

REVIEW AND COMMENT

Objection!: How High-Priced Defense Attorneys, Celebrity Defendants, and a 24/7 Media Have Hijacked Our Criminal Justice System

By Nancy Grace with Diane Clehane

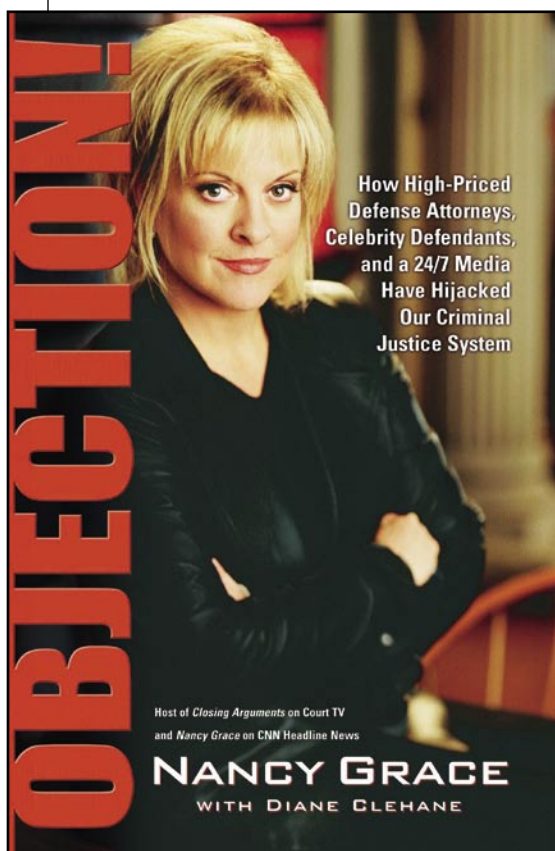
Hyperion, New York
(256 pages, \$24.95)

By Michael M. Epstein

Nancy Grace would probably be the first to tell you that she is a polarizing figure. A former prosecutor turned anchor for Court TV and CNN's *Headline News*, Grace enjoys a reputation, at least among cable news junkies, as a passionate—some would say self-righteous—advocate for victims' rights. In *Objection!*, Grace is all that one would expect her to be—dramatic, angry, glib, and mean—but, unfortunately, as a polemic about justice in America, *Objection!* will not sustain the reader's interest for long. Simply put, it is not a page-turner. Almost from the beginning, it is unclear what kind of book *Objection!* is supposed to be. Co-authored by Diane Clehane, but written in the voice of Grace, *Objection!* is a repetitive, unordered collection of short passages and vignettes that sometimes reads like a first-person memoir, but mostly presents itself as a jeremiad

against the legal system, criminals, and, especially, defense lawyers. In addition, the tone of the book borders on the condescending, assuming that the reader knows absolutely nothing about trials, high-profile cases, and celebrity attorneys. One wonders, who is the intended reader for this volume?

The best thing I can say about this volume is that, as a memoir, Grace's recollections of her experience as a victim turned prosecutor in Georgia can, on occasion, be interesting to read. I was intrigued by her recall of life as an Atlanta assistant district attorney, dealing with trial strategy, botched jury selections, and the importance of image—for both defendant and



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victim—in the courtroom. In one vignette, for example, she describes how she was able to obtain a conviction in a bank robbery case after learning that one of the jurors in the case had previously been convicted of the same offense. Grace remembers the incident as a mistake that she made right; not by seeking a mistrial, but by tailoring her argument to the ex-con juror's expectations. As she describes it, she was able to convince the jury, including the ex-con, that the defendant was so incompetent as a bank robber that he deserved to be caught—and convicted.

But with few exceptions, even her interesting recollections leave the reader wanting. This is partly because the prose is flat, written in a banal, anecdotal style that assumes a reader knows little or nothing about crime or the courtroom. Absent is the color of a Dominick Dunne chronicle or the authoritative eloquence of a Jeffrey Toobin analysis. Moreover, as fleeting as the interesting recollections are, many of those memories are marred by descriptions that are too vague or fragmentary. As storytellers, Grace and Clehane provide their readers with little more than snapshots from cases. Rarely are defendants or opposing lawyers identified; nor are background, facts and arguments of cases presented in more than a cursory fashion. This is especially true with respect to the one story that one suspects many of Grace's fans would be most interested in reading about: the tragic story of the murder of her fiancé. While one learns that his name was Keith—she dedicates the book to him—the reader is told precious little about the man, the crime

or their lives together before the tragedy. And what few details she does share—again as snapshots inserted at different points in the book—seem incomplete and confusing. Grace, at one point, says that her fiancé was murdered for \$35; later she makes reference to his blood-spattered car. What's missing is a clear chronology of what precisely happened. Was it a mugging gone wrong? A carjacking?

While one can understand that someone affected by a horrible crime, as she was, may not want to relive the pain, the story of Keith is pivotal not only as a watershed moment in her life—it led her to law school and the D.A.'s office—but also as a touchstone for her professional opinions on America's criminal-justice system. Indeed, the authors repeatedly use the story of Keith both to justify the stridency of Grace's worldview and to emphasize her empathy for crime victims. Grace herself acknowledges that her critics accuse her of “wearing his death ‘like a badge’” in the final pages of the book, but she dismisses the accusation as hurtful *ad hominem* that distracts from the substantive points she seeks to make. If that is, in fact, the case, then why does the book pepper its discussion of criminal justice issues—from witness handling to the death penalty—with personal references to Keith's tragedy?

The authors, in large part, use Grace's personal recollections as a bridge to a screed against defendant's rights, journalists and American justice. Grace, for example, will make brief mention of an encounter with Scott Peterson defender Mark Geragos or with a Simpson juror, and then use

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that anecdote to make the case that the attorney ethics need to be revised and our jury system reformed. The problem

here is that, with the exception of some studies on the death penalty at the end of the book, the authors do not offer the type of sophisticated analysis of the issues that one might expect

of a purported expert in victim's rights. As a result, what purports to be an explanation of the criminal justice system reads like an unstructured rant in which she offers anecdotes to support her passionate views without engaging the complexities of the issues and without historical context. Grace, for example, claims that, while she supports the U.S. Constitution, she believes that defense lawyers and judges must act to ensure that the "guilty" do not go free. But who determines guilt in the American criminal justice? And why is it that the Constitution places the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt squarely on the shoulders of the state? Grace talks briefly about reasonable doubt and then dismisses it, apparently failing to see that the power of defense attorneys in our system is a necessary evil if society wants to make sure that the state does not use its greater power—including its power to incarcerate or execute—against an innocent person.

The truth is, Grace does not care about the wrongly accused as much as she cares about the victims with whom she identifies. While the book is quick to exploit the tragedies of

murdered children, rape survivors and posthumous celebrity victims like Nicole Simpson and Laci Peterson,

nowhere does the book similarly engage the histories of the wrongly accused whose lives were damaged or ruined by the state, people like purported Olympic bomber Richard

Jewell, purported intern killer Gary Condit, or any number of the convicted felons released from long prison terms as a result of exonerating DNA analysis or prosecutorial wrongdoing. That Grace was quick to proclaim the guilt of Richard Albert Ricci, a handyman wrongly jailed by police investigating the abduction of Utah teen Elizabeth Smart, leads the television anchor not to a humbling apology but to defiance. Ricci was, as she describes it, the perfect suspect, and exhibited behavior that should have landed him back in jail.

This defiance, even in the face of an admitted error in judgment, is what makes Nancy Grace's zeal for victims seem more like self-righteousness to her critics. One gets the sense that Grace wants to live in a *Perry Mason* world where justice always leads to a knowable truth and defense attorneys work alongside ethical prosecutors to assure that the real culprit is revealed. Unfortunately, the reality of justice is never so simple. Justice, in America, is less a function of truth than it is about power—the power of the state to use its resources to prosecute a case, the power of the accused to hire expert defense lawyers, and the power of the

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media to both reflect and shape public opinion. As a former prosecutor turned television personality, Nancy Grace should know this better than most. That she is apparently unable or unwilling to engage this fundamental truth about justice makes *Objection!*, in the opinion of this reader, objectionable.

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Over the Edge: How the Pursuit of Youth by Marketers and the Media has Changed American Culture

By Leo Bogart

Ivan R. Dee, Chicago
(323 pages, \$27.50)

Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century

By Lisa Jacobson

Columbia University Press,
New York
(320 pages, \$37.00)

By Nicholas Sammond

Rare it is that the disposition of a child changes the future of a nation, its boundaries, its relations with other nations (perhaps the Dauphin or the current leader of the United States might mark an exception). Adults are the actors on the world stage; children are their audience. That is what makes it hard to capture the import of children's history and social presence. Yet there is a thread that runs through the record of the grownup world, one that points to the importance of children:

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the gnawing fear that this diminutive audience is watching a bit too closely, is gleaned the worst of our adult world and storing it away for future use. Time-worn jeremiads bemoaning the effects of media on children—from poetry, to plays, to books, to video games—stretches from classical Greece to Imperial Rome to Elizabethan England, into the Bush era.

In *Over the Edge: How the Pursuit of Youth by Marketers and the Media Has Changed American Culture*, Leo Bogart continues the eternal refrain bemoaning media effects on children. Yet he does manage to add a twist to that old dirge: it is the “pursuit of youth” by marketers and media execs that is dragging American culture and society into a quagmire of depravity and postmodern relativism. In series of ten chapters with titles like “The Pursuit of Youth,” “The Wisdom of Wooing Young Consumers,” and “Protecting the Innocent,” Bogart plays at theme and variation, larding his text with loosely related statistics and quotes from sociologists, psychologists and members of the media themselves, explaining how American youth have been corrupted in the twentieth century, how marketing firms have both taken advantage of the moral decline brought on by commercial culture, and how they have amplified its negative effects.

Yet those marketers are not alone in their assault on an

essential American culture. In chapter two, “The Mutability of Mores,” Bogart charts the multiple factors in the decline of that culture, beginning with “...the arrival of millions of predominantly non-European immigrants...” in U.S. cities following World War II, continuing with “...the invention of the new contraceptive pill...” and the resulting increase in women’s sexual freedom, as well as the growth in single-parent households and those led by homosexual couples in the 1960s and 70s. All of these developments (that is, the empowerment of those other than straight, white, middle-class men) Bogart links to a “decline in civility”

OVER THE EDGE



*How the Pursuit of Youth by
Marketers and the Media Has
Changed American Culture*

LEO BOGART

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that provides a chink in the armor of civilization through which hordes of immoral marketers have crept. Thus, we should not be surprised that a few pages later, he speaks warmly of the burka as a shield of female modesty and a regulator of public mores, that later he refers to Ellen DeGeneres as “a lesbian both on-screen and off” (oh, dear), or that he uncritically cites the highly questionable Payne Fund studies of the 1930s and the roundly discredited work of 1950s anti-vice crusader Frederick Wertham in laying his case. Although Bogart suggests that this creeping cultural decay is encouraged by a “postmodern doctrine” which eschews truth and objectivity in favor of a wacky notion that peoples of different cultures have values worth examining, what he really seems to object to is modernity itself. And although he suggests that it is postmodernists who have abandoned truth and objectivity, his rather casual borrowing from histories he doesn’t seem to know well—such as those of media censorship or marketing itself—and his use of loosely correlated statistics would suggest that perhaps he seek a little closer to home for the roots of creeping relativism.

Does this mean that the book is of little value? Hardly. Bogart wants to write a moral tract—perhaps something along the lines of John Locke’s “Some Thoughts Concerning the Education of Children.” Unfortunately, he attempts to prove the objective truth of his position, and the bursts of agglomerated statistics with which he peppers his jeremiad perfectly illustrate the Statistics 101 dictum that correlation does not equal causation. For example, on page 37, he

tells us that in “a survey of 274 directors of university counseling centers in 2001, over 80 percent reported an increase over the preceding five years in the number of students with severe psychic disorders.” Later he states that a “nationwide survey of twelve thousand junior and senior high school students found that 38 percent of blacks, 36 percent of Hispanics, and 22 percent of non-Hispanic whites said that they had carried or used a weapon or had been involved in a weapons-related incident within the last year.” Along with other figures, this data is meant to prove that children and youth today are less psychologically stable, less morally grounded, and more violent than those of previous generations. This weak correlation later links to equally rigorous analysis to demonstrate that this tear in the moral fabric is the result of media consumption. The presence of actual numbers on the page is meant to add weight to Bogart’s argument, when unfortunately it makes what might be a valid moral claim—that we should question the right of private entities to dictate public social relations—a poorly substantiated rant. There is room for a moral tract on the shortcomings of contemporary society, a well-argued claim for the deleterious effects of the unthinking use of certain social categories, or for a social life outside of consumption. (Mortimer Adler, for instance, did this quite nicely in the 1930s.) Cobbling together individually interesting bits of data to make that argument appear socially scientific, thus factual, ultimately undermines those claims.

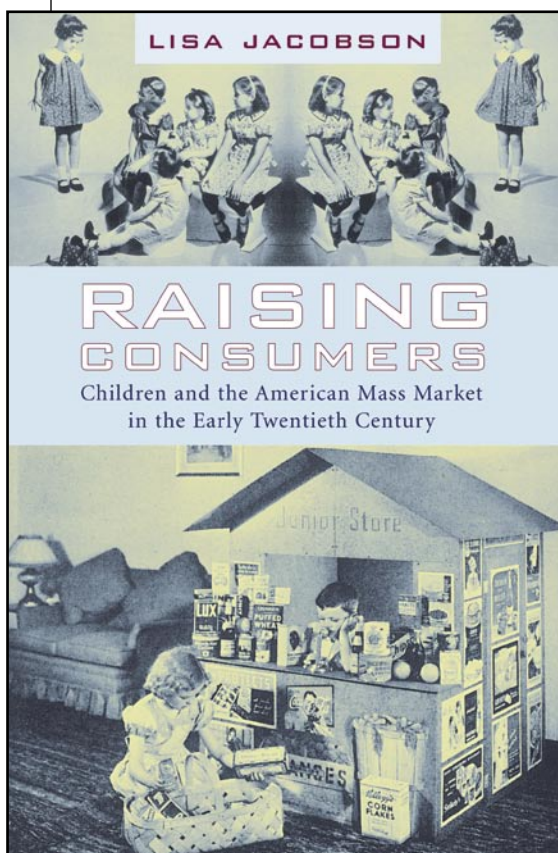
Still, what is useful about *Over the*

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Edge is its discussion of “youth” by marketers, et al. What is less useful is hitching that potentially valuable conversation to a moral denunciation of values Bogart doesn’t like. Either project is worthwhile, but they are poor partners. The larger political consequences of a market construction of youth—which someone like Thomas Frank comes closer to articulating in his *Conquest of Cool*—are lost in the bluster and noise. What Bogart denies is the thornier issue of how youth are empowered or disempowered by consumption generally and media consumption more specifically...or how other social and demographic groups are shaped and limited through a focus on youth. (If there were nothing of value in commercial culture, why would youth be so enamored of it? Do we really think so little of our children?) Instead, he opts for grand social criticism, leaving his reader to decide whether we really are all going to hell in a handbasket... or a virtual shopping cart.

If Leo Bogart does his topic a disservice by treating social criticism as sociological inquiry, in *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century*, Lisa Jacobson offers the corrective of a carefully researched cultural history of consumption. There are challenges in writing about consumer culture. Many authors cannot resist the urge to

translate an almost puritan distaste for the commercial into an argument for a kinder or gentler capitalism (see above). Others err in the opposite direction and celebrate the shiny surfaces of consumer culture as roads to the unalloyed empowerment of the oppressed, paying little attention to the unequal flows of power that underpin that play. To land in the middle, to enter into a more nuanced reading of a cultural landscape, one that clearly stakes out a viable critical position, takes careful and patient research and an eye for contradiction. For the most part, Jacobson’s history of the role of children in an emerging and robust consumer culture admirably manages



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this balance. If anything, it errs on the side of caution, providing no more aggressive thesis than that the rise of consumer culture in the early twentieth century permitted children (particularly adolescents) a more meaningful role in family life, and contributed to the democratizing of the domestic sphere.

Jacobson organizes her project both chronologically and by consumer phenomenon, making a second, implicit argument that children were pivotal to a relatively fluid evolution of marketing and consumption as a cultural phenomenon. Beginning from the premise that a youth culture built around consumption significantly predates the usual touchstone point of the introduction of commercial television in the postwar period, she begins her survey at the beginning of the 20th century, focusing first on faltering attempts to understand and produce a youth market, and examining magazines as an important precursor to radio as an advertising source. In successive chapters, she examines the "thrift education" (using practices of saving to encourage buying), how marketers imagined boy consumers in the early twentieth century (and how they used them to gain a foothold in the home), peer-consciousness in girls of the 1920s and 30s and how advertisers spoke to (and through) girls' concerns, the rise of parental anxiety and playrooms, and, finally, the use of radio clubs to organize children as consumers in the 1930s and 40s.

The strength of this project (and to a certain extent its limitation) is Jacobson's focus on a limited number of archival sources. Drawing

primarily on the extensive N.W. Ayer and Warshaw collections at the Smithsonian Institution, and on the J. Walter Thompson DMB&B archives at Duke University, she engages in a close reading of print advertising and radio campaigns to support the analysis of larger social and cultural moments in the periods she examines. This is a strength for the obvious reason that it grounds her claims in a consistent body of historical material and acts as a touchstone against which she tests her claims. It is a (debatable) weakness in that she hesitates to make larger claims that might require data from more varied sources.

The missteps the book makes are few, and center around reasonably arguable interpretations of the historical record. Jacobson places the rise of psychoanalytic discourse in child-rearing in the late 1920s and 1930s, and links it to a more scientific (or at least scientific) psychological approach to reading the consumer mind. While it is certainly true that there was a flurry of popular interest in Freudian theory in the 1920s, some of which translated into marketing theory (witness the rise of Freud's nephew, Edward Bernays in the world of public relations), sustained interest in the theory was limited to a smaller intellectual class, was treated as a humorous oddity by many, and only began to be widely adopted in the child-rearing community in the late 1930s and 40s. In spite of the curiosity over Freud, behaviorist John B. Watson's *Psychological Care of Infant and Child* (1928) was widely acclaimed, and Freudian approaches to child-rearing were only gradually seen as a corrective

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to the excesses of behaviorist-inspired discipline. Only after World War II, and the rise of Benjamin Spock in particular, were these approaches more fully integrated into mainstream discourse—and with that integration there then arose anxieties about the susceptibility of children to commercial applications of the psychoanalytic. This is not to say that Freudian theory did not have its effect on marketing to children and youth. Rather, it is to say that the extensive adoption of Freudian regimes was limited for a time by a limited popular reception.

Similarly, Jacobson's claims for the democratizing influence of consumer culture in the home must be read against the rise of the single-wage household following the Great Depression, and against such countervailing trends as the exclusion of women from the managerial ranks of radio soon after its establishment as a commercial medium, which Michele Hilmes has so well documented. Consumer culture didn't so much democratize the domestic sphere as it did change the balance of power between parents and children and between women and men in the home. Also, the address of marketing to men, women, and children in the early part of the 20th century helped to further sediment public/private gender divisions, empowering women and children as economic actors in the *private* sphere, but reasserting the *public* sphere as a male domain. In the 1920s and 30s, one is just as likely to find popular discussions about the possibility of consumer culture contributing to domestic unrest as to democracy. The rhetoric of democracy in regard to child-

rearing and domestic management was more a creature of WWII, when the absence of male authority in many homes created anxiety about unbridled feminine power, and about children's acquiescence to that power as a precursor to misunderstanding that their subjugation to state power was provisional rather than normal. Neither of these exceptions, however, invalidate Jacobson's larger argument that consumer culture shifted relations of power in the household and changed understandings of the child as a social being. Indeed, her meticulous approach to the material and desire not to over-read it may have kept her from addressing these broader issues.

This hesitation is a small price to pay for a carefully researched and well-argued discussion of the role of youth in the emergence of consumer culture. It will be a welcome addition to a body of work that includes Jackson Lears, Strasser, McGovern and Judt, and more recently the excellent work of Daniel Cook. More reasoned and based in solid empirical research than Bogart's cry in the wilderness, Jacobson allows her readers to reflect on the place of consumer culture in our daily lives, and then perhaps to make informed decisions about whether to be satisfied with it.

Nicholas Sammond is an Assistant Professor of Cinema Studies at the University of Toronto. He is the author of *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930-1960* (Duke University Press, 2005) and the editor of *Steel Chair to the Head: The Pleasure and Pain of Professional Wrestling* (Duke University Press, 2005).

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COMCASTed: How Ralph and Brian Roberts Took Over America's TV, One Deal at a Time

By Joseph N. DiStefano

Camino Books, Philadelphia, PA
(240 pages, \$24.95)

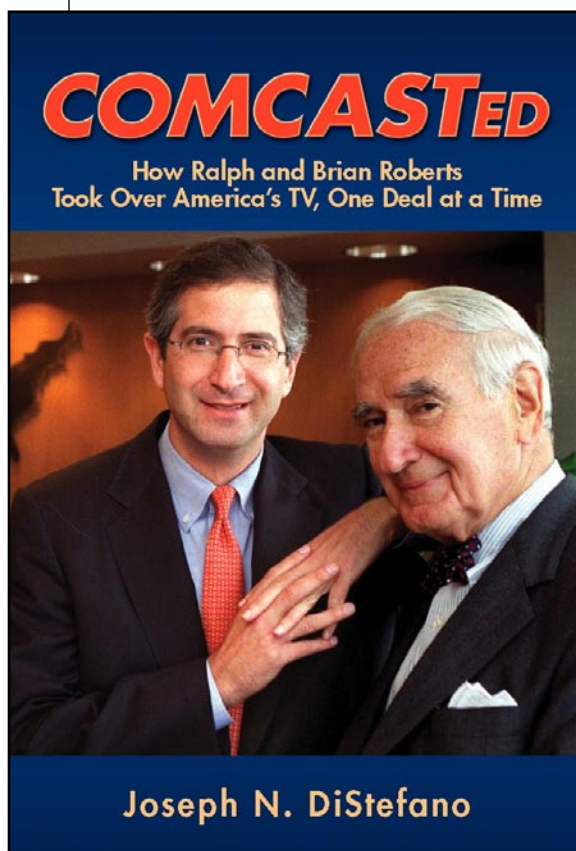
By Paul Noble

It came as a surprise to me, a former broadcast and cable TV programmer, to learn that the Roberts family had already eclipsed Charles and James Dolan, John Malone, Ted Turner, Rupert Murdoch, Michael Eisner, Sumner Redstone, Dick Parsons and Barry Diller in terms of power, prestige and control over what the nation sees and hears.

As a New York area resident for most of my life, Comcast was not an obvious factor in the mix of media behemoths. This past year, I moved to Florida, and soon learned that Comcast would be knocking at my door, gobbling up the Adelphia franchises in my adopted state. And so, when *COMCASTed: How Ralph and Brian Roberts Took Over America's TV, One Deal at a Time*, the new unauthorized biography of Comcast's founders, came my way, I approached the book with a bit of curiosity tempered by incredulity but touched with concern.

Joseph N. DiStefano, an

award-winning business reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, is perfectly situated to look into the Comcast story; he and Comcast have their roots in Philly, and he's been covering the company for many years. Based on this book, you'd have to say that he is not a fan of big business --- really big business. He points out early on that one of Ralph Roberts' first employees, Daniel Aaron, told him that "cable is the greatest thing since stealing." *COMCASTed* bears out this theory, and carefully tells the history of the company and the extremely clever, somewhat and sometimes underhanded, and invariably successful ways in which the Robertses — father and son — have been able to



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keep the fees high, the service low, and the profits astronomical. Television is only one of the services on which Comcast's future lies; it is the possibility of monopolistic distribution of internet access and other forms of digital media that is frightening DiStefano, and, obviously, the rest of us.

A helpful chronology of Comcast's achievements precedes the main story, and an appendix of footnotes follows the text. Incredibly, and chintzily, there is no index of any kind, a symptom of the kind of cost-cutting of which the author might say the Robertses would heartily approve!

We are all complicit in the Roberts family's success, says DiStefano, "thanks....to American television viewers' endless willingness to pay ever higher prices to watch the always flickering screen, instead of going out to make something grand of their own lives." He shows how *our* failure allows Comcast "the deep vein of opportunism; the willingness to look past a range of evils in pursuit of a deal or an advantage; and the keen ability to represent themselves as whatever the customer, regular, investor, or politician who could help them needs to see."

Ralph Roberts, the son of Russian immigrants, sought businesses in which there was little or no competition. According to DiStefano, from Muzak to master antennas, from sports team franchises to shopping-at-home to satellite pornography, the Robertses searched out and exploited the opportunities. The lucrative cable franchise in Philadelphia, the development of QVC, their acquisitions of TCI and ATT Broadband, the control

of sports teams (and TV rights and venues) to the hockey and basketball teams Flyers and 76ers, the failed attempt to take over the Walt Disney Company, and the successful partnering with Time Warner for millions of cable homes soon to be divested by Adelphia Communications, are some of the highlights of Comcast's march forward, trampling over the competition and raising prices for consumers.

Along the way, we're treated to DiStefano's insights into turning points and decisions which have made the Robertses and the others in the business of communications successful in their control of what used to be called "the airwaves." For example:

1 For many years cable pioneers didn't pay for programming. They just appropriated signals and sent them into your home.

2 President Reagan signed a law in 1984 taking the power to set cable rates from municipalities and vesting it in the Federal Communications Commission. Rather than the federal government helping to keep rates low, increases became the norm.

3 It was the growth of cable which took sports telecasting away from broadcast, socking it to sports fans everywhere, especially in markets like Philadelphia and New York, where companies like Comcast and Cablevision controlled rights to major teams as well as their venues.

4 Since "cable companies, unlike phone systems and highways, were

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exempt from the ‘common carrier’ designation that forced other utilities to serve any potential customer,” the cable companies now control the gates to the Internet. And that’s why broadband access is so expensive.

DiStefano’s history is very helpful. However, I found that some of his discussion about the ways in which business deals and decisions were consummated was incomplete for a business novice.

Also, DiStefano’s negative analysis allows little room for the visionary entrepreneur, the not-necessarily benevolent media mogul, the risk-taking (and therefore non-risk-sharing) oligarch. Whatever one may wish to say about Ted Turner’s personal quirks, Rupert Murdoch’s coarse exploitation methods or Sumner Redstone’s aggressiveness, for example, one must see that our television and cable diet is probably richer, more varied and far more exciting than if the descendants of the Big Three (ABC, CBS, NBC) had been the only ones “running the show” these past two decades.

The most curious aspect of the book is the author’s heavy-handed treatment of the Roberts family’s religious and cultural roots. Nowhere in the book do we have such designations applied to Ted Turner, Charles Dolan, John Malone, Richard Parsons, John Kluge, Rupert Murdoch, Barry Diller or any of the other bigger-than-life figures in the industry who are important players in the story DiStefano tells. But we have at least 47 references to the Jewishness of Ralph Roberts and his family and associates.

“To build his team Ralph depended on cold hiring calculations as well as on ties of marriage, blood, and the common life experience of men he chose early to follow and guide him. Brian has assembled his own successor team; it is a more diverse group drawn not from the *ambitious* (my italics) Jewish immigrant ghetto of his father’s time....” the author tells us on page 129. Six pages later: “Like Ralph Roberts a generation before him, (Mayor) Ed Rendell was an *ambitious* (my italics) Jewish New Yorker who came to Philadelphia...” Then, on page 140, (Governor) Milton Jerrold Shapp had staffed his seminal cable equipment and finance company from the ranks of the *ambitious* (my italics) young socialists who had followed President Roosevelt’s left-wing Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace...” Am I being touchy? Is the author using “ambitious” negatively or positively? When it’s attached to “Jewish” or “socialist,” is there a subversive meaning?

In the year 2005, is stereotyping of this sort bad manners as well as politically incorrect? Despite the excellent research this book contains, there’s an undercurrent here that is quite disturbing. I really hadn’t expected to read *The Merchants of Philadelphia*.

Paul Noble recently retired as vice-president, film acquisitions and scheduling, Lifetime Television. He is a Trustee of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences.

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South Park Conservatives

By Brian C. Anderson

Regnery Publishing Inc.
(191 pages, \$24.95)

Everything Bad Is Good For You

By Steven Johnson

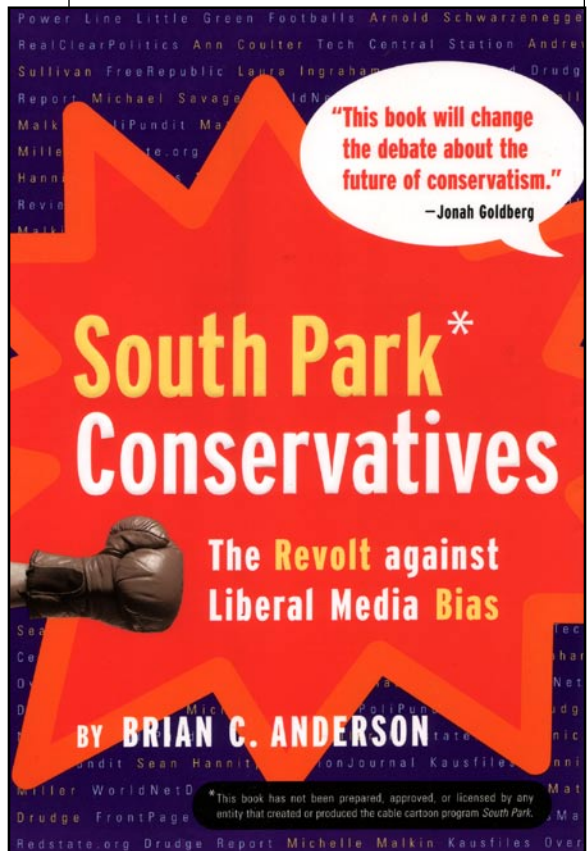
Riverhead Books
(Published by the Penguin Group)
(238 pages; \$23.95)

By Earl Pomerantz

Good news sells, and these books, covering similar terrain though with vastly differing agendas, are exploding with it. The difference is that *South Park Conservatives* is a right-wing pep rally in hardcover, while *Everything Bad Is Good For You* is a skillfully argued affirmation that our much-maligned American culture is actually making us smarter. The second book is better.

Should you happen to find yourself at a Republican fundraiser, you may very well enjoy some institutional catering, author Brian C. Anderson as “our special Guest Speaker” and get *South Park Conservatives* to take home. That’s what this book essentially is,

a conservative party favor, proclaiming that the wicked “mainstream media” has lost its stranglehold on the American consciousness and now the truth can finally be heard. In his introduction alone, three victories are jubilantly declared: the banishing of “The Reagans” miniseries from CBS, the Swift Boat Veterans campaign against John Kerry and the discrediting of the memo attacking the President’s National Guard record. To my reading, this plants conservatives firmly on the side of censorship, the uncritical acceptance of hearsay evidence, and deflection to the memo and away from its contents. Of course, that’s just my interpretation. This is Anderson’s book



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and he can brag about anything he wants.

So what have we got? A book-length report chronicling how conservative talk radio, Internet blogs, the Fox Network, right-wing publishing and increasingly organized Republicans on campus have busted the mainstream media monopoly on the dissemination of news and information and given birth to a broadened range of political expression. So far, so good. A timely story and an unquestionably important one. But then comes the cheerleading: "But before we get to the exciting story of how the new media are overthrowing this old regime, we need to understand its most pernicious effects..." Three words here immediately jump out: "exciting", "overthrowing" and "pernicious." This is not the language of balance and objectivity. Anderson only gushes to one side, leaving his book virtually unreadable to anyone else.

There's a lot of talk about the truth and the liberal media's preventing us from hearing it. "We simply don't get the truth on the abortion issue from the liberal media," head of the Media Research Center's Brent Bozell is quoted as complaining. Which gets me wondering. "The truth about abortion." What exactly is that? Is it that abortion is a sad and painful experience, but criminalization would only make a bad situation worse? That can't be it. That truth is already out. Is it that abortion has been the law of the land since 1973? No, that truth is out too. What I must assume Anderson's referring to is the truth in the survey he cites conducted by The Center for the Advancement of Women demonstrating that "51

percent of women now do not support abortion at all or only in the cases of incest or rape." Okay, fine. Of course, it would enhance the credibility of that truth if Anderson had explained who the Center for the Advancement of Women was, who the women were they surveyed, and how the group broke down as to age, religion, race, financial status and other determining factors. Unfortunately, Anderson neglects to clarify these issues, which, I must say, leaves me skeptical of the whole report.

A major hero in the book is Rush Limbaugh. And why not? Limbaugh got the ball rolling, popularizing partisan conservatism on the AM dial, and ushering in a blabfest explosion wherein "conservatives dominate talk radio to an overwhelming, remarkable degree." Though conceding that Rush's style can be "rude" and his personal life "spotty," Anderson praises Limbaugh for his "unceasing reasoned argument." His selected example? "What I am...is anti-liberal. Liberalism is a scourge. It destroys the human spirit. It destroys prosperity. It assigns sameness to everybody. And wherever I find it, I oppose it." I may be prejudiced, but from an "unceasing reasoned argument" perspective, he doesn't seem to be having his finest day. On the other hand, if Limbaugh had provided a better example of "unceasing reasoned argument," wouldn't Anderson have chosen to include that one instead?

Then there's Fox. You know Fox – the national news organization which trumpets one thing in its ubiquitous slogan, then practices pretty much the opposite? "Sure, the anchor or the host is often a conservative, but it's

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clear he is striving to tell the truth,” Anderson reports. Fair enough. But the foundation of Anderson’s argument denies an equal benefit of the doubt to the other side. Apparently, newspeople trying to be objective can’t be, but those who aren’t trying can. That’s possible, I suppose. Though logic suggests maybe not.

Anderson’s title refers to the hilarious animated series on Comedy Central which he offers as a prime example of anti-liberal backlash, its targets including: “hate-crime laws, and sexual harassment policies, liberal celebrities, abortion-rights extremists, and other shibboleths of the Left.” First, let us agree that pomposity aligns itself with no single political party. There’s plenty of hot air to go around. Second, any cursory viewing of *South Park* would immediately demonstrate that its creators, Stone and Parker, direct their blowhard-puncturing irreverence at targets left and right, using crude language and shots at organized religion (“Mr. Hankie, the Christmas Poo?”) that would have Evangelicals praying desperately for their immortal souls. (Note: Recently, conservatives have been lobbying for legislation to censor cable shows as regards to language and content. That would be an ironic turn of events, don’t you think? Conservatives targeting a show this book made its title-exploiting centerpiece?)

A credible accounting of the right-wing ascendance would be a useful and illuminating addition to the advancing story of modern media. But delivering that would require an author and an agenda that truly are fair and balanced.

One final question. At last count,

Republicans control every branch of American government – the Presidency, both houses of Congress and arguably the Supreme Court (remember “Bush versus Gore”?). If the “mainstream media” have had so little effect on the conservative surge to dominance, what exactly is the problem?

Legitimizing his credentials as a gaming nerd from Page 1, Steven Johnson offers in his highly readable *Everything Bad Is Good For You* a rebuttal to the charge that he’s throwing his life away. When he was ten, Johnson concocted some simulated, statistics-driven, dice-rolling, baseball-related enterprise and spent way too much time immersed in the minutiae of his self-created obsession. Therefrom evolves the theory for his book, colorfully summarized by what Johnson labels the Sleeper Curve. A concept lifted from the Woody Allen comedy “Sleeper,” the Sleeper Curve posits that in the future, things once believed to be bad for you will turn out to be the opposite. What I call Johnson’s spending “way too much time immersed in the minutiae of his self-created obsession...” Johnson files under “Old School” thinking, claiming that, on the contrary, he was learning many valuable skills and lessons, ergo the Sleeper Curve and the title *Everything Bad Is Good For You*.

Johnson quotes the latest Dr. Spock book as saying, “(M)ost computer games are a colossal waste of time.” Though it concedes that game playing enhances eye-hand coordination, the price for these heightened reflexes

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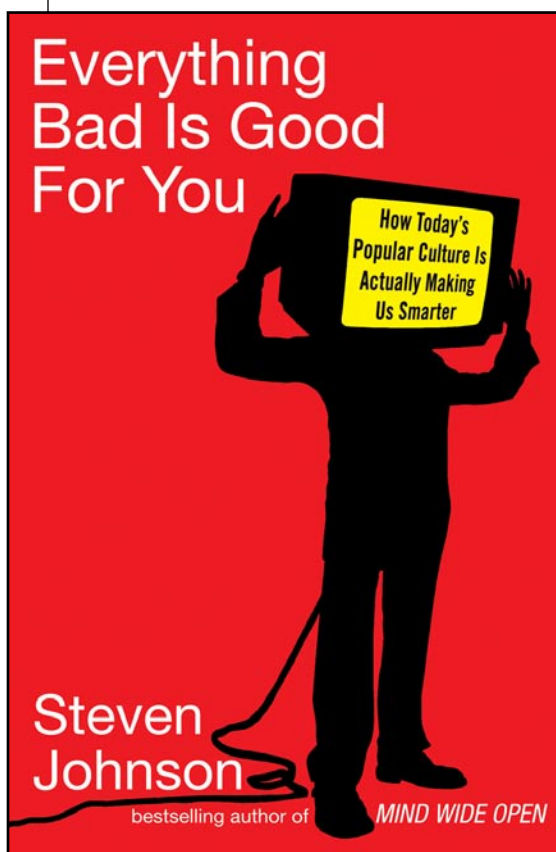
is that gamers become anti-social, potentially violent and stupid. Johnson's response is that games (and the Internet and television) are being judged by old and irrelevant standards. "I believe that the Sleeper Curve is the single most important new force altering the mental development of young people today, and I believe it is largely a force for good: enhancing our cognitive faculties, not dumbing them down." Activities others see as promoting the infantilization of society Johnson believes are "exercising our minds in powerful new ways." We just have to evaluate them in an appropriate – meaning more positive – manner.

The old standard, Johnson argues, favors "the tyranny of the morality play" where "the underlying assumption is that entertainment improves us when it carries a healthy message." That's where the problem lies. "Judged by that morality play standard, the story of popular culture...is the story of steady decline..." From a Gamer's perspective, this is a losing strategy. So how do you win? You change the standard. Which is what Johnson basically does.

He talks about the positive consequences of game playing. He focuses on how playing requires patience, persistence and excruciatingly deferred gratification. He emphasizes the games' problem-solving requirements, filling in the gaps, testing the assumptions. "(G)ames force you to decide, to choose, to prioritize", exercising what Johnson calls the talents of "probing and

telescoping" in search of the answer. "When gamers interact with these environments, they are learning the basic procedure of the scientific method." And so, video games are actually making you smarter. (I may be in over my head here, but couldn't similar claims be made for "Monopoly" and "Clue"?)

But wait, there's more good news. Not only does game playing make you smarter, guess what? So does television. Can you believe it? "For someone loosely following the debate over the medium's cultural impact, the idea television is actually improving our minds will sound like apostasy." Johnson then proceeds to prove that



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TV watching enhances our thinking power. Where was he when my mother was yelling “Will you turn that damn thing off!”

Using a series of impressive-looking charts, Johnson demonstrates that shows like *ER* and *The West Wing* are considerably more contentually subtle and narratively complex than T.V. shows of the past like *Dragnet* and *Starsky and Hutch*. “(P)art of the pleasure in these modern television narratives comes from the cognitive labor you’re forced to do filling in the details.” Dealing with a multiplicity of storylines and unclear information forces today’s TV watcher into a viewing mode Johnson calls “sit-forward” rather than the traditional “lean-back”, or doze off.

And it’s not just the superior shows that are teaching us things. Borrowing techniques from video games, reality shows engage us in the “intellectual labor of probing the systems rules for weak spots and opportunities.” Evaluating the hidden motives of the contestants also helps sharpen our emotional IQ. “‘Playing’ a reality show requires you to both adapt to an ever-changing rulebook, and scheme your way through a minefield of personal relationships.” Comparing *Joe Millionaire* with yesteryear’s *Battle of the Network Stars*, Johnson offers proof of the ultimate test of the Sleeper Curve theory: “(E)ven the crap has improved.”

The cherry on this good-news sundae is served up in a study showing that the American people are smarter now that we’ve ever been. Citing a study by philosopher and longtime civil-rights advocate James Flynn, Johnson reports

that “in forty-six years, the American people have gained 13.8 IQ points on average.” That’s not just brainiacs, it’s all of us. How did that happen? It can’t be the schools. We know how terrible they are. Could our rising intelligence stem from the narrative complexity and problem-solving challenges provided by the current media? Impossible. Everyone knows the media’s making us dumber.

Or are they?

My experience creating television shows leads to one point on which I respectfully disagree. Johnson’s reporting that “syndication and DVD sales offer great financial reward to creators who generate titles complex enough to remain interesting through repeat encounters” points to the implication that writers deliberately complexify their material to generate big-buck bonanzas down the line. In my experience, thoughts of this nature never come to mind. When you’re creating a new television show, you’re not thinking about the down-the-road possibilities of syndication and DVD’s. You’re just trying to get the thing on, and hope that the viewing public responds. True, subtlety and narrative complexity are no longer avoided, but they can’t insure a hit show. And no hit show, no DVD.

Johnson’s theory also offers no explanation for the multi-decade longevity of the uni-layered genius of *I Love Lucy*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, not to mention Chaplin, Keaton and Laurel and Hardy. Maybe it’s not narrative complexity that breeds entertainment longevity but simply quality.

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In the end, it isn't a question of either/or. Responding to the lacerating critique of modern culture, Johnson's book argues for nudging aside the storyteller's perspective for that of the Gamer's, though he's hardly an extremist. Feeling his perspective has been haughtily dismissed, Johnson's appeal requests reconsideration, one his book strongly demonstrates it deserves. Still, for my money, to investigate more deeply, to understand more fully, to get the richest and truest sense of who we are and how we behave, the still most reliable path is the one beginning with six very special words: Let me tell you a story.

A frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly*, Earl Pomerantz was executive producer of *The Cosby Show*. He is a veteran television comedy writer whose credits include *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Cheers*. He has won two Emmy awards, a Writers' Guild award, a Humanitas Prize and a Cable Ace award.

What Women Watched: Daytime Television in the 1950s

By Marsha F. Cassidy

University of Texas Press
(276 pages, \$21.95 paperback)

By Mary Ann Watson

American women of the 1950s have been the subject of countless cultural studies and historical inquiries—all confirming that their lives were far more complex and nuanced than conventional wisdom would have us believe. Marsha Cassidy brings a fascinating new body of evidence to the table with *What Women Watched: Daytime Television in the 1950s*.

In the decade before soap operas began to dominate TV's schedule on weekday afternoons, the networks experimented with daytime formats, production techniques and on-air personalities. Cassidy's analysis of the industry's quest to meld TV viewing into the workaday routine of the average housewife is a *tour de force* of archival research. Each case study is far more than a description of what was seen on the screen. Primary source documents, such as memos between network executives, as well as oral histories conducted by the author, provide a rich context rather than a mere backdrop.

The first program Cassidy chronicles in depth is *The Kate Smith Hour*, which aired on NBC from 1950-1954. Smith's virtuoso radio performances of "God Bless America"—a song she

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had commissioned Irving Berlin to write for her—had a profound impact on patriotism during World War II and drove the sale of war bonds to spectacular heights. Smith would always be linked to her impassioned support of the Allied cause, which became an increasing impediment as postwar women grew more interested in a modern lifestyle.

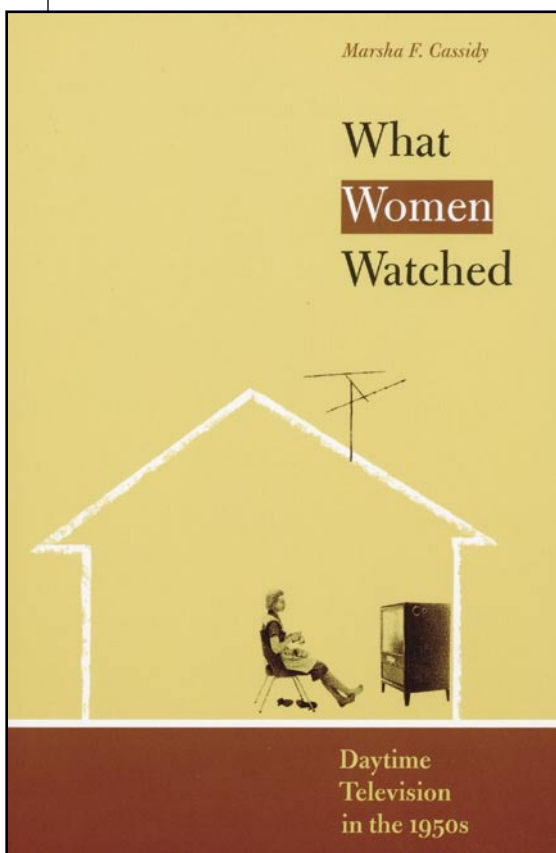
The heavyweight icon was more of a nostalgic figure than a contemporary TV star. A sturdy look was not the goal of 1950s fashions. The trend was slim lines and pinched-waists—inspired by Christian Dior’s vision of women as delicate flowers. The production values of *The Kate Smith Hour* were also out of step with the times. Cassidy details the proscenium staging conventions that fought the medium’s inherent intimacy, including static long shots and virtually no visual acknowledgment of the live studio audience.

Another problem that had nothing to do with her physique was Kate Smith’s reluctance to endorse sponsors’ products on her program. The singer’s dear friend and manager Ted Collins did not want Smith’s stature as an artist diminished by turning her into a saleswoman. When advertisers, such as Jergens hand lotion, insisted on personal testimonials, they found that Smith “lacked enthusiasm right through.” The mission of daytime television in the 1950s was to push product—and Kate wasn’t playing ball like a good scout.

In the following chapter, Cassidy

covers three “Charm Boys” who were proud to be pitchmen to the ladies at home. She describes Garry Moore, Arthur Godfrey and Art Linkletter as “charismatic male stars...whose assertive but tone-down masculinity secured a defining brand of male dominance in the daytime world.” They weren’t artists, just pleasant guys with the gift of gab and an understanding of the close-up nature of the medium. The author explains how much impact a well-timed “grin, or glance, or wink at the camera” had on viewers.

The sprightly, bow-tied host of *The Garry Moore Show* believed housewives used television as a “sop for loneliness” in the daytime hours. His variety



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program created a community for female fans—one in which they felt admired and appreciated. “I reject the notion that housewives are stupid because they listen to daytime shows,” Moore told *Time* magazine in 1953. His spirited and solicitous interactions with the studio audience were key to his rapport with the audience at home. He *wanted* to hear what they had to say. In addition to comedy sketches, musical performances, and weekly exotic animal segments, Moore conducted celebrity interviews—including visits from Frank Lloyd Wright, Carl Sandburg and Eleanor Roosevelt.

Arthur Godfrey Time also had a live studio audience made up primarily of women, but they had little role in the proceedings. Godfrey was a more imperial host, seated on a raised platform with his troupe of performers seated below. His manner was engaging and his smile boyish, but there was never any doubt that he was running the show. Cassidy makes the fascinating observation that the controlling Godfrey functioned more as a “spousal substitute” than the indulgent Moore.

Art Linkletter’s *House Party* is typically remembered for the host’s sometimes hilarious, but always gentle interviews with children. The author reminds us, though, that when Linkletter and the ladies were alone, he often tickled with double entendre and mild innuendo. His athletic build, Cassidy posits, “continually affirmed his virility onscreen.” Fan mail with “big red lipstick kisses” and suggestions of intimacy indicate that his fans regarded him as a “distant yet present paramour.”

The lowbrow offerings of the “misery show” genre raised the hackles of critics who believed they exploited human misfortune for network profits. On *Strike It Rich*, down-on-their-luck contestants, many with physical handicaps, told their sad stories on camera. The author notes that the show “offered the studio audience and home viewers an unfettered stare at the disabled body.” *Glamour Girl* was a show in which women in trying circumstances, whose looks had suffered as a result, competed for the prize of a complete makeover. The postwar premise of the series was that cosmetics and clothes changed not only appearance, but also personality and outlook on life.

In 1956, *Queen for a Day*, another melodramatic “confessional” show, took daytime TV by storm and sponsors lined up. Each day four women were selected from the studio audience to tell tear-jerking stories of life’s cruelties. Tales of sick children especially tugged at the emotions of viewers. Cassidy observes, however, that host Jack Bailey, a former carnival barker, “controlled, interrupted, and reworked” the contestants’ narratives of woe rather than allowing them to speak freely. The women supplied the sobs and distressed expressions as Bailey “manipulated the tenor of each story.”

At the another end of the spectrum was a woman who had the freedom and talent to speak authoritatively on a wide range of subjects. *Home* with Arlene Francis was created by NBC’s Sylvester “Pat” Weaver as a midday version of *Today* and *Tonight*. Its relatively short run between 1954 and 1957, though,

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relegated *Home* to a minor footnote in TV history for decades.

Cassidy makes a strong case for the series being a subject of academic interest. Her discussion of the ostensibly contradictory messages about women's roles conveyed to the viewers of *Home* is the most intriguing theorizing in the book. As the title suggested, the show was about domestic matters. An elaborate circular stage facilitated a segmented format. The daily rotation included features on cooking, beauty advice, gardening and home decorating. But there was also an emphasis on culture, history and the importance of women in public affairs. "*Home* challenged a rigid construction of the homemaker ideal," the author writes. "(The show) cast doubt on homebound femininity and projected the possibility for alternatives."

Another of Pat Weaver's mid-decade attempts to upgrade the status of daytime television was *Matinée Theater*, a daily one-hour drama. The original concept was to offer women at home stories in the legitimate theater tradition of the prime-time anthology series rather than the pedestrian approach of soap opera. Renowned producer Albert McCleery was at the helm of the "gargantuan effort."

During its three-year run, *Matinée Theater* offered 660 hours of live daily drama broadcast in color. The eclectic body of original script explored "human, sexual, and familial relationships" with surprising sophistication. Occasional costumed dramas, adaptations of classics such as "Much Ado about Nothing" and "Wuthering Heights," were part of the mix. The pressure from

advertisers for a more populist brand of teleplay was a growing tension as the series progressed.

As the decade drew to a close, prestige drama—both in daytime and prime time—was caught in changing industry currents. The network could not justify the high cost of producing *Matinée Theater* when more cheaply produced game shows, talk shows and soap operas were earning higher ratings and kept sponsors happy. With understandable bitterness, McCleery called TV "that black marauder of the arts."

What Women Watched is a valuable addition to the study of broadcast history, demonstrating how the cultural pressures faced by postwar women could be traced through daytime TV. For the most part, Cassidy writes with clarity and cogency. There are, however, some unfortunate lapses into academic jargon that have no explanatory power. Phrases such as "in the homology of tropes" and "the aesthetic of distanciation" don't serve the analysis or the reader. This, though, is minor criticism of an impressive scholarly undertaking.

Mary Ann Watson is a professor of Electronic Media and Film Studies at Eastern Michigan University and a frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly*.