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A Time To Grow

JULIAN GOODMAN

Julian Goodman, President of The National Broadcasting Company, delivered the commencement address at Western Kentucky University, August 5th, 1966. His remarks are presented on the following pages.

I hope I am not too far removed, in terms of time and memory, from the seats where you are sitting to be able to recall—especially since it is August and there are other things to be done tonight—the sense of resignation and entrapment I had when faced with a commencement speaker. Therefore, let me promise I shall be out of your way in less time than the average television program takes—an episode of “Get Smart” for example—even without the commercials. As a matter of fact, with the rapid growth of the computer economy, I am hopeful that a computer will soon be invented that can produce ready-made speeches at the punch of a button. This would enable each of you to get a speech on a subject that interests you—printed on glossy paper, suitable for framing—and leave you more time for contemplation tonight, in the soft August air, of the things that lie ahead of you.

At least that’s what I was doing in your place 23 years ago, and 23 years, if you are statistically minded, translate into only 276 months—not too many pay days if you calculate in the same terms I did when I worked for the Central Tire Company, which used to be down at Tenth and College.

If I seem to you to be overly occupied with the subject of time, it is because I have spent almost all my time in the broadcasting business since I left this Hall, and time is an extremely important factor in broadcasting.

Time is important to us for many reasons. We are regimented by the number of minutes in the

hour, and hours in the day, and days in the week. Once they are passed we cannot recall them. In dealing with news, we cannot, as our friends in the newspaper and magazine business do, add a page when we need one, or store it on the library shelf for later, careful scrutiny. When we have done something, it is done forever, except for an occasional rerun.

I think I really learned the importance of time from Dr. Gordon Wilson, whose memory all of us revere, because I over-slept and missed the final exam on English I. He came very close to failing me because of it, then relented and let me take the test, and I don't think I have slept through an alarm clock since. But from then on, time has been a part of my life.

Anyone involved in writing for live television learns the inexorable discipline of the knowledge that, whatever you do, the second hand always moves at exactly the same pace. I saw David Brinkley once—but only once—misread a clock, show up two minutes late for his program on the air, so out of breath he couldn't speak. Time really doesn't wait for anybody, but it is particularly impatient with those of us in television.

Time is important to us not just as a measure and not just as a discipline, but also as an opportunity. There is a time when certain things can be done and should be done.

4 There is such a time for me, I think, right now. I have spent most of my life in broadcast news. I have participated in some small way in the

coverage of some great news stories of the administrations of Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson. I have come from the days when there was one fifteen-minute news program each day on television, and an occasional bulletin—begrudgingly given—to the television of today, when news and public information programming occupy more than one-fourth of our schedule—more than 700 hours of informative news or public affairs programming in a year.

I have come from a time—which seems not too long ago—when the attempted assassination of a President (President Truman in 1950) received coverage only on news shows—and not much on those—to these days where it is unthinkable for a responsible television organization not to give full public view to the matters of life and death that are weighed in such public hearings as the Senate Foreign Relations Committee deliberations on Vietnam.

Now time has brought a different challenge to me. I am the new and, at least others say, young President of an established and distinguished company, a company of honored names and traditions. Yet it is a company that does not want to live on these traditions alone, but must keep growing and building for the future—with full acceptance of its responsibility as an important part of the daily lives of millions of Americans.

I think my presence in this job—with the back-

ground I have in news—is evidence that the National Broadcasting Company is continuing its policy of dedication to public service that has made the NBC channel, wherever you are, an automatic choice for the viewer who seeks not only good entertainment—which we try to provide—but full coverage of the realities of life.

I certainly do not want to limit my objectives, however, to the cause of news coverage alone. I feel that another immediate challenge to television lies in the field of contemporary drama—in offering new hope and opportunity to writers who have something to say but no place to say it.

In this connection, let me say that in anticipation of seeing you here tonight, I searched through an old suitcase left behind from my college days—a suitcase containing several plays I wrote under the excellent tutelage of a Professor for whom I have a great fondness, Miss Frances Richards. And while this certainly could not be the responsibility of Miss Richards, I must say that, after a careful scrutiny of everything I wrote, in my current capacity as a purchaser of television plays I wouldn't pay 30 cents for the lot of it. But I digress.

There is already much good drama on television. Many of the episodes in such continuing weekly NBC series as “Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color,” “Bonanza,”
6 “Run for Your Life,” “I Spy,” “Bob Hope Presents the Chrysler Theatre”—and in the coming season such programs as “The Road West”—are

much better dramatic fare than I used to see after saving up money all week and taking a date to the movies on Saturday night.

But we should not stop there. We should not ever stop, because television is a medium of growth and change and youth and experimentation.

The world has always been changing—particularly at commencement time—but now it seems to be changing at a faster rate than ever before. In this country we are going through a continuing revolution. And in this decade, it takes the form of an effort to remold many of our institutions by bright and restless young people who are trying to create for themselves a life and meaning they feel my generation never realized.

They are the style-setters and the pace-setters, and the results are translated and quickly diffused through many other layers of our society by mass communications. That society itself is becoming better informed, less conformist, more sophisticated and demanding.

As a service that can be embraced or rejected at the whim of its viewers, television cannot only be responsive to their awakening interests. It must be a step ahead. So it is not strange that a lot of stirring and ferment has been going on in the medium. This is true not only in news, where reality—whether in Vietnam, Watts or Washing-
7 ton—is being reflected more closely, but also in entertainment, with more attention to drama

and the product of the contemporary theatre, and a striving for new expression.

Creativity in television begins with the writer, and there is a great deal more of it in television than might meet the eye. This is true not only in special programs, but in such regular series as Bob Hope's Chrysler Theatre, on NBC, which each week creates an original play on a contemporary theme.

However, as in every form of expression—and indeed in every progressive business—we need to experiment so that we can develop new directions in our service and quicken its promise. Experimentation is not easy in network television, where each network presents a half-million dollars' worth of programming each evening, where advertiser support is the only source of revenue for the whole enterprise and where the penalty for failure is so enormous.

It is not easy, but experimentation in one form or another is vital in television, in helping a medium that is reaching maturity also to remain dynamic. So I have given the NBC Television Network a difficult assignment but I am sure its management and creative people will fulfill that assignment with distinction.

Simply put, it is to develop a Sunday afternoon experimental theatre series for television. Underlying this end-product are a number of purposes.

One is to bring forward and test fresh writing approaches that will not be confined by the im-

mediate demands of broad-appeal prime-time programming. Another is to give established television writers a change of pace and a more creative outlet and also to bring to television proficient writers who have not been able to find their way in.

A third is to feed these new efforts progressively into conventional television, much as features of Detroit's "dream" cars are fed into production models of subsequent years.

And a fourth purpose is to see whether, in the course of this effort, we can put on the air a program series that will have an appeal and attraction of its own.

For writers must write for an audience. The work of their minds and imaginations must be communicated to others to be real, and it will become sterile and artificial if it is locked up in a literary workshop.

The task we are setting for ourselves is not easy. Perhaps it will not work, because creative achievement cannot be made to order. But it will get our most energetic and enthusiastic effort. And even if we cannot make it work, we expect to learn from it how we can adapt or modify its direction to achieve the same purpose.

This is not all we intend to do in the field of drama. A series that has cared enough to send the very best to NBC for so many years—"The Hallmark Hall of Fame"—has scheduled such plays as Maxwell Anderson's "Barefoot in Athens," Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit," Guy Bol-

ton's "Anastasia," and Sir James Barrie's comedy, "The Admirable Crichton."

We will add yet another dimension to this effort in the coming season. NBC will offer a television production of "The Investigation," by the controversial dramatist, Peter Weiss, author of "Marat/Sade," which won the Drama Critics Award in this last Broadway season. "The Investigation," which opens on Broadway in October, is drawn from the record of the trials of guards and officials who operated the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz in World War II. It has been hailed by critics throughout Europe as a major theatrical event. Its presentation on NBC will represent a major forward step for the medium, both because of its content and because it will be the first time a nationwide television audience will have the opportunity to see a play in the same season as its run before theatre audiences on Broadway.

There is no doubt that this is a time for a resurgence of drama on television, and I am glad of it.

10 It is unlike me not to spend more time talking about what lies ahead in the field of news, and about the NBC News Specials we plan on a once-a-week average during the coming season. But I will save that for another day because—and I have been talking about time—it is time now for the other things. A book I still like to read says for everything there is a season, and a time for every matter; a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to keep and a time to cast away; a time to keep silence and a time to speak.

And there is also for you, a time to be graduated, and the time is now. Whatever the career you have chosen—and I can think of none more honorable nor more needed than that for which this University was founded, the profession of teaching—whatever your field of endeavor, the world is ready for you, and needs you. The time that you find yourself entering may seem to you a time of violence and of despair. For some it is. But it is also a time of challenge, and of promise, and of opportunity, and it is all yours.

President Kennedy said as he took office—"I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, and the devotion we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it—and the glow from that fire can truly light the world."

It is a world that needs all the light it can get, and you are now in a position to help provide it.

To you as graduates and to those who love you and who have helped make your graduation possible, I congratulate you, I salute you, and I thank you.