

**PROSPECTS OF MANKIND:
EPISODE 309: NEW VISTAS FOR TELEVISION**

1962-05-06

Description: ER and her guests discuss the future of television. This program was recorded at Brandeis University on April 29, 1962 and was produced by WGBH-TV, Boston, in cooperation with Brandeis University for the more than 60 stations throughout the country affiliated with the National Educational Television and Radio Center.

Participants: ER, Newton N. Minow, Marya Mannes, John F. White, Irving Gitlin

[Theme Music begins 0:01]

[Title sequence:] [Text overlaid on *Prospects of Mankind* logo] National Education Television/ Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt/ *Prospects of Mankind*

[Bob Jones:] Recorded on the campus of Brandeis University, National Education Television presents the WGBH TV production Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt *Prospects of Mankind*

[Introduction Music begins 0:23]

[As announcer speaks, film rotates through images related to the announcer's comments]

[Bob Jones:] This is Telstar, one of several types of experimental communication satellites now being perfected. By means of these satellites, television programs can be beamed all over the world. Within the next month or two, Telstar, created by the Bell system, will be launched by the National Space Agency, soon thereafter live television programs will be exchanged between the United States and Europe. If the tests are successful, worldwide television will be an everyday fact of life by 1965. The implications of this new frontier of communication are enormous. Space will have been conquered, but how will it be used? Will the programs transmitted originate in that wasteland deplored by FCC chairman [Newton] Minow or will stimulating, creative programming give the creative world a more favorable image of the United States. There are a few hopeful signs of change. With the superb [John] Glenn coverage and excellent programs like the NBC *White Paper* and CBS *Reports* the commercial networks have shown greater awareness of their responsibility for balanced programming. Another encouraging note is the emergence of National Educational Television, an organization which serves over sixty stations throughout the country. The educational stations present two types of program: in-school instruction at all levels, and cultural and public affairs programs for adults. With limited resources to date, educational TV has had very high proportion of successes. Among them *What's New?*, a popular children's program; *The MIT Science Reporter* exploring the frontiers of science; *A Time to Dance*, featuring some of the world's greatest dancers; *The Age of Kings*, a Peabody Award winner, featuring productions of Shakespeare's historical plays; *Pablo Casals's Master Class*, the world's greatest cellist instructing highly qualified students; *The Ragtime Era*, Max Morath's nostalgic recreation of the not-so-distant past. The government's recent allocation of money for the in-construction of educational TV stations means that more people will be able to receive these types of programs. By the time the satellites are in regular use, there is good reason to hope that the images they beam will reflect a balanced picture of the United States. But this will depend largely upon whether the Federal Communications Commission continues to be

actively concerned with the quality and content of television and whether both commercial and educational networks cooperate.

[Cuts to ER and her guests]

[Unknown announcer:] Joining Mrs. Roosevelt to discuss the new vistas in television are Newton Minow, chairman of the Federal Communication Commission. Soon after his appointment a year ago, he created a furor by his critical remarks about the television industry. Mr. Minow has just won a George Foster Peabody award, the first government official to be so cited for his determined efforts to improve television programming;

Irving Gitlin, award-winning television writer and director, executive producer, Creative Projects, NBC News and Public Affairs, which produces the widely acclaimed NBC *White Paper*. Before joining NBC, Mr. Gitlin held a similar post with CBS. His special responsibility in both positions has been the creation of high appeal information programming;

John White, president of the National Educational Television and Radio Center, was formerly vice-president of Western Reserve University and General Manager of Pittsburgh's educational television station, WQED. Under his direction, National Educational Television has become the country's fourth network.

Marya Mannes, television and theater critic for the *Reporter* magazine, has appeared frequently on network, radio, and TV programs. Journalist, woman of letters, she has revealed great versatility as a writer and a crusading spirit in a wide range of fields. She will assist Mrs. Roosevelt in directing the discussion.

Now here is Mrs. Roosevelt.

[Audience applause]

[ER:] I'm very happy to welcome all of you gentlemen here today. And my first question is one really addressed, not only to you, but to Miss Mannes, who is helping me. But I'll begin with you, Mr. Commissioner Minow. What is the function of television?

[Newton Minow:] Well, I think television's function is to use man's greatest invention, really, of communication. The marriage of sight and sound is the best way we've ever found uh to communicate with each other. Many people think that the mission of television is to entertain. They call it the entertainment business. I think its function is to communicate ideas, to enlarge our vision, our understanding of our world, to instruct us, to guide us. I think the best example of that is Colonel [John] Glenn's recent light into space in which each of us was present. Television made that possible, so I think its mission really is to-is to communicate ideas and not simply to-to be used as entertainment.

[ER:] But ideas should also be entertainment. Now, how about you?

[John F. White:] Well, well, I-I would, and I'm sure each one on this panel would agree with the chairman in principle. That fact is that one has to speak of the mission of television in this country, and that in doing that, we- we would have to include entertainment, learning and the exchange of ideas on as broad a base as possible, in order that we as free people have free choice at any given moment of time.

[Irving Gitlin:] Would you not say, Mr. Chairman and Mrs. Roosevelt, that what television is for is what under our form of government the people of this country determine it shall be used for?

[John F. White:] Oh, Irv, I'm going to argue this! I think--go ahead.

[Marya Mannes:] I think-I think this is an abdication of responsibility, saying the people must choose. How will they choose, and how do you know what they want?

[Irving Gitlin:] How do you choose, and how do you know what you want?

[Marya Mannes:] That would take quite a while, but I think I would like to add my definition of the purpose of television, or rather my agreement that it is an enlargement of human experience. I think it is an extra dimension of feeling and thinking. And as we are going to get into the two areas and particularly the one of education, I think we must stop thinking in terms of entertainment on one side and education on the other. Because all of television is an education, in that it is what happens to a person, what he sees, that makes him. Would you-would you agree that it is then educational--either good education or bad education--but all of television, entertainment included, is an education.

[John F. White:] Even the western is education.

[Newton Minow:] Even the commercial. I mean if the commercial wasn't educational, a sponsor would really have no interest in showing it to you. They expect you to learn something from it. So every-every bit of television, it seems to me, everything you see is definitely educational.

[Irving Gitlin:] Then we're in agreement that all of television is educational, [John F. White: No question.] really there's no-no real issue?

[John F. White:] No. Yeah, but the issue that I think you've drawn here at the outset -- and I must confess that I didn't know that you were going to draw it--is whether we, who control education as managers of stations or heads of networks, are to follow or are to lead. And I would maintain that one of our functions is to lead. Whereas, by your statement I assume you are saying that we have no function but to be Jello and follow.

[Irving Gitlin:] No, no, no. I think you are misreading my statement.

[John F. White:] Good.

[Irving Gitlin:] I'm saying one of functions is to lead, but to lead with reference to what the people, all the people in fact, want. And that there is a great danger of an elite, and I don't care what you call it, whether it be a governmental elite, an intellectual elite, determining and setting standards for the people of the United States. This worries me. I think we must face the fact that as managers and as program producers and as responsible officials, obviously we are concerned with the future and we are concerned with the onward movement of television. No one argues with that. But I am worried that the inarticulate person, perhaps, doesn't have his position represented, for example, on a panel like this.

[John F. White:] But Irv, if you really believe what we're saying and we really speak about our form of government and how it works, we need not worry about an elite, because NBC, which you represent, and NET which I represent, is not going to program for very long that which no one watches, and therefore the final judgment is made by the people themselves.

[Marya Mannes:] Might--I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman.

[Newton Minow:] No, go ahead, Marya.

[Marya Mannes:] Oh, I just wanted to get in this business. You left out one elite. And that is the business elite, which more or less determines what the great American public sees on television. And it is not what

the people--it is on the basis sometimes of eleven hundred families, through ratings, that the choice of what America must see lies. And I call this--if you want to bring up an elite let's-let's include that.

[John F. White:] Yes, my position would be that I would be against any elite or oligarchic control of television. And my whole point is that there must be reference to the people in our form of government by all who participate in the rather complicated government -- complicated structure that is television.

[Newton Minow:] I don't think anyone would disagree with that. The uh--from the government's point of view, the government's mission in broadcasting occurs because not everyone who wants to be a broadcaster can be. We have as many as a dozen people fighting over a television channel; each saying, "Give it to me, I'll do a better job than the other eleven." Someone has to make the unpleasant choice of deciding who will be the lucky fellow to enlarge his voice out to the whole community, in some cases have the eyes and the ears and the attention of the whole world, the whole nation. Now the government has to make that choice because we don't have any other mechanism of making that judgment. And then to decide whether he has fulfilled his public trust. I think that the government should never be an elite setting of what should be on the air, but should rather: A. insist upon the standards of performance which the broadcaster said he would fulfill, that they are fulfilled, and, two, to make as many channels available as possible. To broaden the range of choice for the public, so that then the public will be able to choose, instead of choosing between westerns let us say, but to choose between a wide range of different kinds of programs on the air.

[Marya Mannes:] Would you consider, Mr. Chairman, that there was some uh analogy between let's say the FCC and the Food and Drug Act, which-which insists that the contents of a bottle, A. be not injurious to the person who has it, and B. be clearly labeled. In other words this is--this I would think is some--you wouldn't call that an "elite" dictating, would you--to the masses, to have a slight policing of promise fulfilled?

[Irving Gitlin:] I must say that it's much easier to identify poison or adulterated food than it is to identify adulterated ideas.

[Marya Mannes:] Do you think that?

[John F. White:] Yes I do, Marya. I think that if you and I give to the American public enough choice, enough selection, we need not worry about the night -- the American public in 1962 any more than we have in any other year of our history. And I don't think personally that-that this needs to be done by regulation. I think it needs to be done by opportunity. And I just don't think that we could--we provide enough opportunity to the American public.

[Newton Minow:] Well, that's what we're trying to do in the government is to provide more opportunity, to provide more, more stations, to provide more choices. Unfortunately, now there are only less than five hundred and fifty television stations in the country in a population of a hundred and eighty million people. There are only three networks, three television networks, although we're hoping that the Educational Network will become a full network in that sense, and will be the great fourth. The a--this means that with this narrow number of choices that a program on television must achieve an audience which ranges into the many, many millions. An audience of even twelve, thirteen million people is a failure--is a failure simply because there are so few channels. If we had more choices I think that an audience of twelve million could be a success [ER: Would be a success.] --that's right. There isn't a magazine in the country, I think, with the exception perhaps of the *Reader's Digest*, that has that large a circulation, but in television those numbers are infinitesimal. So the real problem, it seems to me, is broadening the choices, and in the meantime insisting, insisting that those who are lucky enough to monopolize the channels of communication adhere to the high standards which they themselves have set in winning their license.

[ER:] You said something before, which interested me, when you said that commercials should be uh education and entertainment at the same time. I'm wondering if that is the concept usually of those who really think up commercials and-and write them and put them on.

[Newton Minow:] Well, most American children, even the little ones, can recite uh-uh many of the television commercials, which is some tribute to the impact of the--

[ER:] Yes, yes, but are they-are they really training?

[Irving Gitlin:] According to our original definition they are.

[John F. White:] We're dealing here with semantics. What is education? If-if a commercial attracts, you and I have learned, and I think we're using the definition that learning is education.

[Irving Gitlin:] I'm going to make a rather scandalously unpopular statement, but I think that those of us who are in the news and public affairs side of television, those of us who are dealing with complicated ideas, and those of us who are in education, have something to learn from the commercials. That in terms of clarity of presentation, simplicity of presentation, drama of presentation. If we could do with the Common Market what our commercial producers do with a much simpler subject of selling products, we would be in pretty good shape. Just look at some of the characteristics: simple ideas, clearly and forcefully presented and reiterated. Now when I was an educator, I recall people who were teaching me and training me were saying that that was the essence of good education.

[John F. White:] Yeah, but you would include in it the fact that you would be permitted to repeat it fifteen times a week, too.

[Marya Mannes:] I'm glad you said that, Mr. White, because the whole technique of the commercial is towards the slow learner [Guests and Audience laugh].

[Irving Gitlin:] Are you defining all of us, Marya?

[Marya Mannes:] You don't make commercials, do you, Mr. Gitlin?

[Irving Gitlin:] No, I don't.

[Marya Mannes:] You do the finest stuff, I think, on television among several others.

[Irving Gitlin:] Thank you.

[Marya Mannes:] But uh I would like to get back. I think we might get back to this dreadful word education, because you're saddled with it, as you well know. And is there no other way of defining it? I mean educational as a term has been a kiss of death, hasn't it?

[John F. White:] You're quite right, and uh you can tell that we've talked about this before. To my way of thinking, the very worst thing that happened to this movement which I head, was the label that was attached to it by the agency represented by our friend on my left. The FCC, it was, who determined that this should be called "educational television". This is a bad word for a number of reasons. In the first place it drives a good many people away from us, and in the second place, if you sat where I sit you'd also recognize that it attracts every nut in the country. [All laugh] And no matter how bad it is, if it's

education it's just per se good. The fact is that we do need a better label, and the best that we've come up with is "non-commercial."

[Irving Gitlin:] You've got to do better than that!

[John F. White:] Well, you see this is what you have when you deal with governmental agencies. But the fact is that you have here a service institution. An institution which differs from its commercial colleagues in that it is not our function, and I mean that this is an honorable function to make money. That is not our function. Therefore, we do not have to view audience size, or the rating sheet, or the --particularly the balance sheet as a factor in making program decisions. The commercial station has to do this, and it's understandable. Our function is not to make money, it's to spend money, every single cent we can lay on--put our hands on, in the service of people. Therefore, we do not have to ask about what this will do to our audience size or balance sheet. There is just one question that an educational station manager has to ask, and that's "What good does it do for whom?" Now this gives us great freedom--

[Irving Gitlin:] But doesn't "For how many?" come into that consideration?

[John F. White:] Not necessarily, uh because if it's a very small group--civilian defense workers --if they need specific instruction, I think that the instrument of television is a very valuable source for that, and I think it's our job to provide that service.

[Irving Gitlin:] If you had the opportunity, as you do on an educational station, of talking to all the people in the community, or in talking only to civil defense workers, and because of limitations of time, limitations of treatments, you had the choice, which choice would you make?

[John F. White:] I think that if it was important enough -- if it was an important message that needed to be carried to civil defense workers, we have no choice but to elect that.

[Irving Gitlin:] But if you could reach the civil defense workers, let's say through a press campaign which would cost, let us say, twenty-thousand dollars, or issue books through direct mailing, whereas you have your expensive educational television facilities which are capable of being received by all the people in the community, and you can do a broad educational job with all the people in the community, isn't that necessarily your choice in a popular medium?

[John F. White:] Not necessarily. Let's change our example a little.

[Marya Mannes:] Yes, couldn't we get out of civil defense?

[John F. White:] Let's leave civil defense. Let's talk about specialized courses for the gifted in school. No school system can afford the talents which are required to take care of this very small but very important segment of our school population. Television can be a very important instrument, and I think it's our function to do it.

[Newton Minow:] Well, someone once said about educational television that its job in life was to be good and not necessarily popular. And I think an example of the problems that you run into on the other side, the commercial side as opposed to that. Several months ago, you may remember that one of the networks did a series of programs with President Eisenhower. It was on in the evening. It was on in a good time, but it was on up against two extremely popular commercial programs. The result was that some twenty-four million people watched one -- I think it was *Sing Along With Mitch*, twenty-two million people watched *The Untouchables*, six million people watched President Eisenhower. Now under commercial standards, six million people is nothing. If President Eisenhower had written a book, he couldn't have

reached six million people, but under television -- commercial television standards, six million people is nothing. But it seems to me the problem is in figuring out that you must devote some time, some time to minority audiences. A balance of time, not to get all the people all of the time, but you give some of the people a fair share of the use of the public resource, of the public air. And this is where the argument really gets down to, and that is how much time do you devote to this, and how much time do you devote to that? (21:29)

[Marya Mannes:] Uh I would think this --

[Irving Gitlin:] You would - you would agree, though, that there is very little debate about the necessity for commercial television to provide programs like that "CBS Reports" on Eisenhower, or like the "NBC White Paper." That more and more, particularly in this last year, there has been a great increase in that type of programming. But where the discussion comes in is to what extent will it be in the program schedule, and who determines it? Isn't that where the-the argument lies?

[Newton Minow:] I think that's right, and I think that under our system, that judgment has got to be made by the broadcaster, and our hope is that there will be enough broadcasters and enough facilities available so that there will be more time devoted to this for the people as a whole. Our argument --the business about the "elite", it seems to me, is always necessarily meaning that the government is going to become a czar or a dictator or a censor and say you must do this; but I find this impossible to understand, and the law is specific. The law says we cannot censor a program, quite properly so, might as well then forget about a free broadcasting system. All we're doing is insisting that a broadcaster who, as I say, is usually the winner of a great contest to get that station--that he keep his promise of public service, and it seems to me it's as simple as that.

[Marya Mannes:] Mr. Chairman, hasn't something happened this week, uh speaking about the government and television, that is really revolutionary in this passing of this bill for educational television?

[Newton Minow:] Yes. The president this week will sign a bill, which will for the first time permit federal funds for the construction of a--if you'll pardon the term-- educational television stations, and to link these stations together. This will be the first time that uh it's on a matching basis with states and private institutions that federal funds, public funds, will be committed to this purpose. I think it's a landmark. You know in many countries the government operates broadcasting. We've taken a different course in this country of ours. We've said that broadcasting should be in private hands -- on the commercial side for private profit, but in the public interest. Now we're hoping to develop and build an alternative service for those people who want it. I hope now that private resources will take over and make educational television the rich and lively and full of entertainment as well as-as well as penetrating.

[Irving Gitlin:] What kind --

[Marya Mannes:] What -- excuse me, I just wanted to ask the chairman, what kind of private resources? I mean where do you see this money for programming and for establishing a network coming from primarily?

[Newton Minow:] Well, the great foundations have been generous in the past. I hope they'll be in the future. In some cases uh local citizens contribute a dollar or contribute fifty cents or five dollars to helping stations get along. In some cases, the school boards will provide the funds of course for in-school service. And I would hope that we will try many ways to experiment to finance these stations. There are some people who want to try pay television for education.

[Marya Mannes:] Do you need money more or talent more, Mr. White?

[John F. White:] This reflects other discussions again we've had. I-I differ in my opinion from a great many people in terms of what is the most important problem facing educational television. It seems to me that the easy answer is to say "money"--that you can buy quality. I can't accept this. I think that the most important problem facing educational television today, tomorrow, and in the weeks to come, and the years to come, is the problem of talent. That if we attract to this movement bright young men and women and they assume leadership, the dollars will come.

[Marya Mannes:] You say you attract nuts. How are you going to get--

[John F. White:] I'm sorry I said it, but I did! [All laugh]

[Irving Gitlin:] John White and I have sat together on other panels that have been concerned with the future of educational television, and John certainly more than I--we're both deeply interested in seeing educational TV advance, but I differ with him on this one point. Because I really think that the problem is not talent, but money. And that there has been a great deal of unrealistic thinking, not on the part of those in educational TV, but upon the part of those who would set up educational TV, to think that you can mount anything as expensive, as complicated, as difficult, as an educational television network without doing some hard thinking about the financing in advance. It is my contention that the way in which you set up your financing predetermines what you're going to see to a very large extent in the future. And that on the question of talent, that a young person, dedicated, who comes into educational TV, who learns in educational TV, and who then, after acquiring all the craft of television, and perhaps some of the art of television, receives an offer from a commercial station--in terms of his own personal self-fulfillment, in terms of his own career, must take that offer. And so that while you'll provide a very fine training ground for the commercial networks, and certainly we do need such a training ground, there is no question in my mind but that you're going to lose your people.

[John F. White:] Well, you see I don't object to losing my people because I have faith enough in Americans that there will be more young people coming behind them in the first place. In the second place--

[Irving Gitlin:] Wouldn't you like to keep the best of them?

[John F. White:] Yes, and we will, as all of you know--

[Irving Gitlin:] Then why should they be underpaid?

[John F. White:] Well, they are not necessarily underpaid. In the first place, had we taken the position you now assume, Irv, educational television in this country would never have existed. It took a few people, it took a great deal of chicken wire and chewing gum but we did mount an educational television movement. In the last two years the average operating budget of the existing educational television stations have increased over 30 percent. Now you wouldn't have had the opportunity for increase if you hadn't had this. Secondly, uh now the fact is that educational stations are maturing, are becoming more sophisticated, and those which have been on long enough are beginning to pay the kind of salaries that attract people. And you would be amazed, I think, at the names of some of the people in your own industry who would love nothing better than to take a sacrifice financially to come back and work with us.

[Marya Mannes:] I think Mr. White is absolutely right because uh commercial television has lost some of its best talent in the last five years because of lack of freedom, because of commercial pressures and so

forth. But I would like to ask Mrs. Roosevelt, since we're really back on educational television, when you think of the term, Mrs. Roosevelt, what would you hope to see on an educational station? That is, in the evening, what would give you pleasure? What kind of program that you don't get on commercial?

[ER:] Well, I can think of a great many programs that I would like to see, but one of the first that I would like to see educational television develop is more information about what our own government is doing throughout the world, that so many of us know so little about. Now that may be, Mr. White, an almost impossible thing to do, but I would think that it would be of very great value because I am constantly running across things that I'm surprised to find my government is doing in other countries, and thinking all the time, "But why don't we know about it at home? Why don't we hear more about it?" And the way to hear is through television and-and perhaps dramatizing a little bit what is really happening, you see, which would make it, I think, for us a very, very important and valuable thing in broadening our uh whole sense of being the leaders of the non-communist world and understanding what that meant and what it was meaning now.

[Newton Minow:] Mrs. Roosevelt, don't you think one thing--if I can say this without being called a censor -- one of the things I think educational television might do is show us a lot of programs which are done in other countries, which are done by other foreign broadcasting systems. Television is growing all over the world. Each year more countries develop television.

[ER:] We could have exchanges.

[Newton Minow:] That's right, and we could be seeing more of what the other countries are producing. This would be one of the great, it seems to me --

[John F. White:] I know you are doing a lot. [Newton Minnow: Yes.] I couldn't agree more. The fact is that in terms of our present program schedule from this -- from NET to our affiliated stations, they receive ten hours a week, which is five hundred and twenty hours a year. Thirty percent of that programming in the current year, either deals with international subjects or is-is obtained from international sources. There are programs appearing on educational stations this year which have been made in Japan, in France, in Italy, in Germany, in England, and all over. And as a matter of fact, we are just now beginning, and what Mrs. Roosevelt and this group would agree, there's no question about it. We have film crews as we sit here today--this center which I head has film crews in Turkey and in Mexico. We are beginning to do this. Now I am the first to say that we cannot think about educational television yesterday nor should we think about it today. We've got to talk about tomorrow. Because we are less than seven years old, we didn't have sponsors who would finance us, we've had to grow, we've had to achieve sophistication, if you will, but there isn't the slightest question about the role it should fill, and the fact that we are struggling to fulfill it.

[Irving Gitlin:] Well, may I ask a question? I don't want to be Devil's advocate here, but in a meeting we had I believe some of the educational television people said: "We are really interested in talking to the top one-third of a particular community." And as I recall, the attitude of the commercial broadcaster is that it is not sufficient to talk to the top one-third of the community because that top third of the community can get its information through other sources. Isn't the responsibility of educational television to talk to the whole community? We're back to that point again.

[John F. White:] Well, all right, uh but, Irv, that was one man representing if you recall, a very sophisticated community and he was reflecting a fact of life, and one usually is satisfied with his fact of life. Uh however, just this past week a depth survey of audience has been- has been released in eight cities. It was done by Dr. Wilbur Schramm, or under his supervision, head of the Communication Research Institute at Stanford. This does bear out something of what you're saying. But instead of the

typical survey as you and I know it, this was based on four thousand telephone calls in each community, plus two thousand personal interviews which usually extended to-to forty-five minutes. To be classified as a regular listener to these education stations, a person must have listened at least twice a week to this channel, and moreover must have listened at least once in the week prior to the interview and to be able to describe what it was he saw. Now with that standard in--I'm going to use some figures --in Pittsburgh and in San Francisco, 24 percent of the set owners in the coverage area of those stations were regular listeners. 45 percent of those interviewed were occasional listeners. Regular listeners--across [unclear term], I should also add -- came out to an average of about two and a half hours of listening to their educational station. I would maintain that 24 percent is a whale of a lot of people, even in San Francisco--they'll see this program. Twenty percent of the audience in Boston listens to WGBH. Fifteen percent in a small community, Champaign-Urbana. We have the same problem you have because down at the other end we have a UHF station in a VHF market, where it was just 3 percent.

[Marya Mannes:] I would like to ask Mr. Gitlin whether listening to that he feels the cold wind of competition. Mrs. Roosevelt, do you think we might ask these--not antagonists, but--what the one system is going to do to the other?

[Irving Gitlin:] I'd like to start. My complaint about educational television is that we don't have enough competition. I think that the best thing we can have is more and more competition. That those of us--

[ER:] You don't think you'd turn it off because, well, it is off our backs we don't have to do it?

[Irving Gitlin:] No, I don't think so. I don't think so. I think that those of us who are in commercial television, particularly in the side of it that is the news and public affairs area, feel very strongly that the opportunity is widening, and that there are more and more important things to do. And one of the interesting things that's happened in commercial television is that it has become economically feasible to do the kinds of programs that we are talking about. That -- this gets to my point about the economic base--it does not have to be dull to be a good program. It does not have to be audience-limiting. It does not have to be a-a stepchild who's looked down and done to keep Mr. Minow happy. [Unknown guest laughs] We don't have to do that. These programs to an increasing extent are standing on their own feet. They're standing on their own feet because the public is choosing to watch. Now why they are choosing to watch becomes a very complicated subject.

[Newton Minow:] They've never had too much of an opportunity to make that choice before.

[Irving Gitlin:] I do think they've had more of an opportunity than many of us have said because the record of news and informational programming runs back to the very start of television. But I do think that one of the factors that has been taking place is what I call the restlessness factor. And that as the entertainment side has larger and larger problems in getting fresh formats and getting ideas that in fact are alive, by comparison the vitality of the maturing news and public affairs area uh looks pretty good.

[Newton Minow:] Right. Also people, I don't think, want to be entertained all the time. I mean you can get too much of that. People--I don't think they have to be in the top third or anything. [John F. White: No.] Every human being, particularly in a free democratic country like ours, wants to know what's going on. He wants to know if the bomb's gonna go off. He wants to know if we're going to stay alive. He wants to know what this means for his children. And the more exposure that he has to this, it seems to me, the better off we all are.

[John F. White:] Well, and, Irv, if I can make one point. You'll recognize it. You're now talking about ideas and creativity, not necessarily dollars.

[Irving Gitlin:] No, I'm talking about ideas and creativity, but when I think of a network news organization which makes possible the articulation of these ideas and creativity, when I think of the dollars that they cost, the thousands of people involved in an organization of that kind, I say, "Well, how would we do that without the dollars?". You see we want the--

[Marya Mannes:] I think you've got the answer.

[Irving Gitlin:] Personnel, we need the dollars. Now we say, for example, I ask a question "Why isn't there more news and news documentary on educational television?" And the answer I get generally from my friends in educational TV is: one, that the networks are doing it well; and two, we don't have the dollars to mount the kind of news organization to get comprehensive world coverage. I am sure the talent is available. I don't think you have the dollars, and I think you should have the dollars.

[John F. White:] Well, number one, I accept your first contention that the networks do do this well and I believe this. And I don't believe that this is an area in which we should compete, on the hard news. If you're talking about depth treatment and analysis, we certainly should; we must. And I think that the dollars have been excused -- have been used as an excuse too often for a shortage of ideas, and I--

[Newton Minow:] Well, ideas and courage.

[John F. White:] Courage.

[Newton Minow:] I think-I think that very often we think that commercial television is the only part of the communication media that suffers from inhibition. They're afraid of sponsors. I think educators can very often be afraid of trustees, and can be afraid of boards, and can be afraid of controversy. And it seems to me this is an unfortunate thing because this is the place where educational television could be taking the lead -- getting into arguments and stirring up ideas.

[John F. White:] That's right.

[Irving Gitlin:] Would, for example, WGBH, this fine educational station here in Boston, would WGBH do a Boston bookie show?

[John F. White:] I daresay they would. Uh we last year--

[Irving Gitlin:] I would hope so. I would hope so, but I don't believe that that is possible.

[John F. White:] Well, they carried an interview with Chou En Lai that none of the commercial television--

[Irving Gitlin:] He's not as controversial as Boston bookies show -- in Boston! [Guests and audience laugh]

[Marya Mannes:] Could I cut across you just for a moment, because I think, and I don't know if Mrs. Roosevelt agrees with me, but commercial television, don't you think, Mrs. Roosevelt, is doing an increasingly good job of informing the people by news and discussions. I don't think, coincidentally. I think that Mr. Minow's blast had something to do with it. However, don't you think that one of the great functions that we haven't really gone into is original, creative ideas --that is drama; that is humor; that is satire. I mean, wouldn't you--do you see that on commercial television as much as you'd like?

[ER:] Not as much as I think we should. I think we could-I think you could do more in developing new talent and using new talent--

[John F. White:] And I would--.

[ER:] And I also think there is one thing that we-we miss. I think when you have something that is extremely good it could bear repetition sometimes. I sometimes have a feeling that people, for any number of reasons, cannot listen when you show it the first time, and it's cost you an enormous amount of money, and a good deal of talent has gone into it. And then it's wiped out. And I have felt over and over again that - that actually if one could take the comparatively few things that are really interesting, for historic reasons, or because they are extraordinarily well done, drama or sat--whatever, and do them more than once--if they were successful twice, perhaps you could even do them three times. I-I have a feeling it would enormously broaden the knowledge of the public in a great many areas.

[Newton Minow:] Mrs. Roosevelt, I'm so glad you brought that up because it seems to me this is the heart of one of the toughest problems in television. There's a compulsion to put something different on all the time, even though the only--

[ER:] Of course, I suppose the trouble is the numbers of people who would watch each time. But I can't help believing you would have the chance to have a new audience almost each time.

[Newton Minow:] Absolutely. Now on the program, for example--I think when Mrs. Kennedy was on, that was run two more times, and each time it got a very substantial audience again. I don't know whether it was the same people seeing it twice, or people who were busy that evening or not at home, or whatever it may be. But this seems to me, Irv, is the thing that if I were in television, if I were in television, the thing I would be arguing about is that you can't be great eighteen hours a day seven days a week. Why don't you repeat more of the--

[Marya Mannes:] At different hours.

[ER:] Yes, why?

[Newton Minow:] Great things you do?

[Irving Gitlin:] Were you going to answer that?

[John F. White:] Well, I was going to say that one must come to some defense of commercial television on this one. Because this does not only involve management decision and desire. This involves unions. This involves very exorbitant expenses which prevent them from doing this on many occasions, and I think you do need some defense here.

[Irving Gitlin:] I think that the best of the programs should certainly be repeated, but I am concerned about a repeat pattern as a regular part of television, as a program producer. Because, frankly, there are so many things to get on the air and the amount of time on the air is limited, that it may very well be that your time is going to be taken away to repeat a program that has been done by another unit, or by another group. And this is one of the facts of life of television, which is that it's instantaneous, it's immediate, and part of the excitement comes in the fact that you'd better watch it, or you're going to miss it. I-I--the economics are one factor. The other reasons get involved in many other areas, and I would say that we'd be for repeating the best, and unfortunately, there's a certain percentage we wish didn't get on in the first place.

[John F. White:] Do you mean the best or do you mean the most popular? [Irving Gitlin: I-I-] Because I think this is one of the big differences between commercial and non-commercial television, of educational, because I think our function is to repeat just as many times as we can that which is good.

[Irving Gitlin:] Yes, well I would say that I would not create that dichotomy. [John F. White: Hmm.] Sometimes the best is the most popular, and sometimes it is not. [John F. White: Not [unclear terms].] We want to repeat either the best or the most popular, depending on how good it is.

[Newton Minow:] Of course, this gets me to my point about having more channels and having more stations. Congress this week will act on a bill that requires that new television sets carry all eighty-two channels, not just twelve. As the next decade goes on and we have more channels, it would seem to me that we will free ourselves of this dreadful compulsion to have something new every single minute because we'll have more choices available. If you missed it one time on one--I can envision the day, ten years from now, when there may be stations that do nothing but repeat at different times what originally appeared on other stations.

[Irving Gitlin:] But provided, I would assume, Mr. Chairman, provided you do not wreck the economic base upon which television is based at the present time, because the consequences of a complete repeat pattern, or the consequences of too many channels, as we know in the radio area--result in economic distress and lowering of standards, not raising of standards. [Newton Minow: Well--] And the great trouble is how do you find that balance point between freedom of choice and economic self-sufficiency?

[Marya Mannes:] Isn't this our job really, in the future? And I think we're addressing ourselves to the future even more than the present. And also assiduously avoiding that extraordinary little round object that's going up in the sky any minute now called a satellite or Telstar. Don't you think, Mr. Chairman, that it is high time we decided what this little ball is going to bounce off? [Audience laughs]

[Newton Minow:] A hundred years ago, Henry Thoreau wrote that we were in a great hurry to construct a magnetic telegraph link between Maine and Texas. But Mr. Thoreau wondered whether Maine would have anything to say to Texas. [Audience laughs] And this is where we are with the satellite. We're going to send it up; we're going to launch it in a matter of weeks. It's not any bigger than a beach ball but a signal will go up hundreds of miles and bounce against the satellite and across the ocean, and we'll be seeing--and Irv is working on the first program--we'll be seeing uh what's happening in England and France and Germany while it's happening, and they'll be seeing what we're doing. And very little thought is being given to what we're going to do with it. You're right. It's about time.

[Marya Mannes:] Mrs. Roosevelt--

[ER:] And your - your committee is working on that?

[Irving Gitlin:] Yes, there is a three-network committee that has the enviable job of programming the first international broadcast to bounce off the Telstar when it gets up. I'm deliberately not saying "if" it gets up. [Laughter] When it gets up, the latter part of June. And I must say, if we think the complexities of putting together a domestic television program are great, in the international field uh they're really monumental. The first problem, of course, is getting the three networks to agree, and by definition three networks do not agree, you see [laughter]. The committee is having a very good time of it, but our problem is perhaps not as serious as the European --the EBU, the European Broadcasting Union-- because they have at least thirteen nations sitting in committee and met two weeks ago to determine a program. And we already have some reactions. We know, in looking at our own program, that the problems are going to be very great. And one of the greatest problems will be: how are we going to avoid making that

ball in the sky a public relations tool for the points of views of nations, or the points of views of any particular groups, and to get the truth across? That will be the question.

[Marya Mannes:] How are we going to avoid--I'm sorry--making it a selling medium again? You speak--I'm very interested--you talk about this committee which is composed of the networks. Are you blithely assuming that this is going to be a network operation for America?

[Irving Gitlin:] Uh I would assume that the signals that are going to be bounced off the future satellites will be determined by the uh the FCC and by the international agreement. Certainly they're going to be more than television. There are radio signals, there are going to be telephone--

[Newton Minow:] Telephone and telegraph.

[Irving Gitlin:] Television, and I don't think anyone knows--I'd like to ask Mr. Minow what, in fact, and who will program the satellite system when it is in fact permanently in place some years hence.

[Newton Minow:] Well, as they say on television, that's the sixty-four thousand dollar question. The networks are cooperating at the government's request -- the networks are cooperating at the government's request in this first program. I would hope myself that channels will be set aside for the United Nations. I hope someday, Mrs. Roosevelt, that when a great issue is debated at the UN, that it might be seen all over the world. This would be one of the, it seems to me, one of the greatest avenues toward peace and human understanding that would be possible. I'd hope that the USIA will have some use in it. But all these judgments are going to have to be made. I think it's time the nation started thinking about this. Thinking what we want to do. We constantly have technology and science exploding faster than our capacity to think about what we want to do with it humanly.

[Marya Mannes:] Mrs. Roosevelt, what do you--what do you envisage really that this little satellite should do? I know that you uh have an abhorrence, which I think we share, of the word "image" of America. Would you like to comment on that as far as--

[ER:] Well, I hope we will stop trying to create an image of America because America is many images. I don't think you can create an image of America, but I think you can show different aspects of America and American life and thought, and that I would hope that this little satellite would do. And I don't mean by that that it has to be all the good things and none of the bad things. Because I think that's one of the sad things that we have done. That sometimes people think that we only want to tell them where our successes are and never where our failures are. And in a democracy, I think we know that we haven't a perfect democracy, and therefore that we have to have some failures. But I would hope very much that um it would not be, as you said there was fear that it might be just used as propaganda medium for one nation or another nation. But that it would show different nations in their strivings to arrive at something better than they now have. And I think that--that would be a real advantage, if we could really see the strivings of people the world over, and it would help us in many ways to know what to do ourselves.

[Marya Mannes:] Well, that's--that's it. Mr. Gitlin is, I know, committed against the idea of an elite, or in fact anyone laying down any rules, but it seems to me that unless we have a clear philosophy of goals for the satellites, we're going to repeat many of the ghastly mistakes we've made in mass media. Would you care to comment on--on guidelines and--

[John F. White:] Well, I think that the basic principle upon which all of us would agree is that if a satellite or any other instrument of communication is to be effective, it must not become owned by anyone. Be it government, be it foundation, or individual, or corporation. It must in a sense represent all of the people. Now this is going to be a very difficult thing to achieve. And we are going to make some mistakes. But it

just seems to me that in the very nature of the satellite, you will avoid some of these things because you're going to have to treat broad areas of culture or hard news. And you are going to have to avoid propaganda or you'll be dead.

[Newton Minow:] Someone said that it's just providential that in an age of mass destruction we also have mass communication, that the one may prevent the other. And it just seems to me to depend upon how wise we are and how open we are in our thinking of--if we're going to make it serve the cause of communication rather than destruction. The two things are both within man's power--

[Marya Mannes:] Mr. Chairman, can you envisage the government not determining what programs go over, but determining a balance to exactly to show this diversity which Mrs. Roosevelt and I think all of you feel is essential. So that every voice in America gets a chance to be heard on this satellite, and not just any one group.

[Newton Minow:] It seems to me you've articulated a philosophy that the government ought to-ought to adopt. If there were a way that we could achieve that, it seems to me we would then be putting it to its highest and its best use.

[Marya Mannes:] Do you have any objection to that, Mr. Gitlin?

[Irving Gitlin:] No, I would-I would be for that, I would say. Uh I see some of the problems. I also see some of the opportunities. The fact of the matter is I think we shall have a much easier time of it than, let us say, some European states who do not have a tradition of freedom and who do not have a tradition of independent groups programming television. Where, in fact, government policy becomes national communications policy, and obviously will become the policy of the signal that reaches us. And so that we have a pretty sound system that's based upon diversity. It's based upon division of powers, and it's based upon the idea of striving to the extent possible, and particularly in the journalistic side, striving to tell the truth --it's hard to do, but striving to tell the truth, and one other element which I hope most importantly can somehow find a place on this space satellite which is self-criticism and mutual criticism. The critical element has seemed to have gone out and even domestically, [Marya Mannes: Exactly.] and anything we can do to support self-criticism and mutual criticism I think we'll be in a strong start.

[John F. White:] Well, Irv, as we said early in this conversation this afternoon, the user has to be taken into account. You spoke of government control of European television. You're quite right, and it represents most of Europe. But the fact is that with that government control, in many ways they have greater freedom than you and I have in communications here. And in those few countries where freedom did not come with government support or control, they're not going to use it anyway.

[Irving Gitlin:] Well, I-I--it's too late in the program to get into that, but I would just ask how many *Meet the Presses* we have on the -- in the European continent?

[John F. White:] Oh, quite a few--

[Marya Mannes:] Too many, probably.[All laugh] I'm afraid I'm going to have to try and make some rather concise sense, not that there has been unconcise nonsense, [laughter] but to try and get an idea of what we've been hashing out, and I think it sort of has three different points. Uh one or two have to do with actual happenings to further this diversity we want. One is the fact that UHF -- that the receivers -- the set receivers, will now be able to--or we hope will be able to receive all bands instead of just the VHF. The second is this remarkable government grant for the construction of educational television, which is more than just money. It shows faith in a great American need for an alternative system. And I think in the third place, uh the agreement is unanimous that the satellite--not only must we have a philosophy of

broadcasting for the satellite, , but that it must present as many American voices as possible and not be dominated by any one interest, whether that is commercial or whether it is governmental or whether it is educational. Do you think that more or less--

[ER:] I think that is a very good summing up. I think it's uh I think we've really perhaps given the public, which did not know quite so much, perhaps, about the satellite as some of you here do, uh something new to think about this afternoon. And I think that's very important. And now I see our time is very nearly running out, and I would like to thank each one of you. Y you, Mr. Minow, for you've come a long way and made a great contribution--

[Newton Minow:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt, it's been an honor to be here.

[ER:] You, Mr. White, and you, Mr. Gitlin, and you, Miss Mannes. And uh I think that it's been very kind of you to be with us, and I hope that next month all of the audience will again be with us because we will discuss the status of women on *Prospects of Mankind*.

[Audience applause]

[Theme Music begins 58:09]

[Credit sequence overlaid on *Prospects of Mankind* logo]

[Bob Jones:] Newton Minow is chairman of the Federal Communications Commission. Irving Gitlin is executive producer, creative projects, NBC News. John White is president of the National Educational Television and Radio Center. Marya Mannes is television critic for the *Reporter* Magazine. This program was produced in cooperation with the Lowell Institute Cooperative Broadcasting Council. Next month, President Kennedy will introduce Mrs. Roosevelt's program on the status of women. Guests will include Secretary of Labor, Arthur Goldberg, Mrs. Agda Rossel, Swedish ambassador to the United Nations, and Thomas Mendenhall, president at Smith College. This is Bob Jones speaking.

[Theme music ends 59:12]

[National Educational Television Logo]

[Bob Jones:] This is NET. National Educational Television. (59:19)

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