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Gary R. Edgerton, Peter C. Rollins, eds. *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001. 383 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-2190-1; \$24.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8131-9056-3.



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Television is sometimes called the window to the world. The landscapes of the television world change with the press of a button. When we are finished with the outside world, we press the power button to shut the blinds without ever leaving our homes.

Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age looks at television a little differently. TV is a window to the *past*. As a different kind of history—different in form, function, production, and reception—a deep study of TV history gives viewers a profoundly different way of understanding and evaluating how stories of the past are retold. The shift from word to image in transmitting history is a recent shift and needs to be more thoroughly studied. This is where the book begins.

Edgerton lays out seven general assumptions about the nature of television as historian that provide the launch point for the essays that follow. Summed up in the introduction's title, television is "a different kind of historian altogether." It is widespread and influential. It is big business. It makes history embody current concerns and clarifies the present. And, perhaps most importantly, it is popular.

Edgerton says that "a key goal of this collection of essays, in fact, is to better understand television as a pop-

ular art form, an evolving technology, a business and industry, and a social force of international proportions, all from a wide assortment of well-trying and effective historical-critical perspectives." The book "seeks to establish quality criteria and levels of merit for television as 'popular history' rather than judging it by the very different yardstick of professional history, or just dismissing the entire phenomenon as hopelessly flawed and ahistorical" (p. 10). In both respects the book is a success.

The sixteen essays are divided into four sections that deal with different aspects of television history, specifically prime-time entertainment programming; television documentaries; news and public affairs programming; and production, reception, and history of history on television. A fair sample of television histories are studied in these essays, from alternate histories created in science fiction series to "correct" historical documentaries found on public television to history as recorded by news outlets.

The third section, "TV News and Public Affairs Programming as Historian," may appeal most to Jhistory subscribers. Generally, these essays deal with how news creates history. "Images of History in Israel Television News," by Netta Ha-Ilan, discusses how Israeli journalists use historical narrative to create a collective

identity. David Culbert's "Memories of 1945 and 1963" and Philip M. Taylor's "Television: The First Flawed Rough Drafts of History," deal largely with the archival nature of television. The first essay looks at the transient nature of news, first as a source of currency, and once it has passed into old news, news as collective history. The second examines the methodology of television news. As a new source of history, the production of television news creates obstacles for historians. As television evolves, how do researchers deal with the ever-growing waves of historical content?

Taylor's essay segues into the fourth and final section of the book. The strongest essay in the section, and perhaps the entire collection, is Douglas Gomery's "Rethinking Television History." This essay describes some of the limitations of television scholarship that need to be taken into account when evaluating television history. Among others, FCC regulations and the business dealings of conglomerates in the early days of television had a significant impact on how television programming was created. Gomery iterates the need for a strong economic and institutional history of television and mass media in general, particularly at the local level, since local decisions had the most immediate impact on the media. Deference towards a strong foundational his-

tory of the medium will allow communications scholars to more fully understand how policy, custom, and demographics formed mass media, and how it was in turn formed by mass media. Gomery emphasizes that attentiveness to the symbiotic growth of the television industry—the process influencing what was formed, and vice versa—is key to creating a more complete scholarship of television. He writes, "in sum, the history of TV needs to be written not simply about the wholes—the networks that dominated—but also by the parts from the local level, analysed from the rich approaches of policy, urban, social, demographic, and economic historiography" (p. 301).

This book persuasively makes a case for developing a political, economic, social, demographic, textual, and contextual study of television history. The breadth of material aired each day and the certain impact it has on audiences clearly demands serious study. With a significant quantity of television histories produced over the last fifty years, and with a huge number of topics left untouched (for example, television histories produced for children, and the implications of multiculturalism on national identity as witnessed on television), this collection persuasively argues for a sequel.

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