

**FROM STAGE SHOWS TO STREAMING:
THE EVOLUTION OF ENTERTAINMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS
MEDIA IN THE 20TH CENTURY**

Coordinator: Bob Cohn

During the 20th century—through a remarkable combination of talent, technological innovation, entrepreneurial drive, financial opportunities and legal constraints—the world of entertainment and communications in the US changed dramatically, decade after decade. This study group will explore the major milestones of this evolution, the opportunities that they created, and the changes they spawned. Through a combination of presentations and group discussions we will explore the impact of each of these developments, the companies that took advantage of these opportunities, and the frequently colorful leaders who ran those companies. We will explore the major forms of audio-visual entertainment—from the birth of motion pictures in 1896 through the rise of radio, the growth of the Hollywood studio system, the coming of television, the dominance of the three major broadcast networks, and the subsequent impact of cable programming. In addition, we will examine the impact of these developments on print media and the simultaneous changes in the newspaper and magazine business, as well as the recent impact of digital media on all of these outlets.

Bob Cohn retired in 2020 after a 51-year career in media, primarily in the magazine publishing business. His interest in media and communications started when he was an undergraduate at Dartmouth College, where he was Program Director for the college radio station. He subsequently earned an MBA at Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business. He joined the IRP in the Spring of 2018 and has previously coordinated one session in the Art of the Profile study group.

Type of Study Group: Presentation followed by discussion

Readings and other Materials/Online Services:

Coordinator will email links to online materials—primarily articles, book chapters and videos

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***** SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS *****

WEEK 1

TOPIC: Entertainment and media environment—1880-1900

READING:

The History of North American Theater: The United States, Canada, and Mexico by Stefanie Koory, pp. 187-198;

The Rialto: A Study of Union Square, the Center of New York's First Theater District, 1870-1900 by John Warren Frick, Jr., pp. 1-75;

Magazines and the Profession of Authorship in the United States, 1840-1900 by Ellery Sedgwick.

QUESTIONS:

How long did it take information to travel from city to city and state to state? How did that impact the theater business? How did it impact the magazine and newspaper business? How did the actor/manager model impact what shows were presented in which cities?

WEEK 2

TOPIC: Birth of motion pictures—1896-1920s

The Vitascope & live music; emergence of silent film studios in NYC and New Jersey; the move to Hollywood; consolidation of studios and growth of theater chains

READING/VIEWING:

The Dark Side of the Silent Film Era (whole article) by Natasha Lavender;

Video: *The Silent Era: Crash Course Film History # 9*;

Timeline of Greatest Film Milestones and Turning Points in Film History, 1896-1920.

QUESTIONS:

What motivated the early entrepreneurs to enter the motion picture business? How “risky” was the early studio business? Would the business have developed differently if it had not moved from the East Coast to California?

WEEK 3

TOPIC: The rise of radio—1910-1930s

Investor/entrepreneurs; Marconi, De Forest, and RCA; Westinghouse launches KDKA in Pittsburgh—1920; birth of the networks—1926-1928;

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the Golden Age of Radio—1930's-1940s.

READING:

The History of the Radio Industry in the United States to 1940 by Carole E. Scott;

In All His Glory: The Life and Times of William S. Paley and the Birth of Modern Broadcasting by Sally Bedell Smith, Chapters 3-5.

QUESTIONS:

What was the original business model that motivated Westinghouse and RCA to launch radio stations? How did Bill Paley totally transform that business model? How would radio stations have been different without the dominance of the major networks?

WEEK 4

TOPIC: Sound comes to Hollywood!

1927-*The Jazz Singer* ; growth of the studio system-MGM, Paramount and Warner Bros.; vertical integration of distribution channels; financial control-the battles between NY and Hollywood.

WEEK 5

TOPIC: Television arrives—1927-1947

Initial broadcast ventures; RCA and the 1939 World's Fair; World War II limits development; radio networks co-opt new television media.

WEEK 6

TOPIC: Stage entertainment—1930s-1950s

Stage entertainment in the 1920s and 1930s; competition from the movies; consolidation of theaters; evolution of the Broadway musical.

WEEK 7

TOPIC: 1947—the year that changed the entertainment Industry

Antitrust suits break up the motion picture industry; decline and death of the studio system; full scale launch of commercial television

WEEK 8

TOPIC: The 1950s—the dominance of television

Boycott by the motion picture companies; motion picture studios experiment

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with new formats to compete with TV; major advertisers support & develop TV programming; live drama—the Golden Age of television; battle for color television development—CBS vs. RCA

WEEK 9

TOPIC: Newspapers and magazines from the 1950s through the 1970s
Newspapers consolidate and compete with broadcast news; major magazines grow circulation to rival size of TV audiences; birth of the special interest and hobby/enthusiast magazines; explosion of advertiser creativity

WEEK 10

TOPIC: 1960s evolution
The world's #1 advertising medium; network battles vs. independent stations; beginnings of cable TV; DVR's—the VHS vs. Beta battle

WEEK 11

TOPIC: Cable TV becomes a factor—1970s-1990s
Cable changes from utility to programming source; spin-off of Viacom from CBS; birth of the cable networks; fragmentation of audiences

WEEK 12

TOPIC: The Digital Age—1990s-present
PCs, the internet, smart phones and tablets disrupt existing media; the change from “appointment viewing” to “on demand” viewing; streaming changes the role of traditional and cable television networks; future of streaming, networks and movie theaters