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Editors: Roger Gimbel, Fay Kanin

The Caucus for Television Producers, Writers & Directors
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Editor's note: the opinions expressed in this journal are those of the individual authors.

FROM THE EDITORS

Fay Kanin
Roger Gimbel

All year long, we have not stopped — the *Journal* has weighed in with article after article opposing media consolidation at every turn, every point of view — obviously a high priority for the Caucus.

This issue proposes other subjects of interest ranging from *Why Join the Caucus?* to network bigwigs discussing “repurposing” the new disease of the week ... as well as why HBO is having a hard time selling off-network packages of *Sex and the City*.

A lot of what has been written here is downright “edgy.” *Edgy* is the word. According to *Webster’s Collegiate*: dangerous; sharp according to the *The New Yorker*. Read Bill Blinn’s *Eulogy for Act Three*, look at Lorenzo Semple’s *One or Many* — both successful screenwriters. Another strong piece by Brent Bozell questions the quality of prime time TV. Anyway, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

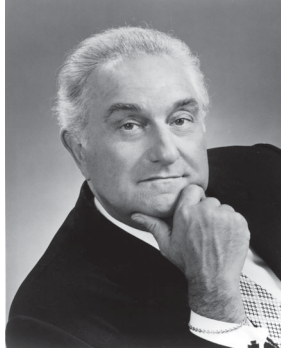
Chuck Fries
Chairman of the Caucus

Over my 29 years in the Caucus, I've served full-time (except for a two year sabbatical) on the Steering Committee and as Caucus chair for seven years, co-chair for seven years, and secretary for three years. And now I'll do two more years as a co-chair to help my successor's transition. Then I'll take my second constitutional term limit sabbatical for two years.

Over these years, I've seen and administered many issues, events and changes at the Caucus. In January 2004, we'll celebrate our 21st Annual Awards Dinner. In the last two years we instituted two new events – TV: A Year in Review (moderated this year by Cynthia Littleton of *The Hollywood Reporter*) and our Annual Birthday/Reunion lunch where this year we celebrated our 30th birthday and honored our member Vin Di Bona's 300th episode of his *America's Funniest Home Videos*.

Carrying out our Mission Statement and our Aims and Objectives however is the most important function of the Caucus chair. And for the last two years we have been striving to monitor the quality and diversity of television in a world of media consolidation. A world where the vertical and horizontal integration of entertainment companies has impacted the small businessman, i.e. the independent producer.

In doing so we have joined with all four guilds – PGA, WGA, DGA and SAG – in op-



posing media consolidation. We have filed with the FCC, communicated with Senate and House Judiciary and Commerce Committees, and filed with the FTC. And we have seen a positive response to our work in legislation and in judicial rulings that will thwart the strangling sprawl of the conglomerates.

To accomplish these goals I have to thank the Steering Committee and Officers with whom I have served the past two years. They have been a dedicated and industrious group of men and women anxious to create a diverse quality of programming for the viewing audience.

Our Caucus Foundation has now conferred 29 Student Film Completion Grants totaling \$170,000. These students represent a diverse group of young filmmakers, a number of whom have garnered Awards for Excellence and who have gone on to set up their own independent film production companies. We have found the Foundation, which receives a significant portion of the net proceeds from our Awards Dinner, to be a remarkably rewarding experience for the Caucus.

The Caucus continues to be an energetic and vibrant organization whose membership is evolving and changing with the entertainment industry its members serve. And I see in its future a strong and dynamic organization where creative forces can gather to discuss and deal with many industry issues.

ONE OR MANY? —THAT IS THE QUESTION

Lorenzo Semple, Jr.

The above is the title of a small book written by Aldous Huxley many years ago about Monotheism vs. Polytheism. For the record, he came down heavily on the side of Poly, asserting that to honor many gods and goddesses, each representing different human emotion or hope or fear, and to let no particular one dominate your life, was the key to the good life.

Somewhat the same question, in a less lofty form, confronts the “producing community” today. One or many? Great concern has been expressed over the last few years about the remarkable “many-ness” of producer credits on all kinds of shows. The complaint has been that many of these credits are “cheap” and have nothing to do with “real producing.” There is some validity here, particularly in episodic TV where it’s customary for a dozen or so “producers” of various flavors to be credited for 23 minutes of film. Indeed, such is the disconnect that the *genuinely real* producer may be credited as an executive producer but in fact is known as the show runner, a title of enormously greater respect.

But one must not be too quick on the trigger. In movies, some of these much-maligned credits are not cheap but extremely expensive.



It is common for one or more of these producers to have brought tens of millions of dollars to a production, without which it never would have happened. Is not raising money an important, if not the most important function of a “real” producer?

Similarly, is not another vital producing function attracting stars and keeping them content?

If this involves, as it often does, crediting their hairdressers, dog walkers, second cousins, personal trainers, managers, drinking buddies, lawyers, accountants and others of that lowly ilk as executive producers (or co-executive producers, if the star’s clout is borderline), what’s wrong with that? It’s

merely acknowledging the realities of the industry. One is loath to say it in this publication, but many of the tasks of the “real” producer, daily scheduling, doing line-by-line budgets, hiring teamsters and so on, can be taught to most any per-

son of near-average IQ.

So what are we advocating here regarding the desirable number of producers? A simple policy of the more the merrier?

Though tempting, no. Other creative elements “come from different places,” as the psychobabblers would put it. Directors, obviously, would prefer there to be only one producer per project, giving them a single human

***“Writers have a
different view.”***

being on whom to focus their righteous fury when their movie or TV work turns out catastrophically.

Writers have a different view. (Full disclosure: I have been one of those.) Informal interviews reveal a decided preference for numerous producers. To boil these down, it is usually the writer who has first contact with the producers, during the myriad pitch meetings, illegal rewrite demand sessions, note giving and suchlike, which are the norm these days. If they're clever they can manipulate one (or even two) producer "into their camp" as far as the script is concerned. This is particularly true when the writer is "cute" and the producer is responsive to persons of that gender. As one award-winning scribe, a sit-com yoksmith, said pithily at a local Starbucks: "Five producers, dude, it's like stealing caviar from a baby! That's five slots where you can hammer in a wedge and get the [expletives] fighting each other. It leaves a creative opening you could drive your Hum-

mer through without the [expletives] noticing! But given just one [expletive] in charge, dude, you're toast. He'll eat you up every time."

There's also an aesthetic argument for multiplicity, the maintenance of a pleasing balance of alpha and omega. That's to say, with an average of 127 credits running at the end of a movie, shouldn't there be some kind of equivalent weighting at the opening? It's impossible to describe the pleasure of watching very old movies that one has TiVo'd wherein a single card at the beginning often carried *all* of the production credits, save only cards for a single producer and a single director.

Those who favor fewer credits will be heartened to hear of an October meeting between officials of the Screen Actors Guild and

Actors Equity. Not a whisper has been leaked to *Variety* or *The Reporter*, but an impeccable source tells us that the subject of this meeting was a truly revolutionary demand to be incorporated as a deal-breaker in the next contract negotiations: *The number of actors in any filmed or live entertainment must at least equal the number of credited producers.*

Consider for a moment what this would mean if achieved. Almost every play on Broadway, wherein a cast of four qualifies the show as an epic spectacular, would have to shut down immediately, and many so-called "sitcoms" would be gravely threatened.

Speaking of threats, however, another looms even more ominously. As the number

of producers on a given show rises, it takes no rocket scientist to realize that the productivity per individual producer falls. *Productivity* — that double-edged sword which may cause severe job loss but remains the key to America's continuing prosperity, according to President Bush and others equally qualified

in macroeconomics. And what recourse does a giant corporation have such as controlling the entertainment industry today when its productivity drops?

Outsourcing — the "race to the bottom," scouring the planet for benighted countries offering ever-lower wages and overhead. For example, if you called American Express Customer Service these days, odds are you'll be serviced (if you're so lucky) by someone sitting with a phone headset and computer screen in Delhi. India today, Sri Lanka next month, Rwanda by 2006. A recent small piece in the *Wall Street Journal* reported a current boom at Indian universities in filmmaking courses — with, surprisingly to some, a new emphasis on producing techniques rather than the usual

***"Productivity — that
double-edged sword ...
Outsourcing — the
'race to the bottom,'"***

“creative” aspects of the medium.

Wake up. Don't smell the coffee but remove your Armani shades and notice the handwriting on your office wall. “Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.” In the Bible, this mysterious riddle was written by a hand on the wall at Belshazzar's feast. These Aramaic words may be translated literally as “it has been counted and counted, weighed and divided.” Daniel interpreted this to mean that the king's deeds had been weighed and found deficient and that his kingdom would be divided. It takes little imagination to read “producer” for “king.”

Just because you eat cow at Morton's or get about in a Mercedes AMG, don't think it can't happen to you. The dogs bark and the caravan moves on, as our Arab comrades say. Any day now, your agent may call you with your conglomerate owner's best-and-final

offer: either accept immediate relocation to your new supervising producer's facility at Wal-Mart Studios in Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte (first-class airfare for one, of course, and unlimited phone privileges from that venue), or else have security escort you from your office in 15 minutes *and don't take anything with you.*

Unimaginable! You might bleat. *Me?* Hmmmmn. Think R*per* M*rd*ch.

Lorenzo Semple Jr. is a writer. He has also worked as a free-fall parachute jump instructor, not to mention a highly rewarding stint as a volunteer auditor for the IRS. In between these chores, he wrote or co-wrote such movies as Three Days of the Condor, The Parallax View, Papillon, Never Say Never Again, and Pretty Poison.

TELEVISION: A YEAR IN REVIEW

TOP PROGRAMMING CHIEFS PONDER THE ISSUES

On June 5, 2003, the Caucus held a luncheon meeting at the Beverly Hills Hotel addressing the subject, "Television, a Year in Review," and featured a panel of leading television network executives and production heads. The following are excerpts from the discussion moderated by **CYNTHIA LITTLETON**, Deputy Editor of *The Hollywood Reporter*.

The Members Of The Panel:

GAIL BERMAN, President of Fox Broadcasting Company, is the first series producer to hold the top Fox programming post. She is in charge of all Fox program development and scheduling as well as marketing and promotions. On Broadway, she produced *Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Hurly Burly*, *Blood Knot*, and *The Nerd*.

LAWRENCE LYTTLE, President of Paramount Company's Big Ticket Television, produces prime time network and first run syndication. Under his management, Big Ticket produces *Judge Judy*, *Judge Joe Brown*, the UPN comedy *The Parkers*, CBS' *Hack*, and the WB comedies *Jamie Kennedy Experiment* and *Greeting from Tucson*.

DAVID KISSINGER, President of Universal Television Productions, oversees network series that include *Law and Order* and its various spin offs, last summer's reality series *Crime and Punishment* as well as *The District*, *The Agency*, *Just Shoot Me*, *American Dreams* and *Dragnet*.

BARBARA FISHER, Executive Vice President of Entertainment, Lifetime Entertainment Services, which encompasses Lifetime Television, Lifetime Movie Network and Lifetime Real Women. She was responsible for *Just Shoot Me* and *The Steve Harvey Show* at Universal.

ARNOLD SHAPIRO, Producer with hundreds of hours of television programming to his credit. A partial list includes *The Family*, *Family Business*, *Big Brother One*, *Big Brother Two*, *Scared Straight — '99*, *Scared Straight! 20 Years Later*, *Smoking, Truth or Dare*, *Rescue 911*, *Kids Killing Kids*, *Kids Saving Kids*, and *True Detectives*.

CYNTHIA LITTLETON: *The 2002-03 season was an eventful year for all of the broadcast and cable networks and the people on this panel. I throw this question open to anyone on the panel: What were some of the biggest surprises of this season, whether it be the perfor-*

mance of a show, the performance of a network, the creative direction that primetime series have taken, the reality trend; or anything else that comes to mind?

DAVID KISSINGER: With Gail here it's very

convenient for me to say this, but it happens to be true. I think the rebuilding of Fox this year is really the biggest story and in some ways the biggest surprise. No one could have imagined the incredible success of *American Idol*, which I think transcends the reality craze. But the continued success and growth of *24* is also a terrific story. For me, that's the standout, at least on the broadcast network side. On the cable side, you have to look at the continuing breakout of cable series as an amazing phenomenon that's taken off in the last couple of years, whether it is *The Shield* on FX or *Monk* on USA.

GAIL BERMAN: Thank you for those nice words. It was an extraordinary year at Fox. In the early part of the year, we found ourselves in a very bad place. We had the interruption of baseball. We had started a couple of series with an episode or two, we were off for a month, came back from baseball in the November sweep. It was the first time we were able

to take a look at what having all post-season baseball in a straight run meant to the company. And it was extremely challenging. That is the nicest way I know how to put it. What we didn't know at the time was what a show called *Joe Millionaire* would mean to the company. Obviously, you never know. We did have a run of *American Idol* in the summer and we felt that the show would probably do as well as it had done in the summer. We had no expectation that it would do any better than it had done in the summer. So that was how we were approaching the new year thinking, we're making this very significant scheduling change and we're just going to throw it all against the wall and hope that something good happens.

In fact, something very good happened, and we started the new year with our fortunes changed. I think we all know that in show business, you're in the dumps in December and by January everybody thinks you're a genius.

ARNOLD SHAPIRO: For me, the whole reality craze is this lava flow that doesn't seem to stop. In 2002, when we did *Big Brother Three*, just a couple of reality shows were on. Twelve months later, there were close to 20 reality shows on that we're competing against. And every time we think that it's finally peaked and that it's going to take its place in a normal way, it keeps getting bigger. Obviously it can't go on indefinitely.

BARBARA FISHER: Obviously with a cable point of view, I would share what David said. I think cable has become a real force, not just in series but also in movies. I will also say, because David is on the panel, that *Law and Order* just keeps on coming. In cable, one of our biggest competitors are the *Law and Order*

repeats on Turner. What amazed us this summer is that, in repeats it's a force to be reckoned with.

CYNTHIA LITTLETON: *It's amazing that with all those shows, the writing is consistently so high quality. That is a testament to Dick Wolf and his team. Now, when you're in those schedule-setting meetings in early May, how much are you looking at a grid that is just a "big six?" Or are you looking beyond that? Do you want to make sure you know what's on HBO and Lifetime on Sundays?*

GAIL BERMAN: That's a very funny question because we have just been through it. We

***"...in show business,
you're in the dumps in
December and by
January everybody
thinks you're a genius..."***
— Gail Berman

have this traditional grid that has six networks on it and we're sitting there thinking it's perfect. And then somebody says, you know on such and such a date, we think *The Sopranos* will be premiering or the return of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* or whatever. And you begin to understand that the landscape is so much bigger than what is on this big board in front of you.

CYNTHIA LITTLETON: *That's very interesting. Is the content of cable programming something that you guys think of when you're developing shows or taking shows out to pitch?*

LAWRENCE LYTTLE: At our place the economic model of cable somewhat precludes us from actively being in the cable supply business. In the drama business, which is the forte of cable programming in the series business, the people at Paramount who distribute our shows have an aversion to cable programming, but not because of the quality of the material. In fact, they're quite smitten with it. But the afterlife, meaning the foreign sales and any domestic re-usage, somewhat mitigates against a major studio with its significant overhead actively being involved in the cable series business. We recently had a situation with FX and a script that we had developed. Somehow the agent or the writer got it to FX and they were interested in buying it. We would have been in a real dilemma, because the business model the distribution people advanced didn't really facilitate the logic in going ahead. I'm sure you're in a different situation, having USA Network. But at Paramount, even in the Viacom Company, we obviously have a

myriad of cable networks and it still is a very difficult thing. I'm sure most of your suppliers, Barbara, are not from major studios, right?

BARBARA FISHER: Actually, Viacom does *The Division*, and we understand they do very well with it. And Sony does *Strong Medicine*. But it is particularly a challenge at Lifetime, which is perceived as sometimes a softer programming. We have taken great care in our new development to try to address that. We want studios to be in business with us, so we're very happy that *The Division* and *Strong Medicine* do so well overseas. We're looking first

and foremost for what series is going to do well for us. And we are staying away from things that we think are going to be weak in the foreign market.

DAVID KISSINGER: I think it's changed radically in the last year. I remember having this debate with Barry Diller about three years ago and in his usual gentle

way, he said, "You don't know what you're talking about, this will change in a heart beat." And he was right. Our show *Monk* actually does better numbers internationally than some of our shows produced for networks exclusively. So it's a whole new ballgame.

LAWRENCE LYTTLE: At Paramount, we haven't really experienced that but I fully understand it. In show business it's a collision of the show and the business model. I think that, in this case, there's not a person who supplies product who would not be interested in supplying product to Lifetime, TNN, USA Network or FX. We're really in the business of manufacturing software; if you reduce it to that denominator then we're interested in outlets

***"And we are staying
away from things that we
think are going to be
weak in the foreign
market."
— Barbara Fisher***

in which we can exhibit our product. It's interesting that *Monk* does better overseas than some of your network shows, which is somewhat of an aberration from the model today.

GAIL BERMAN: It's interesting if you look at some of the studios having pulled out of shows on networks they felt were too soft for foreign return. But, there are some things that were on CBS that people pulled out of, and yet those very same companies are producing shows like *The Shield* for FX, because the international return on a show like that is significant.

CYNTHIA LITTLETON: *The off-network market. I think in two years we'll be talking about the radical change in selling. Probably the best example is that HBO is having a hard time selling an off-network package of Sex and the City and even The Sopranos, which is grade A programming but hard to place in the off-network market. Even for traditional shows, the economics have been very challenging. However, I did want to get back to looking at networks competitively. Barbara, do you look at the broadcasters?*

BARBARA FISHER: We're certainly aware of what everyone is doing, both in cable and broadcast. Our programming board would take over the whole room. We don't have the budget for a board, but we're all - (LAUGHTER) . . . we're thinking. We have it on Xerox, but we have everybody there.

LAWRENCE LYTTLE: It reverts back to the initial question: what are the most significant

things that have occurred in the broadcasting networks? I think the most significant change in our business in the last several years is that the networks have somewhat conceded the summer.

GAIL BERMAN: Man, I wish it was still around, but I can tell you it's not. If you look at the way things were when I arrived at the network three years ago; the summer came, and we had a lot of repeats — *X-Files* in repeats, *Ally McBeal* in repeats, *Boston Public* in repeats, all summer long. And we were, just sliding by. Then we had a television show called *24* and this was a situation where the tail was leading the dog, because we knew that we could never repeat this show. Oh, of course we could repeat it. Absolutely, we can repeat it. It's so good that we must repeat it. We knew that once we had gotten through the end of that day, there was — it would probably have little repeat value in the summer. So we had a model where we could

only run an awfully big expensive television series for one run. We had to figure out how to do that, luckily the international market was good and the studio and the DVD.

CYNTHIA LITTLETON: *It wasn't very long ago that repurposing was the buzz. Everybody was talking about repurposing. We haven't heard nearly as much about it but clearly it's a key component of the Law and Order business. For you producers, has repurposing become almost like a vital part of the business model of a high-end drama?*

LAWRENCE LYTTLE: From our end, there

“I think the most significant change in our business in the last several years is that the networks have somewhat conceded the summer.” — Lawrence Lyttle

is a flux of issues that are involved with repurposing. The greatest question (and I don't think there's any specific answer), is what does it do to the sanctity of the negative? We have a show called *The Jamie Kennedy Experiment* and there have been a ton of phone calls from cable networks that want to repurpose it. It perfectly plays into their demographic and it obviously plays in the WB's demographic. But we're very nervous about the notion of repurposing. We're uncertain about what its back-end viability is, because it's not really a sitcom, yet it is. And the idea of deluding the value of the product by running it elsewhere at the same time is a big question for us.

DAVID KISSINGER: Our experience is kind of unusual, given the addictive quality of the *Law and Order* shows. At some point, maybe they will exhaust people, but for now, there seems to be no sign of that. With those shows, the more exposure, the better. It's a legitimate concern that overexposure has deluded impact on the backend of shows. But I think we face a great challenge now in getting awareness for our shows. So that tends to tip me in favor of repurposing wherever we can.

ARNOLD SHAPIRO: We have a repurposed show this summer. I don't own it. That seems to be my business model. I never seem to own anything that I produce. (LAUGHTER) But *The Family*, which was brought to us by ABC, has been repurposed on Family Channel, a

week later. And I think it's going to run a week after the episodes run.

GAIL BERMAN: I actually agree with David. In a marketplace where it's so hard to get attention for anything, as far as I'm concerned, run it a bunch of times. We repurposed *24* on FX. It was good for us but at FX, I'm sure they feel quite differently about it. It didn't receive the ratings.

LAWRENCE LYTTLE: Well, the only reason to repurpose a television series is for it to get exposure so people can look at it on the primary carrier. But there's another twist on it. *Monk* appears on USA first and ABC second, and yet, it's one of the most successful dramas on ABC. But the truth is, for their second run, they pay an extremely low license fee and it's doing well for them.

BARBARA FISHER: I was going to give a different point of view. We think of our network as a brand more than a network. We would be concerned with what Larry says — that it dilutes our brand a bit. So, right now we would not be for repurposing our shows, because we're very protective of that brand.

Note: These remarks are from the discussion that took place at the "Television – A Year In Review" luncheon. The Caucus thanks the distinguished panel and those who attended. We look forward to seeing you at the Caucus Awards Dinner in January.

“...the only reason to repurpose a television series is for it to get exposure.”
— Lawrence Lyttle

EULOGY FOR ACT THREE

William Blinn

It may or may not be accurate, but it's taken on the strength of legend. We're told that fabled playwright, George S. Kaufman, when asked for his formula for commercial success replied, "In the first act, get your hero up a tree. In the second act you throw rocks at him. In the third act, get him down out of the tree." Sound advice, pragmatic and effective, used for years and years by writers of every stripe and venue. Kaufman's formula provided a roadmap to the final curtain, a series of essentially immutable steps allowing us to increase the heat to the boiling point and then release that tension, usually in a satisfying action sequence just in time for a painfully cute tag and a final word from Tidy Bowl.

By following this series of steps, we were permitted to simplify and throw away the byways that might dilute and divert the audience's unwavering attention. This allowed our heroes – and sorry, Karen Sisco, they were invariably heroes then – to confront the problem and take a handsome male wrestling the dragon to the ground and then emit a chest thumping howl of triumph. The heroes were strong, confident, and determined. They were Matt Dillon, Ben Cartwright and Wyatt Earp. Certain of the rightness of their cause and the effectiveness of their strategy. The programs that these characters were in were Westerns, often called "horse operas," and the name had

reason and accuracy. The storytelling style in opera is large, the passions elemental and primal, and it could make for entertainment that was both insightful and riveting. Those who question that, just go check out any *Gunsmoke* rerun. And yet, for all the quality, there also came a drawback.

The stultifying sameness of formula TV.

It would be flattering to those of us who generate scripts and concepts for television to say we saw this happen and swiftly made the switch to more imaginative storytelling but that

happens not to be the case. We took the same predictable storytelling MO and transformed it to policemen, uniformed and plain clothes, teachers, doctors, and lawyers. We never got to process servers, but I suspect we were well on

our way there. We had driven into the dirt, poured gallons of water out onto the its surface, and now looked about, bewildered, when we found ourselves mired in a hackneyed bog of our own making.

It was life itself that showed us the light, helped by the merciless assault of the news media. We, hand-in-hand with the general population, started to become aware of the contradictions to which we'd turned a blind eye for ongoing decades. There were American warriors in cloaked and questionable combat. We saw some of our law officers belaboring fellow citizens for the sin of being a member of a minority race. We also saw elected offi-

***"The stultifying
sameness of formula
TV."***

cial with feet of clay that reached well above knee level. We saw they were frayed and flawed, venal and distressingly imperfect.

We went careening down this new avenue like bikers into a lapdance beer bar. Our cops became depressed and duplicitous, obsessive-compulsive, alcoholic and sadistic. The lawyers were greedy, sexually feral justice molders and plea whores. The doctors were drug dipping, ill-tempered, fee meisters, although ever kind to the terminally ill little girl on the fourth floor. Having copped to dance the creative vanilla foxtrot for years and years, we now proclaim ourselves liberated as we perform a line dance called the "Macarena." We had discovered a new cliché, and damn those are hard to come by.

At this point let's acknowledge a time-honored tradition of television's creators blaming network programmers for making those decisions, which lead us down the oft-trod track leading to pabulum predictability. This tradition boils down to grizzled veterans of the creative process taking guidance from network executives who think Britney Spears reflects the establishment and Tiger Woods is a place. If fingers need to be pointed, if blame is to be assigned, I hope we can agree that we're as much culprits as we are victims, because if we only nod toward network pressures, we are tacitly admitting to our own timidity and powerlessness. The Caucus is founded on precisely the opposite mind set.

Are these new clichés all to the negative side? Absolutely not. Numerous characters are more subtly drawn, more finely nuanced; but there is a school of thought wondering if a committee of flaw finders is involved with the new construction. Our doctor will have a drug

problem. Our lawyer will suffer from an eating disorder. The cop will experience a dark sexual kink. Instead of creating characters, we're using psych textbooks like the menu in a Chinese eatery: one from column A, two from column B and presto, there's the new addition to our ensemble. Some call it modern writing. Others call it cherry picking aberrations. Either side represents somewhat of a subjective call. What is, in my opinion, not subjective is that there has not been a sea change in the manner used to structure television's dramatic offerings.

At an earlier time, writers sought to consciously turn up the heat by building to an explosive (sometimes literally) climax, which is an emotional or physical outpouring designed to allow the tension to dissipate in what was hope-

fully a satisfying manner to the audience. As our new awareness of life's imponderables has increased, this kind of dramatic construct seemed over simplified, too-pat, too-pap, no longer bearing relevance in a world that saw leaders assassinated, and wars mismanaged and misrepresented. If the world had become mysterious and perplexing, how could we, in all good conscience, offer the viewer an ending that implied the answers were not there? Well, we couldn't. So, we didn't.

Enter the brooding, profound and ponderous close-up.

There was a time when dramatic act ends were hammered home in a style John Henry would have recognized. The telling clue, the new piece of vital information, and the hysterically blurted confession to deeds most foully, were all followed by a musical cue that would topple Big Ben. We weren't subtle. We sought to knock the end off the Richter scale.

***"...network executives
who think Britney Spears
reflects the
establishment and Tiger
Woods is a place."***

We grabbed for the jugular and worse, squeezing for all we were worth.

But, in the new world of confusing ambiguity, we needed to back off. No longer do we point fingers in electric alarm. Now our writing is soft about the edges, filled with frailty and knowledgeable of our flaws. We are now confronting bittersweet moments of realization, communal moments of inner reflection, all of which lead to the ponderous, profound close-up referenced earlier, which is oft times supported by music with a solo lead on oboe or one-finger piano coda. This is a world that is admittedly truer to our condition and more accurate in its description of our mutual *mis-asma*. It is also, in my opinion, a world in which it is difficult, if not impossible, to create heroes.

I submit we are in need of heroes.

Not cotton candy heroes. Not Hoppy, Roy or Gene. Maybe not even Ben or Matt, though I'm less sure when it comes to the latter duo. I acknowledge, on my part, a growing concern that while admittedly writers have a responsibility to reflect the flaws inherent in our characters, is that accurate depiction all that's expected of us? Is it enough to say that the situation is screwed up and so are we? Personally, I think not. I think the audience looks to us to not merely point out the wound, but to also go on and illuminate what balm may be applicable. To be accurate is the job of a reporter. To be insightful is the task of the writer. I fear we have interchanged one for the other, harming ourselves and shortchanging our audience.

Years ago, there was a brilliant Stanley Kubrick film entitled *Paths of Glory*, which dealt with the true story of the execution of three French soldiers, scapegoated by their own command and government. They were wholly innocent of the charges placed against them, for which they were found guilty and

executed by a military firing squad. This was total and brutal rape of the justice system. Kubrick and his screenwriters did not turn away from any of this. The final scene of the movie, which I will not detail here, establishes that though monstrous things take place, we are, as a species, not monsters but fellow beings groping through the darkness toward a light as yet unseen but sought with desperate need and passion.

Don't lose the meaningful close-up. Don't sugarcoat reality. Don't do away with the darkness.

But perhaps, in light of these storytelling changes, we need to consider a rewrite of George S. Kaufman's pragmatic advice.

In the new version, our hero would approach the tree and start to climb the tree after spotting an endangered species perched atop the uppermost branch. As he climbs, he gets a better view of the surrounding countryside, notes the decimation of the forest, and his heart aches as he knows it was his family's fortune that was responsible for laying waste to the countryside and as this angst tears at him, the limb upon which he's climbing, weakened by industrial pollution, breaks away and he plummets to the earth far below. He survives the fall, but his leg is severely injured. He limps noticeably as he walks off into the sunset.

What used to be a winner has now become a whiner; it's far more realistic and far more accurate.

Sorry, George. Somehow, we went and got small.

Mr. Blinn has been active as a writer and/or producer for the better part of four decades. He has received multiple Emmys, WGA Awards and Golden Globes. He has submitted no photo because he is weary of groupie harassment.

PRIME TIME TV. IS IT SLIDING INTO THE SEWER?

L. Brent Bozell III

The message was cryptic: A gentleman wanted to see me to propose a project for the Parents Television Council (PTC), and he was willing to make a \$100,000 contribution to launch it. As the head of this very non-profit organization I was intrigued but skeptical. Strangers don't come out of the blue offering that kind of cash without the kind of strings attached that invite IRS and/or FBI investigations. I agreed to the meeting, doubtful that anything would come of it.



At the appointed hour, an elderly man impeccably dressed but carrying the most battered briefcase I've ever seen arrived; he got straight to the point. He said he was a retired advertising executive and proposed the PTC launch, a national newspaper advertising campaign to raise national awareness for our mission to restore a sense of decency to the television industry. The ad campaign should entail a message of outrage aimed at those corporations sponsoring the sleaze on television. He would create the ad (subject to my final approval) and handle all ad buys free of charge and he would put up the first \$100,000 to launch it. I waited for the catch, and it, rather, they came. He wanted the late Steve Allen, then the PTC's honorary national chairman, to serve as the ad's spokesman. He also wanted to insert a little box asking readers to join the PTC and if they could, send contributions, which contributions I would have to agree to use for future ad purchases.

That was it.

The message, I responded, was one I heartily endorsed. I also felt confident Steve would agree to participate, but I had to level with this fellow. In more than 20 years in this business I'd never seen newspaper ads pay for themselves in contributions, and I couldn't see this advertising campaign going much further beyond his hundred grand. But he dis-

missed my concern immediately. "It's my money," he answered gruffly, and that was that.

Two days later the proposed ad copy arrived. It was awful. It was beyond awful. The message was poignant, to be sure – an open letter from parents to the advertising community in America denouncing it for sponsoring the "moral sewer" that has become the television industry. But the layout, the presentation, looked like the most amateurish, homegrown, cut-and-paste job I'd ever seen. I made as many changes as I could without insulting this man's sensibilities. Steve agreed to hold his nose; we purchased \$100,000 worth of space in a handful of papers, and awaited the response. I expected maybe \$10,000 to come in enabling us to buy a couple more ads, and the exercise would be over.

The results came in. Every ad not only paid for itself, it posted a handsome profit. We poured everything into another round of ad buys, and again every one made money. Again and again, round after round of buys, the message resonated. By the time Steve passed away 18 months later, thus ending the campaign, full-

page ads had run in 1,351 papers reaching well over 100 million readers, and over 500,000 of them had joined the PTC. At one point during this incredible run I met with the ad's creator and expressed my amazement, confessing I'd never seen anything like this. For once this stern, elderly man allowed himself a smile. "That's why I'm a retired advertising executive," he said triumphantly, "and you're not."

There were reasons this ad generated those extraordinary results. The most "un-Madison Avenue" look was a stroke of genius that captured readers' attention. Steve Allen had built a lifetime of affection, and the public was clearly moved to action by the courageous way he was standing up to his own industry. But most important was the message. Americans, pure and simple, are fed up with Hollywood's assault on their values.

Turn on your television set and the pollution is everywhere. Want sexual depravity? Watch Fox's *Keen Eddie* to see a prostitute attempt to have sex with a horse. Want gratuitous violence? Flick on any episode of FX's *Nip/Tuck* to see faces smashed open, bodies sliced, and blood splattering everywhere. How about raunchy language? Tune in to this year's live presentation of the Academy Awards and you, along with 14 million others, could listen to U2 singer Bono describe his award as "really, really, f—— brilliant," an obscenity NBC deliberately chose not to bleep out. Ah, but these are the extremes, the exceptions to the rule, the naysayers claim. Examples of this sort do not accurately reflect the broad picture that is prime time television.

What is the picture?

To answer that question the PTC analyzed every prime time television program on broadcast television between the 1998 and 2002 sea-

sons and published three landmark studies examining how the industry is portraying the issues of sex, language and violence. (Given the sheer magnitude of the operation – 89,000 hours of televised footage tape – it was impossible also to include the tens of thousands of additional hours of footage on basic cable, but one can safely state that on that medium the problems are even more severe.) The inescapable conclusion one reaches is that the industry is in a free-fall and it is dragging the American society into the moral sewer.

"The trend is actually moving away from saturation sex on prime time television."

The first study, "Sex Loses its Appeal: A State of the Industry Report on Sex on TV," showed some surprising and positive developments. The trend is actually moving away from saturation sex on prime time television.

Every broadcast network, but the WB, experienced a decrease

in sexual content during the so-called "family hour" (8 p.m. - 9 p.m. EST/PST). Sexual content on ABC was down a remarkable 67 percent during this time slot between 1998 and 2002; on Fox it was down 148 percent; on NBC it was down 34 percent; on UPN, down 13 percent; and on CBS, which historically had the least amount of sexual content during this time period, it was down another six percent. The WB network bucked the tide with an 88 percent increase in sexual material during the "family hour."

In the final hour the story changed. While on ABC the numbers dropped yet again (41 percent), on CBS sexual content rose by 75 percent, and NBC posted a huge 257 percent increase. (UPN and WB didn't run original programming during this time.)

In short, sexual material was down during the first two hours, and up during the 10:00 p.m. hour when, presumably, it is adults, not

children watching. By any quantitative measure this was good news for families sickened by the coarsening nature of television. But look at the qualitative analysis and the picture changes dramatically.

The PTC's second study, "The Blue Tube: Foul Language on Prime Time TV," brought even more disturbing news: in every hour and on virtually every network, raunchy language has increased to ridiculously high levels. Foul language during the "family hour" increased by a whopping 95 percent between 1998 and 2002 and by an even higher 109 percent during the second hour of prime time. Ironically, the rise was slowest during the 10 p.m. hour (39 percent) when impressionable children are least likely to be watching.

An examination of violence – oftentimes brutal, bloody, graphic violence – found the same trends. The PTC's third study, "TV Bloodbath: Violence on Prime Time TV," produced chilling numbers. Though the numbers were up for ABC in every time slot between 1998 and 2002, the total output remained minimal, making this network the best performer overall. Violence on CBS was virtually non-existent during the "family hour" in 1998 and almost disappeared by 2002. That was the good news. Unfortunately, it rose 30 percent during the second hour, and another 38 percent, to 8.1 instances per hour, easily the worst on broadcast television. NBC also maintained a mostly violence-free "family hour" throughout the four years and also produced a 58 percent drop during the 9 p.m. period, but rose 79 percent at 10 p.m.

Qualitatively things were also worse: In 1998 the most common form of violence (44 percent) involved martial arts. By 2002, 38 percent of all violent scenes contained guns or other weapons of that ilk. It's now acceptable to show bodies carved (*Millennium*, *NYPD Blue*), corpses mutilated (*C.S.I.*), people sliced (*Providence*); and if that's not enough, you can

watch a son suffocate his own mother (*Profiler*) or one teenager chew off and spit out another's ear (*Boston Public*).

Is it any wonder why so many people are upset?

Who is to blame for turning television into the moral sewer it has become? Trying to get someone to take responsibility is an exercise in futility. Talk to writers and they'll blame producers calling for evermore envelope pushing. Go to the producers and they finger the advertisers demanding more titillation to capture the all-important young, male demographic. Confront the advertisers and they blame the networks; take your case to them and they fault parents for not controlling their children's viewing habits. Everyone is innocent.

No, everyone is guilty. The creative community in Hollywood knows the power it has to influence the popular culture – particularly impressionable children – and some in the industry are deliberately, and eagerly, choosing to undermine it. The advertisers know it is their money that funds the depravity; if they were to stop sponsoring the sewage, it would end overnight. And when surveys show that 97 percent of all parents are revolted by the content poisoning their children, yet almost half allow their kids to have TVs in their bedrooms, they are abdicating their parental responsibilities.

Hollywood should take the lead in changing this sorry state of affairs. Just as it has the power to assault, it can too be a beacon for positive change. It is the grand storyteller, and through those stories can educate a society desperately needing to learn positive values. Art is complex; and yes, the gritty is as much a part of the human experience as the beautiful. But there is a right way, a right place, and a right time to express that grittiness. I don't pretend to lecture the industry on how it should be done. Hollywood knows the formula better than anyone.

WHY DID I JOIN THE CAUCUS?

Holly Harter,
inspired by Liz Lang

Frankly, when I heard about The Caucus for Television Producers, Writers & Directors from my peer Liz Lang, I was surprised that there was a large and legitimate group of producers still present in the business. Yes, folks, real bona fide independent producers.

My own perspective had been of late: independent producers were becoming increasingly obsolete, going by the way of the dinosaur.

Despite the low economic tides, growth of indigenous film industries abroad, the aftermath of *fyn-syn*, and the recent emergence of media oligopolies, other producers that I know and I remain defiant. We are fueled by the adrenalin of finding a project and being able to jump through all the hoops of getting it made. I also suspect that many of us are inspired by the unfortunately faded hey-day of producers from Hollywood's glory years. We, as producers of today, are tired and a bit worse for wear, but we are still passionate about producing.

Producers are undervalued and disrespected. Producers of today are often confused with the new breed of producer called the producer-manager. Producers have been subtly substituted by the role of the distribution executive who has ever-so politely wrenched away many of the producer's responsibilities. The producer has become a haunting specter behind a now hollow-screen credit that is widely used as a cheap plastic bargaining chip to pay someone off, to get someone for cheap, or to seduce a name player for more money and shiny marquee trappings.

Here I am, a baby producer, doing double duty and doing it solo: maintain the stamina to continue hustling via the independent producer legacy, and keep up the good fight — as my profession surely needs it — by tirelessly demonstrating the value of an effective producer. So, like a kid dragging along her pink plastic shovel and yellow plastic bucket of sand, I hopped into the Caucus sandbox to join the other kids I saw there. “Wow, other kids!” I thought to myself. “Other kids like myself who like to do what I do!”

In addition to the camaraderie that the Caucus affords, “Hey, it's great to have other kids to play with ...” it is significant to have other “kids” in the veritable producing sandbox as a kind of professional solidarity. We are here in this business because we are good at what we do, we care about what we do, but more importantly, because we recognize that what we do has distinct value and impact.

Often, it's the producer who does the most valuable work at the project's inception; and often it's at the project's most critical juncture — the start of the script's development process. It is the producer who maintains the integrity of the project's vision all the way through wrapping and posting the project. Producers are the only party involved with the project who have the best interest of the project in mind. We work but for the good of the movie or series.

Furthermore, it is the producer bringing all the people, ideas and companies involved with the project together. Simply put, producers create value. Not only does the producer create a commodity for the buyers/distributors,

we create jobs. Without the material we producers create, there would be near-empty pipelines of product and even more in Hollywood's unemployment lines. Producers are the unsung heroes who live in the shadows, getting little recognition, in large part because it is their job to enable others on their creative team to shine. When you think about it, not many can do what we do so very nimbly: juggle creative thinking, wordsmithing, logistics, finance, legal-ese, sales and psychology all at once, without batting an eyelash.

And speaking from the trenches, I hope to somehow, in some small way facilitate a sea change in the vernacular of the business about the value of producers, and turn the tides so that producers once more are able to be the captains of the ship. I'm not exactly sure of how to bring this ship around in such muddy waters, but I am certain that being a part of the Caucus sandbox, strength in numbers will enable us to maintain our defiance.

As sandbox players, struggling to build our sandcastles everyday, we also plop down to help others new to the art of sandcastle building. We show them how to build a sandcastle, especially when you have no water, limited personnel, few decorative trappings, no tools, etc. Despite the odds, we know how to make those grains of sand work for us. I personally like to share such expertise with others.

Yes, folks, I've boiled down the art of producing to be defined as *we facilitate the building of sandcastles*, but remember, sandcastles are magical things. They can be simple and practical and yet they can be breathtaking. And when we're lucky, once in a great while, they can come together easily, be inspired acts, and be an incredible amount of fun!

Enough about the sand. When I really think about the Caucus, the *plopping down and helping others* is the single aspect of the Cau-

cus itself, as an organization, which attracted me to joining. The Caucus Foundation endeavors to help others who are new to the business and to the art form of making products for the visual media. Specifically, the Foundation provides grant assistance and professional support to young filmmakers. For many years, I've had the opportunity at the production companies where I've worked to build several internship programs. I've also had the honor to be a mentor to several mentorees through other mentorship programs.

It is personally and professionally fulfilling to be involved with students who are super passionate about making film and television product. As their mentors, we see that they are hungry for advice, anecdotes, reality-checks, information on protocols, ethics, etc. It is fantastic that the Caucus provides this mentorship experience — and I'm sure the grant monies don't hurt either — for such vibrant students. I don't think any of us participating in the Caucus will ever truly comprehend the impact we make upon the personal and professional lives of these future sandbox players.

So, while the Caucus makes a committed stance to reinforce the foundation on which it stands, nurturing those filmmakers who will come after us, I look forward to being a part of the Caucus' efforts (despite the changing times and economic flux that has shackled the entertainment business to date) to keep the business of being a producer as the defiant, entrepreneurial, artful and productive contributor to the business of making movies and series for the mass audience.

*Holly Harter has produced four films and developed countless others during her years as a development executive and producer. She is proud of the three internship programs she built along the way. Her production company for film and television is called **cinemasoup**.*

IS THERE A ROLE FOR CENSORSHIP TODAY? PART II

Al Schneider

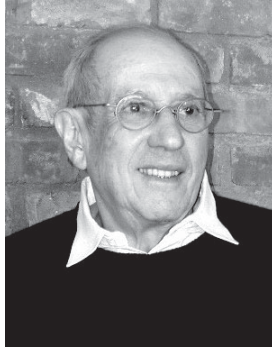
In the Pacifica case, the Supreme Court held that the FCC had the power to regulate a broadcast that is indecent, but not obscene, despite the First Amendment prohibition against government action. The reasoning behind the decision is pertinent to this discussion of the role of censorship in television.

In Justice John Paul Stevens' concluding paragraphs he stated:

"We have long recognized that each medium of expression presents special First Amendment problems. ... And of all forms of communication, it is broadcasting that has received the most limited First Amendment protection. ... A broadcaster may be deprived of his license and his forum if the Commission decides that such an action would serve 'the public interest, convenience, and necessity.'"

"The reasons for these distinctions are complex, but two have relevance in the present case. First, the broadcast media have established a uniquely pervasive presence in the lives of all Americans. Patently offensive, indecent material presented over the airwaves confronts the citizen, not only in public, but also in the privacy of the home, where the individual's right to be let alone plainly outweighs the First Amendment rights of the intruder."

"... Second, broadcasting is uniquely ac-



cessible to children, even those too young to read. ..."

"... We have not decided that an occasional expletive ... would justify any sanction. ... The time of day was emphasized by the Commission. ... We simply hold that when the Commission finds that a pig has entered the parlor, the exercise of its regulatory power does not depend on proof that the pig is obscene."

A broadcasting license became a very fragile commodity that could be put in jeopardy depending on how "public interest" requirements would be balanced with free speech. That decision came late in my tenure as censor, but was part of the evolution in the understanding of censorship.¹

It is this convolution of reasons and principles that guided the exercise of standards and practices procedures. However, are they not reasons and principles of a time gone by? Has the canvas and the role of censor not changed?

The role of censor clearly changed as television changed. Few rules were written in stone and often an intelligent dialogue brought about revisions that were acceptable to the censor and the creator.

But the dynamics of change not only involves changes in taste, the maturation or indifference of the audience, the breaking of taboos and societal growth, but also involves technological advances.

¹ Excerpted from *Censorship And The Censor's Role, The Gatekeeper: My Thirty Years As a TV Censor*. Syracuse University Press, 2001.

Diversity of distribution systems, television on the Internet, the advent of the v-chip to supplement the new rating system, and the digitization of the broadcasting signal contribute to a vast wave of change, which is sweeping over the communications business.

From a legal and practical standpoint, how do you censor the Internet? Providers and search engines are nothing more than common carriers, and only a limited amount of technological controls are available to “police” the Internet. The First Amendment does not apply internationally, and with millions of websites already on line, it’s impractical to apply editorial standards to existing or future websites.

With more than 100 channels potentially available in the home, isn’t it up to the parent to decide what a child watches? Or is even the idea of parental supervision antiquated? The audience today is more receptive to material that would have been found offensive in the past. Matters of sexuality certainly bother people less and disturb more infrequently. While concerns remain about the quality of programs for children and the extent to which violent material induces violent behavior, the management of such material becomes an impossible task as programming sources proliferate.

Technological changes, diversity of offerings, and shifts in audience attitudes are contributing to the demise of the self-regulatory standards review process. Is this “good” for society? In the degree of violent portrayals and in the presentation of sexual encounters, is the freedom to choose from an abundance of programs a satisfactory substitute for surrogate judgment as to appropriateness in matters of taste? Need we have a checker of facts? Who is to hold the line against propaganda and po-

lemic in favor of an objective and fairly balanced presentation? Is the practice of mixing fact and fiction and the blurring of the line between news and entertainment of concern?

Can we trust marketplace mentality and creative competitive juices to give diligent consideration to the “public interest”?

Can we trust those in power over the most influential medium yet devised by man for communication of ideas to set aside financial and political considerations when making programming choices?

How important is it to maintain that trust in a society beset with debates over the right

to bear arms, the necessity for affirmative action programs, racial understanding, sexual preference, prayer in the schools, public education, and not to mention questions of foreign policy?

Is there a need today for a gatekeeper?

My answer, prejudiced perhaps, is a qualified “yes” based on two concepts: “checks and balances” that our forefathers built into the Constitution and recognition that to maintain a civil society certain traffic signs are necessary to prevent crashes. Together these precepts speak to a reasonable self-regulatory system that insures public interest considerations and all the other questions I raised above, for which answers are sought and dealt with in an objective and fair manner. This is especially the case because the license to broadcast is a gift from the people and reaches more than 250,000,000 homes as an invited guest.

The system of “checks and balances” should serve as an operational model for the application of reasonable standards to take into account three major concerns of our society. First, because the troubling problems of a violent society exist, we need stan-

“Matters of sexuality certainly bother people less and disturb more infrequently.”

dards to deal with the degree and amount of violence that can be portrayed on the screen. Second, without a shared platform for divergent attitudes toward sexuality, we need to exercise care with respect to the time, manner and explicitness of portrayal. Third, we need to maintain a guide to outline the degree of factual accuracy required in telling history.

We must balance the imperatives of free speech and free enterprise. Without some measure of gatekeeping, the forces that control the marketplace and the rewards that adhere to a successful program product will leave us with an incoherent and inchoate culture. On the other hand, a process that is reasonable in its

administration and cognizant of change in its deliberations will leave us with a popular culture that we can pass along to generations with confidence as to its dignity, fairness, integrity and inspiration.

This is the second and final portion of Al Schneider's thoughts regarding the role of censorship in our turbulent industry. Formerly chief censor for ABC, Alfred R. Schneider is currently an attorney and consultant in the communications business and an adjunct professor at Fordham University's Graduate School of Business Administration. Mr. Schneider is the author of The Gatekeeper: My Thirty Years As a TV Censor.

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER: IS IT NECESSARY?

Robert Dowling

More than at any time in its history, the entertainment industry is immersed in change and grappling with a series of complex issues. Industry leaders are under growing pressure to solve the problems and capitalize on the opportunities created by the forces of change. They need to develop strategies and concepts that will help them succeed in a constantly shifting, fast-moving business and creative environment.

That's where trade publications prove their worth. Good reporting is at a premium, and our sophisticated readers depend on us for in-depth coverage of today's hot topics and tomorrow's emerging trends. It goes far beyond the sensational glitz, gossip and spin found in many typical "showbiz" publications to provide concise, actionable business intelligence. We call it "fuel for thought," evident in coverage of such important issues as runaway production, mega-studio conglomeration and digital piracy.

Special theme issues provide in-depth news and analysis of important show business topics and developments whether at Cannes, Toronto or Sundance. Take *The Hollywood Reporter* for example; we have an international



edition that comes out weekly that serves the needs of the international film community.

Trade publications offer an intuitive understanding of the real issues, problems and opportunities facing the entertainment community – especially the enormous effort required to successfully create, develop and complete a movie or TV show.

The first step in this process is

the most daunting. It begins with someone with an idea confronting a blank piece of paper or computer screen. This idea has to fight to be heard. The Writer's Guild registers an estimated 40,000 – 50,000 scripts or properties each year by people who own a

property or want to develop it. The competition is fierce. There are no formulas, historical data or trends that can guarantee success, and there are usually 15 times more projects in development than will ever get made. Many producers have told me that it's taken them 10 or more years to get their

movie made.

The good news is that once a movie or TV show gets the green light, it becomes a powerful job creation machine. The average cost for a Hollywood movie to be produced, marketed and distributed is \$80 million. That

"... once a movie or TV show gets the green light, it becomes a powerful job creation machine."

translates into hundreds of jobs.

Sometimes the news refers to a new president of a studio, a director who has been attached to a film project or two companies merging. Reading “the trades” will quickly tell you just how many handshakes away you are from closing the deal or getting the job or which projects are moving on the “fast track.” Timing is everything. Anyone who’s looking for an opportunity needs to be at that intersection of knowledge when an employment slot develops.

We live in an era where there’s an overflow of available information. The advent of digital technology and the Internet have only intensified the demand for immediate information. Studio heads and network executives

must make decisions in a much shorter period of time. An active online presence is essential with a constantly updated and full-featured website. Entertainment professionals need to have “24/7” access to an accurate news source with a proven ability to analyze information and put it into perspective. East Coast power brokers get a jump on the news with *The Hollywood Reporter’s* east coast focused version of the regular edition. Whether you subscribe or get your information online, trade publications are a “must read” for insight and analysis that could very well put you to work tomorrow.

Robert Dowling is the editor-in-chief and publisher of The Hollywood Reporter.

ANOTHER WAY TO LOOK AT *THE REAGANS* -

WHY IT WAS PRODUCED IN SUPER 16 FORMAT

Bob Fisher

Do you think you have heard and read everything there is to know about *The Reagans*? Think again. The miniseries about Ronald and Nancy Reagan, originally intended for broadcast on the CBS Television network during sweeps week, was yanked from the CBS Television schedule amidst a political controversy about the way main characters are depicted. It subsequently aired as a two-hour-45-minute original movie on the Showtime cable network.

There is another salient fact that flew under the radar. *The Reagans* was produced in Super 16 film format. It aired on Showtime in the letterboxed widescreen (16:9) aspect ratio that cinematographer James Chressanthis, ASC used to frame the story.

Chressanthis put the finishing painterly touches on *The Reagans* while timing the film in digital HD format. He was able to focus on such subtleties as touching up skin tones and putting a gleam in a character's eyes at precise moments without altering anything else in the scene. Chressanthis believes that the high-definition digital master created for *The Reagans* will pay dividends in the future when there is a larger population of HD TV sets in households in the U.S. and other countries.

"There are nuances on the film that will be even more effective when larger audiences are able to experience this story on high-definition screens," he says.

The bottom line is that advances in film, camera and postproduction technologies are fueling a trend towards choosing Super 16 as an alternative to producing TV programs and lower budget motion pictures in HD video for-

mat as a cost-saving measure.

Cinematographer Stephen Goldblatt, ASC and director Frank Pierson demonstrated the effectiveness of the Super 16 aesthetic several years ago when they filmed *Conspiracy*, an HBO telefilm, almost entirely with handheld cameras. Such popular series as *Scrubs* and *The Shield* are also filmed in Super 16 format. The respective cinematographers, John Inwood and Ron Schmidt, cite camera mobility, the ability to record a broader range of contrast and colors, and such nuances as a capacity for ramping frame rates faster and slower to create the illusion of action speeding up or slowing down as benefits unique to originating on film.

The Super 16 format was invented by Rune Ericson in Sweden more than 30 years ago. Basically, he asked Kodak to eliminate perforating one side of a conventional 16 mm frame. That increased the useable image area on each frame of negative by approximately 40 percent, resulting in a dramatic improvement in picture quality. It also enabled filmmakers to compose images in a wider 1.851 aspect ratio.

The impact has been considerable. When Ericson was cited with a special commendation by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences several years ago, they listed more 500 feature films produced in Super 16 format.

Chressanthis observes that the trend is accelerating on television as new tools are developed for the Super 16 format. He cites the new 500-speed Kodak Vision2 film used to record night, interior and other dark se-

quences, which account for about 80 percent of *The Reagans*. Chressanthis describes it as, “The sharpest, clearest, most grainless 16 mm film ever made. It also offers a wider tonal range and the ability to record more subtleties in dark areas, which was very important to us on this project. When the film was combined with high-definition telecine transfers, it gave us a really lush look.”

He cites the ability to record deeper shadows and brighter highlights with more details. For example, there are scenes staged in the White House where windows are extremely bright and areas around them are blown out. Parts of the interiors are dark, reflecting the mood, without losing details. Ackerman wanted the audience to see faces.

“I have shot beautiful HD pictures on other projects,” Chressanthis says, “but it is comparable to a writer being limited by an abridged alphabet. It’s like taking away the ability to express yourself with 50 percent of the adjectives in the English language. You can still tell a great story, but chances are it won’t be as intricate.”

Chressanthis says that the ability to compose widescreen images and the sensitivity of the film were factored into his collaborations with Ackerman, the producers, and production and costume designers during preproduction planning.

“I thought a lot about the visual arc and how the look should evolve with the story,” he explains. “Ronald Reagan came from very humble beginnings. We depict their relationships with their families and staff as their lives evolve.”

During preproduction, Chressanthis watched countless scenes, including outtakes,

from Reagan’s movies, and also newsreels to get a sense of the characters at different stages of their lives. The creative team also studied still photographs from different time periods. The cinematographer posted the still images in his office as a constant reminder. He put them in chronological order ranging from high school to Reagan’s retirement, so you can see him aging and the transitions in his life.

“In the early pictures, he was tall, dark and handsome, and he seemed very strong,” Chressanthis says. “Nancy seemed comparatively petite, passive and demure. In those pictures, it looks like she is being protected by him, especially in the early part of their marriage. You can literally see the transformation of her personality as time passes.”

“There are black-and-white flashbacks to Ronald Reagan’s youth, when he was a lifeguard in Illinois,” he continues. “He was proud of having saved people’s lives. Towards the end of the film,

they were so close, they almost seem like a single person. There are more two-shots with them closer together instead of cut-aways to one-shots.”

Chressanthis chose an Aaton XTR camera for steadiness combined with the new Zeiss prime lenses for sharpness. He created subtly different looks for the 1940s, ‘50s, ‘60s, ‘70s, and ‘80s. Techniques included using different makeup as the characters age. He also lit the Reagans in more flattering light and used diffusion to soften the look when they are younger. Besides the cost benefits and aesthetic values derived from producing *The Reagans* in Super 16 format, Chressanthis points out that the decision will also pay long-term dividends in assuring that the movie will endure for posterity.

“I thought a lot about the visual arc and how the look should evolve with the story.”
— James Chressanthis

He notes that Sony Pictures Television has cut the negative to conform with the final video edit, and recorded visual effects shots created in digital post out to film. Chressanthis observes that if properly archived, the negative should endure in its current condition for hundreds of years, so future audiences can experience it the way it was intended to be seen when they made the final cut. In the future, he points out, it

will become more practical to re-scan the film at higher resolution and get an even truer film-look on the advanced TV screens that tomorrow will bring.

The Reagans was produced by David Mace, Neil Meron and Craig Zadan and directed by Robert Allan Ackerman. The film is based on a non-fiction book, *First Ladies – Volume II*, written by Carl Sferrazza Anthony, and was scripted by Elizabeth Egloff.



Spring 2003 Grant Recipients (L to R) Guillermo R. Rodriguez, Alberto Barboza and Monika Hennig are flanked by Caucus Foundation President, Chuck Fries (L) and Director, Bill Blinn

CAUCUS MISSION STATEMENT

- ☞ Our mission is to protect and actively promote the artistic rights of producers, writers and directors. We actively oppose any interference with these creative rights whether they originate from government, studios, networks, or special interest pressure groups.
- ☞ We are opposed to the growing concentration of ownership of development and television production in fewer and fewer hands. When a small number of mega-corporations control the vast majority of the process, diversity of voice is threatened, and our creative rights and our ability to compete as entrepreneurs are gravely endangered.
- ☞ We are aware of the powerful impact of television and we will strive to elevate program quality and encourage responsible programming for the public.
- ☞ Our continuing task is to increase communication among Caucus members about creative and business issues in the television industry and communicate our concerns to those outside our organization.
- ☞ From time to time we will lend our support to other groups and causes that support our mission.

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Friday, January 16th, 2004, The Beverly Hills Hotel, 6:30 PM

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NOVEMBER 2003

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“When I last spoke to you I had asked if you could give me any leads to any other possible funding and you said one of the primary reasons behind the creation of this grant was because of the lack of finishing funds available. Well, you were right. You (The Caucus Foundation) are a great resource.”

—a Spring 2003 grant recipient

The Editorial Board of *The Journal of the Caucus for Television Producers, Writers & Directors* welcomes letters from its readers.