From Cronkite to Colbert: The Evolution of Broadcast News, Geoffrey Baym, Paradigm Publishers, 2010, 1594515549, 9781594515545, 197 pages. In a time when increasing numbers of people are tuning out the nightly news and media consumption is falling, the late-night comedians have become some of the most important newscasters in the country. From Cronkite to Colbert explains why. It examines an historical path that begins at the height of the network age with Walter Cronkite and Edward R. Murrow, when the evening news was considered the authoritative record of the day's events and forged our assumptions about what the news is, or should be. The book then winds its way through the breakdown of that paradigm of real news and into its reinvention in the unlikely form of such popularized shows as The Daily Show and The Colbert Report. From Cronkite to Colbert makes the case that rather than fake news, those shows should be understood as a new kind of journalism, one that has the potential to save the news and reinvigorate the conversation of democracy in today's society.


The Evening Stars: The Making of the Network News Anchor, Barbara Matusow, 1983, Biography & Autobiography, 302 pages. A look at the system that produces the elite of television newscasters features incisive profiles, candid observations, and numerous anecdotes, as it portrays the personalities.

Behind the Smile: Negotiating and Transforming the Tourism-imposed Identity of Bahamian Women, Dellareese M. Higgs, 2008, , 224 pages. Moreover, with the advent and development of tourism throughout the Bahamas, whiteness became the protracted mode by which Bahamian progress was assessed. The minority white.


Bad news at Black Rock: the sell-out of CBS News, Peter McCabe, 1987, , 302 pages. Provides a detailed account of the titanic corporate struggles and often bitter individual rivalries at the legendary television network, focusing on the fall of a morning news.


Meet the press fifty years of history in the making, Rick Ball, NBC News, 1998, Performing Arts, 238 pages. Chronicles the program's radio and television history, including featured journalists,
newsmakers, and events.


Tabloid justice criminal justice in an age of media frenzy, Richard Logan Fox, Robert W. Van Sickel, Thomas L. Steiger, 2007, Language Arts & Disciplines, 251 pages. From Booknews: Arguing that the US has entered an era in which the mass media tend to focus on the "sensationalistic, personal, lurid, and tawdry details" of high-profile ....

With increasing numbers of people tuning out the nightly news and media consumption falling, late-night comedians have become some of the most important newscasters in the country. From Cronkite to Colbert explains why. It examines a historical path that begins at the height of the network age with Walter Cronkite and Edward R. Murrow--when the evening news was considered the authoritative record of the day's events and forged our assumptions about what "the news" is, or should be. The book then winds its way through the breakdown of the paradigm of "real" news and into its reinvention in the unlikely form of such shows as The Daily Show and The Colbert Report. From Cronkite to Colbert makes the case that rather than "fake news," these shows should be understood as a new kind of journalism, one that has the potential to save the news and reinvigorate the conversation on democracy in today's society.

"From Cronkite to Colbert" is a fascinating study of the slow evolution of television news. Ironically, I read it as my exasperation with current news program structures and journalistic coverage of stories kept gnawing at me. Why did I keep finding myself turning to C-Span or "The Daily Show" for my news? Why were pundits' opinions coming in the guise of news? I hadn't realized it, but the erosion of reliable, credible news coverage was intentional and insidious. This book provided numerous "ah ha!" moments for me.

Dr. Baym's choice of CBS News as a research subject represents the ever-changing face of television journalism. By focusing on the iconic Walter Cronkite's reliability to Dan Rather's fall from grace, the book provides evidence of symptomatic problems within television news. Thankfully, the author stayed aligned to his research mission, and did not turn the book into tangential arguments. The changes at CBS News are representational, but certainly not all inclusive of both cable and broadcast news. However, by maintaining a focus on one network, the readers may be inclined to think about the changes in other network news programs as well. For instance, it can be argued that from Huntley and Brinkley (contemporaries of Walter Cronkite) to Brian Williams on NBC, numerous parallels are evident with CBS.

What I find most compelling is the author's observation of how both "The Daily Show" and "The Colbert Report" have, through the use of satire, returned us to the age of reliable, investigative journalism. Though Stewart calls his show "Fake News," "The Daily Show" actually holds a mirror up to our perception of current events. As I read through the examples from transcripts of both Stewart's and Colbert's programs, it became evident that, just as the erosion of credible news has been almost imperceptible as it was happening, so, too, has the re-establishment of investigative journalism through Stewart/Colbert become a sleight of hand. The author demonstrates that there is a sound reason why television audiences are switching to "The Daily Show" for their nightly news.

In addition, as a professor of Mass Communication, I am always looking for ways to deepen the students' understanding of the media. Dr. Baym's book is a marvelous text to explicate the changing face of news. The juxtaposition of the two Presidential impeachment processes (Nixon and Clinton) easily translates into lecture material and is a perfect example of how news has become almost intrusive. While it is not written at an undergraduate level, it would, however, make an excellent companion text for graduate students and for the very curious. For instance, if you are wondering "What happened to television news?," "From Cronkite to Colbert" is the book for you.

I worked in the industry so I expected it to be fun and insightful reading. But, either it was a doctoral
thesis or should have been. It took determined, dogged reading to understand the premises and just get through it. But if one can persevere through the trenches, it has some very intelligent insights and interesting and justifiable theories. It achieves the same thing as TV news itself, judged by the masses who want to be entertained and invigorated every second: it's a dull and boring narrative of a subject that could be enlightening and thought-provoking.

If someone could tell me whether or not Colbert and Stewart get a Royalty from the sale of books with their image on the cover or name in the title, I'd be by 10 each. Short of that, go with the reviews,... unless Colbert tells his Nation to buy it, then buy buy buy it. If Colbert says stay away, then do so. "wink"

Part of the book was fairly decent. The first couple chapters contained some great history of how CBS News began, and the philosophies behind the early news programs. Baym also delivered some interesting facts - for example: during the 2004 Presidential campaign, the candidates appeared on late-night talk shows a total of 25 times. During the 2008 election, that number skyrocketed to over 110.

The next several chapters made some interesting comparisons between how the media handled the Watergate scandal as compared to the Monica Lewinsky scandal. The comparisons were kind of fascinating, ranging from the length of time the news programs showed raw video footage of the players involved, how reporters referred to the President, and even down to how reporters interacted with one another.

There are several problems with this book, however, and because of them I wouldn't recommend spending your time reading this one. First, the language throughout reads like a hyper-academic extended journal article. Baym (an associate professor of media at the University of North Carolina) constantly employs obtuse language that just comes across as someone trying too hard to sound smarter than they are. And even in this, he belabors so many of his points - reading through many paragraphs you'll find yourself thinking, "Okay, I get it! Let's move on."

Secondly, his research appears to be about a mile deep but only an inch wide. He zeroes in specifically on CBS News and all of their affiliate stations and programs, largely ignoring every other network and news organization out there. Along those same lines, it would have been nice to see some other data points outside of his Watergate/Monica Lewinsky comparison to flesh out his theory of news evolution a bit more. How about comparisons of the coverage for some other major political events - the economy under Carter versus the economy under Reagan or Bush, for example? The Iran-Contra scandal? Cold War coverage versus War on Terror coverage? Out of nearly infinite possibilities, the fact that Baym cherry picks only two for comparison sake rings pretty hollow. Two points do not a data set make.

And finally, the last third of the book completely falls off the deep end academically speaking. I almost quit reading in the middle after continually getting bogged down in the author's language, and now I wish I had. If this book was meant as something resembling an academic article or a textbook (which is what the writing style makes it sound like), then Baym completely loses all academic sensibilities when he begins to talk about the two Comedy Central shows mentioned above.

Calling the mainstream media "the lapdogs" of the Bush administration, claiming that Bush had the media in his back pocket, and that the media never attacked Bush hard enough during his tenure as President (could there possibly be a more absurd foundation for advancing an argument?), he then points with much fanfare and celebration to the 'solution': comedy shows that lambaste conservative politicians.

His "review" of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert's shows are largely just transcripts of interviews where the hosts and guests use humor to attack the politicians Baym doesn't like - over and over and over again. Made even worse is the fact that Baym then stops and explains to us why every joke is funny - something that completely ruins the joke and makes one wonder if Baym even has a sense of humor.
In this excellent new book, Geoffrey Baym tells the story of late 20th-century American political news in much the way that reporters once sought to tell the stories of American politics in an authoritative, erudite and philosophically informed manner, such that the average educated reader can understand.

Baym's starting point is that political news on the "big three" networks has devolved into profit-driven spectacle and cynicism though this in itself is not news. The book's contribution comes from his analysis of the "fake news" on the alternative network Comedy Central — Jon Stewart's The Daily Show and Stephen Colbert's The Colbert Report — and the comparison of them with their predecessors in both the early days of network news and the late 20th century. The Daily Show and The Colbert Report, Baym argues, are the only network newscasts fulfilling the journalistic mandate of speaking truth to power. For example, whereas traditional reporters' response to the growing sophistication with which politicians manipulate the news has been to relativize all political statements no matter how obviously untrue as equal, Stewart and Colbert use humor and irony to highlight the ridiculousness of what now often passes for political discourse.

American anchor appears argues audience Barack Obama become blog broadcast journalism Bush Bush's camera campaign CBS's celebrity Clinton coverage clip Colbert Report comedy Comedy Central Communication conversation critical culture Daily Show debate democracy discursively integrated discussion dominant election entertainment explains fact fake floodlight functions Henry Jenkins high-modern paradigm Hillary Clinton Huffington Post impeachment infotainment insists Internet Iraq John Jon Stewart journalists Kerry Kerry's kind Koppel Lara Logan late-night Logan interview mainstream media McCain Moyer's multichannel narrative network age newscast night nightly Nixon O'Reilly offers Palin parody percent play political post-network postmodern president presidential producers professional public affairs media public sphere reality Republican role Salant satire says scholar searchlight segment show's sound bites speak spectacle speech Stephen Colbert story strategy suggests talk television truth truthiness turn University Press viewers visual voice Walter Cronkite watch Watergate Watergate coverage York YouTube

"Geoffrey Baym is the Jon Stewart of journalism studies (though not as funny): If you want to see the emerging shape of television journalism, watch The Daily Show. If you want to understand its roots, significance and potential for invigorating democracy, read From Cronkite to Colbert: The Evolution of Broadcast News." —Michael X. Delli Carpini, University of Pennsylvania

"How did a comedian whose show comes on after puppets making crank phone calls come to be seen as the chief advocate of a responsible democratic media? Geoffrey Baym offers an original and convincing interpretation of the historical significance of Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, and other practitioners of contemporary 'infotainment.' The result is a thought-provoking and important reflection on the transformation of television news and of American political discourse." —Dan Hallin, University of California, San Diego

"The story that Baym tells in From Cronkite to Colbert is essential reading, not just for scholars of journalism or popular culture but also for political communication effects scholars. For scholars trying to understand why Stewart and Colbert have become so relevant, Baym offers thoughtful and well-supported arguments. Baym's text is both undeniably important and eerily prescient." —Political Communication

Geoffrey Baym is an Associate Professor in the Department of Media Studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He has written numerous journal articles and book chapters on the changing styles and standards of news media and political discourse. He has worked as a newswriter, reporter, and researcher for media outlets such as the CBS Network News, KSL Television in Salt Lake City, and the Tucson Citizen.

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A description of Ted Koppel's head projected in giant proportions behind Jon Stewart's desk serves notice from page 1 that Geoffrey Baym has penned more than a traditional history of journalism. Add Koppel's distinctive voice saying, "I have unconfirmed reports coming in that say, quote, 'You suck.' A pause for laugh, then, "I'm now getting confirmed reports. At 11:05 Eastern Standard Time, it is now official that you, in fact, do suck" (1). You get the gist. From Cronkite to Colbert: The Evolution of Broadcast News is going to entertain. The question is whether it passes academic muster or simply appropriates names, images, and a heavy dose of vignettes from The Daily Show and The Colbert Report to grab the attention of readers who believe they get news when they watch comedians on late-night TV.

It is no secret journalism is changing, and no one is rushing in to fill the legacy of Walter Cronkite. Colbert and Stewart are the heroes now; they entertain as well as inform. What's less clear is how to incorporate the niche they've carved in popular culture into scholarly discussions of broadcast news or the curriculum of journalism schools built on models of professional practice.

Baym hits those challenges head on. He meets expectations set by the title and cover photo of Colbert with a liberal dose of anecdotes that should hold a casual reader's attention. The book's real strength, however, is its academic frame. This is more than a book about journalism written by a former journalist. It is a veiled genre study that bases its critique on scholars such as Jürgen Habermas and James Carey rather than journalists such as Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel. Instead of a chronological walk through 50 years of cultural, technological, and political developments, Baym stays largely in the present and deconstructs the relationship between twenty-first-century broadcast news, civic participation, and the public sphere.

In chapter 3, entitled "Publicizing Politics," for example, Baym invokes Immanuel Kant's idea that classic publicity stimulates citizen involvement in public discourse. He adds Habermas's notion that the media is the primary agent of publicity in Western democracies and Carey's idea of media acting as a "hot light" to suggest that the manner in which we see things depends on the way they are lit. He argues that the same object cast in different light may appear to be a different object altogether and concludes that, if news is the hot light of publicity, "different kinds of news project different kinds of light, contrasting conceptual maps that make sense of publics and the public domain in different ways" (44-45).

Such thinking provides a strong segue to the concept of "the high modern," an idea Baym borrows from Daniel Hallin, author of The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam (1986). High modern is the ethos that defined Cronkite-style journalism: an industry of informed, value-free experts committed to an objective public interest and the rational pursuit of social order (11). It's also the ethos that was turned on its head by "discursive integration," a purposeful blending of techniques drawn from news, comedy, and talk television offered with the trappings of journalism—an idea Baym tied to The Daily Show in a seminal article four years ago. In a sense, this book further develops the details of this evolution from "the high modern" to "discursive integration."

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