

TELEVISION

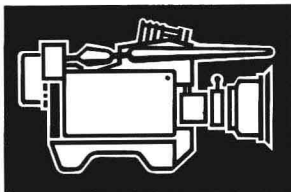


RADIO



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TELEVISION NEWS



RADIO NEWS

Fourth Edition, Revised

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Kevin K. Whaley designed the book. Photographs are by Patrick O'Leary.

Introduction

The commander of United States forces in Vietnam, General William Westmoreland, filed suit against CBS for \$120 million over a news documentary.

Tens of thousands of people sent postcards to the networks in a campaign to delay the reporting of election news.

In a survey, Walter Cronkite was voted the most trusted person in the United States.

Tens of thousands of people wrote hostile letters and telephoned the networks and local stations at the bidding of a vice president of the United States, Spiro Agnew.

Letters-to-the-editor columns at newspapers across the country bristled with anger about television reporters who intruded on a family's grief at the death of a child or a soldier.

At the same time, radio newscasts poured incessantly out of bedrooms and kitchens and cars, just as they have done for two generations. Even commuters and joggers who tuned out the world with orange earplugs sometimes stopped listening to The Who long enough to catch the what, when, where and why.

College broadcast journalism classes bulged with students who brushed aside rumors of low pay, insecurity and overcrowding.

What's going on here?

The answer is obvious. Broadcast news matters.

This book tries to recognize that television and radio news have become part of our daily lives, so these chapters contain more than simply guides to broadcast news writing and electronic news gathering. An effort has been made to identify the problems that swirl around television and radio news. The book also contains chapters on such special areas as weather and sports reporting, editorials and documentaries.

Readers familiar with earlier editions will find in these pages extensive reorganization and rewriting. Two chapters have been added to the writing section and two chapters to the reporting section, plus a chapter on a typical morning in a radio newsroom. A section on the history of broadcast journalism has been introduced. At the same time, material relating to film has been removed, along with much of the earlier writing about news consultants, newscasters, and cameras in the courtroom. The number of examples used to illustrate specific points or techniques has been sharply increased.

The fourth edition revision extends to a change in format. Larger pages contain more white space for easier reading, with topical subheads and interesting quotes in the margins.

The purpose of all these changes has been to help the reader, who is more likely than not a college student majoring in broadcast journalism, to develop the judgment and the skills to feed the apparently insatiable appetite of the public for news which reaches them via the air waves.

Many people are hungry news consumers. Newspapers, news magazines, and books on current topics all find a ready welcome in the home. So do television and radio news, which at their best give the feel of what has happened, the actions, the emotions. "We reach people who count, not who are counted," is the boast of some media. People who count, the news makers and shakers, also listen to radio and watch television news, and what the broadcast journalist communicates to them may influence a chain of events.

It is a heavy responsibility.

There are also people who get their news about the world beyond the neighborhood and the workplace from television alone. They don't buy books. The postman stuffs no news magazines into the mailbox. The newspaper kid bicycles past the house. They listen to no radio news except for the headlines that briefly interrupt their music. Only television news talks to them about their city's pollution, their state's taxes, their nation's political campaigns, their world's nasty little wars.

If the television journalist does not communicate clearly, some viewers — citizens and voters — will not understand what is happening. If the television journalist does not communicate interestingly, some citizens and voters will not care what is happening. If the television journalist does not communicate accurately, some citizens and voters will have a distorted view of what is happening.

It is a heavy responsibility.

These television news "messengers" carry this responsibility daily along a rocky path. Snags and thorns pull at them, the rocks give way, sometimes rocks are thrown at them, and from time to time they trip over their own feet as they run to deliver their messages before the sun sets.

Thinking about those snags, thrown rocks and clumsy feet is not a frivolous task, nor inconsequential. Television news has become too important. Those who prepare it and deliver it ought to look at everything they do with an unflinching gaze. Even if they don't, others do. Although Roper Polls report that television news is a more believable news source than any other medium and the source of most news for most people, from time to time

the network news mailrooms are clogged with complaints. One Roper Poll reported that one American in seven thought the government should control television news programs.

Television news does not deserve all the criticism it gets. It also does not merit all that trust. Not yet.

Television news helped to hold the nation together when a president fell in Dallas. We saw his killer killed, but there were no riots in the streets. Through television news we felt the Vietnamese War across ten thousand miles, and the resulting outcry led to its ending. We have watched men walk upon the moon, and the resulting excitement helped to fund the space program. We have watched flies settling around the unblinking eyes of starving Ethiopian children, and the horror we felt fueled airplanes filled with grain and wool blankets and medicine.

Through radio news, too, we have heard of these things as they happened, and we have learned of plainer events closer to home, of the coming of a rainstorm, of bad government at city hall, of our high school winning the homecoming game.

Speaking about all journalism, Howard K. Smith said, "I would guess that, after formal schooling is over for the average citizen, at least four-fifths of what he continues to learn about his community, about his state and city, and about his nation and the world, come filtered through the observations of a journalist."

The world day by day moves closer to that peculiar place that Marshall McLuhan called the global village. Like it or not, electronic information involves everyone with everyone else, North with South, Mideast with Midwest, white with black, old with young, the well-fed with the hungry.

Go to any corner of this nation, walk through any neighborhood, and you will find television aerials poking up. The roof may leak, but those skinny sticks of metal protrude from it. Go to any corner of this nation and you will hear somebody's ragged music. The table may sag, but a radio perches on it. Sometimes, in the midst of all the televised fantasy and the radio racket, the news comes through.

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