

## SOCIETY

He calls on educators to heed philosopher William James (1842–1910). In *Talks To Teachers* (1899), James wrote that schoolwork must be “hard and unnatural” if students are to learn. He argued that the goal of a teacher was to find how to prod his pupils to “let loose the effort” to study. If teachers choose to *teach*, instead of entertain, they may be surprised by their students’ “miraculous” ability to listen—and to learn.

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**PRESS & TELEVISION**


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*Sunday Sermonette*

“Securing the Middle Ground: Reporter Formulas in *60 Minutes*” by Richard Campbell, in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* (Dec. 1987), Speech Communication Association, 5105 Backlick Rd., Annandale, Va. 22003.

Now 20 years old, *60 Minutes* is the longest-running and most popular prime-time news program in U.S. television history. Why? Creator Don Hewitt’s prophecy that a documentary series that packaged reality “as well as Hollywood packages fiction” could not fail has been richly fulfilled.

Campbell, assistant professor of communications at the University of Michigan, analyzed 154 segments of the CBS series aired between 1968 and 1983. He concludes that Hewitt’s winning formula employs old-fashioned storytelling to dramatize a “mythology for middle America” that celebrates traditional virtues: fairness, simplicity, honesty, individualism.

The *60 Minutes* reporters play one of three archetypal roles:

- *Detective*. In investigative pieces, the reporter introduces a “crime” (political corruption, murder), then reconstructs the story, confronts witnesses, and unravels the mystery. Villains tend to be anonymous institutions (the government, big companies, unions); their facelessness may be underlined by their executives’ refusal to be interviewed. When villains are questioned, they are shown at close range. Their heads fill the screen and “sweat, facial twitches, and tears” stand out. Medium-range shots and trenchcoats mark the reporters as “individual loners” who always triumph.

- *Analyst*. In profiles (of politicians, actors, intellectuals), reporters again act as viewers’ surrogates, often posing “tough” questions. Example: Mike Wallace asks the Shah of Iran to comment on the CIA’s assessment of him as a “brilliant but dangerous megalomaniac.”

- *Tourist*. In segments that portray interesting places (Kuwait, rural America) and seek out “authentic” life and tradition-minded folk, reporters chastise villains (bureaucracy, modernity) by evoking myths from a lost, heroic age. (“This is one of those *Our Town* kind of stories,” intones Morley Safer, beginning a piece about a New Jersey village.)

Campbell finds that *60 Minutes*’ producers approach their audience (“Kiwanians, Rotarians, I understand them,” says Hewitt) with more sophistication than they display with their subjects. These get two-dimensional treatment at best. The series survives because it offers its Sunday evening audience “a center to go back to (or start out from) each week.”