

PRESS & TELEVISION

Congressional hearings — with their predictable schedules and potential for newsworthy confrontations—make for good television.



Wide World

The Supreme Court bars network coverage of any of its proceedings; the President "is covered too personally, too directly, to be maligned by the networks day to day." Indeed, the authors conclude, the "networks need the President, and *generally* they cultivate him."

Time Marches On

"*Time Magazine Revisited: Presidential Stereotypes Persist*" by Fred Fedler, Mike Meeske, and Joe Hall, in *Journalism Quarterly* (Summer 1979), 431 Murphy Hall, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minn. 55455.

Does America's No. 1 news magazine give the facts—and nothing but the facts? Fedler, Meeske, and Hall, who teach journalism at the University of Central Florida, sampled *Time* magazine's coverage of Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter for 10 consecutive issues each. In their view "*Time* has never claimed to be objective. It is still not."

With a circulation of 4.5 million, *Time* leads *Newsweek* (3 million) and *U.S. News and World Report* (2 million) as the nation's most popular weekly news magazine. In a 1976 survey, American journalists ranked it sixth on a list of dependable sources—ahead of all three television networks and several newspapers, including the *Los Angeles Times*.

Most *Time* presidential stories, the authors say, begin on a "neutral note" but end with *Time's* conclusions. Often, the magazine (like its rivals) purports to tell readers what the nation thinks—for example, on the Watergate scandal, "For most Americans, it is a matter of profound disappointment." The magazine's headlines (e.g., "Carter's Dog Day Afternoons"), adjectives (Ford's "realistic way of curing the nation's ills"; Carter's "unsuitable, missionary foreign policy style"), and emphasis on the personality of the President all contribute to the creation of stereotypes, say the authors. Thus Lyndon Johnson was depicted as a

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"demanding, often difficult" President; Nixon (pre-Watergate) was "dedicated, clearly serious"; Ford came across as a "square salt of the earth" man; while Carter "has a penchant for reading hope into almost everything."

Time's acknowledged pre-1965 Republican sympathies have only slightly abated, the authors contend. In their samplings, Johnson was the subject of 46 positive and 41 negative mentions; Nixon (before Watergate) of 42 positive and 16 negative; Ford of 53 positive and 34 negative; and Carter of 24 positive and 63 negative.

In only one aspect did the authors see *Time* relatively free of bias: Of all the political cartoons reprinted in the magazine during the periods studied, none was favorable toward any president.

*The Morality
of Soap Operas*

"The Angst of the Upper Class" by Philip Wander, in *Journal of Communication* (Autumn 1979), P.O. Box 13358, Philadelphia, Pa. 19101.

Despite their scriptwriters' focus on personal problems, television daytime soap operas make "modern life appear coherent and relatively secure," says Wander, professor of speech communication at San Jose State University.

The world of the soap opera is governed by a strict moral code: "Playboys are untrustworthy"; "adultery is invariably punished"; "divorce always tears apart the children." "Two people may love each other," Wander writes, but "where there is no marriage there is no hope for the future." Unsavory characters (e.g., Ty, the pimp in the ABC series "All My Children") provide for a natural selection of sorts. The weak who succumb to their charms are branded—usually forever—as "unfit for family life"; they tend, moreover, to be infertile.

The chief setting in today's soap operas has shifted from the home to the office. "Village life," Wander observes, "with friends and relatives living nearby, gossiping, helping, dropping by for a chat, is born again in the hospital, the law office, the corporation." The series' authors generally ignore social problems, such as "diseases resulting from smog or bad working conditions, a sudden increase in the work load, unemployment, or the insane pace of social change." Most difficulties faced by the predominantly upper-class characters can be remedied by readily available professional help—"a few hours of surgery, a visit to a psychiatrist or a lawyer." Dilemmas are rooted in individuals. For example, in "Days of Our Lives" (NBC), Brooke, the illegitimate daughter of Bob Anderson, president of a company that depends on military contracts, becomes an industrial spy against her father—not on political grounds but to get even for his desertion of her and her mother.

Soap operas, Wander concludes, present a view of society akin to that of the 19th-century romantic novel, filled with "characters struggling to keep things the way they were."