

and both series immediately jumped into the top ten. They were joined there by another ABC clone, *The Bionic Woman,* who was literally raised from the dead and given her own show.

In the spring of 1975, a two-part story on *The Six Million Dollar Man* introduced Jaime Sommers (Lindsay Wagner), an old flame of Steve Austin's who, after an accident, was also given nuclear powered limbs. The ratings for the episodes had been extremely high and the public obviously wanted to see more of the Bionic Woman; however, she had been killed at the end of that story. Such minor considerations had never stopped comic book writers in the past, so she was brought back in the fall of 1975 in another two-part episode of *The Six Million Dollar Man.* In January, *The Bionic Woman* became a weekly family hour series of its own. In order to help boost the new program's ratings, both Steve Austin and Jaime Sommers occasionally appeared in each other's stories, and both series were plugged in the coming attractions at the end of every episode. Anyone who was interested in one of the shows would end up watching both. Just to be sure, Silverman also flip-flopped the two series a few times, running *The Bionic Woman* in *The Six Million Dollar Man's* time slot, and vice versa.

ABC had unlocked the secret of the family hour, going straight for the motherlode: kids from two through seventeen. The kids responded and turned ABC's family hour fare into certified hits on five of the seven nights of programming. Suddenly, ABC was dominating most nights of the week, combining its family hour success with solid action-adventure shows that aired later in the evening.

In the past, ABC had blown ratings leads by finding one program type and working it to death. Silverman did not let this happen and seemed determined to develop winning programs in many directions so that ABC could build its own well-rounded stable of hits and draw viewer loyalty similar to the support that had taken CBS through season after season of success. Even as the new ABC hits became familiar to more and more people, Silverman began inserting special programming to lure new viewers who would then hopefully stick around for the regular series.

In early February, ABC devoted thirty and one-half hours of prime time to coverage of the Winter Olympics in Innsbruck, Austria. NBC's coverage of the Winter Games four years earlier had bombed, so many television insiders regarded this as a foolhardy risk, but it paid off. Roone Arledge's *Wide World of Sports* crew, led by Howard Cosell, Frank Gifford, and Chris Schenkel, clearly explained each event. They produced "up close and personal" profiles of standout performers (filmed in the athletes' home towns before the formal competition) to give viewers human background information in addition to the usual endless statistics. Bewildering events such as a cross-country ski and shoot competition became comprehensible and exciting contests with heroes the home audience could cheer on. The Winter Olympics coverage won most of its time slots, even up against established entertainment hits.

Immediately after the Winter Olympics, ABC introduced its first major followup to the successful 1974 novel-for-television, *QB VII,* a twelve-hour adaptation of Irwin Shaw's *Rich Man, Poor Man.* Like the British historical dramas presented on public television's *Masterpiece Theater, Rich Man, Poor Man* was a high-gloss soap opera. It traced the lives, loves, and intrigues of the members of a high-class family over the span of one generation, focusing on two fiercely antagonistic brothers (played by Peter Strauss and Nick Nolte). Like the Olympics, this miniseries also cracked the top ten.

In the spring, Silverman gave producers Aaron Spelling and Leonard Goldberg the chance to move from the cop mold to more serious themes in *Family.* The concept of the series had been kicked about at ABC for three years but landed nowhere because the network had been afraid that the average viewer would not be able to identify with the Lawrence family: they "lived too well, dressed too well, and spoke too well," one executive said. In short, they were portrayed as real people who talked about serious matters such as death, divorce, alcoholism, and homosexuality without wrapping the discussions in vicious putdowns or simpleminded caricatures. Silverman had enough faith in the series to give it an extended tryout against first-run competition in early March, rather than waiting for the late spring and summer rerun season. With practically no publicity, it replaced the ailing *Marcus Welby, M.D.* and captured a 40% share of the audience against CBS's gimmicky "Sting" rip-off, *Switch,* earning a spot in the fall lineup.

The Olympics were supposed to bomb. *Rich Man, Poor Man* was not supposed to be a big hit. *Family* was not even noticed at first. But they all clicked. CBS and NBC executives had felt certain that once the flashy specials were out of the way, ABC's new viewers would melt away. They did not. For eleven weeks in a row, through the winter and into the spring, ABC won the weekly ratings race, not just with its specials, but with growing viewer loyalty to its regular series. During the second season, ABC had four of the top five shows, nine of the top twenty, and thirteen of the top thirty. It was steadily chipping away at the cumulative ratings lead CBS had built at the start of the season.

In the summer, after the regular season had ended, ABC carried the Summer Olympic Games in Montreal and these proved more successful than the incredible 1972 Olympics in Munich. For two weeks, the network junked its prime time schedule and presented the Olympics all night, every night. It won every time slot every night, with an average 49% share of the audience. With this sports blockbuster, ABC matched and passed CBS's average over the previous twelve months. In one amazing season, ABC had become the number one network, ending years of programming frustration.

Fred Silverman appeared to be a miracle man, with everything he touched turning to gold. Actually, he still had not proved himself in creating new programs from scratch; he had relied on spinoffs and series already under development before he came to ABC. However, there was no denying his ability to program the material at hand into the best possible slots. Fred Silverman had taken his new network to the top and there was no one in the industry better equipped to keep it there.

1976–77 SEASON

36. The Big Event

DESPITE ABC'S INCREDIBLE PERFORMANCE from January to August of 1976, the network had just barely edged out CBS in the cumulative ratings for the entire twelve months of the 1975–76 season. CBS, in fact, had technically won the "regular" season (September to April), losing only when the summer rerun period was averaged in to the total. The fall of 1976 was therefore expected to mark the beginning of a very tight season-long ratings battle. To counter the revitalized ABC, NBC turned to special event programs while CBS eased in a handful of new shows, still convinced that, in the new season, viewers would return once again to their old favorites. As the network temporarily on top, ABC planned to build on the momentum of last season's dramatic come-from-behind victory, confident that it had won viewer loyalty with its new hits and frequent specials.

Just as he had done in keeping CBS on top earlier in the decade, Fred Silverman carefully arranged ABC's series, stars, and special events for the fall, yet he remained flexible enough to make last minute changes to counter the competition with the strongest possible line-up. He shifted a variety series featuring the musical duo of the Captain and Tennille from a scheduled summer tryout period directly into the fall line-up, where it could serve as both an ideal family hour program and an ABC promotional device. Then, at the end of August, he changed the announced time slots of five series, including new episodes of the popular *Rich Man, Poor Man* story. He rescheduled that series (labeled *Book II*) from a Saturday night slot to the frontlines on Tuesday at 9:00 P.M., right after *Laverne and Shirley*.

Counting on the strength of its familiar veterans, CBS held firm. NBC, however, juggled its own schedule in response, changing the announced time slots of six shows, eliminating *Snip* (a situation comedy based on the film "Shampoo"), and postponing the John O'Hara-inspired drama *Gibbsville* until an appropriate second season slot opened. These changes took place so close to the opening of the new season that the special annual fall preview edition of *TV Guide* (which hit the stands in mid-September) still contained profile background information on these two NBC proto-series. The editors apologized and explained that the text, graphs, and writeups in that issue reflected the new season as it stood at press deadline time, but that everything could change at any moment. Even the once sacrosanct fall schedules had succumbed to the increasingly common last-minute network brinkmanship aimed at scoring the season's first ratings blow.

Attempting to gain an additional edge, each of the networks also jammed September with special events such as blockbuster films, extended length series premiere episodes, TV movies, and celebrity-studded variety shows. The previous fall Silverman had used such "stunting" and "frontloading" techniques extensively in order to keep the other networks from building an insurmountable ratings lead over then number three ABC. This season, all three networks stressed such programming both to pump up their ratings on particular nights and also to tout their overall schedules by using regular series stars as special headliners and guests. Such cross-pollination encouraged viewers to follow a network's entire line-up to see their favorite series stars in action.

During premiere week, variety star Sonny Bono played a ruthless rock manager and record promoter on CBS's *Switch*, while the casts of both *Switch* and *One Day at a Time* appeared on the season opener of *The Tony Orlando and Dawn Rainbow Hour*. Freddie Prinze, from *Chico and the Man*, played a character similar in spirit to his fast-talking Chico in a new NBC made-for-television movie, "The Million Dollar Ripoff." On ABC, stars such as Penny Marshall and Cindy Williams from *Laverne and Shirley* and the sweathogs of *Welcome Back, Kotter* appeared throughout the week. They ushered in the new Captain and Tennille variety show as well as new series from Bill Cosby (*Cos*) and *Kotter's* producer, James Komack (*Mr. T and Tina*). To plug the one-hour season premiere of *Happy Days* featuring Roz Kelly as Pinky Tuscadero (a tough-talking woman with her eyes on the Fonz), Kelly also appeared the night before as a special guest on *The Captain and Tennille*.

Once viewers had sampled the many new offerings and specials, they did just as CBS had predicted and returned to their old favorites. However, these favorites now included Lee Majors, Henry Winkler, John Travolta, Robert Blake, Peter Strauss, Lindsay Wagner, Penny Marshall, Cindy Williams, and Gabe Kaplan—all stars of series on ABC. Fred Silverman had analyzed the network situation perfectly the previous season. The special events and flashy changes in the early months of 1976 had lured viewers and introduced them to the regular ABC stars and series. As these shows began winning week after week in the ratings, more and more people fell into the habit of looking in on the programs presented by the new number one network. These new viewer habits carried over into the fall and the expected tight three-way race never developed. Instead, ABC quickly jumped out in front and stayed there, dominating four or five nights a week. It was soon clear that ABC had solidified its position as the number one network and would win the 1976–77 season with ease. CBS's two-decade string of season victories was at last at an end. The real fight this season became the contest for the number two spot.

Of course, ABC had its share of clunkers including *Holmes and Yo Yo, The Nancy Walker Show,* and *Mr. T and Tina*; these never caught on even with all the hype. Overall, however, the network did extremely well with its returning shows and managed to come up with the only new regular series to break into the top ten, *Charlie's Angels*.

Produced by crime show veterans Aaron Spelling and Leonard Goldberg (of *Starsky and Hutch* and *The Mod Squad*). *Charlie's Angels* featured a trio of beautiful women taken from routine police work and assigned to special undercover detective duty by a man known only as Charlie (John Forsythe). He dubbed them his squad of "angels" and used them for dangerous undercover missions suited to their particular talents. Charlie never appeared in person, but gave his instructions over a speaker phone, outlining the details of each high-priority mission. When not near a phone, the angels took orders from Charlie's flunky, John Bosley (David Doyle). Despite the familiar cloak and dagger trappings, *Charlie's Angels* was far more than a routine detective-adventure show. It was an excuse to show sixty minutes of suggestive poses by walking, talking pin-up girls.

Each of Charlie's angels waged her battles in form-fitting clothes, a bikini, or nightgown, soundly thrashing international spies, deranged maniacs, and other strawmen-villains, yet barely worked up more than a mild, sexy sweat. Yet they also willingly responded to the orders from their off camera male superior, creating the perfect male sexual fantasy with a dream woman for every man: Sabrina (Kate Jackson) was the low-key intelligent type that combined brains and beauty; Kelly (Jaclyn Smith) symbolized the traditional high society charmer who was always in style; and Jill (Farrah Fawcett) brought up images of torrid back-street passion with her windswept coiffure and knowing smile.

Television critics gasped in horror when they realized that the most popular new series of the season had such titillation at its soft, suggestive core. They rushed to point out the obvious flaws of *Charlie's Angels,* panning the show as "dreadful," "schlock" and "stupid." Yet just as the general public had ignored the critical lambasting of *The Beverly Hillbillies* the decade before, viewers (male and female) eagerly followed the adventures of the three scantily clad glamour lovelies despite the knocks. The threadbare plots, papier-mâché characters, and wooden dialogue did not matter. Women were pleased to see a team of female adventurers more than hold their own in a standard television setting. The men were more than happy to ogle. Besides, nothing explicit ever took place on the screen.

The sex on *Charlie's Angels* was really just suggestive, squeaky clean TV sex. Even with their bra-less wardrobe, Sabrina, Kelly, and Jill were, in truth, just like previous television glamour girls such as the genie (Barbara Eden) of *I Dream of Jeannie,* the perfectly constructed female robot (Julie Newmar) of *My Living Doll,* and the aspiring starlets of *Bracken's World.* They never appeared in scenes of torrid physical passion, just in revealing costumes. The active imaginations of the viewers filled in the rest with whatever fantasy seemed appropriate.

With *Charlie's Angels*, ABC had once again struck ratings gold and the reality of the network's competitive position at last hit home at CBS. After the first month of the new season, though CBS still had twelve of the top forty shows (including the very successful *All in the Family* and *M*A*S*H*) the former number one found itself in the cellar. With the exception of a new blue collar working sitcom, *Alice* (based on the hit movie "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore"), all the new CBS shows bombed. More important, many previously solid CBS hits such as *Phyllis, Kojak,* and *Sonny and Cher* were dropping even as the ABC line-up soared.

Part of CBS's problem could be traced directly to the family hour, which CBS president Arthur Taylor had originally proposed and championed. Overnight it had shifted the emphasis in prime time programming away from relatively adult fare such as *Kojak* to the types of teen-oriented material that ABC had specialized in for years. While ABC rolled on with shows such as *Laverne and Shirley,* CBS was unable to develop new programs that could adapt its strengths to the demands of a television world less interested in topical issues and realistic violence.

A more important cause of CBS's downfall, however, was that while on top the network had become complacent and overconfident. Instead of developing a wide range of pilots and new shows as back-up inventory, the network had stagnated. Since the fall of 1974 CBS had come up with only three new hit shows (*Rhoda, The Jeffersons,* and *One Day at a Time*) to step in and share some of the load. As a result, CBS's success depended almost entirely on an increasingly old line-up. ABC, in contrast, had only one program (*The Streets of San Francisco*) that had been on before the fall of 1973.

In the late 1960s, CBS management had committed the same sin with an over-reliance on aging rural series, but then-network president Bob Wood and his chief programmer Fred Silverman had been able to snap CBS back to life by pruning the schedule and ushering in the Norman Lear-*All in the Family* era. That action had come just in time. Now, it was too late to save the 1976–77 season. As one CBS insider put it, "We're running out of gas."

In October, CBS's Arthur Taylor walked the plank and the

Less than a year after the premiere of *The Robert MacNeil Report*, Washington-based anchor Jim Lehrer *(left)* received official co-billing with the New York-based MacNeil *(right)* and *The MacNeil/Lehrer Report* was born. *(Courtesy of MacNeil/Lehrer Productions)*

FALL 1976 SCHEDULE

	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
M	THE CAPTAIN AND TENNILLE		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)				ABC
O	Rhoda	Phyllis	Maude	ALL'S FAIR	EXECUTIVE SUITE		CBS
N	Little House On The Prairie		NBC Monday Night At The Movies				NBC
T	Happy Days	Laverne And Shirley	Rich Man, Poor Man: Book II		Family		ABC
U	Tony Orlando And Dawn Rainbow Hour		M*A*S*H	One Day At A Time	Switch		CBS
E	BAA BAA BLACKSHEEP		Police Woman		Police Story		NBC
W	The Bionic Woman		Baretta		CHARLIE'S ANGELS		ABC
E	Good Times	BALL FOUR	All In The Family	ALICE	The Blue Knight		CBS
D	The Practice	NBC Movie Of The Week			THE QUEST		NBC
T	Welcome Back, Kotter	Barney Miller	TONY RANDALL SHOW	NANCY WALKER SHOW	The Streets Of San Francisco		ABC
H	The Waltons		Hawaii Five-O		Barnaby Jones		CBS
R	THE GEMINI MAN		BEST SELLERS (CAPTAINS AND THE KINGS; ONCE AN EAGLE)		VAN DYKE AND COMPANY		NBC
F	Donny And Marie		The ABC Friday Night Movie				ABC
R	SPENCER'S PILOTS		CBS Friday Night Movies				CBS
I	Sanford And Son	Chico And The Man	The Rockford Files		SERPICO		NBC
S	HOLMES AND YOYO / MR. T AND TINA / # NEW ORIGINAL WONDER WOMAN		Starsky And Hutch		MOST WANTED		ABC
A	The Jeffersons	Doc	Mary Tyler Moore Show	Bob Newhart Show	Carol Burnett Show		CBS
T	Emergency		NBC Saturday Night At The Movies				NBC

	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
S	COS		The Six Million Dollar Man		The ABC Sunday Night Movie				ABC
U	60 Minutes		Sonny And Cher Show		Kojak		DELVECCHIO		CBS
N	The Wonderful World Of Disney		NBC Sunday Mystery Movie (McCloud; Columbo; McMillan; QUINCY, M.E.)			THE BIG EVENT			NBC

network began a top-to-bottom executive housecleaning. The new management team, led by Gene Jankowski, faced both the long-term task of rebuilding the network's schedule and the immediate challenge of trying to salvage the current season by at least moving ahead of NBC into the number two spot.

NBC found itself in a much better competitive position going into the fall of 1976. Not only did the network have high hopes for two special prime time vehicles (dramatic miniseries and "big event" specials), it had also developed a new comedy-variety show the previous season that had become the talk of television: *Saturday Night Live.*

Since the early 1950s, NBC had consistently turned to comedy-variety as an important television programming strategy. Stars such as Bob Hope, Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, Sid Caesar, Flip Wilson, and Dan Rowan and Dick Martin had headlined some of the network's most successful programs. Though Bob Hope and Dean Martin continued to do occasional specials, NBC had been unable to find successful new headliners for a weekly series going into the mid-1970s. The network had brought in the Smothers Brothers as mid-season replacements in 1974–75, but, after strong opening ratings in January 1975, their series failed. Despite fresh talent such as Steve Martin, Don Novello (as Vatican correspondent Father Guido Sarducci), and writer Chevy Chase, the Smothers seemed unable to adapt to the new decade. They fluctuated between familiar rehashes of bits from their late 1960s show (with Pat Paulsen and Bob "Officer Judy" Einstein) and bland new skits with guests such as Ringo Starr.

For the fall of 1975, the network turned to former *Laugh-In* writer Lorne Michaels to supervise a new comedy-variety show. (Over the previous two seasons Michaels had worked on two successful comedy-variety specials starring another *Laugh-In* graduate, Lily Tomlin, first as a writer, then as a producer.) Because the proposed new NBC series was viewed as somewhat experimental, it was slotted to appear late night on Saturdays, 11:30 P.M. to 1:00 A.M., three times a month. This placement was also aimed at tapping the young adult audience, a long-ignored but growing group of viewers that the networks had begun to pursue during the 1972–73 season.

The initial shows targeted for this demographic group featured rock music. ABC was first in November 1972 with a late Friday night special, *In Concert.* The program soon became a twice-monthly fixture and NBC followed in early 1973 with its own weekly late night series, *The Midnight Special* (hosted by legendary rock disk jockey Wolfman Jack). That program also broke new ground by becoming the latest-starting network show in television history, beginning after the Friday night *Tonight* show (1:00 A.M. Saturday morning). Though rock had rarely been able to capture sufficiently high ratings to succeed in prime time, the late Friday night exposure attracted a solid audience consisting primarily of young adults that shunned prime time (going out for the evening instead) but who returned to catch their favorite acts before turning in.

In the fall of 1974, NBC slotted a monthly news and public affairs program, *Weekend,* in the Saturday night slot of 11:30 P.M. Its slightly tongue-in-cheek style catered toward this same young adult crowd. For the fall of 1975, NBC's new Saturday night comedy-variety show was to fill in the remaining three Saturday nights of each month.

In setting up the new program, Michaels was determined to develop *Saturday Night Live* as a special entity, different from standard prime time network variety. Like NBC's *Your Show of Shows* from the early 1950s, there would be guest stars, but they would be generally limited to a guest host that would work with a continuing company of writers and supporting players. Like the late night rock shows, the musical guests (rock, jazz, and folk-oriented) would be presented straight, performing one or two songs without engaging in banal "transition" patter. Like *Laugh-In* and the original *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour,* there would be topical references and satirical jabs, as well as parodies of television, movies, and commercials. And, like the fondly remembered golden age of television, the program would be presented *live,* from New York City, before a real studio audience.

The decision to do the program as a live New York production immediately gave the project a distinct flavor and generated high expectations, while the late night weekend slot provided the much needed time to work out rough spots. The first broadcast of *Saturday Night Live* (originally titled *NBC's Saturday Night*) took place on October 11, 1975, with veteran comic George Carlin as host and Billy Preston and Janis Ian as the musical guests. It was very uneven. Singer-songwriter Paul Simon hosted the second show and, in effect, turned it into a Paul Simon musical special. (He had three guest singers and together they performed nearly a dozen numbers.) Yet in just a few months, working with subsequent hosts such as Rob Reiner, Lily Tomlin, Candice Bergen, Richard Pryor, Buck Henry, and Dick Cavett, the program's crew gelled and the show began to develop its style, a reputation, and a following.

High school and college students were among the first to latch on to the show, partially because the program was deliberately outrageous, sometimes even tasteless, in the style of the increasingly popular BBC import, *Monty Python's Flying Circus,* and the homegrown radio, stage, and magazine efforts of the *National Lampoon.* The opening joke on the very first show involved the Python-ish premise of two men dying of heart attacks, capped with the punchline: *"Live,* from New York, it's *Saturday Night!"*

As with *Your Shows of Shows,* the company of regular performers evolved into the real stars of the series. Dubbed "The Not Ready for Prime Time Players," Dan Aykroyd, John Belushi, Chevy Chase, Jane Curtin, Garrett Morris, Laraine Newman, and Gilda Radner each developed their own distinctive character types and caricatures. Chase was the first to attract a following, based chiefly on his mock newscasts ("Weekend Update") and his portrayal of a bumbling, dull-witted President Gerald Ford.

Aykroyd, Belushi, and Chase also served as program writers, joining *National Lampoon* co-founder Michael O'Donoghue, Lorne Michaels himself, and nearly a dozen others including Al Franken, Tom Davis, Anne Beatts, Rosie Shuster, and Alan Zweibel. They produced the expected excellent movie and television parodies, including a remake of "Citizen Kane" (revealing Kane's last words to be: "Roast Beef on Rye with Mustard"), *Star Trek*'s final voyage, and a "Jaws"-like urban killer, the "Land Shark." Political and topical subjects ranged from President Richard Nixon's final days in office to a white/black "job interview" skit with an increasingly racially charged word association game between Chevy Chase and host Richard Pryor. Yet there were also very effective mood pieces such as a chance coffee shop encounter between a man and a woman he had admired from afar years before, in high school. By the spring of 1976, *Saturday Night Live* had gained such a following that even Gerald Ford's press secretary, Ron Nessen (a former NBC news correspondent), agreed to serve as host, bringing along film inserts of President Ford himself.

For the next four years, *Saturday Night Live* grew in popularity and quality. Though the very nature of a live weekly show meant that any particular episode might be weak, overall the series emerged as the most daring and innovative television program of the late 1970s. Hosts such as consumer advocate Ralph Nader, football star O. J. Simpson, and rock star Frank Zappa, as well as more traditional Hollywood actors such as Cecily Tyson, Richard Benjamin, and Elliott Gould, turned in excellent performances as headliners. Though Chevy Chase left the cast in the program's second season to pursue a solo career in films (he was replaced by another of the show's writers, Bill Murray), the rest of the players remained, further developing their stock of characters and routines. Skits became increasingly complex and sophisticated with such presentations as "The Pepsi-Syndrome" (based on the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island and the film "The China Syndrome") running nearly twenty minutes.

After five seasons, all the players as well as Lorne Michaels himself left the show. A completely new cast took over in the fall of 1980 but it was a chaotic transition; by 1985, Michaels was lured back to the helm. After leaving the show, most of the original cast attempted solo film projects, with Chevy Chase and John Belushi scoring the biggest initial successes: Chase in "Foul Play" and Belushi in "National Lampoon's Animal House" and "The Blues Brothers" (with Dan Aykroyd). Through many up-and-down cycles (in both ratings and creativity), *Saturday Night Live* carried on into the twenty-first century, serving as the launching ground for wave after wave of comedians including Eddie Murphy, Dennis Miller, Phil Hartman, Mike Myers, Chris Farley, Chris Rock, Adam Sandler, Will Ferrell, Amy Poehler, Jimmy Fallon, Seth Meyers, and Tina Fey.

Unlike *Your Show of Shows,* all *Saturday Night Live* episodes were preserved on video tape and could be rerun during the summer or during the regular season to give the cast a few weeks off. In the show's fifth season, NBC took highlights from these tapes and turned them into a brief prime time series, *The Best of Saturday Night Live.*

NBC's 1975 late night comedy-variety experiment was quickly recognized as an unqualified success and, for the fall of 1976, the network hoped for similar success in prime time with another traditional NBC programming strength, blockbuster special events.

Ever since the Pat Weaver days of the early 1950s when NBC had last been on top, the network had done very well with special programming. In the 1975–76 season, for instance, the prime time World Series broadcasts had kept NBC in contention for number one through December. For the 1976–77 season, NBC set aside a specific weekly slot for prime time sports extravaganzas, blockbuster movies, special dramatic presentations, and even nostalgic retrospectives. Dubbed *The Big Event,* this Sunday night series was designed to expand or shrink to accommodate different types of programs. Some nights it ran ninety minutes; on others it filled the entire Sunday night prime time block. Occasionally *The Big Event* extended to other nights as well. This was the most flexible, extensive use of irregularly scheduled programming any network had attempted in years.

The Big Event got off to an inauspicious start with "The Big Party," a boring collection of live and taped clips from a number of

August 30, 1976
Tom Brokaw replaces Jim Hartz as host of *Today.*

September 20, 1976
The Muppet Show. Jim Henson's muppets get their own program, a high-quality syndicated half hour aimed at the access slots.

September 21, 1976
The Toronto branch of the improvisational theater troupe Second City brings its satirical skewering to TV with *Second City Television* on Canada's Global network. John Candy, Joe Flaherty, Eugene Levy, Andrea Martin, Catherine O'Hara, Dave Thomas, and Harold Ramis are the core performers (later joined by Rick Moranis and Martin Short), playing multiple roles at a fictional low-budget TV station in "Melonville." The series is syndicated to the U.S. in 1977 and lands a late night network slot on NBC in 1981 as *SCTV Network 90.*

September 23, 1976
Televised debates between presidential candidates return after a sixteen-year hiatus as Democratic challenger Jimmy Carter takes on incumbent Republican Gerald Ford.

October 3, 1976
Quincy, M.E. (NBC). Jack Klugman stars in a new segment of *The NBC Mystery Movie,* featuring television's first coroner-as-cop.

October 4, 1976
Barbara Walters, television's first million-dollar newswoman, joins Harry Reasoner as co-anchor of *The ABC Evening News.*

October 18, 1976
Four months after Barbara Walters left, twenty-six-year-old Jane Pauley debuts as her replacement on *Today.*

October 19, 1976
The New Avengers. (Thames). The popular adventure series of the 1960s returns in top form in Britain with Patrick Macnee continuing his role as government agent John Steed, aided by two new young partners: Joanna Lumley as Purdey and Gareth Hunt as Mike Gambit. The updated Avengers arrive in the States on CBS in a late night slot for the fall of 1978.

"exciting and glamorous showbiz parties" throughout New York City. Rather than perform, most of the celebrities merely plugged their latest projects before waving the camera on. Dick Cavett, host of the confusing, fractured event, said at one point, "I'm absolutely humiliated because I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing." Shortly thereafter, he began doing impromptu hand shadows.

Subsequent *Big Event* presentations were much better shows, offering viewers many exciting television programs, from the annual World Series contest to the American network debut of the 1939 movie classic, "Gone With the Wind." The *Saturday Night Live* cast made its first prime time appearance in February with "Live from the Mardi Gras-It's *Saturday Night* on Sunday!" Among the special dramatic presentations were several docudramas including "Raid on Entebbe" (the Israeli commando rescue mission to Africa), "Tail Gunner Joe" (a silly and self-righteous review of McCarthyism), and "Jesus of Nazareth" (a special Easter presentation of the life of Christ, directed by Franco Zeffirelli). There were also well produced retrospectives that gave producers and writers the chance to rummage through movie studio and network archives and to share, on the air, the nostalgic treasure trove they uncovered. Two of the best of this type were the three-hour *"Life* Goes to the Movies" (a dandy review of cinematic history hosted by Shirley MacLaine, Liza Minnelli, and Henry Fonda) and the four-and-one-half-hour "NBC: The First Fifty Years" (NBC's own history presented through the eyes of Greg Garrison, Dean Martin's producer, and hosted by Orson Welles, the era's consummate voice of history).

The Big Event gave NBC a tremendous weekly ratings boost that pushed it past CBS and into brief head-to-head competition with ABC, largely due to the record-breaking audience for "Gone With the Wind," telecast over two nights in early November. At the time, the film won the distinction of being the highest rated program in television history.

The chief problem with *The Big Event* was the one that always followed such special series, from Pat Weaver's spectaculars to ABC's made-for-TV movies: There were only so many special events. What's more, each episode had to stand on its own with less carryover than for a regular series with returning characters and a consistent situation. Viewers did not automatically follow *The Big Event* but rather tuned in special programs that had caught their attention. In subsequent seasons, then, the emphasis of *The Big Event* shifted somewhat to more frequent use of theatrical features, special made-for-TV movies, and miniseries, mixed in with occasional specials.

Even with its shortcomings, *The Big Event* was a welcome success for NBC and became one of the top ten shows during the 1976–77 season. It demonstrated that viewers would tune to special events, even those carried over an entire evening or running several nights. Lacking many regular series hits, NBC frequently billed special events on other nights as "Big Events" and began to further develop this "event programming" strategy as its answer to ABC's success. This dovetailed perfectly with the network's increasing interest in miniseries, begun that season with the *Best Sellers* anthology.

Best Sellers was an obvious attempt to cash in on the success of ABC's novel-for-television hit *Rich Man, Poor Man* by using the approach taken by public television's *Masterpiece Theater* to present several "novels" in one season. Since 1970, *Masterpiece Theater* had served as the weekly slot for such miniseries as *The Pallisers* and *Upstairs, Downstairs,* running one entire work before moving on to the next title. These sweeping, romantic dynasty epics (chiefly British series, usually set in the 1800s) pulled in surprisingly high ratings for PBS and had even inspired CBS to attempt an Americanized version in 1975–76, *Beacon Hill.* That series, however, quickly became bogged down by its period production and stilted storyline and lasted for only half a season.

NBC planned to avoid those problems with *Best Sellers* by taking the attractive soap opera hooks of lust and intrigue and wrapping them within the works of slick pulp fiction in the style of Harold Robbins, Jacqueline Susann, and Irwin Shaw. The network turned to Universal Studios for production of the series and the studio brought in big name stars as special secondary and cameo players to support the very beautiful but generally unknown newcomers cast in the lead roles. In addition, each story was structured to follow the style of the drawn-out British epics that spanned generations, though these American versions usually focused on World War II.

Best Sellers consisted of four miniseries: Taylor Caldwell's *Captains and the Kings,* Anton Myrer's *Once an Eagle,* Norman

Bogner's *Seventh Avenue,* and Robert Ludlum's *The Rhinemann Exchange.* They all did fairly well in the ratings, though overall *Best Sellers* was not a blockbuster, averaging just a 27% share of the audience. This was quite a letdown and far below the top ten performance of *Rich Man, Poor Man* the previous season. One other NBC novel-for-television, however, did much better. Upton Sinclair's *The Moneychangers,* which ran in four parts on *The Big Event* in December, scored a 35% share of the audience presenting exactly the same type of soapy drama as *Best Sellers.* Apparently the weekly *Best Sellers* slot was not the most effective commercial format for these novels for television. In fact, a weekly series seemed to reduce the impact of the programs as special events. Incorporating such miniseries within *The Big Event* format, though, seemed to offer the best of both worlds. Not only could each one be touted as a special presentation, there was also no need to churn out "a chapter each week" because other material appeared in the slot as well. NBC therefore dropped the weekly *Best Sellers* after only one season and merged subsequent miniseries into various *Big Event* and movie slots.

Although NBC had made the most substantial commitment to special events and miniseries for the 1976–77 season, it was number one ABC that scored with the show that was both the season's most successful miniseries and television's biggest big event.

Following the high ratings of one of television's first multi-part docudramas, *QB VII* (presented in April 1974), ABC had begun work on other historical-type dramas, based both in pure fiction *(Rich Man, Poor Man)* and real life *(Eleanor and Franklin).* One of the books selected for miniseries treatment was *Roots,* a work in progress by black writer Alex Haley, who had distinguished himself with his assistance on the autobiography of black activist Malcolm X in the mid-1960s. At that time, Haley had become increasingly interested in his own black heritage and, at age forty-four, set about reconstructing his family genealogy, determined to trace his personal roots back to Africa, if possible. His search consumed nearly twelve years and was financed chiefly through the advance sale of every possible permutation of the story he hoped to tell, including an adaptation for television.

Plans for the David Wolper production of *Roots* were already well under way before Fred Silverman came to ABC, but it was Silverman who had to decide the most effective way to present the finished product. Haley's incessant probing had resulted in a story that was potential ratings dynamite, tracing the struggle for freedom by Kunte Kinte, an African hunter brought to America as a slave in colonial days, and his descendants. The twelve-hour adaptation took Haley's story from the kidnapping of the young Kunte Kinte (LeVar Burton), through several generations of slavery to the family's post-Civil War independence on their own farm. Subtitled "The Triumph of an American Family," *Roots* was an epic drama of love, war, and death in the soapy style of the successful *Rich Man, Poor Man.* It was assumed that ABC would place *Roots* in a weekly slot (two or three hours at a time) for a month or two, just as it had done with *Rich Man, Poor Man.* Instead, Silverman chose to transform *Roots* into a special television event and he scheduled it for eight consecutive nights, from Sunday, January 23, through Sunday, January 30, 1977, running one or two hours each night. Such treatment had never been given to an entertainment program before, though it was not unprecedented. In its coverage of the Olympics the previous season, ABC had junked its entire prime time schedule for two straight weeks in order to present special sports coverage. The packaging of *Roots* was a simple variation on that strategy.

Silverman was taking a chance with the eight nights of Roots, facing either overkill from too much exposure at once on a sensitive topic, or indifference to the entire subject, especially by whites. Of all the networks, though, ABC was in the strongest position and had the most room to maneuver. The continued high ratings of ABC's regular series had given the network a comfortable lead in the cumulative ratings race so it could have absorbed even a mediocre performance. Just to be safe, though, Silverman made certain that *Roots* ended its run before the vital February ratings sweeps period began.

Naturally, ABC gave *Roots a* tremendous buildup on the air, emphasizing the star-studded cast that included O. J. Simpson, John Amos, Leslie Uggams, Cicely Tyson, Ben Vereen, Ed Asner, Chuck Connors, Lloyd Bridges, and Lorne Greene. It also encouraged schools and civic groups to participate in special courses and discussions based on the program. Haley himself was already working the lecture-and-talk-show circuit hyping the book, so he started including plugs for the television adaptation as well. Just before the miniseries aired, the hardcover edition of *Roots* topped the bestseller charts. Yet despite all the promotion, no one was prepared for the tremendous surge of interest that exploded across the nation.

Roots began with an unexpectedly large number of viewers on opening night and the interest just kept growing. By the time the series concluded, it had broken practically every ratings record in TV history. One-hundred-thirty million people saw some part of

November 11, 1976
"Network," Paddy Chayefsky's prophetic film fantasy of television network strategy taken to a deadly extreme, opens in New York. Peter Finch plays Howard Beale, news anchor for the mythical UBS network, who angrily denounces American broadcasting and American life in general, shouting, "I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!" Instead of firing him, the network uses "the mad prophet of the airwaves" to build an audience. When his ratings drop, Beale is assassinated by the network's hired guns.

December 17, 1976
WTCG, Ted Turner's Atlanta UHF independent station carried by cable in six Southern states, becomes a "super station" by sending its signal, via satellite, to cable systems nationwide.

March 19, 1977
After seven successful seasons, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* goes out with a sly twist: In the final episode, the new management of WJM-TV fires the entire staff except for the incompetent Ted Baxter.

May 4, 1977
After being paid one million dollars, former President Richard Nixon comes out of nearly three years of hibernation to be interviewed by David Frost in the first of five hour-long programs syndicated nationally.

May 11, 1977
CBS chairman William Paley relinquishes his other job, chief executive officer, to CBS president John Backe.

June 1, 1977
Roone Arledge, president of ABC Sports, becomes president of ABC News as well.

Roots, more than any other entertainment program ever aired, topping even the spectacular ratings of NBC's presentation of "Gone With the Wind" two months earlier. ABC won every night *Roots* aired and its ratings average for the week (35.5%) was the highest any network had ever registered. The eight episodes of *Roots* held the top eight ratings positions of the week, boosting all twenty-one of ABC's shows into the top twenty-six as well. The concluding segment snared a 71% share of the audience and was, at the time, the highest rated entertainment show in TV history. (The other seven segments placed fourth, fifth, sixth, eighth, ninth, tenth, and thirteenth in the all-time ratings compilation, as of 1977.) The first post-*Roots* issue of the showbiz weekly *Variety* epitomized the entertainment industry's reaction to the program as it bluntly headlined: "Roots Remakes TV World in Eight Nights!"

The more impulsive analysts and executives went even further, declaring that thirty years of programming tradition had been exploded practically overnight, and that *Roots* marked the passing of regular weekly TV fare in favor of diversified miniseries that placed an extra emphasis on reality. Some people even asserted that *Roots,* and *Roots* alone, had made ABC number one for the 1976–77 season. Such contentions conveniently ignored both the merely adequate ratings of other miniseries that season, as well as the strength of ABC's regular line-up.

In reality, ABC had been safely ensconced at the top before *Roots* aired and its ratings never slumped once *Roots* was gone. Regular weekly series were still the backbone of television and *Roots* did not mark the end of that format. It was merely an exceptionally successful special event. Nonetheless, *Roots* had passed beyond being viewed as merely a very successful TV show to the status of a national phenomenon, and the nation's pundits felt obligated to explain every aspect of its success. *Time* magazine confidently labeled its story: "Why *Roots* Hit Home." Other magazines, newspapers, and talk shows rushed to present their own sweeping observations, identifying *Roots* in terms such as "the ultimate admission of white guilt" and "the beginning of a new era of racial harmony."

There was certainly a good deal to analyze. Millions of people had rearranged eight days of their lives in order to follow *Roots* on television. Restaurants, social clubs, and movie houses reported sharp drops in attendance during the broadcast, while bookstores faced mobs of buyers who depleted their stockpiles of the book. Places such as drug stores and newsstands, which normally never touched hardcover editions, sold *Roots.* Beyond that, people from every ethnic group began to take an interest in their own personal roots and thousands followed Haley's lead in digging through state birth records, newspaper files, and old shipping logs. It was obvious that *Roots* had touched Americans in every walk of life, but in their zeal to come to grips with a very special event, people ignored many simple, obvious aspects of the *Roots* phenomenon.

Ethnic pride and interest in U.S. history had been on the upswing for years, reaching a peak during the 1976 American bicentennial celebrations. Haley, in fact, dedicated the book as his bicentennial gift to the nation. *Roots* was therefore presented to an exceptionally receptive audience which was generally familiar with the highlights of the country's developments. The program was also handed a built-in base audience of sorts: An extended cold weather snap throughout the East and Midwest forced many people to remain home, so television viewing was slightly higher than usual anyway.

Above all, *Roots* attracted and kept its audience because it contained the basics of entertaining television: excellent writing, first rate acting, effective violence, strong relationships, tantalizing sex angles, a clear-cut conflict between good and evil, and an upbeat ending. Although race was its central theme, in structure *Roots* was actually more like a Western in the tradition of *Bonanza* and *Wagon Train* only with blacks as the heroes and whites as the villains. The willingness of whites to identify with the black characters did not reflect an admission of racial guilt as much as the usual desire of the audience to side with the good guys on TV. Their allegiance was perfectly consistent with twenty years of television adventure yarns.

Of course, the presentation of blacks as the good guys was a very important change. Over the eight nights of *Roots,* millions shared the black perspective on very familiar events, seeing the old story of the struggle for personal freedom and the fulfillment of the American dream from a new vantage point. "The triumph of an American family" cheered by the nation was, for the first time, the triumph of black Americans. In a way no lecture, preacher, or textbook ever could, *Roots* conveyed the essence of black pride and black culture to millions of Americans. *Roots,* in that sense, *did* become far more than just a successful television show. It came to serve as a respected national rallying point for all black Americans, transforming Alex Haley's own personal "obsession" into a symbol of ethnic pride.

1977–78 SEASON

37. T & A TV

IN EARLY 1975, DESPITE THE SUCCESS of *All in the Family, Sanford and Son, Maude, The Jeffersons,* and *Good Times,* producer Norman Lear found himself unable to convince any of the three commercial networks to pick up one of his new program projects: a spoof of soap operas. Even CBS, which had financed the pilot, declined to exercise its option on the material. Lear was convinced he had another potential hit on his hands, so he decided to use his contacts and prestige to deal directly with local television programmers, by-passing the networks completely in order to syndicate the show. He met with nearly two dozen of the country's top station managers in late summer 1975, offering them rights to *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman.*

Pitching a show too hot for the networks directly to the locals went against the conventional programming wisdom. Traditionally, local programmers were viewed as even more fearful of controversy than the networks. Yet local executives were also interested in getting the largest slice of the television advertising pie possible when the "middle men" (the networks) were eliminated. Earlier that year more than 100 stations had purchased an original science fiction series, *Space: 1999,* directly from a British production company that had offered it to them following rejection by all three networks. Lear was then one of the most successful program producers in television, so the locals gave his proposal serious consideration. After viewing a few sample episodes, several stations agreed to sign on, though Lear did not woo everyone. WNBC and independent WPIX from New York City turned down *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* before Metromedia's WNEW bought it. Chicago's top VHF independent, WGN, decided to pass on the offer as well, so the series went to a low-rated UHF station instead. By *Mary Hartman's* premiere in January 1976, though, Lear had assembled a complement of fifty-four stations to run the series, with new episodes five days a week.

At first, many stations placed *Mary Hartman* in the afternoon, the time when other television soaps played. Other programmers discovered that *Mary Hartman* worked quite well in a late night slot and many placed the show just after prime time. It was there that, unexpectedly, the series took off and became a national hit. For the first time, a syndicated program became the most talked about series on television.

Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman built a following by walking the delicate line between reality and farce in presenting the adventures of characters from the mythical town of Fernwood, Ohio. The program was funny, clever, satirical, sometimes outrageous, and sometimes touching. In form, it played more like a regular soap opera than a sitcom: There was a complicated continuing storyline, no laugh track, and an absence of typical comedy one-liners. Yet the pacing was faster than the usual soaper and the expected plot complications of illicit sex, love triangles, and dreams of showbiz success were set slightly but effectively askew by exaggerating both the soap opera style and soap opera plot twists.

Mary Hartman (Louise Lasser) was a typical middle class housewife and mother, only she wore a little girl's Pollyanna housedress and pigtails. Her husband Tom (Greg Mullavey) was temporarily impotent, her young daughter Heather (Claudia Lamb) was ready to run away, her promiscuous sister Cathy (Debralee Scott) was suicidal, and her grandfather Raymond (Victor Kilian) had been identified as the neighborhood flasher. Mary's deepest concern in the opening episode, however, was over the waxy yellow buildup on her kitchen floor.

In subsequent weeks as the storyline evolved, viewers found themselves hooked on the characters of Mary, her family, and her friends, as well as on the program's quickly won reputation for unusual plot twists. At the end of the first season, Mary was chosen the year's "average American housewife" and invited to appear on television on *The David Susskind Show.* As the definitive consumer housewife who had accepted and modeled her real life on the commercial images of the perfect television household, she found herself unable to cope with actually crossing over to become a part of the world of television. Susskind himself appeared as a guest on that episode and, in the studio, Mary suffered a mental breakdown on the air.

With such stories, *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* regularly topped its competition, often at the expense of the lucrative local news shows running against it on the network affiliates. In March, Metromedia found itself doing so well with *Mary Hartman* that the company ripped up its contract with Norman Lear and wrote a new one for a higher rate.

While *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* never duplicated its frantic first year following, the show did last for two more seasons, never losing its feel for outlandish plot twists. Mary began her second season in a mental hospital, recuperating from her on-the-air breakdown. This facility turned out to have another function: It was one of the "average TV households" selected by the Nielsen television ratings service for estimating national viewing habits. Back home, Mary's friend Loretta Haggers (Mary Kay Place) achieved her dream of recording a hit Country and Western record

FALL 1977 SCHEDULE

Day	Network	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30
MON	ABC	THE SAN PEDRO BEACH BUMS		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)			
MON	CBS	YOUNG DAN'L BOONE		BETTY WHITE SHOW	Maude	RAFFERTY	
MON	NBC	Little House On The Prairie # Laugh-In		NBC Monday Night At The Movies # Columbo			
TUE	ABC	Happy Days	Laverne And Shirley	Three's Company	SOAP	Family	
TUE	CBS	THE FITZPATRICKS		M*A*S*H	One Day At A Time	LOU GRANT	
TUE	NBC	RICHARD PRYOR SHOW		MULLIGAN'S STEW		Police Woman	
WED	ABC	Eight Is Enough		Charlie's Angels		Baretta	
WED	CBS	Good Times	Busting Loose	CBS Wednesday Night Movies			
WED	NBC	The Life And Times Of Grizzly Adams		THE OREGON TRAIL		BIG HAWAII	
THR	ABC	Welcome Back, Kotter	What's Happening!!	Barney Miller	CARTER COUNTRY	REDD FOXX	
THR	CBS	The Waltons		Hawaii Five-O		Barnaby Jones	
THR	NBC	CHIPS		THE MAN FROM ATLANTIS		ROSETTI AND RYAN	
FRI	ABC	Donny And Marie		The ABC Friday Night Movie			
FRI	CBS	New Adventures Of Wonder Woman		LOGAN'S RUN		Switch	
FRI	NBC	Sanford Arms	Chico And The Man	The Rockford Files		Quincy, M.E.	
SAT	ABC	Fish	OPERATION PETTICOAT	Starsky And Hutch		THE LOVE BOAT	
SAT	CBS	Bob Newhart Show	WE'VE GOT EACH OTHER	The Jeffersons	Tony Randall Show	Carol Burnett Show	
SAT	NBC	The Bionic Woman		NBC Saturday Night At The Movies			

Day	Network	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30
SUN	ABC	The Hardy Boys / Nancy Drew Mysteries		The Six Million Dollar Man		The ABC Sunday Night Movie			
SUN	CBS	60 Minutes		Rhoda	ON OUR OWN	All In The Family	Alice	Kojak	
SUN	NBC	The Wonderful World Of Disney				The Big Event # Police Story			

("Baby Boy"), but was tricked into signing over her career management from her husband Charlie (Graham Jarvis) to a slick con man, Barth Gimble (Martin Mull). Neighbor Merle Jeeter (Dabney Coleman) managed to stage a successful campaign for mayor by proving that he had nothing to hide: He stood before a town assembly wearing only a raincoat. Mary's father, George Shumway (Philip Bruns) topped them all. Much to the confusion (but eventual delight) of his wife Martha (Dody Goodman), George came out of necessary plastic surgery following a plant accident looking exactly like movie star Tab Hunter, from head to toe. (Tab Hunter himself took over the role.)

Louise Lasser decided to leave the show at the end of the second season, so the title changed to *Forever Fernwood* in the fall of 1977. To set up her departure, Mary abandoned her family and left Fernwood to elope with a handsome policeman, Sergeant Dennis Foley (Bruce Solomon). The final episode with Lasser showed Mary's new life as a virtual replay of her old, even down to concern over the waxy yellow buildup on her floor.

The message of *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* went out loud and clear to both local station programmers and program producers: Popular new programs could be successfully sold and promoted without any involvement by ABC, CBS, or NBC. In 1977, Lear himself launched two other syndicated ventures, *All That Glitters* (a humorous soap opera on sexual role reversal) and a *Mary Hartman* spinoff/summer substitute that spoofed late night talk shows, *Fernwood 2-Nite* (later called *America 2-Nite*). Universal Studios and Mobil Oil were even more successful with their respective first-run projects: Operation Prime Time (OPT) and the Mobil Showcase Network. These ad-hoc networks were set up for a limited but effective penetration of prime time, including placement on network affiliates. The first OPT presentation, a six-hour miniseries (*Testimony of Two Men*), scored well on ninety stations during the May 1977 sweeps. Mobil's first series, a ten-part program the company purchased from the BBC (*The Explorers*, which Mobil retitled *Ten Who Dared*), ran over ten weeks on forty stations, twenty-five of which were network affiliates. Each success guaranteed that there would be further challenges to the established networks' hold on programming, even in prime time.

While all three networks had been embarrassed by the acceptance of *Mary Hartman* in syndication after they had turned it down, ABC was the only one to try a similar format in prime time, slotting its own soap opera spoof for the fall of 1977. Thirty-five-year-old Susan Harris (a veteran writer for such Norman Lear shows as *Maude* and *One Day at a Time*) was the creator and chief writer for this new program, called *Soap*. The series setup was simple: the trials and tribulations of two sisters and their families, one wealthy (the Tates) and one middle class (the Campbells). The plots would focus on the usual grist of soaps, with a heavy emphasis on sex.

Even with the acceptance of *Mary Hartman*, ABC was nervous about *Soap* and held a private screening of two episodes for affiliate executives at an ABC convention in May 1977. While the reaction was generally favorable (much to the relief of the network), the affiliate programmers convinced ABC to allow stations in the Central time zone to delay the show an hour so that it would not appear before 9:00 P.M. The network also promised to add a "viewer discretion" warning at the beginning of each episode identifying the series as more adult-oriented. Then something strange happened. Months before an episode of *Soap* hit the air, the series became the subject of heated criticism across the country.

Advance word about the show clearly conveyed the point that *Soap*, like *Mary Hartman*, would be a sexually oriented comedy, but no one seemed to know just how far it would go. Speculation based on plot summaries and hearsay touched off a wave of charges and counter-charges. *Newsweek* magazine, given an advance synopsis of one of the episodes already produced, reported that *Soap* would present the seduction of a priest in church. This set off alarms in Catholic parishes throughout the country, and letters began pouring in to ABC demanding that the network take the show off the air, even before it aired one episode. *The Tiding*, the official weekly of the Los Angeles archdiocese, observed that ABC's decision to schedule *Soap* showed little respect for the audience and that the network's initials really stood for "Absolutely Brazen Contempt." Citizens of Memphis, Tennessee, picketed local ABC affiliate WHBQ with placards that read: "Protect our children from evil!" and "We don't want *Soap!*" The U.S. Catholic Conference labeled *Soap* "morally reprehensible," saying the program would be "publicly challenged" and should be "removed from television."

Even some of those select few that had already seen *Soap* joined in the criticism. Westinghouse's only ABC affiliate (WJZ in Baltimore) decided not to air *Soap* because "it presented a variety of subject matter which does not lend itself to comedic episodic form." The executive vice president of WOWK in Huntington, West Virginia, called it, "one long dirty joke."

As public protests mounted through the summer, ABC and its chief programmer, Fred Silverman, began to fight back. The network described *Soap* as more than just a soap opera: It was "an adult character comedy with a continuing storyline." More important, Silverman stressed that "no character in *Soap* is ever rewarded for immoral behavior, and, in the final analysis, there will be retribution for such behavior."

Regarding the controversy over the show itself, Fred Silverman pointedly remarked in *Variety*, "The summer of 1977 may well go down in television history as the summer of *Soap*. Never have so many words been written about a television pilot which so few people have actually seen."

The Reverend Bob Spencer, an Atlanta Baptist minister, explained the validity, in his eyes, of the protests against the program before it aired, saying, "We don't have to see the show to know it's indecent. We believe what we have read in national and local publications. I believe in the Bible and I don't have to see certain things to know they are wrong."

By August, fifteen ABC affiliates said they would not show the program, and two advertisers had pulled out. In early September, both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* ran editorials on the *Soap* controversy. The *Times* backed the protesters, asking how else could people object. The *Post* defended the right to object but said that people should wait until the show was on before registering their complaints. Through the entire rumpus, ABC held firm. On the day before the premiere, the *ABC Evening News* covered the *Soap* controversy as a news story and, on September 13, the special one-hour first episode aired. It was quite a letdown.

People expecting a sophisticated sexy show that would upset the traditional television taboos were given instead a series of silly slapstick scenes and sophomoric one-liners. Unlike *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*, everything in *Soap* was played for cheap laughs. The characters were one-dimensional and relegated to delivering leering putdowns on such topics as homosexuals, extramarital affairs, impotency, transvestites, and sex-change opera-

Louise Lasser as Mary Hartman and Greg Mullavey as her husband, Tom, in Norman Lear's humorous soap opera, *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*. *(Sony Pictures Television)*

September 5, 1977
Laugh-In. (NBC). Producer George Schlatter revives the *Laugh-In* format as a monthly special for NBC, but without Dan Rowan and Dick Martin. Instead, guest hosts perform with a group of comedy unknowns, including Robin Williams.

September 13, 1977
Richard Pryor Show. (NBC). The daring and imaginative black comic is perversely stuck in a family hour slot with his new comedy-variety hour. Following some censorship feuds with NBC, Pryor himself calls it quits after four shows.

September 15, 1977
Cheryl Ladd steps in as Kris, a new member of Charlie's Angels, following the departure of Farrah Fawcett in a contract squabble.

September 16, 1977
Sanford Arms. (NBC). After Redd Foxx and Demond Wilson quit *Sanford and Son,* NBC bravely tries to keep the series going, explaining that Fred and Lamont have moved to Phoenix. In their place, Phil Wheeler (Theodore Wilson) operates a rooming house next to the junk yard. The revamped show lasts only one month.

September 20, 1977
Starting the fifth season of *Happy Days,* Fonzie is in California for a Hollywood screen test and, as part of a beachside challenge, jumps over a shark while on water skis. In the 1990s, the "Jump the Shark" Internet website uses this event to symbolize the moment when any good TV series begins to fade in quality.

October 10, 1977
The Dick Cavett Show. (PBS). ABC's former talk show host reappears on public television, hosting a half-hour weeknight interview show that lasts four years.

October 11, 1977
After twenty-six years as an NBC exclusive, the World Series comes to ABC in the beginning of a new yearly rotation with NBC.

November 4, 1977
The end of the Lucy era at CBS. Twenty-six years after the premiere of *I Love Lucy,* the third of Lucille Ball's sitcoms, *Here's Lucy,* ends its weekday morning network rerun cycle and goes off CBS.

tions. Even the much-discussed seduction of the priest turned out to be just a double-entendre proposition which produced a few moments of embarrassment for the cleric but no violation of his vows. *Soap* was not the promised outrageous adult satire, just a tiresomely childish program.

Nonetheless, with all the advance publicity, *Soap* became the season's first big hit, immediately landing in the top ten. As the season wore on, it slipped a bit in the ratings, but several important revisions also took place. The scripts moved away from being a collection of scandalous topics and innuendo to focus instead on developing both the comic characters and plotline. Though still more joke-oriented than *Mary Hartman, Soap* began to mix in less boisterous, more human moments. There was still a tremendous emphasis on sex, but the characters began to care for each other.

With this new approach, *Soap* began to build solid audience support presenting likable characters in funny situations. The highlight of the first season was the trial of Jessica Tate (Katherine Helmond) for the murder of her tennis-pro lover (played by Robert Urich). Certain of her innocence, she spent most of the time trying to cheer up her household, including her promiscuous husband Chester (Robert Mandan), their daughters Corinne (Diana Canova) and Eunice (Jennifer Salt), son Billy (Jimmy Baio), and their sharp-tongued black butler Benson (Robert Guillaume). Though pronounced guilty, Jessica was saved from imprisonment at the start of the second season when Chester confessed to the crime, explaining that he had been temporarily out of his mind when he did it. Jessica's sister, Mary Campbell (Cathryn Damon), spent much of the first season trying to prevent the murder of her new husband, Burt (Richard Mulligan), by her son, Danny (Ted Wass), who had become involved in organized crime.

The best example of the improvement in *Soap* could be found in the character development of Mary's other son from her first marriage, Jodie Dallas (Billy Crystal), a homosexual. At the start of the series, Jodie served chiefly as the focus for every "gay" joke the writers felt they could get away with. Then Jodie's character was fleshed out and softened. He decided against a sex-change operation, had an unsuccessful affair with a football player, and, to his own amazement, found himself involved with a woman, even becoming a father. This eventually led to an emotional legal battle at the close of the third season in which Jodie gave a powerful, impassioned courtroom speech in defense of his attempt to win custody of the child. By then, all that remained of the original *Soap* controversy was ABC's continued policy of airing the summer reruns of the show in late night slots instead of its usual prime time period. The network had quietly dropped both the time delay feed to the Midwest and the viewer discretion warning in December 1977, as *Soap* shifted focus.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the public controversy surrounding the premiere of *Soap* was that it served as a dramatic illustration of the networks' increased emphasis on sex as a replacement for violence; it also became a rallying point for reaction against this policy. This new wave of sexual hooks had begun with the success of *Charlie's Angels* for ABC in the fall of 1976 and the number one network had the most success in exploiting it in other shows for the 1977–78 season, especially in comedies. As with *Charlie's Angels,* these programs took an ogler's approach to sex, emphasizing well-built bodies and suggestive comments over any real sex. The perfect example of this ABC formula for sexual comedy was *Three's Company,* a carry-over hit that had begun in the spring of 1977, based on a British series *Man About the House.*

Three's Company presented three young singles living together in the same apartment: Jack Tripper (John Ritter), an easy-going part-time professional cook; Janet Wood (Joyce DeWitt), a level-headed brunette florist; and Chrissy Snow (Suzanne Somers), a sexy "dumb blonde" office secretary. Despite the scandalous setup, nothing ever happened between them. The three were "just good friends" sharing the apartment in order to split the rent. To assure Stanley Roper (Norman Fell), their apartment landlord, that their activities were perfectly harmless, they all convinced him that straight Jack was gay and had no interest in either woman.

As a matter of fact, Jack would eye both, and practically any other pretty woman that crossed his path. In addition, everyone else in *Three's Company* was always thinking about and talking about sex, so a typical program would consist of some simple complication (usually resulting from a misunderstanding involving Chrissy) giving the men a chance to leer and deliver risqué lines, and the women a chance to strike suggestive poses and deliver

risqué lines. The series was an obstacle course sitcom right out of the all-talk-no-action mode of *Love, American Style* from the 1960s and the Rock Hudson-Doris Day "pillow talk" theatrical comedies of the 1950s, playing it squeaky clean but hinting dirty while dishing up malapropisms, double takes, and pratfalls.

While *Three's Company* merely carried on the *Love, American Style* philosophy, two other of the season's new hit ABC series actually followed that program's format. Produced by Aaron Spelling and Leonard Goldberg (of *Charlie's Angels*), both *The Love Boat* and *Fantasy Island* (a mid-season replacement) were mildly titillating anthologies, interweaving several light romantic tales to make an hour show. Unlike *Love, American Style,* though, there were also series regulars that appeared each week to tie the individual segments together as part of the same overall story: *Mary Tyler Moore* alumnus Gavin MacLeod acted as the skipper of the *Pacific Princess, Love Boat*'s romantic cruise ship, while Ricardo Montalban played the mysterious Mr. Roarke, owner of the tropical island resort where fantasies seemed to come true.

ABC was comfortably on top, propelled by the tremendous performance of its sitcoms, both the established series such as *Happy Days* and the new hits including *Love Boat, Soap,* and *Three's Company.* Even against this competition, former number one CBS still had solid top ten performances from *M*A*S*H, All in the Family, One Day at a Time,* and newcomer *Alice,* but the network was very eager to develop new shows itself as part of a concerted rebuilding effort. One of the companies it placed strong hope in was Mary Tyler Moore's production company, MTM (headed by her husband, Grant Tinker). Like Norman Lear's company, MTM had developed a specific approach to comedy that could be used to spawn other shows. For seven years, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and its immediate spinoffs (*Rhoda* and *Phyllis*) stood as the base of the company, but when Moore decided to end her show after the 1976–77 season, the company needed to work in earnest to create series successors to these hits.

MTM had developed *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* as the model of an adult-oriented ensemble comedy for the 1970s, with very strong supporting players and excellent writing. While Norman Lear usually set his stories in a formal family situation (such as the Bunkers or the Jeffersons) and would "do a show on rape" (or some other topical issue), Moore's ensemble formed a "professional family" of individuals that worked together and grew to love, respect, and depend on each other. Such an approach, however, needed time for the writers and performers to develop the pacing of the series and for the audience to become familiar with the characters.

MTM's first attempt at a new companion comedy was *The Bob Newhart Show,* which began in the fall of 1972, slotted immediately after Moore's show. This placement gave it a spillover audience that found another good show similar to but distinct from *Mary Tyler Moore.* Developed by David Davis and Lorenzo Music, *The Bob Newhart Show* focused on the home and office life of a low-key Chicago psychologist, Bob Hartley (Bob Newhart), and his loving but strongly independent wife Emily (Suzanne Pleshette), an elementary school teacher. The excellent supporting cast included Bill Daily as neighbor-sidekick Howard Borden, Marcia Wallace as office receptionist Carol, Peter Bonerz as orthodontist Jerry Robinson, and Jack Riley as Elliott Carlin, an incurable neurotic. Like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show,* Newhart's series improved each season as the cast members developed their characters and personalities.

Besides *Bob Newhart* and the two direct *Mary Tyler Moore* spinoffs (*Rhoda* and *Phyllis*), MTM had found that the ensemble comedy formula, while easy to outline in theory, was very tricky to successfully duplicate with totally new characters and settings. Three promising MTM shows flopped, hurt chiefly by either unfamiliar characters or a difficult premise to develop: *Paul Sand in Friends and Lovers* (a bass violinist with the Boston Philharmonic), *We've Got Each Other* (a husband who did the housework while his wife worked downtown) and *Texas Wheelers* (Jack Elam, Gary Busey, and Mark Hamill as fun-loving ranch hands in modern rural Texas). Yet at the same time the ensemble approach was still working quite well in non-MTM shows such as *M*A*S*H* and *Barney Miller,* which both survived major cast changes by drawing on the strength of their respective companies of players. Obviously, the formula was resilient once a show got off the ground. The difficulty was in trying to quickly acquaint viewers with a totally new world. For the 1977–78 season, MTM had tremendous hope for a careful combination of the old and the new in what looked like a sure-fire comedy winner: *The Betty White Show.*

The new program carefully drew basic elements from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show,* including two former cast members, Betty White and Georgia Engel. White played Joyce Whitman, a sweet-

November 14, 1977
Walter Cronkite interviews both Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, via satellite, on his nightly news show. Sadat says he might visit Jerusalem. Cronkite asks Begin if that would be all right with Israel. Begin says yes. Five days later, Sadat flies to Israel with Cronkite, NBC's John Chancellor, and ABC's Barbara Walters in tow.

November 30, 1977
Eric Sevareid, a thirty-eight-year CBS veteran, retires upon reaching age sixty-five.

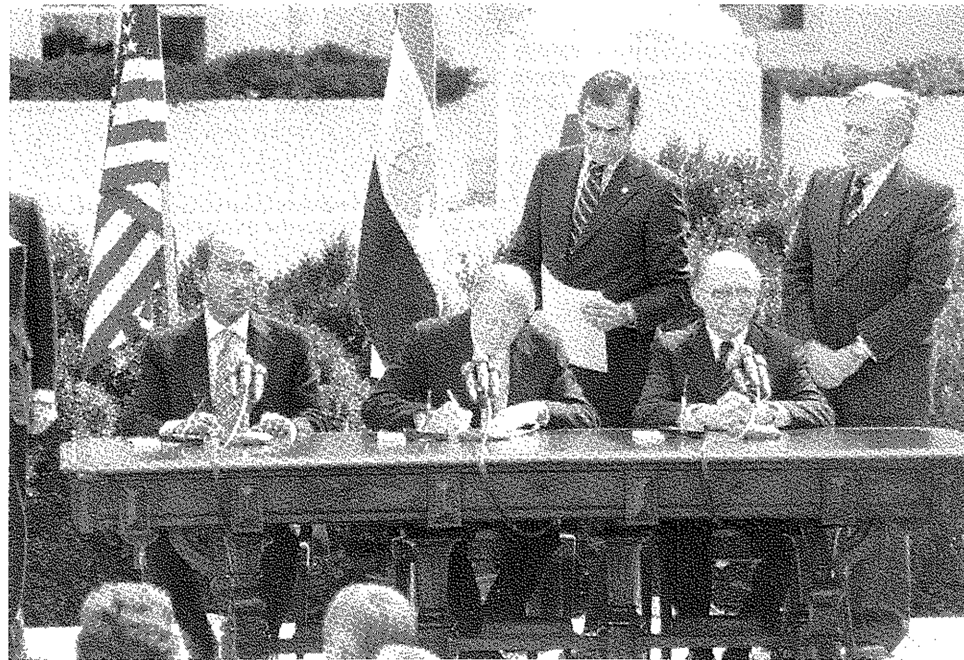
January 22, 1978
Sportsworld. (NBC). A new weekend afternoon sports anthology, modeled after ABC's Wide *World of Sports.*

March 10, 1978
The Incredible Hulk. (CBS). Bill Bixby plays Dr. David Banner who, when angered, turns into Lou Ferrigno as the big green Hulk. The series is loosely based on the Marvel Comics hero.

March 19, 1978
Mike Stivic, wife Gloria, and baby Joey leave Archie and Edith Bunker and Queens for a new home in California.

April 10, 1978
America 2-Night. Norman Lear's satiric view of late night television moves intact from Fernwood, Ohio, to Alta Coma, California (the unfinished furniture capital of the world). Martin Mull is Barth Gimble, the self-centered host; Fred Willard plays the Ed McMahon role of sidekick Jerry Hubbard; and musical veteran Frank DeVol is band leader Happy Kyne, director of the off-key Mirth-makers.

July 10, 1978
World News Tonight. (ABC). ABC News President Roone Arledge breaks up the Harry Reasoner-Barbara Walters anchor team and creates a new style (and name) for ABC's nightly news show. Frank Reynolds, Peter Jennings and Max Robinson share the anchor chores in the new format.



Though CBS's Walter Cronkite initiated a moment of TV diplomacy in November 1977 by inviting the leaders of Egypt and Israel to talk, it was U.S. President Jimmy Carter *(center)* who brokered the 1979 agreements between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat *(left)* and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin *(right)*. *(National Archives / Photo by Bill Fitz-Patrick, The White House)*

faced woman with a biting tongue (just like Sue Ann Nivens) and Engel was Mitzi Maloney, Joyce's dumb but kind-hearted apartmentmate (just like Georgette Franklin, her similar supporting character on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*). Like *Mary Tyler Moore,* the series included a show-within-a-show. Joyce was the star of a new CBS television cop show called *Undercover Woman* (a take-off on the popular NBC series *Police Woman* starring Angie Dickinson) and the stories focused on both her home life and behind-the-scenes production activity, including anxious reports on the show's ratings. Included in the support cast were John Hillerman as acerbic show director John Elliot, Joyce's former husband; Caren Kaye as Tracy Garrett, a sexy young actress on the make; and Alex Henteloff as Doug Porterfield, the insecure liaison from the network.

The Betty White Show started strong in a tough slot (against *Monday Night Football* and an NBC movie), but then collapsed and was gone by January. Even with so many "surefire" hooks, the mixture had failed to gel, hurt chiefly by two flaws in the setup: White's caustic character, while a good foil in a supporting role, did not provide a very likable lead; and the angle of Joyce's former husband being the director of *Undercover Woman* was a silly gimmick that just got in the way of the inevitable conflicts between the two working on opposite sides of the camera.

The failure of *The Betty White Show* was a great disappointment to MTM, which had pegged the series as its front line comedy successor to Moore's show. It was also more bad news for CBS, which wanted some quick success to counter ABC's increasing number of successful comedies. With this latest failure, the prospect for quickly regaining the top spot looked increasingly bleak. Neither Norman Lear nor Grant Tinker of MTM, who had been the main sources of CBS's sitcom success in the early 1970s, seemed able to come up with new hits to replace their successful older shows when they inevitably ended their runs.

As ABC continued securely in its number one spot, NBC and CBS went on the offensive and became more openly critical of ABC's programming. This dovetailed perfectly with the protests by pressure groups which had suddenly realized that their crusades against violent television had ushered in the increased emphasis on sex. As the top network with the top shows, ABC was the obvious target for their renewed protests. CBS and NBC just joined in the chorus. Robert Wussler, president of CBS television, said during the height of the *Soap* controversy that his network would *never* have aired the program, and then went on to call ABC's shows "comic book stuff, cartoon style without the cartooning, and I say it is junk ... they're all clever and well done, but they're like junk food." NBC's new programming boss, Paul Klein, offered the shorthand reference "jiggling" to describe ABC programming that prominently featured females in revealing tight tops, often with no bra underneath, and an emphasis on shots of bouncy breasts.

What neither network pointed out, of course, was that both were scrambling for that same audience and were looking for ways to adapt such ABC hooks as comic book adventures, teen comedy, and sexual-orientation to their own schedules. When ABC's Fred Silverman decided in early 1977 to cut the still successful *Bionic Woman* and *Adventures of Wonder Woman* from the ABC schedule (feeling they had probably peaked), NBC and CBS (respectively) were more than willing to pick them up for the fall of 1977. Besides *The New Adventures of Wonder Woman,* CBS also added another comic book series to its schedule, *The Incredible Hulk.*

NBC was even more blatant in playing up sexual hooks. The World War II adventure series *Black Sheep Squadron* (a revival of the previous season's *Baa Baa Black Sheep*) introduced four nubile nurses to the cast, dubbed "Pappy's Lambs" (a dig at *Charlie's Angels* which ran opposite the show). A relatively straightforward drama series, *James at 15,* pumped up the scripts with sex angles, culminating with the day James turned sixteen and lost his virginity. There was even a male equivalent to the beauties of *Charlie's Angels* with *CHiPs*, which featured two gorgeous California police "hunks" (Larry Wilcox and Erik Estrada) for the women to admire.

NBC's sex angle surfaced most often, however, in the network's schedule of miniseries, which formed the cornerstone of its programming strategy. One insider said, only partly tongue-in-cheek, "If ABC is doing 'kiddie porn,' NBC will give the audience 'adult porn.'" The soapy drama of *The Moneychangers* had done well the previous season taking such an approach, so the network touted *79 Park Avenue, Aspen, Loose Change,* and *Wheels* as spicy special events. These "novels for television" usually ran over consecutive nights on NBC's Saturday movie, the Sunday *Big Event,* and the Monday movie, and all featured steamy TV sex (frequent thrashing in bed), seamy characters, and unbridled ambition.

Though not actually showing much more than ABC's sex comedies, the presentation in these pulpy stories was far more direct in its underlying assumption: Illicit sex was just another requirement for success and advancement in corporate America.

These programs did well in the ratings, to an extent proving that the success of *Roots* and *Rich Man, Poor Man* was no fluke. Nonetheless, the grand pronouncements regarding miniseries toned down considerably from the euphoria following *Roots.* NBC was the only network committed to miniseries on a continuing basis. The other networks regarded them more as extended specials to be used sparingly as blockbuster lures during the ratings sweeps or to open the season. ABC, for example, slotted the six-part *Washington: Behind Closed Doors,* a political drama loosely based on John Ehrlichman's Watergate-themed book *The Company,* as its premiere week lure. That series did all right, but was not an exceptional blockbuster like *Roots.*

NBC scored much better in November with *The Godfather Saga,* a combination of the two theatrical "Godfather" films plus nearly an hour of previously unused footage. "Godfather" director Francis Ford Coppola himself supervised the entire project, including the necessary adjustment of particularly violent scenes to the limitations of television. The finished product ran nine hours over four nights and was dubbed: *Mario Puzo's "The Godfather": The Complete Novel for Television.* By presenting the saga of the Corleone family in chronological order, the chilling evolution of gangland power from young Vito Corleone's first kill to Michael Corleone's calculated murder of his own brother clearly emerged. For once, the television version of a theatrical feature was more effective and powerful than the original presentation.

NBC's success with such special events helped the network cover the fact that it had very few hit series. *Little House on the Prairie* was the network's only top ten entry, and *CHiPs,* its highest rated new show, did not even make the top twenty. NBC was in even worse shape than CBS, which was at least trying its best at a concerted rebuilding effort.

As the season wore on, the problems with NBC's event strategy became increasingly apparent as did the problems of miniseries. Miniseries were much more expensive to produce than regular series, yet generally they did not do well in reruns. Unlike the interchangeable segments of a regular series, the episodes of a miniseries had to be shown in order, preferably over consecutive nights. Yet this meant either setting aside weekly slots for miniseries—thus reducing their "specialness" by making them part of the weekly program routine—or constant preemption (which undercut attempts to develop strong regular series).

The most dramatic flaw in the miniseries scheme was that the best time to slot a series could instantly become the worst. A new story had to do well on opening night or the network was stuck with a multiple-night failure because it was hard to convince people to join the events in mid-run. NBC's biggest miniseries bomb took place during the February sweeps when ABC's *How the West Was Won* and CBS's Sunday movie, "Gator," soundly defeated an episode of *King,* a highly touted three-part story on the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

King became the symbol of an unsuccessful miniseries. It was well-written and featured excellent performances (Paul Winfield as Martin Luther King, Jr.; Ossie Davis as Martin Luther King, Sr.; and Cicely Tyson as Coretta Scott King). Nonetheless, it lacked the sexy hooks of shows such as *79 Park Avenue* or the built-in violence of *The Godfather Saga.* Consequently, NBC was very careful with its final miniseries of the season, *Holocaust,* scheduling it before the spring sweeps and against chiefly rerun material on CBS and ABC. Network programming boss Paul Klein even downplayed network expectations because *Holocaust* seemed the perfect candidate for a ratings flop. It was a depressing story of the persecution and systematic murder of six million Jews by the Nazis in World War II. There was no happy ending and nearly all the heroic characters were gassed or shot by the end of the story.

Despite all these apparent handicaps, the four nights of *Holocaust* became the most-watched entertainment show in NBC's history to that point, drawing nearly 120 million viewers. It became the number two miniseries in television, right behind *Roots.* And, like *Roots,* it used the basics of good television drama to hit home in a very special way.

Holocaust transformed a nearly incomprehensible crime against humanity into a personal war drama, focusing on an ambitious young German lawyer, Erik Dorf (Michael Moriarty), and on an upper-middle-class Jewish doctor in Berlin, Josef Weiss (Fritz Weaver), and his family (Rosemary Harris as his wife Berta; Joseph Bottoms as their younger son, Rudi; Blanche Baker as their daughter, Anna; James Woods as their son, Karl; and Meryl Streep as Karl's Aryan wife, Inga). Both were caught up in the rise of Nazism: Dorf as a legal henchman for the party and Weiss as an innocent man fighting to hang on to his family, his dignity, and his life. Over the four nights of *Holocaust* he was stripped of them all.

Like *Roots, Holocaust* acted as a catalyst for ethnic pride and even anger. Throughout the country, millions watched the re-creation of events that had been a frightening part of their lives. For another, much younger, generation, *Holocaust* conveyed the horror of events they had never really thought about as anything more than another page of history.

Despite the surprising performance of *Holocaust,* NBC's basic programming problems remained unchanged. The network's decision to commit itself to developing expensive miniseries over weekly shows locked it into that "longform" pattern. Without strong new series to plug in, NBC would have to continue to stress "event programming." This, in turn, seemed to guarantee a long stint by NBC at number three and the beginning of a long reign by ABC as number one.

ABC's formulas ruled the airwaves.

CBS continued to arrange and rearrange its old hits.

NBC produced great special events, but was a prisoner of its abysmal lack of strong regular series.

Then, in one bold move, this network equation changed.

On January 20, 1978, the man who had guided ABC to the top, Fred Silverman, announced his defection to NBC. The broadcast industry wondered: Could Silverman pull the TV hat trick and make NBC his third number one network?

38. Born Again Broadcasting

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF FRED SILVERMAN'S jump from ABC to NBC not only sent shock waves through the broadcast industry but also attracted a great deal of coverage by the general news media. Like his move from CBS to ABC three years before, the story made good copy. Once again, Silverman was leaving a number one television network and taking his tremendous programming expertise to the last place competition. In 1975 that had marked the beginning of a changed television world that soon found ABC at the top of the heap. Comparisons and speculation were inevitable: Could "Freddie" work his magic once again?

Actually, Silverman faced a far more difficult task coming to NBC. ABC in the mid-1970s had been on the verge of breaking out with its kid-oriented shows and was only waiting for a deft hand to guide it. NBC in 1978 had only a handful of popular prime time shows: *The Big Event, Little House on the Prairie, The Rockford Files, Quincy,* and the moderately successful *CHiPs.* More important, NBC was heavily committed to a big-event-miniseries strategy, which placed great reliance on what had proved to be a very unpredictable form.

There were also other weak spots. Late night ratings king Johnny Carson was showing increasing signs of wanting to end his seventeen-year stint on *Tonight.* The previously unassailable *Today* show found its ratings lead being whittled away by ABC's *Good Morning America.* In the nightly news race, ABC's new *World News Tonight* format threatened NBC in the contest for the number two spot behind CBS's Walter Cronkite. And as a result of such overall slippage, NBC was even losing affiliates.

NBC was the perfect new challenge for Fred Silverman, offering him something more important than a hefty salary and fringe benefits: an impressive boost to his professional pride. Instead of simply moving over to become NBC's prime time programmer, Silverman was hired as president of the entire NBC broadcast corporation, including television, radio, and special projects.

Beyond that, there was the undeniable challenge of once again playing the part of miracle man. Almost single-handedly Silverman had built up the image of a network programmer to someone just as important as the programs and stars themselves. With ABC almost routinely continuing as number one, his day-to-day decisions there seemed far less crucial. Now, at NBC, he was instantly the most important man at the network.

Silverman's contract with ABC ran until June 8, 1978, and the network held him to it. As a result, between January and June, Silverman was forced into a management limbo of sorts. He could not communicate with NBC personnel yet was no longer part of the ABC team. For five months he vacationed while his new network put together the schedule for the fall of 1978 with absolutely no input from him. This heightened the dramatic effect of Silverman's arrival in June: Who or what would remain?

NBC's emphasis on event programming under chief programmer Paul Klein ran in direct opposition to Silverman's philosophies. Though he was master at slotting special events, Silverman's base of success at ABC and CBS was regular series, especially sitcoms. NBC did not have one hit sitcom going into the fall of 1978, so it was expected that when Silverman took over there would be an all-out campaign to beat ABC at its own game with teen sitcoms and suggestive sex. Yet when Silverman actually assumed control in June, just the opposite occurred: Fred Silverman suddenly became the champion of "quality" programming. Three days after assuming office, he told NBC affiliates, "I want NBC not only to be the audience leader, but also the most respected network." He also pledged a stronger commitment to news, cultural specials, and family programming.

Obviously, some of this was standard public relations rhetoric, but Silverman also backed such talk with action. During the summer he made several changes in the announced NBC fall schedule, replacing *Coast to Coast* (a sexy adventure-comedy featuring two airline stewardesses and a handsome steward) with *Lifeline* (a *cinema-verite*-style documentary series about real life doctors operating on real patients in real hospitals), and transforming *Legs* (a Garry Marshall sitcom about the backstage life of sexy Las Vegas showgirls) into *Who's Watching the Kids?,* an apartment house sitcom emphasizing Jim Belushi (brother of John) and *Happy Days* alumnus Scott Baio rather than the glamour girls. Though NBC could not cut back overnight on miniseries well into production, Silverman did axe plans for thirty hours of steamy Universal miniseries that he labeled as too exploitative. These included a sequel to the successful *79 Park Avenue* and a Taylor Caldwell story about a prostitute in ancient Rome.

Such moves seemed quite surprising from the man who had recently presided over a schedule that included *Three's Company, Charlie's Angels,* and *Love Boat.* In a sense, though, this "born again" commitment to quality was about the best counter-programming hook available. Practically speaking, there was little chance of changing NBC's competitive position for the 1978–79 season, so while planning for the future Silverman focused attention on something other than instant ratings success. He ordered at least thirty new pilot concepts to be ready in January, when he could begin to phase in shows more in tune with the long-range Silverman plan for NBC supremacy. Silverman also felt that ABC's approach to television had peaked and it was only a matter of time before viewers grew tired of the ABC schedule as a whole, so he instructed producers to stay away from "jiggling" themes in the new NBC pilot projects.

On March 19, 1979, Speaker Thomas "Tip" O'Neill gaveled the U.S. House of Representatives into the television age as C-SPAN (the Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network) began live coverage of its sessions. *(Courtesy of C-SPAN)*

Following Silverman's schedule adjustments, NBC opened the season a strong number two, temporarily buoyed by good opening ratings for the mammoth twenty-five hour miniseries *Centennial* (running as a *Big Event*) and the usual boost provided by the World Series. By November, NBC had begun to slide. *Centennial* fell out of the top twenty and all nine of the network's new fall series flopped. During the November ratings sweeps, NBC finished a distant third with only four programs among the top forty shows.

Though he had promised in June to cut down on last-minute program shuffling, Silverman decided he could not wait any longer to act. At the start of December, he wiped the slate clean and canceled nine of NBC's nineteen series in one day, including all of the new fall shows that had survived until then. Silverman fell back on the thirty pilots he had ordered and pulled out nine new shows, including three sitcoms. Soon thereafter, holdover programming boss Paul Klein was deposed as part of the network shakeup. It was clear the Silverman era at NBC had begun in earnest.

Despite these moves, the rest of the season was a shambles for NBC. From January until May, the network's schedule was a revolving door for new shows that premiered, quickly shifted time slots, and then disappeared. NBC tried virtually any concept for a series, including: a weekly slot for miniseries (*NBC Novels for Television*); a revival of *Columbo* without the Columbo character (*Mrs. Columbo*); a land-locked *Love Boat* (*Supertrain,* produced by NBC itself and featuring a very expensive model train set); an update of the *Millionaire* format (*$weepstake$*); a cash-in on the fraternity humor success of the film "Animal House" (*Brothers and Sisters*); serialized melodramas (*Cliffhangers*); and even the old *Stand by for Crime* setup of a crime drama mixed with a game show-type panel (*Whodunnit?* with Ed McMahon as host and famed criminal lawyer F. Lee Bailey as a regular panelist). None of these shows made it to 1980.

Even the high-priority search for new hit NBC sitcoms produced only two marginal successes, *Diff'rent Strokes* and *Hello Larry,* back-to-back offerings from Norman Lear's TAT/Tandem company. *Hello, Larry* was a male version of *One Day at a Time,* starring McLean Stevenson as a divorced radio talk show host with two teenage daughters. *Diff'rent Strokes* served as a black-infused *Family Affair,* featuring Conrad Bain (of *Maude*) as a wealthy Manhattan millionaire-widower who adopted two black orphans from Harlem, thirteen-year-old Willis Jackson (Todd Bridges) and his eight-year-old brother, Arnold (Gary Coleman). Both series offered warm lessons on growing up and occasionally the two combined for special one-hour joint episodes. Silverman also treated them as a matched set; even during NBC's many schedule shifts the two moved in tandem. Silverman saw Coleman as a potential new network star and he hoped that *Diff'rent Strokes* would help *Hello, Larry* build its audience as well. *Hello, Larry* eventually flopped (surviving for little more than a year), but *Diff'rent Strokes* caught on, lasted eight seasons, and Coleman became a frequent guest star on other NBC series.

NBC wound up finishing the 1978–79 season deep in third place, a full rating point lower than its 1977–78 showing. Silverman eventually admitted that his frantic mid-season juggling was the wrong strategy, saying that a slower transition would have worked better. Most of the chosen pilots had been forced into the weekly schedule far too quickly and suffered from the lack of production time. Still, Silverman carried over into the next season a few shows that had done moderately well and continued with his reorganization plans, aiming for the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow. NBC had purchased exclusive television rights for them in February 1977 at a price tag of $100 million, and Silverman knew from his ABC success with the 1976 Olympics that the games provided the perfect launching pad for the new season. If NBC had a strong line-up to promote during the Olympics, the network could, with a little luck, be back on top by Christmas 1980. Informally, that became Silverman's deadline for success.

For the present, however, ABC continued to reign as number one. Silverman had left his former network in very strong shape and ABC president Fred Pierce and Tony Thomopoulos, Silverman's replacement as chief programmer, pursued a vigorous fall campaign, determined not only to keep ABC far ahead of the pack, but also to prove that the network's success had not been due totally to Silverman. Besides touting all the returning ABC hits, they used a rerun of *Roots* to open September and then promoted a championship boxing rematch between Muhammad Ali and Leon Spinks into the number one slot the first week of the new season. Through October ABC continued comfortably on top with eight of the top ten shows and nineteen of the top thirty. Unlike NBC, ABC had little trouble with its new fall shows: Four of the five were in the top fifteen. The only thing close to a ratings disappointment for ABC was the late fall collapse of *Battlestar Galactica,* the network's attempt to cash in on the spectacular success of George Lucas's film for Twentieth Century Fox, "Star Wars."

Opening in May 1977, "Star Wars" quickly became the top-grossing movie in history at that time, appealing to both children and adult audiences. It took a simple space war adventure yarn, reminiscent of the popular Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon film serials of the 1930s and 1940s, and effectively updated it with a witty script and spectacular special effects. Its success led to a host of imitations and a revival of interest in science fiction adventures.

FALL 1978 SCHEDULE

		8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30
MON	ABC	Welcome Back, Kotter	Operation Petticoat	ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)			
	CBS	WKRP IN CINCINNATI	PEOPLE	M*A*S*H	One Day At A Time	Lou Grant	
	NBC	Little House On The Prairie		NBC Monday Night At The Movies			
TUE	ABC	Happy Days	Laverne And Shirley	Three's Company	TAXI	Starsky And Hutch	
	CBS	THE PAPER CHASE		CBS Tuesday Night Movies			
	NBC	GRANDPA GOES TO WASHINGTON		The Big Event			
WED	ABC	Eight Is Enough		Charlie's Angels		VEGA$	
	CBS	The Jeffersons	IN THE BEGINNING	CBS Wednesday Night Movies			
	NBC	DICK CLARK'S LIVE WEDNESDAY		NBC Wednesday Night At The Movies			
THR	ABC	MORK AND MINDY	What's Happening!!	Barney Miller	Soap	Family	
	CBS	The Waltons		Hawaii Five-O		Barnaby Jones	
	NBC	Project U.F.O.		Quincy, M.E.		W.E.B.	
FRI	ABC	Donny And Marie		The ABC Friday Night Movie			
	CBS	New Adventures Of Wonder Woman		The Incredible Hulk		FLYING HIGH	
	NBC	THE WAVERLY WONDERS	WHO'S WATCHING THE KIDS	The Rockford Files		THE EDDIE CAPRA MYSTERIES	
SAT	ABC	Carter Country	APPLE PIE	The Love Boat		Fantasy Island	
	CBS	Rhoda	Good Times	THE AMERICAN GIRLS		Dallas	
	NBC	CHiPs		NBC SATURDAY SPECIALS		THE SWORD OF JUSTICE	

		7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30
SUN	ABC	The Hardy Boys Mysteries		BATTLESTAR GALACTICA		The ABC Sunday Night Movie			
	CBS	60 Minutes		MARY		All In The Family	Alice	KAZ	
	NBC	The Wonderful World Of Disney		The Big Event				LIFELINE	

The first "Star Wars"-inspired television series was NBC's *Quark,* a space comedy (created by Buck Henry) that had just missed earning a spot on the network's fall schedule in 1977. Though *Quark's* May 1977 pilot was set up as a parody of *Star Trek,* the revived series added appropriate "Star Wars" touches and opened in February 1978 with an effective take-off on the hit film, down to a "Force"-like power known as "The Source" (actually the voice of Hans Conried). The series regulars included Richard Benjamin as commander Adam Quark, skipper of a garbage ship in the United Galaxy Sanitation Patrol; Conrad Janis as Palindrome, Quark's home base superior; Richard Kelton as Ficus, Quark's Spock-like logical assistant (he was really a plant that looked human); and former Doublemint chewing gum identical twins Cyb and Tricia Barnstable as Betty I and Betty II, the ship's radio crew (one was a clone of the other). Subsequent episodes featured parodies of other popular space tales (including Flash Gordon, "2001: A Space Odyssey," and *Star Trek*), but the premise was far too limited and the series failed to catch on.

For the fall of 1978, Universal came up with *Battlestar Galactica,* a flashy big-budget space effort that took the essential "Star Wars" plot hook of a space war and combined it with other familiar science fiction touches for the program premise of a small army of humans (led by Lorne Greene as Commander Adama) fighting the Cylons, a race of robots out to destroy all human life. *Battlestar Galactica* opened with a three-hour premiere that so effectively captured the "Star Wars" techniques and rhythm that Twentieth Century Fox sued Universal for copyright infringement. *Galactica's* early episodes landed in the top ten and easily defeated its competition, especially CBS's highly touted new variety hour starring Mary Tyler Moore. This produced a sigh of relief at both ABC and Universal because, in order to duplicate the technical effects audiences had come to expect after "Star Wars," the program's budget for the first few episodes was several million dollars. This success, however, was short-lived.

The scripts for subsequent episodes of *Battlestar Galactica* were far below the quality of the season opener, shifting the emphasis to simple kiddie adventures closer to *Lost in Space* than *Star Trek* or "Star Wars." In November, CBS juggled its Sunday schedule, dropped Moore's show, and placed veteran *All in the Family* against *Battlestar Galactica.* Within one month, Archie and Edith had knocked the space saga out of the top thirty. By the end of the season, ABC dropped the program as an expensive failure. Both the network and Universal attempted a bit of additional mileage from their investment the following season with a short run revival (*Galactica: 1980*) and an update of *Buck Rogers,* but neither registered impressive ratings.

Though *Battlestar Galactica* turned out to be a flop, ABC scored spectacular success with a very different sort of space hero, Mork from Ork, in another spinoff from Garry Marshall's *Happy Days.* Marshall explained that one of his children (no doubt inspired by "Star Wars") suggested it would be fun to do a *Happy Days* episode involving aliens from outer space, so he had the adventure take place in a dream. Dozing off one night, Richie Cunningham dreamt that he met Mork (Robin Williams), a nutty alien with strange powers, who decided to take him back to his home planet, Ork. To save Richie, the Fonz challenged Mork to a duel and then—Richie woke up. Naturally, neither Richie's friends nor family took his story seriously, yet the episode ended with a knock at the door and the reappearance of Robin Williams, playing a country hick, asking Richie for directions.

The "Mork" episode ran in February 1978 and went over extremely well, so Williams was given his own series for the fall, set in the present. For *Mork and Mindy,* he continued the role of alien Mork, this time sent on a long term fact-finding mission to Earth, landing in Boulder, Colorado, and taken in by a young single woman, Mindy McConnell (Pam Dawber). On the surface, *Mork and Mindy* was just *My Favorite Martian* updated and it should have been primarily for kids, but instead it managed the "Star Wars" trick of appealing to all ages. Williams's Mork had a crazy unpredictable manner (he often talked and operated at very high speed) and at any moment could spout lines (in the appropriate voices) from old movies, TV shows, and even political speeches. These off-the-wall improvisations appealed to young adults, while the physical humor (such as hanging upside down in a closet or drinking orange juice from a pitcher using only his index finger) attracted the kids. Parents found the program good family entertainment because, despite his powers, Mork was very much a little boy exploring a strange new world. Dressed in baggy jeans and suspenders, he innocently wandered into situations and each week learned some basic lesson of life.

Even though Mork lived with Mindy (staying in the attic of her apartment), the two were like brother and sister, with Mork running to her arms for a hug whenever he was afraid or confused. In a similar manner, Mindy's father (played by *Quark* veteran Conrad Janis) and grandmother (played by Elizabeth Kerr), who ran a music shop in town, acted as homespun surrogate parent figures, casting a stern but loving eye on Mork's crazy actions, even after they learned he was an alien.

Though the supporting cast was good, Williams and his manic energy were the obvious focus of the series. He was regularly allowed to draw on his improvisational background and ad-lib some bits during the filming before a live audience. As a result, when Mork broke into one of his wild spurts of rapid-fire jokes, allusions, and body movements, the show revved up to a pace reminiscent of *Laugh-In.* No one, not even the writers and other performers, knew exactly what was coming next.

Mork and Mindy was launched with a special one-hour episode featuring guest appearances by Henry Winkler and Penny Marshall in a new "flashback" sequence showing how the Fonz and Laverne had met alien Mork in the 1950s. With this tie-in from ABC's top superstars, *Mork and Mindy* became an instant smash, adding to ABC's chain of sitcom hits. The network's continuing ratings success, though, prompted cries of anguish by television critics, even those that liked *Mork and Mindy,* because it seemed to guarantee that teen-oriented shows would continue to dominate programming at the expense of more adult fare for years to come. In particular, critics pointed to the failure of a prestigious new CBS drama series, *The Paper Chase,* as a sure sign that in this ABC-dominated era of television, a quality show did not stand a chance.

The Paper Chase was based on the 1973 theatrical film of the same name starring Timothy Bottoms as James Hart, a Harvard law student who fell in love with the daughter (played by Lindsay Wagner) of his tyrannical law professor, Charles Kingsfield (John Houseman). For the series, Houseman continued his role of Kingsfield with a new cast of students, but the same focus: the struggles of first-year law students in a study group trying to develop the necessary discipline to become lawyers. The series tackled such abstruse subjects as legal ethics, personal discipline, and legal methodology, as well as flashier matters such as sexual harassment of students and prison reform.

CBS slotted *The Paper Chase* directly opposite *Happy Days* and *Laverne and Shirley* which, at first glance, seemed "suicidal" scheduling. Actually, though, it made sense as potentially perfect counter-programming. *The Waltons,* for instance, had proved to be Flip Wilson's undoing in a similar match-up earlier in the decade. With high quality writing and good characters, *The Paper Chase* could slowly but steadily build an audience and perhaps pull a similar upset. Its placement against the top teen humor shows of television, however, turned the series instead into a symbolic rallying point that was regarded somehow as a barometer of whether, in the short run, the American public wanted quality drama or familiar comedy. Not surprisingly, the public chose familiar comedy.

As a result, *The Paper Chase* found itself pulled in opposite directions throughout the season. Though it wore the mantle of serious drama, there was constant pressure for more accessible hooks aimed at more broad-based success. John Houseman was very effective in the lead role of Professor Charles Kingsfield, completely dominating the screen with his presence. James Stephens, who took over the role of James Hart for the TV series, was

With *WKRP in Cincinnati,* MTM again turned the premise of an unsuccessful Midwest broadcast operation into a top-notch sitcom: *(from left)* top: Frank Bonner and Gordon Jump; middle: Richard Sanders, Gary Sandy, Jan Smithers, and Tim Reid; bottom: Loni Anderson and Howard Hesseman. *(WKRP in Cincinnati © 1979 Twentieth Century Fox Television. All Rights Reserved.)*

September 10, 1978
Return of the Saint. ATV in England brings back suave adventurer Simon Templar a.k.a. The Saint with a new lead, Jan Ogilvy. CBS airs the revival in a late night slot beginning in December 1979.

September 13, 1978
W.E.B. (NBC). Lin Bolen, a former NBC programmer who served as the role model for Faye Dunaway's Diane Christensen character in the film "Network," produces a TV series patterned after the movie. Appropriately, this is the first show canceled in the 1978-79 season.

October 14 & 21, 1978
"Rescue from Gilligan's Island." (NBC). After fourteen years on the "uncharted desert isle," the seven shipwrecked refugees from the *Minnow* are rescued at last. This two-part special ends with everyone shipwrecked again on the same island, but the program does well in the ratings so they are rescued once more in a May 1979 sequel. After one final TV movie in 1981 (when the island becomes a resort), the series at last fades to black.

October 16, 1978
Sneak Previews. (PBS). After one year on local Chicago public TV, Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel (film critics for the *Chicago Sun-Times* and *Chicago Tribune*, respectively) go national with their weekly critiques of new film releases. The duo moves to commercial syndication in 1982 with a new series, *At the Movies.*

November 18, 1978
California Congressman Leo Ryan, NBC correspondent Don Harris, and two others are ambushed and killed at the air strip near the religious commune run by Jim Jones in Guyana.

also good as the hardworking kid from the Midwest waiting tables to earn his law degree. However, too often potentially effective themes were sabotaged with hokey, heavy-handed subplots. In two of the best episodes (one on moot court and another on understanding contract law), key characters were inexplicably struck by puppy love halfway through the story. Even more basic, the scripts often seemed to be fighting the central setup of focusing on a small group of law students, who spent most of their lives studying and going to complicated classes. It was also sometimes awkward attempting to involve Kingsfield in every story of their lives.

Still, these flaws might have been overcome by fleshing out all the characters. Instead, apart from Hart and Kingsfield, *The Paper Chase* too often settled for stiff stereotypes that made most of the "first year" characters downright unlikable. Hart's study group included a strident feminist, the son of a prominent lawyer, and a smart-aleck jock. They were all clever kids studying at a prestigious law school to be rich and successful lawyers, and it was sometimes very difficult to feel much sympathy for characters whose greatest fear was not finishing at the top of the class. Even Hart, who had to work nights to earn money for school, was exactly the type of student the average person grew to resent: He studied hard, always had the right answers, and held down a job to boot. Stephens, fortunately, was given the opportunity to soften and develop his character. The others were not so lucky. The fact that *The Paper Chase* often managed to overcome so many obstacles for some effective episodes was a tribute to the determination of the cast and the powerful figure of Houseman. CBS did not let *The Paper Chase* die without a fight. When it appeared obvious that the program was not going to siphon viewers from the ABC comedy blockbusters running against it, the network moved the show for a few weeks to later Tuesday night against much weaker competition (the fading *Starsky and Hutch).* However that was hardly enough time for new viewers to discover the program, nor for the production team to work out some of the rough spots in the show's pacing and scripting. Fans of the series insisted that with a little more time and some breathing space, *The Paper Chase* could build on its strengths and develop into a solid and successful offering. Instead, when the program's ratings did not change significantly after its time shift, the series was canceled, becoming the most glorious television failure in years.

Despite the well publicized flop of *The Paper Chase,* the state of quality programming on television was actually quite healthy. Besides established hits such as CBS's *M*A*S*H,* ABC's *Barney Miller,* and NBC's *Saturday Night Live,* there were several strong newcomers, including four high quality shows from the MTM production family: *Lou Grant, The White Shadow, WKRP in Cincinnati,* and *Taxi.*

Lou Grant had premiered in the fall of 1977, starting very slowly in the ratings and barely hanging on through the winter. The show was a somewhat risky approach to one of the most obvious successors to *The Mary Tyler Moore Show.* Instead of placing Ed Asner's Lou Grant character in another sitcom, MTM used him as the basis for its first hour-long drama program. The premise was simple: After being fired from his management position at WJM-TV in Minneapolis, Lou Grant returned to the newspaper business, becoming city editor of the *Los Angeles Tribune.* Each episode revolved around the investigation and preparation of stories for the daily paper.

MTM applied its comedy ensemble approach to the new drama series, building a large supporting cast behind Asner and a wide range of topical, sometimes controversial, subject matter for the stories. This was a tricky combination and everyone involved needed the opportunity to work out the bugs. Asner's Lou Grant character had been a popular part of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* for seven years and his presence helped buy the time necessary for development.

At first, the stories and character development focused primarily on Asner. This allowed him some very effective scenes as a middle-aged man suddenly taking on a whole new career in a brand new city, but it left the supporting characters less clearly defined. They seemed more like character types straight out of such theatrical "newspaper film" hits as "The Front Page" and the more recent "All the President's Men" (about the Watergate investigation by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein). There was an irascible editor-in-chief (Mason Adams as Charlie Hume), a long-haired photographer (Daryl Anderson as Dennis "Animal" Price), a young woman reporter (Rebecca Balding as Carla Mardigian, soon replaced by Linda Kelsey as Billie Newman), an intense Bernstein-like investigative reporter (Robert Walden as Joe Rossi), a handsome assistant city editor (Jack Bannon as Art Donovan), and an older woman as owner and publisher (live TV drama veteran Nancy Marchand as Margaret Pynchon). In addition, some of the scripts ended up a bit preachy and self-conscious while others tried to cover too many aspects of some "burning issue" and emerged as just a series of interviews ending in some dramatic headline. For example, in one of the first season's episodes (Billie Newman's investigation into the background of an American Nazi), an otherwise effective drama was undercut at the end by the melodramatic news of the Nazi's suicide as a result of the *Tribune's* story. (Billie had discovered that the Nazi actually was Jewish.)

City editor Lou Grant (Ed Asner) frequently ended up at the office of newspaper owner Margaret Pynchon (Nancy Marchand) on *Lou Grant.* *(Lou Grant © 1977 Twentieth Century Fox Television. All Rights Reserved.)*

One of the best episodes of the first season was more restrained and realistic in tackling its problem: Should an aging, possibly senile, judge be removed from the bench? It could have been a flashy expose, but instead turned into an intense interpersonal confrontation, reaching a dramatic peak during a discussion between the judge, Mrs. Pynchon, Lou Grant, and Charlie Hume in the *Tribune's* editorial offices. After some serious soul-searching, the judge decided on his own to retire. The *Tribune's* only story from the events was a short item in the back of the paper.

This was the heart of the matter: Most newspaper stories are not Watergate-style headliners that help topple governments, but rather consist of small slices of life from the news of the day. Throughout the first season both the writers and the performers sharpened their skills and moved into a more difficult style: tackling issues that often had no flashy ending, glib solution, or obvious bad guys. To do so, the focus shifted away from the expose orientation to how shades of problems affected people. In the process, the *Lou Grant* ensemble graduated from being merely reporter types to full-fledged interesting characters that just happened to work at a newspaper. The show became an effective equivalent to the legal drama of *The Defenders* from the early 1960s, providing entertaining dramatizations of current topical issues within the framework of a standard TV series.

By the 1978–79 season, *Lou Grant* had stretched, found its style, and flourished. Though Asner's Grant remained the solid rock at the helm of the city desk, more and more time was turned over to the other performers. With this more controlled approach emphasizing characters, *Lou Grant* was able to mix in stories that went beyond merely dealing with controversy, including quiet mood pieces, straightforward character conflicts in the office, and even a sly tribute to 1930s-style Hollywood detective movies (complete with a Sam Spade-type voiceover narration by Asner). At the same time, particular episodes that did take a strong stand were that much more effective.

In a story dealing with Vietnam veterans, Lou tried to help an unemployed black vet find a job, discovering in the process that there were dramatic differences in the after-effects of World War II (Lou's war) and the Vietnam War on the men who fought. While this naturally led to a *Tribune* series on Vietnam veterans, it also

January 28, 1979
Sunday Morning. (CBS). Charles Kuralt comes off the road to host a low-key, informative ninety-minute news show on early Sunday morning.

February 18-25, 1979
Roots: The Next Generations. (ABC). For twelve hours over seven nights, Alex Haley's search for his family history moves from Reconstruction to Africa in 1967. James Earl Jones plays Haley and Marlon Brando, in a rare TV role, plays American Nazi leader George Lincoln Rockwell.

March 5, 1979
NBC's *Another World* becomes the first ninety-minute soap opera.

March 11, 1979
Mr. Dugan. (CBS). The scheduled premiere for the show that never was. Although promotional clips have already aired, at the urging of prominent black leaders, Norman Lear cancels his new sitcom about a black Congressman.

April 1, 1979
William Leonard succeeds Richard Salant as president of CBS News. Salant, forced to retire from CBS upon reaching age sixty-five, moves to NBC where he becomes vice chairman in charge of news.

April 20, 1979
Howard K. Smith quits ABC after seventeen years. Angered that his nightly news commentaries had been cut to about three-per-week, Smith leaves his resignation on the ABC bulletin board in Washington and goes on vacation.

September 7, 1979
Bankrolled by Getty Oil and headquartered in Bristol, Connecticut, the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN), an all-sports cable network, begins. By its first anniversary, it is on twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

In *Diff'rent Strokes*, Conrad Bain played a millionaire-widower who raised both his daughter and two orphaned brothers (played by, *from left*, Dana Plato, Gary Coleman, and Todd Bridges). *(Sony Pictures Television)*

helped Lou to understand the personal pressures affecting a Vietnam veteran on his staff, Animal. The program also made effective use of the *60 Minutes* style of intercutting between separate interviews to underscore points. While Rossi asked officials from a local Veterans Administration office about the unique problems facing those who had fought in Vietnam, Billie posed similar questions to representatives from an organization of Vietnam vets. As each person raised an issue, there was an appropriate comment from the other interview inserted, illustrating how very different the perceptions of the same situation really were. The episode ended with mixed results: Animal solved his problem, the unemployed veteran did not get a job, and all the frustrations discussed in that hour remained unresolved.

A sure sign that *Lou Grant* had inherited the mantle of the golden age of television drama came when a pressure group tried to stop the airing of an episode on nursing homes. The program not only presented an effective look at older Americans, it stirred the ire of the nursing home industry which tried to get the sponsors and CBS not to include the episode in the summer reruns. The story in question focused at first on the shoddy treatment in one particular nursing home where Billie took an undercover job as a nurse's aide. It quickly expanded to the larger issue of growing old with dignity and, on that subject, the program took a clear, unequivocal stand: Nursing homes were not the answer. One character, a seventy-year-old woman, explained that she would rather spend one day at home than ten years in a nursing home, *any* nursing home. Another declared that "even the best of 'em is just a place to wait to die." To its credit, CBS stuck by the series and reran the episode.

Like the MTM ensemble comedies, *Lou Grant* had needed time to grow. Once in the groove, the show managed to pull off the difficult task of presenting thoughtful, well-written, and entertaining drama with class and consistency. It also provided a sharp reminder to CBS that some of its biggest hits had needed time to catch on. From barely adequate ratings early in its first season, *Lou Grant* slowly inched up the charts. It cracked the top thirty by early spring, winning renewal. By the summer of 1978, it took off, consistently finishing in the top ten. Thereafter it scored well enough to be considered both a solid ratings performer and one of the most respected series on television.

Lou Grant's success gave MTM credibility in the drama field and the company followed with another hour-long series, *The White Shadow,* which CBS plugged into the 1978–79 schedule in late November. Produced by Bruce Paltrow and Mark Tinker (son of MTM's boss Grant Tinker), *The White Shadow* presented Ken Howard as Ken Reeves, a former professional basketball player who was forced to retire following an injury. In order to stay with the game, he took a job as basketball coach for Carver High, a largely black Los Angeles ghetto school. The stories focused on the white coach's efforts, on and off the basketball court, to build the talented but unsuccessful team members into winners by helping them develop self-respect, discipline, responsibility, and a spirit of teamwork. Actually, these goals were quite similar to the ideals behind the ill-fated *Paper Chase,* only in *The White Shadow* everything clicked. The writing, dialogue, and characters at Carver High were solid and believable, especially the students. As a result, the series was able to tackle a wide range of themes in a manner distinct from but every bit as good as *Lou Grant.* Some stories dealt with broad topical issues such as venereal disease, drugs, and teenage pregnancy, while others concentrated on small slices of life such as the team's first airplane flight or each senior's decision whether or not to try college. At the end of the second season, the team won the city basketball championship and, in violation of television's usual taboo against anyone ever aging, all but four of the players graduated. Like any real high school coach, Reeves had to start all over again the next school year, which proved to be the show's last.

MTM's new-found success in the field of drama was welcome news to CBS, but the network was even more pleased when the company at last came up with a sitcom successor to *The Mary Tyler Moore Show, WKRP in Cincinnati.*

Another story of broadcasting in the Midwest, *WKRP* began with Andy Travis (Gary Sandy), a hot-shot program director, being brought in to boost the ratings of a "beautiful music" radio station, WKRP. He immediately changed its format to rock'n'roll, receiving only grudging approval from station manager Arthur Carlson (Gordon Jump), who was worried what his mother might think. ("Mama" Carlson owned WKRP.) Andy discovered that one of the station's disc jockeys was a West Coast rock radio legend, Dr. Johnny Fever (Howard Hesseman) and instituted the format change during the "Doctor's" morning show. Fever dragged the needle across the instrumental record then playing and kicked into a hard-driving rock song, punctuating the format announcement with the word "Booger!" (He had lost his job in Los Angeles for saying that on the air.) Travis then brought in another rock pro for the evening shift, Venus Flytrap (Tim Reid), a hip but mellow black disc jockey.

The changes in WKRP upset sales manager Herb Tarlek (Frank Bonner) and news director Les Nessman (Richard Sanders), both of whom did not like rock'n'roll. Les was a straight-laced newsman who took his job very, very seriously, especially the hog reports. (He proudly displayed the Silver Sow award he had won prominently on his desk.) Herb spent most of his time making unsuccessful passes at Jennifer Marlowe (Loni Anderson), the station's beautiful receptionist. Yet they both decided to give the new format a try. It might catch on and possibly boost the station's ratings from dead last in the market.

WKRP's premise and ensemble were MTM's strongest since *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and the series won high praise (especially from radio disc jockeys). Like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show, WKRP* got in some effective digs at the world of broadcasting. For instance, as a Thanksgiving promotion, Carlson decided to release a load of wild turkeys from a helicopter above a shopping mall where Les was stationed to do a live remote broadcast. Carlson failed to realize until it was too late that turkeys cannot fly. Les described the results in a horrified voice, using lines exactly like those in the live radio report of the crash of the German Zeppelin *Hindenburg* in 1937.

In spite of such inventiveness, *WKRP*'s ratings were quite low through September and October, and it seemed doomed to die just a popular cult program. CBS, however, came up with an innovative new strategy to give the show a second chance. Instead of canceling *WKRP,* the network pulled the program from the schedule for a few months. This break gave MTM time to fine-tune the show and when *WKRP* returned in January, CBS gave it the royal treatment, slotting it between *M*A*S*H* and *Lou Grant. WKRP* registered the expected better ratings in its new slot and then took off. During the summer, it shot into the top five, outscoring even *M*A*S*H.*

WKRP was a near-perfect execution of the MTM philosophy of sitcoms, which may be why CBS gave it a second chance. The show had a funny situation with many obvious hooks, yet it also used the setting as a backdrop for developing the humanity of its characters. Jennifer looked like a typical "dumb blonde" but was totally in control of her situation at all times. Leering Herb played up to her but when she called his bluff, he backed down and the two actually became friends. Venus hid behind his on-the-air name because he was AWOL from the Army, yet conservative Arthur Carlson stood by him when that news came out and helped negotiate a compromise settlement with the government. Johnny Fever loved rock music, but admitted that he felt embarrassed living and looking like a college kid when he was almost forty. Les was an insecure, shy man who hid behind a male supremacy view, yet he learned to accept assistance in his private turf, news gathering, from a woman, Bailey Quarters (Jan Smithers).

The other MTM-family newcomer for the fall of 1978 had a similar high quality set up and cast, but unlike *WKRP in Cincinnati,* ABC's *Taxi* became an immediate hit. Technically, *Taxi* was not an MTM show, but the series had the MTM company style stamped all over it. In early 1977, as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* ended its run on CBS, ABC signed four veteran MTM producers to turn out a similar style show. James L. Brooks (co-creator of *Mary Tyler Moore* and *Rhoda*), Ed. Weinberger and Stan Daniels (co-producers of *Mary Tyler Moore*), and David Davis (producer of *Rhoda* and co-creator of *The Bob Newhart Show*) came up with a series set in a New York City taxi company's dispatch garage.

Alex Reiger (Judd Hirsch) was the lead cabbie on *Taxi.* While he was perfectly happy driving a taxi as his life's work, the other "hacks" dreamed of grand success in other areas and claimed that the taxi job was just temporary: Bobby Wheeler (Jeff Conaway) wanted to be an actor, Tony Banta (Tony Danza) a boxer, and Elaine Nardo (Marilu Henner) an art dealer. In the meantime, they shared the less glamorous life at the Sunshine Cab Company working with each other, an immigrant mechanic who barely spoke English (Andy Kaufman as Latka Gravas) and a surly, diminutive dispatcher (Danny DeVito as Louie DiPalma). As in every good MTM show, the group developed into a strong ensemble, fleshing out the characters while facing a wide variety of funny situations. Unlike the many other ensemble shows, though, *Taxi* was an immediate top ten smash, given a tremendous boost by the lead-in of *Happy Days, Laverne and Shirley,* and *Three's Company.*

Adding the strong performance of newcomers *Taxi, Mork and Mindy,* and (in the early fall, at least) *Battlestar Galactica* to its returning hits, ABC jumped out to a commanding lead at the start of the 1978–79 season. It was painfully obvious to CBS and NBC almost immediately that ABC would walk away with its third straight winning season in the overall ratings. Yet there was still a chance to score an upset victory in a more limited contest, the brief but highly competitive race to win the "sweeps" months.

Throughout the year, the Nielsen ratings service measured how well the networks were doing each week, using its sample of some 1,200 "metered" families across the country. Four times each year, for an entire month, the company conducted a much more detailed survey (called a "sweep") that encompassed the performance of more than 700 commercial stations nationwide, which then used the results to determine their local advertising rates that would apply until the next sweeps period. In order to calculate these ratings, Nielsen used a much larger sample (several hundred thousand homes) for the four sweeps periods of November, February, May, and July (representing typical months for their respective seasons).

Because the prime time programming on the network affiliates was in the hands of the networks, the locals pressured them to air the most saleable shows possible during the sweeps. The increasingly fierce ratings wars in the mid-1970s led to the practice of stacking these months (especially the heavy-viewing fall and winter months of November and February) with blockbuster movies, specials, and flashy gimmicks—in the process, of course, making these supposedly typical months very untypical.

The February 1979 sweeps were the most intense to that point. The month became a merry-go-round of time shifts, stunts, and specials. One night viewers had to decide between one episode of ABC's *Roots: The Next Generations* and the network television premieres of two major movies: "American Graffiti" on NBC and "Marathon Man" on CBS. On another February evening, the choice was between "Elvis," ABC's docudrama on the life of Elvis Presley, "Gone With the Wind" on CBS, and "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" on NBC. There were expanded editions of some series while others completely disappeared. It was an expensive, confusing month that left both viewers and executives unhappy. The concentration of so many blockbuster events running against each other and disrupting the regular weekly schedule frustrated and annoyed viewers. At the same time, counter-programming moves and stunts were very expensive for the networks. (One night, February 11, was reported to have cost them $13 million.)

Ironically, after all the moves and countermoves, the February sweeps produced no surprises and seemed only to confirm the obvious: ABC was on top with CBS and NBC far behind fighting for the number two spot. Media analysts regarded these results as clear evidence of a television network status quo that would be around for a long time to come. ABC's number one position looked unassailable.

They were wrong.

1979–80 SEASON

39. Gleam in the Eye

IN MAY 1977 ABC MADE AN UNUSUAL personnel shift and appointed Roone Arledge, then president of the network's sports operations, to an additional post: president of ABC News. Though ABC had successfully taken a commanding lead in entertainment programming, it desperately wanted similar triumphs in the less profitable but more prestigious area of news. Arledge had built ABC Sports into a highly respected and tremendously successful arm of the network; and while continuing at that post, he was to do the same in news.

Since coming to ABC from NBC in 1960, Arledge had demonstrated a sharp sense for packaging and presentation, overseeing such operations as ABC's live coverage of the Olympic Games and weekly shows such as *Wide World of Sports* and *Monday Night Football.* His news responsibilities required him to apply his expertise to another area of network programming that involved both live on-the-spot events and reports from all over the nation and the world.

One of the key areas for improvement was ABC's nightly news program. In 1976, the network had attracted a great deal of attention by signing away Barbara Walters from NBC for $1 million and making her co-anchor of the evening news with Harry Reasoner. That match-up never gelled, leaving Reasoner unhappy and the ratings virtually unchanged. When Arledge took command of ABC News he realized that trying to find a personality mix to outdraw Walter Cronkite was the wrong strategy. Instead, Arledge concentrated on completely reworking ABC's nightly news format to give the program a distinctly different feel and appearance from the competition.

Arledge's primary goal was to reduce the incessant focus on the anchor position in the nightly news and, at the start of 1978, *The ABC Evening News* began to change. Two former ABC news anchors, Frank Reynolds and Peter Jennings, appeared more often, acting as "mini-anchors" for stories from their respective beats: Washington (for governmental stories) and London (for foreign news). ABC's news ratings went up, so Arledge decided to develop his concept further. The result was *World News Tonight.*

The new format, which premiered in July 1978, was slick and fast moving. There was less patter between stories, more use of graphic material (including teasers for upcoming reports) and catchy electronic stinger music going into the commercials. Arledge moved the anchors into a newsroom setting and incorporated the control room bank of monitors into the open and close of the program. Moreover, he broke from a hoary news tradition and eliminated the New York anchor position. Frank Reynolds, still in Washington covering the federal government, became the "first among equals" in an anchor triumvirate: Reynolds usually opened and closed the show, with the necessary transition comments divided between him, Peter Jennings (in London, at the foreign desk), and newcomer Max Robinson (in Chicago, handling domestic reports outside Washington). Barbara Walters remained in New York, but shifted to special assignments and interviews, her real strengths, while Harry Reasoner returned to CBS, the network he had left for ABC back in 1970.

World News Tonight did improve in the ratings, but that represented only a first step. If ABC was going to tout itself as a leader in news programming, it needed some dramatic action to build its credibility. The most obvious move was to expand the nightly news slot, but such a proposal had been fiercely resisted for years by affiliates from all three networks, even when championed by Walter Cronkite himself. Local programmers knew that an hour of network news, or even forty-five minutes, would take time from their own lucrative newscasts or access slot series. It was unlikely that ABC would have any better luck with a proposal to expand the evening news. There was, however, another way for the network to increase its news programming: use a different slot, such as late night (11:30 P.M.) immediately following the late local news. This was the time all the networks generally used anyway for either their "instant news" special reports on late-breaking developments in big stories or the obligatory obituaries on major political and entertainment figures. The chief problem with the late night slot was that it faced formidable competition: Johnny Carson. Since the mid-1970s, CBS and ABC had garnered respectable, if not spectacular, ratings against the *Tonight* show with reruns of movies and old network series. No one thought that a regular late night news show would stand a chance against such solid entertainment fare. Then on Sunday, November 4, 1979, Iranian militants seized control of the U.S. embassy in Teheran and, in the process, took more than fifty Americans hostage.

NBC aired the first TV report on the events in Iran, showing pictures of the embassy takeover during halftime of its Sunday afternoon football game. All three networks immediately rushed correspondents and crews into the country, while drawing on film from European broadcasters in the meantime. In the special late night reports, network correspondents attempted to sort out the events, and their initial explanation of the situation was rather straightforward: Iranian militants had seized the American embassy in angry reaction to the decision by the United States government to admit the exiled Iranian Shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, for medical treatment in New York City. They demanded the extradition of the former Shah in exchange for the hostages.

All three networks did their best to report every available detail on the hostage crisis and, on November 18, each one broadcast its own filmed interview with Iran's religious and secular leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (conducted by Mike Wallace for CBS, John Hart for NBC, and Peter Jennings for ABC; all of whom had to submit questions in advance). After a flurry of late night reports following the embassy seizure, though, both CBS and NBC pulled back, scheduling a late night wrapup only if there were some dramatic developments that day. ABC, however, committed itself to a broadcast at least fifteen minutes long each weeknight "for the duration" (beginning November 8), under the title *The Iran Crisis: America Held Hostage* (anchored first by Frank Reynolds, then by Ted Koppel). In the process, the network not only attracted a huge audience (sometimes outdrawing the entertainment offerings on both CBS and NBC), but also found itself in a position to deal with the story in much greater depth. Instead of merely repeating what had been reported on the nightly news, *The Iran Crisis* featured longer and more detailed presentations on all aspects of the story. At first, the reports covered the obvious questions: What happened today? What do Americans think about it? What can the United States do now? These soon led to a far more difficult question: Why did it happen? In trying to answer that, each evening's report became, in effect, a mini-lesson in basic foreign policy and Mideast history.

The Iran Crisis reports served as an all-around unexpected bonus for Roone Arledge and ABC News. The show attracted a large, steady audience and helped viewers to become accustomed to a late night news program. It also established ABC as *the* network with complete coverage of the situation. This boost in credibility and viewership spilled over into other programs. *Good Morning America,* which had been gaining on *Today* for a while, at last pulled ahead with the bonus carryover audience of people who had gone to bed watching ABC and who then woke up with the TV dial still set there. *World News Tonight* also rose in the ratings, moving into a virtual deadlock with NBC for the number two news position behind CBS.

The hostage situation lasted far longer than anyone first imagined. Through November, December, and early January, reporters filed hundreds of stories on virtually every movement, rumor, and protest in and around the captured embassy. Media coverage, in fact, became an issue itself both in the United States and in Iran. American correspondents complained that often the "spontaneous" demonstrations against "Western imperialism" probably took place because the Western camera crews stationed outside the embassy were ready and eager to film. Officials in Iran, on the other hand, grew increasingly frustrated at their inability to control the image of their own country sent back by the journalists. In mid-January, Iran ordered all American reporters out of the country, so subsequent stories had to be filed from "listening posts" in nearby countries or through other foreign reporters allowed to remain.

By March, though there was still no end to the hostage situation at hand, ABC decided to change its late night *Iran Crisis* "special reports" into a permanent nightly news show that would cover other stories as well. The show was extended to twenty minutes each night and retitled *Nightline.* The revamped program followed the *Iran Crisis* format, though, concentrating on in-depth coverage of a few items rather than a recap of the earlier nightly news (much like PBS's *MacNeil-Lehrer Report).* While *Nightline* was not as big a draw as the Iran wrapups, four months of late night reports had built a solid base audience for ABC, and the show was able to compete successfully in the slot. ABC News emerged from the crisis with stronger news credibility, an expanded news schedule, and higher ratings overall for its *World News Tonight* program. Arledge had done his job well and now focused on beating CBS. Even the nightly news lead would be up for grabs soon because Walter Cronkite was nearing retirement.

Despite ABC's improved news performance, CBS was still considered the leader in news, based on the tremendous public respect for Cronkite as a credible source, the quality of CBS's own special reports, and its increasingly successful news magazine, *60 Minutes,* which had actually become a top ten show.

60 Minutes had been around since 1968, attracting little attention at first with its deft mix of hard-hitting investigative reporting and softer, entertaining feature pieces. It ran for three seasons in prime time, but was exiled in 1972 to the fringe period of very early Sunday evening where it was preempted every fall by professional football. During the summer of 1975, the show ran in a Sunday prime time slot and managed to land in the top thirty. When it returned in December, following the football season, *60 Minutes* was placed at the beginning of prime time against *The Wonderful World of Disney*, allowing it to be on the air year round. At the same time, correspondent Dan Rather joined Mike Wallace and Morley Safer as one of the program's co-anchors.

Through 1976 and 1977, the program's ratings rose steadily, benefiting from the hefty audience of its new fall sports lead-in,

Reflecting accomplishments in both sports and news, Roone Arledge received the Peabody Award in 1966 (for *ABC's Wide World of Sports*), 1968 and 1976 (for network coverage of the Olympic Games), and in 1984 (honoring his entire career). *(Courtesy Peabody Awards Collection)*

FALL 1979 SCHEDULE

	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
MON	240-ROBERT		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)				ABC
	The White Shadow		M*A*S*H	WKRP In Cincinnati	Lou Grant		CBS
	Little House On The Prairie		NBC Monday Night At The Movies				NBC
TUE	Happy Days	Angie	Three's Company	Taxi	THE LAZARUS SYNDROME		ABC
	CALIFORNIA FEVER		CBS Tuesday Night Movies				CBS
	THE MISADVENTURES OF SHERIFF LOBO		NBC Tuesday Night At The Movies				NBC
WED	Eight Is Enough		Charlie's Angels		Vega$		ABC
	THE LAST RESORT	STRUCK BY LIGHTNING	CBS Wednesday Night Movies				CBS
	Real People		Diff'rent Strokes	Hello, Larry	The Best Of Saturday Night Live		NBC
THR	Laverne And Shirley	BENSON	Barney Miller	Soap	20/20		ABC
	The Waltons		Hawaii Five-O		Barnaby Jones		CBS
	BUCK ROGERS IN THE 25th CENTURY		Quincy, M.E.		Kate Loves A Mystery		NBC
FRI	Fantasy Island		The ABC Friday Night Movie				ABC
	The Incredible Hulk		The Dukes Of Hazzard		Dallas		CBS
	SHIRLEY		The Rockford Files		EISCHIED		NBC
SAT	The Ropers	Detective School	The Love Boat		HART TO HART		ABC
	WORKING STIFFS	The Bad News Bears	BIG SHAMUS, LITTLE SHAMUS		PARIS		CBS
	CHiPs		B.J. And The Bear		A MAN CALLED SLOANE		NBC

	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
SUN	OUT OF THE BLUE	A NEW KIND OF FAMILY	Mork And Mindy	THE ASSOCIATES	The ABC Sunday Night Movie				ABC
	60 Minutes		Archie Bunker's Place	One Day At A Time	Alice	The Jeffersons	TRAPPER JOHN, M.D.		CBS
	Disney's Wonderful World		The Sunday Big Event				Prime Time Sunday		NBC

NFL football. In April 1977, the CBS news division announced an unheard-of development: Due to the success of *60 Minutes,* it was showing a profit. This was a dramatic change from the long-standing image of news programs as prestigious loss leaders, and for the 1977–78 season CBS made every effort not to have its Sunday afternoon football coverage run overtime and thereby shorten *60 Minutes.*

Going into the fall of 1979, *60 Minutes* was an established top ten show and, by October, it ranked as the number one network show overall. This proved to be no fall ratings fluke as *60 Minutes* hung on through the winter and spring, eventually finishing as the number one program for the 1979–80 season, the first television news show ever to reach this rarefied height. Such ratings success sent a clear message to all the networks' programming departments: *60 Minutes* was the biggest bargain in television. Not only did *60 Minutes* now offer both prestige and high ratings, but, as a news show, its budget was only a small fraction of most entertainment series, thus allowing a tremendous profit margin. Both NBC and ABC joined the bandwagon and reinstituted prime time news shows, with mixed results.

ABC launched *20/20* in the summer of 1978, but its June premiere at times seemed almost a bad parody of *60 Minutes.* A pair of ill-at-ease hosts, Harold Hayes and Australian Robert Hughes (two print journalists) introduced an investigative report by Geraldo Rivera on the training of vicious greyhound racing dogs (including gory footage of the animals attacking and eating rabbits); a piece by Sander Vanocur on the threat of homemade nuclear bombs; and puff piece interviews with California governor Jerry Brown, his sister, and his mother. Hayes and Hughes were canned after the first show and veteran Hugh Downs assumed the hosting chores. The program ran weekly through the remainder of the summer and as a monthly series during the regular season, hammering out its weak spots and moving away from the much-criticized sensationalist style of the opening episode to a more controlled and focused approach. By the time *20/20* returned as a weekly series in May 1979, the show had developed its own distinctive weekly magazine format, which was generally more feature-oriented than *60 Minutes.* As with the nightly news race, ABC gave up trying to beat CBS at its own game and tailored its program to a different style of appeal.

NBC decided to use an existing series for its prime time magazine, promoting *Weekend* (with Lloyd Dobyns) from a late Saturday night monthly show to a weekly prime time slot beginning in January 1979. *Weekend*'s mix of serious subjects and light, satiric features did not transfer well to the demands of weekly prime time exposure, and the show bombed in its new time period, coming in as the lowest rated program on prime time television. In June, NBC brought in another late night star, *Tomorrow*'s Tom Snyder, to host the more serious *Prime Time Sunday.* Though scoring better than *Weekend,* this series was also unable to duplicate the

success of *60 Minutes* or even *20/20.* In the fall of 1980, NBC revamped the show again as *NBC Magazine with David Brinkley,* adding to the usual feature reports a round table discussion between NBC correspondents (much like PBS's *Washington Week in Review*). However, like its predecessors, *NBC Magazine* was a ratings flop.

Even CBS had difficulty when it tried to create its own feature-oriented spinoff to *60 Minutes.* Back in January 1977, the network launched *Who's Who* (hosted by Dan Rather and Barbara Howar), built around personalities in the news, much like the weekly feature magazine *People.* Each program included extended profiles of or interviews with famous writers, performers, and politicians, mixed with short gossipy anecdotes delivered by Rather and Howar. To contrast with these high-powered celebrities, the program also incorporated reporter Charles Kuralt's popular "On the Road" feature from the evening news in which he turned attention to unusual, amusing, and talented non-celebrities throughout the country. Though individual segments of *Who's Who* occasionally worked (Kuralt's features were consistently the most entertaining), the program never gelled and was gone by June.

For the fall of 1978, CBS went directly to Time-Life, the publisher of *People* magazine, for a celebrity-oriented feature program called (what else?) *People.* With David Susskind as executive producer, the half-hour show (hosted by former Miss America Phyllis George) faithfully duplicated its slick, glitzy magazine namesake. That, too, flopped, chiefly because *People*'s print style of dozens of super short articles and picture captions did not adapt well to television. TV's *People* played like a series of thirty-second commercials sandwiched between title graphics and upbeat disco music.

Ironically, while all three networks had great difficulty trying to successfully copy *60 Minutes,* another type of news magazine was catching on locally in the prime time access slot. This Monday-through-Friday program began in August 1976 on the Group W (Westinghouse) station KPIX in San Francisco, which axed the syndicated *Concentration, Dealer's Choice, The Price Is Right, The New Treasure Hunt,* and *Name That Tune* from the 7:30–8:00 P.M. access slot in order to run the new locally produced show. Three of the five canceled series had been beating their competition, so the move was not out of desperation at poor ratings. Rather, it reflected a desire by KPIX program manager Bill Hiller to do something different with access time, possibly even developing a program that could itself be profitably syndicated. He made himself executive producer for *Evening: The MTWTF Show* (for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday), soon simplified to *Evening Magazine.*

The format for the new show consisted of a nightly celebrity profile (subjects the first week included Paul McCartney, Bill Cosby, Valerie Perrine, and John Ehrlichman), brief helpful "tips" (such as how to exercise while watering your plants), and a "wild card" feature piece. After only two months, the program was a hit, registering better ratings than the game shows it replaced. Within a year, the Group W stations in Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Baltimore added the program to their schedules. Each followed the basic format, with their own local production crews and hosts, and each was also responsible for doing one piece each week that was offered to the other stations. This gave each show both a local and a national slant. By the fall of 1979, the *Evening Magazine* format was on forty-five stations (running as *PM Magazine* on non-Group W stations) and had become the number one access show in the country.

Television critics, of course, loved *Evening Magazine* and pointed to it as the program that at last fulfilled the ideal of the FCC's much maligned access rule. While *Evening Magazine* was certainly much more informative than most syndicated game shows, it was not exactly an overnight commitment to educate viewers with hard-hitting public affairs. In essence, all *Evening Magazine* did was take generally non-controversial "soft" features that were typically part of many local newscasts anyway and package them with similar features from other local stations. Yet this familiar feel probably helped account for the program's popularity, especially with its use of local hosts to read transition material and introduce each story. (Most stations that carried the show did at least one or two local pieces each week.) While *Evening Magazine* was born and bred in local access syndication, there was no reason that its basic format could not work in network prime time as well. NBC, in early 1979, became the first network to come up at last with a workable feature and personality-oriented program, *Real People.*

Former *Laugh-In* producer George Schlatter developed *Real People* as a stage for non-celebrities, "real people" who were presented to be as amusing, talented, and entertaining as any showbiz figures. This was the same world of American backroads visited by such reporters as Charles Kuralt, whose stories usually served as an off-beat closing feature for the network news. *Real People* strung together a series of such reports and anecdotes on unusual individuals in strange situations, focusing as much on the personality of the visiting correspondents as on the "ordinary folks" being interviewed. Schlatter enlisted a large cast of entertaining personalities to act as co-hosts, correspondents, and regular guests, including (for the first season) Fred Willard, Jimmy Breslin, Mark Russell, John Barbour, Sarah Purcell, Bill Rafferty, and Skip Stephenson. He also took a cue from Allen Funt's old *Candid Camera* series and set up the show itself as the playback stage for the films and tapes of their stunts and interviews, presented to a studio audience for laughs and applause. These feature reports included such subjects as an all-male swimsuit competition judged by women, a man in San Francisco named Sherlock Bones who

The *60 Minutes* team: *(clockwise from top)* Dan Rather, Harry Reasoner, Mike Wallace, and Morley Safer. *(CBS News Photo/ CBS Photo Archive © 2003 CBS Worldwide, Inc. All Rights Reserved.)*

September 10, 1979
Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy. (BBC-2). Alec Guinness is outstanding in this seven-hour miniseries as low-key spy master George Smiley, brought back from a forced retirement to find a "mole" in the British intelligence service (dubbed the "Circus"). Produced by Jonathan Powell, it arrives in the U.S. in September 1980 on PBS's *Great Performances* series.

September 12, 1979
Shelley Hack, who appeared in commercials for "Charlie" perfume, replaces Kate Jackson as one of Charlie's Angels.

September 13, 1979
Benson. (ABC). Robert Guillaume takes his butler character, Benson, from *Soap* to the household of a bumbling governor.

September 23, 1979
Archie Bunker's Place. (CBS). A revamped *All in the Family,* set at Archie's tavern. Martin Balsam joins as Murray, Archie's Jewish partner, and Anne Meara plays the new chef, Veronica.

September 23, 1979
The Associates. (ABC). James L. Brooks, Stan Daniels, and Ed. Weinberger (from *Taxi*) create an engaging ensemble sitcom set at a powerful Wall Street law firm. Even with a cast including Martin Short, Tim Thomerson, Joe Regalbuto, and Wilfrid Hyde-White (and a theme song played by B. B. King), the show is a ratings flop.

September 29, 1979
Paris. (CBS). James Earl Jones stars as Woody Paris, a black police detective in an unnamed urban setting. At night, Paris moonlights as a professor of criminology at the local university. While earning good reviews, this series, produced by Steven Bochco for MTM, is axed in January.

October 8, 1979
David Brinkley gives up his co-anchor chores on *NBC Nightly News* and is again reduced to only occasional commentary.

November 4, 1979
Three days before Senator Edward Kennedy announces his candidacy for president, "Teddy" airs on *CBS Reports.* Roger Mudd's extended interview catches the "last Kennedy son" surprisingly unclear as to why he even wants to be president, damaging his image at the start of his campaign.

December 6, 1979
World premiere of "Star Trek—The Motion Picture," first in a series of theatrical films based on the 1960s TV show.

searched for lost pets, and even a *Candid Camera*-type skit featuring real shoppers being asked their opinion of a foul-tasting "new" drink as if they were part of a commercial. (When they thought the camera was on, they praised the drink; when they thought the camera was off, they made faces and admitted it was awful.)

Real People represented one of NBC's few moderate successes from its 1978–79 "revolving door" season, capturing just enough viewers during a six-episode spring run to win renewal for the fall of 1979. Without much fanfare, the ratings for *Real People* crept upward and by Christmas of 1979, the show had sneaked into the top thirty, occasionally beating ABC's *Eight Is Enough* in the time slot. As *Real People* caught on, all three networks were quick to launch copies, turning the format into a programming fad labeled "reality shows."

Alan Landsburg, creator of the pseudo-scientific syndicated access show *In Search Of* (which examined such topics as witchcraft and UFOs), produced *That's Incredible* for ABC. This mid-season entry harkened back to Robert Ripley's *Believe It or Not,* showing "incredible" occurrences that affected real people such as a forest ranger hit by lightning seven times, a woman who allowed herself to be covered with bees, and a Minnesota policeman who reported seeing a UFO. Hosts John Davidson, Cathy Lee Crosby, and Fran Tarkenton presented the stories in an upbeat casual style of wide-eyed amazement ("That's incredible!"). *That's Incredible* turned in incredible ratings, placing in the season's top ten shows, even ahead of *Real People.* Landsburg followed up *That's Incredible* with *Those Amazing Animals,* a similar series for ABC that focused on "incredible" events in the animal kingdom, and *No Holds Barred,* a brief late night CBS show that copied the *Real People* formula but aimed it toward the *Saturday Night Live* audience. CBS also turned to veteran game show producers Mark Goodson and Bill Todman for a reality show update of *What's My Line* called *That's My Line.* The refurbished program did away with the original's celebrity panel and presented instead on-the-scene reports of real people with oddball occupations.

In spite of the success of *Real People,* NBC had disappointing results with its subsequent follow-up reality shows. The in-house *Games People Play* lasted just four months, presenting real people participating in so-called "trash sports" such as beer chugging, tug-of-war, and bar bouncer competition. George Schlatter's outlet for the *vox populi, Speak Up, America,* ran only a few episodes with a format that offered real people throughout the country the opportunity to speak up on the issues of the day. However, the deliberate mix of news, public affairs, and entertainment inherent in such a show stirred unease among the network's affiliates.

Even with such problems, NBC embraced the reality formula because the network needed some kind of breakthrough in its campaign to climb from the ratings cellar. Nonetheless, going into the fall of 1979, it was still no match for the powerhouse line-up at ABC, which looked as if it would continue to roll right over the competition. Not only were there such returning top ten hits as *Happy Days, Three's Company, Laverne and Shirley, Taxi, Mork and Mindy,* and *The Ropers* (a successful spring spinoff from *Three's Company*), but the network also had the World Series in October and the Winter Olympic Games in February. There seemed no way ABC could lose.

Buoyed by such assumptions, network president Fred Pierce and chief programmer Tony Thomopoulos confidently decided to go for the kill and move some of ABC's big hits (*Mork and Mindy, Laverne and Shirley, Fantasy Island,* and *The Ropers*) to other nights in order to spread ABC's ratings strength over all seven nights, and obtain an even larger ratings lead. Though this tactic went against the traditional network strategy of not tampering with established successes, it was not really regarded as that much of a risk. After all, the programs could always be moved back.

The poor performance of some of CBS's unsuccessful new fall sitcoms (*Working Stiffs, The Last Resort,* and *Struck by Lightning*) only seemed to underscore the security of ABC's position. Yet in the first week of the new season, NBC finished on top due to Fred Silverman's front-loading with blockbuster movies and specials. NBC also won the third week, due to the baseball playoffs and the prime time broadcast of Johnny Carson's 17th anniversary on the

Tonight show. At the same time, ABC's former hits were slipping in their new time slots, sometimes dropping completely out of the top twenty. ABC recovered somewhat and pulled into the lead for the season by the fifth week as NBC used up its blockbuster specials and faded. CBS, however, quickly cut off some of its dead weight new shows and bounced back as well, moving ahead of NBC by mid-November and breathing down ABC's neck by Christmas. Part of the reason for this immediate rebound by CBS was the sudden surge by the network's Friday night Southern soul mates, *The Dukes of Hazzard* and *Dallas.*

Dallas began as a little-noticed spring series in April 1978, a product of the Lorimar company (which also turned out *The Waltons*). The program was a high-powered classy soap opera, presenting the oil-rich world of the burgeoning sunbelt as the locale of the Ewing clan, owners of a powerful energy empire. Though each episode of *Dallas* could stand on its own, the series also played like a spicy soap opera, with continuing story threads winding in and out all season. Aging John "Jock" Ewing (Jim Davis) was the nominal boss of the company, but he was being steadily usurped by his crafty oldest son, John Ross (J.R.) Ewing (Larry Hagman), who was determined to keep as much control as possible over the family business. J. R. was more than willing to use anyone and anything to increase his personal power and Ewing Oil's profits. In fact, he rather enjoyed stepping on other people. He blithely ignored his high-strung wife, Sue Ellen (Linda Gray), and boldly carried on an affair with Kristin (Mary Crosby), Sue Ellen's sister. Yet, when Kristin tried to turn the tables and have her own affair on the side, J. R. barged into the bedroom, smiled at the couple in bed, and coolly telephoned the boss of Kristin's lover, having the interloper fired on the spot.

Jock's younger and more principled son, Bobby (Patrick Duffy), was married to Pamela Barnes (Victoria Principal), the daughter of "Digger" Barnes (David Wayne, and later, Keenan Wynn), Jock's former partner turned arch-enemy. Pamela's brother, Cliff (Ken Kercheval), carried on the family feud by waging a war against the Ewing empire from his post in Texas state government. The youngest Ewing, Lucy (Charlene Tilton), Jock's granddaughter (and daughter of the exiled Ewing son, Gary), spent her time seducing Ewing ranch hands and flirting with any other men who passed by. Only the Ewing matriarch, "Miss" Ellie (Barbara Bel Geddes), held no grudge against another main character, and she always acted as confidante and peacemaker.

What made *Dallas* stand out from other soap operas (including recent prime time failures such as *Executive Suite* and *Big Hawaii*) was its Texas locale (where myths of the old West clashed with the reality of modern day business morals) and the character of J. R. Most glossy soap operas focused on admirable, if somewhat flawed, heroes. J. R. was bad and mean and no good and he knew it. He was a villain people loved to hate, and his personal manipulations added an electricity to *Dallas* that attracted viewers who kept tuning in just to see what J. R. would dare try next.

At first CBS did not quite know what to do with *Dallas,* shifting the show a few times before settling on a Friday night slot beginning in January 1979. There it was teamed with another new Southern-based CBS show, *The Dukes of Hazzard,* a slick television equivalent to the popular 1977 Burt Reynolds film, "Smokey and the Bandit."

The Dukes of Hazzard presented life in the rural South as just good fun with fast cars, beautiful women, and moonshine whiskey. Plots for the shows were simple: Cousins Luke Duke (Tom Wopat) and Bo Duke (John Schneider) and their curvaceous female kin Daisy Duke (Catherine Bach) were out to have a good time in Hazzard county, despite constant run-ins with the corrupt local power boss, J. D. Hogg (Sorrell Booke) and his bumbling police force, sheriff Rosco Coltrane (James Best) and deputy Enos Strate (Sonny Shroyer). The two Duke boys were on probation (from some trumped-up charge) so they had to watch their step, and they never did anything really bad. They were what country singer and program narrator Waylon Jennings described as "good ol' boys fightin' the system." *The Dukes of Hazzard* pulled off its simple, good-timey premise with light-hearted scripts, a colorful cast, upbeat country music, and non-stop car chases and car crashes.

Dallas and *The Dukes of Hazzard* complemented each other well and made a perfect back-to-back Friday night double feature. One month into their partnership, both shows were into the top thirty. By the end of the 1978–79 season, both were in the top twenty. In the fall of 1979, the team kept rising, and both shows broke into the top ten. CBS had already built winning lineups on Sunday and Monday going into the new season, so the *Dallas*-

March 4, 1980
The Big Show. (NBC). Nick Vanoff, who produced *The Hollywood Palace,* flops with more old style vaudeo, featuring ninety minutes of singing, dancing, swimming, skating, and comedy.

March 11, 1980
United States. (NBC). Larry Gelbart, the co-creator of *M*A*S*H,* tries a unique thirty-minute comedy on marriage (starring Beau Bridges and Helen Shaver) reminiscent of Ingmar Bergman's "Scenes from a Marriage" for Swedish TV. The program runs without an opening theme or laugh track, devoting most of each episode to conversations about life, death, and sex.

March 15, 1980
Sanford. (NBC). Redd Foxx returns as Fred Sanford, sans son, but with a rich girlfriend.

April 11, 1980
Fridays. (ABC). In a blatant copy of NBC's *Saturday Night Live,* ABC brings together nine young unknowns (including Larry David and Michael Richards) to serve as the troupe for a seventy-minute live late-night comedy show from Los Angeles.

May 8, 1980
CBS chairman William Paley fires John Backe, his heir apparent. Thomas Wyman is named the new president and chief executive officer of CBS, Inc.

June 1, 1980
Ted Turner's Cable News Network begins twenty-four hours a day of television news.

June 23, 1980
David Letterman Show. (NBC). Frequent *Tonight* show substitute host David Letterman receives his own ninety-minute morning variety show. His off-the-cuff esoteric humor does not click in daytime, though. After trimming the show to sixty minutes on August 4, NBC drops it entirely at the end of October.

June 30, 1980
John Davidson Show. Group W dumps Mike Douglas as host of its syndicated talk show for the younger Davidson. Douglas keeps his show going by syndicating it himself.

Dukes of Hazzard combination gave the network three consistently strong nights. This was one of the main reasons CBS rebounded so fast from its weak fall start.

For ABC, something was wrong. The network's seemingly invulnerable position had crumbled practically overnight. Boosted by the World Series and hit movies such as "Jaws," ABC held on to first place in the cumulative ratings through January, though CBS won the November ratings sweeps. A season that was supposed to be a rout for ABC had turned into a neck-and-neck race.

Fred Silverman had observed, going into the 1979–80 season, that he expected ABC to fade soon because the network was repeating its most frequent sin, overworking hit formulas. When he had been with ABC, Silverman had stressed diversity in programming (from *Three's Company* to *Family*) and even raised a few eyebrows by canceling shows that were still ratings winners (*The Bionic Woman* and *Wonder Woman*) because he felt they had peaked. Now ABC seemed determined to produce as many teen-oriented sitcoms as possible, while banking on the success of all its older series to continue undiminished. Even the homespun *Mork and Mindy* found itself tinted with titillation in episodes featuring Mork as a Dallas Cowboy cheerleader and Raquel Welch as a sexy alien. Silverman explained that when viewers at last tired of ABC, they would not so much tire of particular shows as of the approach taken by the entire schedule.

Equally important to ABC's slippage, though, was the miscalculation by Fred Pierce and Tony Thomopoulos on the drawing power of particular hit shows. Viewers did not automatically follow them to different nights and different times, so all the programs dropped in their new slots, some immediately, some after a few weeks. (*Mork and Mindy* dropped as low as 41st in the ratings one week; in another, *Laverne and Shirley* sank to 51st.) ABC shifted *Fantasy Island* back to its previous Saturday slot almost immediately and the show regained much of its ratings strength. The network doggedly stuck with its other shifts awhile longer, and that was a fatal mistake.

CBS had made similar scheduling moves in the 1978–79 season, rearranging several moderate hits in mid-season to build strength on other nights. In the process, *The White Shadow*, *One Day at a Time*, and *The Incredible Hulk* lost their audience and practically dropped from sight. CBS quickly saw its mistake and, within a month, moved them all back to their previous slots, thereby saving the shows.

In the fall of 1979, CBS yanked its fall flops from the schedule right away (in addition to its three unsuccessful sitcoms, that also included three hour-long series, *Paris, California Fever,* and *Big Shamus, Little Shamus*). Some were gone by the beginning of October. ABC, on the other hand, took until February to finish its moves. By then, shows such as *Laverne and Shirley* and *Mork and Mindy* had lost much of their ratings luster and needed time to rebuild even in their old slot. To have former top five shows occasionally in the Nielsen basement dragged down the entire ABC schedule and CBS pulled ahead in January.

One important reason for ABC's inability to move quickly, cut its losses, and bring in new shows was that the network had failed to develop adequate back-up strength. Earlier in the decade, CBS had fallen from first place for much the same reason: While comfortably on top, it had not built up a solid inventory of replacement shows. CBS, however, had also learned its lesson. In the 1978–79 season, the network was ready with *The White Shadow* and *The Dukes of Hazzard* as early winter replacements. This season, CBS displayed more of its valuable "bench strength" at the end of 1979 by quickly replacing failed series with two strong new shows: *Knots Landing* (a *Dallas* spinoff set in California, with Ted Shackelford as Gary Ewing, the exiled son) and *House Calls* (a hospital comedy starring Wayne Rogers and Lynn Redgrave and based on a hit movie of the same name). Both series became solid hits and kept up the CBS momentum. In April, CBS temporarily replaced *House Calls* with yet another strong series, *Flo* (a spinoff from *Alice*), which immediately jumped into the top ten as well.

ABC, in contrast, had only one big new mid-season hit, *That's Incredible. Tenspeed and Brownshoe,* a well produced new cop show, flashed into the top ten after an intense publicity boost surrounding its premiere, but then faded before the characters had time to catch on. *240-Robert* (a pale copy of *CHiPs* and *Emergency*), *B.A.D. Cats* (worse than *240-Robert*), and a condescending blue collar sitcom, *When the Whistle Blows* (worst of them all), were tremendous flops.

Still, ABC planned to hang on for the season by riding the Winter Olympics ratings boost, then heavily promoting its key series as they returned to their previous hit slots and plugging in special blockbuster movies. The February Olympics did put ABC back in the lead, but, by March, CBS was rolling with solid performances on Sunday, Monday, and Friday. Veterans such as *Archie Bunker's Place* (the renamed *All in the Family*), *Alice,* and *The Jeffersons* were once again top ten hits. MTM shows such as *Lou Grant, WKRP in Cincinnati,* and *The White Shadow* were also doing well. And then CBS's Friday night headliners exploded.

As the battle for the top spot in network television moved into the spring, *Dallas* and *The Dukes of Hazzard* became the hottest shows on the air, sometimes finishing first and second in the weekly ratings. *Dallas* pumped up fresh viewer interest by closing out its new episodes for the season with the shooting of the dastardly J. R. by a mysterious assailant. Reruns began the following week and many new *Dallas* viewers, lured by the closing episode, stayed put to fill in character background and catch up on the plot lines and setups they had missed from earlier in the season.

Armed with this line-up of hits, CBS closed the gap on ABC and the two were in a dead heat going into the final week of the regular season (which ended April 20). The cumulative ratings victory rested on the performance of a few blockbuster specials. ABC opened strong on Monday, April 14, with the number one show of the week, the annual Academy Awards program hosted by Johnny Carson. CBS neutralized this by scoring big on Tuesday and Wednesday with the surprisingly well-done miniseries, *Guyana Tragedy: The Story of Jim Jones.* On Friday, ABC put in "The Best of *That's Incredible,*" a special edition of its only new big hit. It all came down to the last day, Sunday, April 20. ABC pulled out one of its champion theatrical films, "The Sting," for an encore performance. CBS countered with a special new two-hour episode of *The Dukes of Hazzard.* The downhome Hazzard County crew beat the con men from Chicago. CBS won the night, the week, and the season. The final seasonal averages for the networks were CBS: 19.6; ABC: 19.5; and NBC: 17.4. CBS held a party to celebrate its first regular season win since the 1975–76 season, and network chairman William Paley called it one of his "sweetest victories."

In one season, CBS had outscored and outmaneuvered the competition with a varied, versatile schedule ranging from the high gloss soap of *Dallas* to the serious character drama of *Lou Grant.* Yet, this dramatic turnaround also underscored how volatile the network standings had become. Even with one of CBS's strongest line-ups in years, there was little chance that victory in the 1979–80 season, however sweet, marked the beginning of another twenty-five year reign at the top by CBS.

40. The Strike

FOR MORE THAN THREE YEARS, NBC's strategy for becoming the number one network hinged on the 1980 Summer Olympic Games. In February 1977, even before luring Fred Silverman from ABC, NBC had won the rights to the contests (the first to be held in the Soviet Union) by committing a record-breaking $100 million in its bid. This broke down to approximately $22.4 million for the actual television rights, $50 million for the production facilities in Moscow, $12.6 million to the International Olympic Committee, and $12–$15 million for such miscellaneous items as talent and transportation.

There was a very good reason for this expenditure: The 1976 Olympics had helped push ABC to the number one slot. Even though the Summer Games took place before the annual ratings battle began for the regular season, they had provided a tremendous opportunity for ABC to promote its upcoming fall schedule. NBC counted on doing the same in 1980, while also treating its overall Olympic coverage as an on-going "big event" with frequent on-the-air promotions. When Fred Silverman joined NBC in 1978, he paced his plans toward the summer and fall of 1980, aiming to have ready a strong program line-up that could ride the momentum of the Olympics and bring NBC to the top by Christmas 1980.

To coincide with its huge investment, NBC signed ABC's 1976 Olympics producer, Don Ohlmeyer, to supervise both the actual coverage in 1980 and the necessary preparations by NBC's sports department. Ohlmeyer's first NBC project was *Sportsworld,* a weekend afternoon sports anthology modeled after ABC's *Wide World of Sports*, that arrived at the start of 1978. This new program gave NBC's sports production crews the opportunity to sharpen their technical skills while providing the network with the perfect on-air promotional forum to talk up Olympic-type competitive events.

As 1980 drew nearer, NBC also scheduled a host of other tie-in programs, ranging from specials such as the animated "Animalympics" to the NBC-financed movie "Goldengirl" featuring Susan Anton as an American track star at the Moscow games. Ohlmeyer himself produced a four-hour made-for-TV movie on the Summer Olympics, "The Golden Moment." NBC announced plans for 152½ hours of Olympic coverage in 1980, pre-empting most of its prime time schedule from July 18 through August 5. Then, on Christmas day 1979, the entire NBC Olympics project was put in jeopardy as the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

The Russian invasion shocked and angered many Americans who were already frustrated by the continuing stalemate over the hostages taken in the seizure of the American embassy in Iran the previous month. Looking for some way (short of war) to protest the Soviet move, many people focused on the Summer Olympic Games in Moscow as a symbolic rallying point and they began to call for a boycott of the event. On January 20, 1980, President Jimmy Carter appeared on NBC's *Meet the Press* and expressed his support for such a move. He said that unless the Soviets withdrew their forces from Afghanistan by February 20, he would formally request the U.S. Olympic Committee to officially sanction a boycott. Many athletes, who had been training years for the games, disagreed with that course of action, saying that it unfairly mixed sports and politics in violation of the true spirit of Olympic competition.

While everyone watched for the next move by the Soviets, the 1980 Winter Olympics went on as scheduled in Lake Placid, New York, running from February 12 through 24 and carried by ABC. The ratings were even better than ABC's successful 1976 Winter Olympics coverage, culminating in a dramatic face-off between the Soviet Union and the United States, on ice. There, for the first time in twenty years, the U.S. hockey team beat the Russians, eliminating them from the Olympic championship series. A video tape replay of the game placed as the number four program of the week and, two days later, the U.S. team went on to beat Finland for the gold medal in hockey.

In the jubilation over the American victory, many people opposed to the boycott were quick to point out that the Winter Olympics seemed a perfect illustration of why the United States should participate in the Summer Games: Confrontations could take place in the sports arena rather than on the battlefield. Nonetheless, the Soviet troops remained in Afghanistan into the spring and, on April 22, the U.S. Olympic Committee voted 1,604 to 797 in favor of the resolution calling for a boycott. Though individual athletes were not specifically ordered to stay home, the committee's vote meant that there would be no official U.S. team sent to Moscow and, therefore, no funds available to defray the tremendous cost of participating.

Throughout the months of public debate on the boycott, NBC found itself in a difficult position and deliberately kept a low profile. Because the Soviets said that the Olympics would go on even without U.S. participation, NBC could still carry them. Realistically, however, such a move would have been a public relations fiasco. The network's financial investment in the games had been widely reported and to go through with coverage while the athletes