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## Appalachia on the Airwaves: A History of Public and Educational Television in the Southern Mountains

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APPALACHIA ON THE AIRWAVES: A HISTORY OF PUBLIC AND  
EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION IN THE SOUTHERN MOUNTAINS

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
Carson Benn  
Lexington, Kentucky  
Director: Dr. Kathryn Newfont, Associate Professor of History  
Lexington, Kentucky  
2021

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### APPALACHIA ON THE AIRWAVES: A HISTORY OF PUBLIC AND EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION IN THE SOUTHERN MOUNTAINS

Through a series of historical case studies of individual states within the multi-state region of the Appalachian mountain range, as well as the region as a whole, this dissertation examines educational television (ETV) operations, both at the network level and that of individual stations. Though mostly thought of as “public television”—an educational and noncommercial alternative to mainstream broadcast media—these ETV networks offered, I argue, something more analogous to present-day understandings of distance education and the use of instructional media and technology. Station directors, philanthropic benefactors, and school administrators took different approaches to providing the service of ETV, but all were motivated by the prospect of ETV as an instrument of educational equity and a compensatory resource for regions with unequal educational outcomes. Appalachia as a region has historically experienced under-resourced public schooling systems and educational opportunities for working adults. Through television programs, available either in formal classrooms and other schooling spaces, or at home, ETV networks sought to provide some redress to the struggling region. Educators, working within the medium of educational television, and in consultation with the teachers they endeavored to serve, envisioned new technological spaces for interaction and learning, believing that if it were it to be offered astutely, then students at all walks of life, regardless of the endowment of their local schools and communities, could receive through ETV, at little or no cost to them, some of the best resources available in the state and nation to complete an education.

KEYWORDS: Educational Television, Public Television, Appalachia, Distance  
Education, Instructional Media and Technology, Public Media

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Carson Benn

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04/26/2021

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APPALACHIA ON THE AIRWAVES: A HISTORY OF PUBLIC AND  
EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION IN THE SOUTHERN MOUNTAINS

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## DEDICATION

To all teachers who, out of care for their students, upended their lives and bravely faced the challenge of creating totally new learning spaces and environments during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My first thanks-and-praise goes, as always, to Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. In Him all things are possible, and though I have dealt with immense personal doubts ever since I started—about my worth and about whether this dissertation was even possible—I stand corrected. He has also blessed me with the following friends and colleagues.

Kathy Newfont is a wonderful mentor and advisor, and an exemplary role model. She frequently apologizes for the “guinea pig” treatment I’ve received from her, owing to the fact that we both started out at UK in the same semester. No apologies are necessary: it has been a joy to work with her every step of the way, and I am indebted to her for the host of opportunities and experiences she has provided for me in my time here. On the day of our first meeting here on campus, when she could have easily limited her advisory role to saying things like “you need to go visit *x* person and *y* office,” she instead offered things along the lines of “the Appalachian Center is a great place! Let’s walk over there right now and check it out!” and “I’m not entirely sure about that—let’s go over to Dr. Taylor’s office and find out, shall we?” I knew then and there that I had a great advisor, and I have never had any reason to think otherwise.

Many other faculty scholars at UK have contributed to this project, and I have had the benefit of working with an absolutely wonderful committee. Amy Murrell Taylor, an eminently distinguished and brilliant scholar, has consistently posed the most thought-provoking questions of my research and historical perspective, from my earliest seminar here at UK all the way up through the dissertation defense. She said at the close of my defense that it has been a joy to watch me grow as a scholar, and though I suspect that she



merely meant that I have cut down on the lame jokes I used to always throw out in seminars, that kind word from such an amazing historian is one that I will cherish forever. Tracy Campbell—always a go-to for graduate students needing to de-escalate the stress of qualifying exams and oral defense sessions—has been a joy to work with, particularly for his keen sense of the magnitude and scope of a historian’s work. It’s easy for scholars to numb themselves to the truly sublime events and changes we witness in our studies of the past, and Dr. Campbell always steps in to remind his students just how transformative and meaningful our work really is. Jim Albisetti, ever thoughtful and assiduous in his comments and observations, has been incredibly patient and supportive, ever since I first sat in his office years ago and proposed an unusual, and, admittedly, unwieldy qualifying exam field. Phil Hutchison had to bow out before the final stages of the project, but conversations with him during my quals prep pushed my project to a new level of interdisciplinary awareness, well beyond the scope of humanities and social sciences I started out in. Dieter Hennings was a gracious defense referee, and his questioning challenged me to think of ETV’s past as not even past, as the saying goes. Dwight Billings pinch-hit for my committee with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning and brought us all home with an electrifying grand slam! Apart from that storybook finish, he has given invaluable support and guidance to my research, and truly made me feel at home as a New Mexico transplant working on Appalachian history.

A few other scholars outside my committee deserve recognition and praise.

David Hamilton sharpened my application materials for the research fellowships I was awarded, and thus helped me gain the time I needed to research and write the bulk of the project. Stephanie Lang, of the Kentucky Historical Society, shepherded me through a

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seeing her as I signed in to the reading room. At Eastern Kentucky University, Neil Kasiak directed me to their library's totally awesome KET Oral History Collection, and Caitlyn Rahschulte made my first pandemic-era archive visit a safe and stress-free experience. At UNC's Wilson Library, Aaron Smithers was a thoughtful and engaged lifeline. He and his colleagues delivered troves of PDF scans via email, thus saving several chapters from certain doom during the pandemic. Bethany Antos of the Rockefeller Archive Center graciously tolerated many foibles during my first visit to a private archive, and the staff at the RAC provide excellent snacks.

Without a doubt, this dissertation would have been much slower in coming and of far less quality if it weren't for the writing groups and partnerships of fellow graduate students I joined during the past year. Mel Kapitan, Steffi Greenhill, and I read weekly dispatches from each other's projects and challenged each other to always improve our prose and to never avoid the difficult questions. In the home stretch, sociologist Julia Miller offered tremendous encouragement, and ran the timer for our weekly Pomodoro Technique sessions. The collective advisees of Kathy Newfont, known as the UK Ferns (including Emma Kiser, Rachel Herrington, Chris Leadingham, Abi Stephens, Lincoln Boykin, Stuart Simms, and Kathy herself), founded a group in early 2020. Together, we Ferns form a circle of brilliant young scholars that offers weekly emotional support and project accountability for our respective endeavors. They have been an absolute joy to work with and see every week, and they are the reason why I've permitted myself to employ so many baseball metaphors in this section. If you are producing scholarship and you don't have any groups of peers like these, I strongly suggest you go out and get two or three right away. Other graduate student peers in the history department have been

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In 1966, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the philanthropic agency first established by a steel magnate and known most commonly for building public libraries, announced a plan to radically redesign a burgeoning educational institution. Since the Second World War, educators in communities across the nation had experimented with using television as a learning tool. Broadcast media could reach homes and businesses hundreds of miles away, and few people in the postwar era doubted the ability of that technology to both inform and influence the opinions of those who tuned in. Prior to World War II, educators and commercial interests alike had demonstrated these capabilities with radio programming. Educational television producers, acting either as representatives of higher education institutions or as service-minded professionals within the broadcast industry, had found inventive ways to teach via television and use its power to reach students and households many miles away. Though it was not used everywhere for this purpose, the television set had by the mid-1960s emerged in the minds of many as a legitimate educational tool, either to be used in classrooms themselves, or as a means to connect children and adults with educators while at home. Skepticism remained as to whether or not radio and television really provided the same authentic learning experiences as those offered in in-person environments, but by 1966 it was clear that these visual educational media would play a significant role in the American education system.

Like many other interested parties within the sectors of broadcasting and education, the Carnegie Corporation found that educational television had certain inefficiencies and faults that needed addressing. Their fifteen-member “Commission on

Educational Television,” comprised of university administrators, manufacturing executives, various political figures, one broadcasting president, one labor union leader, one concert pianist, and one celebrated novelist, gathered under the Carnegie banner to determine the extent to which the nation and its communities were relying on noncommercial and educational television, and to recommend solutions to the federal government based on their findings. The report of their study was published nationally, in the landmark book-length 1967 text, *Public Television: A Program for Action*. This study would provide much of the basis for the Public Broadcasting Act signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in that same year. Though educators and media professionals had at that point been making use of television channels throughout the United States for noncommercial and educational purposes for decades, the Carnegie study confirmed the benefits these channels had provided to their communities, and they imagined new ways to grow and support what the earliest educational stations had begun.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the Carnegie Commission’s 12 major recommendations centered on the creation of a national, centralized, and federally supported system of public television, where none had ever seriously existed before. Some of these recommendations might seem quite familiar to a present-day PBS viewer, as most were adopted virtually wholesale into the subsequent legislation. These included the “Corporation for Public Television,” a government-chartered organization that would financially support the development of new programs and facilities at various underfunded and overstretched

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<sup>1</sup> *Public Television: A Program for Action. The Report and Recommendations of the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television* (Bantam Books, 1967).



stations across the U.S. Another recognizable antecedent was the Commission's call for "at least two national production centers," which would be "free to contract with independent producers to prepare Public Television [sic] programs for educational television systems." Other recommendations made by the Carnegie Commission never saw the light of day, such as a "manufacturer's excise tax on television sets (beginning at 2 percent and rising to a ceiling of 5 percent)" to support the new Corporation.<sup>2</sup> All in all, the Commission demanded that the federal government take the lead in the nation's noncommercial television operations by providing a robust system of vision and support for the many educational stations that, to that point, had operated with tenuous finances and, more or less, in isolation from one another.

Though the Carnegie Commission boldly imagined the new national scheme of public television and its possibilities, they did not overlook the hard work and skills of local educators who had found in television a dynamic and powerful tool for learning. Commercial broadcasters, in their view, were more "obliged for the most part to search for uniformities within the general public, and to apply [their] skills to satisfy the uniformities." Educational broadcasters, by contrast, had concerned themselves with "matters of local interest," and operated predominantly at that level. In this localized service, the Commission found, educational television stations in the United States had found ways to celebrate "our varying regions, our varying religions and national and racial groups, our varying needs and social and intellectual interests," all of which contributed to "the fabric of American tradition."<sup>3</sup> The Carnegie Commission aimed to

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<sup>2</sup> Public Television: A Program for Action, 3-9.

<sup>3</sup> Public Television: A Program for Action, 14.

bolster a national framework of educational television for the American public, but they did not want to lose the ingenious and elemental work of local stations that had given noncommercial media its acclaimed position.

The imminent challenge of educational television that faced the Commission, in spite of the good work being done by local stations across the nation, was that access to this medium and the benefits derived from it had not been given out equitably. The Commission displayed a clear faith in the desire of all Americans to explore and pursue educational opportunities where they lived, and to that end, *A Program for Action* stressed:

“To all audiences should be brought the best energies, the best resources, the best talents—to the audience of fifty million, the audience of ten million, the audience of a few hundred thousand. Until excellence and diversity have been joined, we do not make the best use of our miraculous instrument.”<sup>4</sup>

The ambitious program to connect all educational stations and promote sharing of resources, knowledge, and funds, was premised on the work local stations and producers had done to that point.

This dissertation highlights the work of some of these local operations, both before and after the arrival of PBS and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. To date, much more is known by historians and interested viewers about the national framework of public television envisioned by the Carnegie Commission, while far less attention has been paid to the local stations that Carnegie credited with laying that system’s foundation. Here the focus will be on stations that aimed to serve communities in the Appalachian region, including some that continue to do so through the present day. In

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4 Public Television: A Program for Action, 14.

various ways, television stations sought to serve Appalachia at the local, state, and regional level by providing educational resources to schools and interested learners outside of classrooms. These institutions, and the people that supported them, recognized the benefits television could provide to both students and teachers within a conventional school environment, as well as learners at a distance from those environments who wished to pursue an education, formally or informally. The successes and failures of these educational television stations together offer valuable insight to succeeding generations seeking to fairly and justly incorporate media and technology into an education system.

Appalachia is a region that has historically experienced inequitable funding and distribution of resources among its schools and educational systems, and while Appalachia was not the primary focus of all the stations considered in this dissertation, all responded in some manner to the inequalities present within that region. Though the Carnegie Commission would have defined most of these educational television operations as local (i.e., serving only the communities that could be immediately reached by their transmitter equipment), the creators of each of these case subjects imagined how television could contribute to regional transformation and improvement in education. They insisted on the creation of networks, whereby smaller, more rural communities within Appalachia that had historically faced inequitable support for schools and education would be directly connected to the same sources of funding, personnel, and learning materials that had hitherto been held almost exclusively by wealthier, urban communities.

The extant networks whose founders committed themselves to this service operate at the state level. North Carolina and Kentucky, two states that encompass regions of varying geography and economic stability, both account for significant portions of the greater Appalachian mountain range—eastern Kentucky’s ridges in the Cumberland Plateau, and the Blue Ridge and Great Smoky Mountain expanses in western North Carolina. Educators in both these states fought to establish networks within the apparatus of a public education system. The founders of North Carolina’s network (known first as WUNC-TV, now as PBS-North Carolina) followed the Federal Communications Commission’s first directive on noncommercial television stations, and built the network as a component of a consolidated university system. Kentucky Educational Television (KET) was established as a new state agency, independent of, but in close contact with, the state’s departments of Public Instruction and Higher Education. Both networks would display with pride the work they have done in their Appalachian regions, but they took different routes in beginning that service that bore serious implications for how Appalachians’ educational needs were met.

Though the circumstances surrounding the construction of networks in Kentucky and North Carolina differed in complex ways, the crucial factor to consider between the two states is the order in which each state elected to establish its educational television service. North Carolina began its state network in the vicinity of Chapel Hill—now known as the Research Triangle, but then simply the only areas featuring member schools under the Consolidated University banner. These included the state’s flagship school, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, the land-grant North Carolina State College (later University) in Raleigh, and the Woman’s College in Greensboro (later University

of North Carolina at Greensboro). The state's Consolidated University was thus confined to schools in the Piedmont foothills—the wealthier central portion of the state which to that point had garnered the bulk of industrial development and urban services in North Carolina. It would take several decades of incremental expansion before North Carolina's network would fully reach its less populous and less wealthy peripheral areas, and only after significant protests from residents not receiving this “state” service.

Kentucky, by contrast, insisted on covering all parts of the state from day one, even though that meant their network would come at a considerably higher cost. Though colleges and universities within the Bluegrass State were invited to play a role in producing and distributing their knowledge through the state television network, they did not hold the reins of the system, as was the case in North Carolina. Nor were they held by the state's Department of Public Instruction, which oversaw public schools, administration, and facilities. Instead, they operate as an independent state agency which works among these other interests, but not beneath them. As with North Carolina and many other states, Kentucky has a grossly uneven distribution of wealth between urban and rural areas, and the network's architects knew that the benefits of educational technology could easily fall along those lines if not planned accordingly. They had the option to follow the lead of states like North Carolina, and proceed gradually in the construction of their network, but their ultimate decision was to provide total, instantaneous coverage. This speaks volumes for those seeking to implement educational technology across a wide territory.

Other networks considered in this dissertation either failed to get out of the planning stages, or were completely dismantled after less than a decade of operation.

They demand our attention, though, because of their even greater ambition to serve an entire region and address educational inequality on a massive, yet carefully defined scale. One network, the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction (1958-1971), is considered here not because it had any direct consequence on the people of Appalachia, but because its curious and unorthodox method of transmitting television signals to an entire region was briefly considered as a system that could be adapted in other regions like Appalachia—regions that were witnessing tremendous inequality in their educational opportunities. The offer to adapt an airborne television network in Appalachia coincided with a plan developed within the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), a powerful new federal agency chartered to effect regional transformation and improvement in a variety of ways.

Neither the proposed experimental method of educational television delivery via airplane, nor the plan submitted to the Appalachian Regional Commission, which relied primarily on interconnection and cooperation between radio and television stations already operating within the region, would gain acceptance in Appalachia. The failure to convince the ARC of educational television's benefits, this chapter shows, demonstrates the palpable concern many felt over the potential of television to become the new authority in education: something that might increasingly dictate and control the actions of teachers, or worse, replace their labor altogether with a futuristic machine. Opposition to these networks was expressed primarily with appeals to the virtue of localism in education. Broadcast media, critics suggested, no matter how beneficent their producers' intentions might appear, could potentially violate the sacred bonds between teachers and students that many people associated with their local communities. Even though these

plans for regional networks in the Midwest and Appalachia emerged alongside the Carnegie Commission's similar call for a nationally unified public television network, the transformations envisioned by the regional networks were more radical than most of the planners' peers in education were prepared to accept.

By contrast, the later attempts to offer a region-specific educational television service across Appalachia considered in this dissertation, were configured and tailored with far more attention to local needs expressed by teachers and learners within Appalachia that the network's producers were seeking to benefit. The chapter on these later efforts (ca. 1968-1985) covers various experimental network arrangements in educational television proffered by the Appalachian Regional Commission. The two major initiatives, the Appalachian Educational Satellite Program and the Appalachian Community Service Network, made use of new developments in telecommunications technology to serve the Appalachian region in these more narrowly tailored ways. Through satellite and cable-access television, network designers could specifically target smaller audiences and certain demographics and even allow two-way digital communication between remote locations. Previous critics had noted that conventional broadcast television did not offer these features as it entered the world of education.

Though the Appalachian Regional Commission's educational television networks from the 1970s and 1980s were much more collaborative and attentive to local communities, they fell victim to several budget cuts. These cuts were felt most acutely during the first administration of President Ronald Reagan, who cast doubt on the need for the ARC and government aid to Appalachia in general, and not merely on the particular programs of any one agency. Many within the ARC protested the networks'

dismantling, as well as cuts to many other programs targeted by Reagan's White House. The programs' ultimate demise marked the end of an era in which the federal government made serious effort to redress educational inequality in regions like Appalachia via learning technology. The Appalachian Community Service Network ultimately transferred its property and services over to a private corporation and became The Learning Channel, or TLC. This decision illustrates the value in keeping resources in educational technology widely available and under the public domain. State networks' success in this effort has been one of their most celebrated legacies. The networks in Kentucky and North Carolina have for many decades proven to skeptics the benefits of their services to the general public.

Studying the concepts of "region" and "aid" with regard to Appalachia can be a thorny endeavor, especially in the context of the post-World War II era and the subsequent creation of the Appalachian Regional Commission's massive bureaucracy. Historians of the region have deftly illustrated how generations of reformers have, since at least the 1870s, fanned out through mountain communities and visited upon them new ideas and structures of "uplift," "development," and aid. Often these reformers embarked on such quests under the aegis of benevolence, philanthropy, and, of course, mass education and schooling. The successive liberal reform agendas of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson in the 1960s—alongside which most of the educational television networks considered in this dissertation emerged—have made historians especially leery. Ronald D Eller and others have exposed many of the ARC and other Great Society agencies' technocratic plans as sadly out of touch with economic and social realities within



Appalachia.<sup>5</sup> The “technology” most historians associate with the ARC would likely be either: the neoliberal business “growth centers” that predominantly benefited elected officials and capital interests rather than the unemployed and underpaid, or the four-lane highways that made it that much easier for residents to leave the region with no thought of return.

Education programs introduced to the Appalachian region in this time period, despite their profound effect on mountain communities, have not drawn parallel attention.<sup>6</sup> Since the postwar era was an intensely pivotal moment in Americans’ understanding of public education systems, this is a significant oversight. People of color in these decades were, everyday, challenging oppressive systems of education that had consigned them to the rank of second-class citizen; they were opposed by wealthier white people who felt that their own safe position in the status quo should remain unaffected by fellow citizens’ fight for freedom. Amid much of this strife, the federal government began deploying beneficent educational aid programs on a massive and totally unprecedented scale as it sought to help raise people of lesser means up towards equality

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5 Accounts of the education program of the Appalachian Regional Commission dwell mostly on the Vocational Education focus of the ARC and other Great Society-era agencies. See David E. Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer: People, Power, and Planning in Appalachia* (1980; repr., Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1994); Michael Bradshaw, *The Appalachian Regional Commission: Twenty-Five Years of Government Policy* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1992); Ronald D Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia since 1945* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

6 There is an extensive body of literature on the history of education in Appalachia in the Progressive Era, including Deborah Blackwell, “‘The Ability to Do Much Larger Work:’ Gender and Reform in Appalachia, 1890-1935,” Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 1998; Karen Tice, “School Work and Mother Work: The Interplay of Maternalism and Cultural Politics in the Educational Narratives of Kentucky Settlement Workers, 1910-1930,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 4, No. 2 (Fall 1998), 191-224; Jess Stoddart, *Challenge and Change in Appalachia: The Story of Hindman Settlement School* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky), 2002; Melanie Beals Goan, *Mary Breckenridge: The Frontier Nursing Service and Rural Health in Appalachia* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); See also P. David Searles, *A College for Appalachia: Alice Lloyd on Caney Creek* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), and Connie Park Rice and Marie Tedesco, eds., *Women of the Mountain South: Identity, Work, and Activism* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2015).

and prosperity. Within this framework, educational television producers seeking to benefit Appalachia and other marginalized regions were not at the forefront of any movement. But those movements undoubtedly had an influence on them. Like their colleagues in the Carnegie Commission who hoped to make “the best use of our miraculous instrument” through excellence and diversity, the people behind these local and regional networks endeavored to usher in a more equitable society.

More specifically, educational television networks such as these offered a series of experiments in what today we might call “distance learning” technology. Educators who first became interested in using television as a delivery platform wrestled with how best to implement it during the medium’s first two decades. Some felt that educational programming should appear mostly as a noncommercial alternative for home viewers, and should only provide options beyond the major network entertainment fare offered by the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) and the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS). Viewers might find such programs edifying and uplifting, but the programs themselves would not necessarily be translatable to any formal schooling. Others thought that educational television’s most useful application would be in classrooms, either as a visual component to a teacher’s lesson, or a mechanism that might allow teachers to handle rising class sizes resulting from the baby boom. As the work of educational broadcasters shifted from one focus to the other, they received considerable financial support and direction from major philanthropic interests such as the Ford Foundation. That foundation proved to be a key player and benefactor throughout educational television’s history, as will be evident in the following chapters.

These early understandings of television’s potential benefits to education centered on making the programs visible within conventional spaces, meaning homes and classrooms within reach of a single educational channel in one urban area. The region-mindful educators considered here, however, had their sights set on homes and classrooms *beyond* those immediate channels. Thus their efforts have real resonance with the work of present-day distance educators. In building a regional network, they sought to reach homes and classrooms that were historically beyond the reach of standard educational resources. Distance learners in these areas could be individuals who might have desired a formal or informal education, but who could not for various reasons be present in a conventional classroom. A distance learner might also be, conceivably, a student in a conventional classroom, but in a community historically removed from the tax revenues, wealthy benefactors, proximity to colleges and universities, or any of the other circumstances that have historically made some schools more successful than others. Though KET, PBS-North Carolina, and the major Appalachian regional networks might not fit today’s standard definition of “distance education” services, the networks’ founders certainly saw themselves as such. An expanded definition and understanding of “distance-ed” may be in order.<sup>7</sup>

I argue that the educational television networks examined here did, on the whole, provide a valuable and useful addition to the overall education systems in their purview--

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<sup>7</sup> See Mona Gleason, “Families Without Schools: Rurality, Correspondence Education, and the Promise of Schooling in Interwar Western Canada,” *History of Education Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (August 2017). Gleason, likewise, treats correspondence courses as an early form of distance education, though her conclusion section indicates that she would not consider informal home television specifically as a form of distance education. She does advocate for a more inclusive understanding of what can or cannot be considered authentic distance education, citing the work of Damien Collins and Tara Coleman, who examine the relations between school geographies and social inequality. Collins and Coleman, “School Geographies of Education: Looking Within, and Beyond, School Boundaries,” *Geography Compass* 2, no. 1 (Jan. 2008).

and still do so, in some cases. This position puts me at odds with some scholars and educational thinkers. The field of educational technology has a pronounced and eminently justifiable skepticism toward exactly the types of educators I study—those who promise fantastic benefits from emerging technologies. Scholars working in this field have effectively and skillfully documented numerous instances in which “techno-utopian” thinking actually undermined the labor and autonomy of teachers rather than serving them personally. Historian Larry Cuban looks specifically at unwanted changes television and other visual media forced upon teachers as they were introduced in schools. Allison Perlman’s overall work on media advocacy portrays some early educational broadcasters in a positive light, but she is also acutely aware of how that medium could be co-opted by private interests and more misanthropic state administrators. Katie Day Good’s recent work on visual learning materials in the early twentieth century shows how the content of those media can and did perpetuate colonialist thinking in the minds of young children that used them in school. And in the thoroughly-researched web blog *Hack Education*, Audrey Watters fiercely and succinctly skewers all manner of malign ed-tech, making it abundantly clear how harmful such new technologies can be if their promises and effects are not observed closely.<sup>8</sup>

Despite such scholars’ suspicions, for a number of reasons I hold that the educational television experiments presented in the following chapters were and are, for the most part, positive and constructive. Many of the networks’ architects held lofty

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<sup>8</sup> Larry Cuban, *Teachers and Machines: The Classroom Use of Technology since 1920* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1986); Allison Perlman, *Public Interests: Media Advocacy and Struggles Over U.S. Television* (Rutgers University Press, 2016); Katie Day Good, *Bring the World to the Child: Technologies of Global Citizenship in American Education* (M.I.T Press, 2020); Audrey Watters, <http://hackededucation.com/>.

positions in school administration or government offices, but they did not command the political power of elected officials or major philanthropic organizations. Although they did depend a great deal on the largesse of some of these powerful figures (e.g. federal agencies, the Ford Foundation) they held their ground in the face of criticism from those figures, choosing not to compromise their editorial integrity or their overall service to the network. They produced visual documentaries and other homegrown educational programs of the regions in which they operated, helping to inspire wonder and pride among viewers for the places in which they lived. This approach was especially important among Appalachian viewers whose communities were so often mischaracterized by national media. Network architects learned from their peers' experience how overreliance on educational technology alienated the very teachers they invited to use that technology in their curriculum. The networks responded with a close study to find a just and amenable balance between the teacher's lesson plan and the visual media that supported it.

Simply put, these educators, working within the medium of educational television, and in consultation with the teachers they endeavored to serve, envisioned new technological spaces for interaction and learning. They knew that were it to be offered astutely, then students at all walks of life, regardless of the endowment of their local schools and communities, could receive through ETV, at little or no cost to them, some of the best resources available in the state and nation to complete an education. A true believer in a system of public education should strive for nothing less.

## A Note on Terms

Oral histories on the subject of the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, as well as the Commission's report *Public Television: A Program for Action*, reveal that Carnegie's formative study proceeded, for the most part, without a crystal clear understanding of what their new term "public television" meant specifically. That descriptor for television programs was not one that many people used or had even heard of at that point—one insider derided it as "a name without a concept."<sup>9</sup> Those interviewed recalled that the Commission generally wanted, however, to avoid using the older terms, "educational" and "noncommercial" television, out of a concern that the older names might not generate the same excitement among a U.S. Senate Subcommittee, so a newer term was used, and it has stuck fairly well ever since.<sup>10</sup>

For the most part, this dissertation will favor the term "educational television" (ETV), as most of the networks considered here had their beginnings prior to the Carnegie study's publication. The state network Kentucky Educational Television uses the older term, though it is a proud PBS member station. "Noncommercial" is also used, though it denotes a broader category, including some obscure types of television program that are not discussed whatsoever. The subcategory within educational television that the Carnegie Commission was most likely trying to avoid discussing was instructional television (ITV). This refers mostly to educational television intended for use in formal schooling, most commonly in classrooms themselves.

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<sup>9</sup> Les Brown, *Television and the Business Behind the Box* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 319.

<sup>10</sup> Jim Robertson, *Televisionaries* (Charlotte Harbor, Fla.: Tabby House Books, 1993), 238-239.

“Public television” is used, but mostly in the context of ETV activities after the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, when broadcasters gradually began to replace ETV with the new term.

## CHAPTER 2. “UNIVERSITIES CAN NO LONGER HAVE TRULY CLOISTERED HALLS:” WUNC-TV AND THE STATE’S PERIPHERIES

Gordon Gray seemed an odd choice to take on the role of president of the University of North Carolina, only the second person in that role since the state consolidated its top public higher education institutions during the Great Depression. Prior to taking the presidency, Gray had notched a few terms in the state senate, but was better known for his rapid ascent of the ranks in the U.S. Army, serving as a captain during the war and as Secretary of the Army under Harry Truman—“better known in the halls of statesmanship than in the groves of academe,” the *New York Times* would observe following his inauguration. His selection as president resembled a few other high-profile university president hirings in those years—Harold Stassen, boy-wonder politician from Minnesota taking over the University of Pennsylvania, and Dwight Eisenhower’s stint as President of Columbia University. If Gray retains any lasting historical notoriety outside of North Carolina though, it is likely for his role in stripping J. Robert Oppenheimer of his security clearance for suspected communist affiliations in 1954, a concentrated dose of an anticommunist bent and rhetoric Gray had displayed ever since his inaugural address in 1950.<sup>1</sup>

On its face, Gray’s turn at the helm of UNC seems brief and relatively unremarkable. He oversaw the first steps toward full desegregation of the University, though his attitude on the subject was one of resignation rather than an active desire to accommodate and defend the first black students in the state’s medical and law schools.

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<sup>1</sup> “North Carolina U. Picks Gray as Head,” *New York Times*, 7 February 1950 (quotation); “Gray is Installed; Bars Communists,” *New York Times*, 11 October 1950.



Both Franklin Porter Graham, Gray's predecessor, and William C. Friday, his successor, served longer terms and did much more to publicly promote the University as a positive force for improvement in the state's society and education system. UNC historian William D. Snider admits that Gray's departure in 1955 left a strong impression that "he may have been overqualified for the presidency," or at least that "his qualifications lay in other fields."<sup>2</sup>

Yet while Gray's time in Chapel Hill was brief, his administration is worthy of recognition for its launch of North Carolina's educational television network and eventual PBS affiliate, WUNC-TV. To this project, Gray brought certain expertise. Prior to his service in the military, he had worked in newspaper publishing in Winston-Salem, and owned a commercial radio station there. Amid the pointed remarks in his inauguration address about preserving academic freedom in the face of a creeping communist threat, Gray's experience in media and communications suffused his vision for the role of educators in the new political and technological postwar era. "In a world of compressed time and shrinking space," he mused in his address, "it is evident that universities can no longer have truly cloistered halls...academicians must now communicate to the free world the meaning of the democratic dream and proof of the desire to make it a way of life."<sup>3</sup>

WUNC-TV was not the first of its kind as a state-sponsored educational television service. It grew alongside projects in many other states hoping to fulfill the same mission

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<sup>2</sup> William D. Snider, *Light on the Hill: A History of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 246-253.

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey J. Crow, "'The Paradox and the Dilemma: Gordon Gray and the J. Robert Oppenheimer Security Clearance Hearing,'" *The North Carolina Historical Review* 85, No. 2 (April 2008), 164; "Gray is Installed; Bars Communists," *New York Times*, 11 October 1950.

via television. Historian Allison Perlman has assiduously profiled the efforts of these educational broadcasters and their allies to secure space for noncommercial media at a crucial moment (1948-1952) in television's history. For her, this moment of "media advocacy," though misguided at times by a fixation on anticommunist rhetoric and occasional co-opting by opportunist Jim Crow supporters, was, overall, significant for securing "space for noncommercial television." At that point, there was no guarantee that such a thing would exist. By no means could the Carnegie Commission have debated the future of public television in the late 1960s had educators not made the case before the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for special channel reservations within local communities across the nation.<sup>4</sup>

The collective action of educational broadcasters toward winning this victory is well-known, thanks to Perlman and many other scholars. But WUNC-TV's early history reveals a significant aspect about the particulars in this collective effort. While Gray and his colleagues touted educational television's ability to, as Perlman describes, "equalize access to educational, informational, and cultural resources," his University's network would take a considerable amount of time—decades, even—before that claim became a reality.<sup>5</sup> The remote mountain communities of western North Carolina, and the coastal plains of the eastern part of the state, would have to wait many years before receiving a consistent and reliable signal like that received in the more well-off center of the state where the University's energies had already been concentrated.

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<sup>4</sup> Allison Perlman, *Public Interests: Media Advocacy and Struggles Over U.S. Television* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Perlman, *Public Interests*, 44.

To a certain extent, this slow progress can be attributed to the initial scheme devised by the FCC for how ETV would be arrayed across the United States: a plan that put an emphasis on states' "educational centers" like Chapel Hill and the Piedmont region. However, under this arrangement, the peripheral communities were, for a significant period, deprived of the educational advantages then available only in the "educational center." The slow, piecemeal progress toward full network coverage of North Carolina, combined with the fact that the University was all the while developing newer and more advanced ETV pedagogy, will shed light on why future networks serving regions like Appalachia strove for full coverage all at once. For the time being, in this chapter, we have only to wonder how these peripheral areas felt at being left out, and how other districts and regions might today feel something similar.

### **The FCC and a Television "Freeze"**

The postwar era led television broadcasting in the United States to a crossroads. On the one hand, the regulatory agency of the Federal Communications Commission could permit commercial interests to hold the driver's seat in determining signal expansion and program content throughout the nation; a strategy which, in spite of a spirited movement on the part of a handful of educational innovators, had largely characterized the growth of radio in the preceding decades. Alternatively, the FCC could respond to the pleas of educators and other philanthropic interests, and show initiative in staking a place for communication that endeavored to further nourish the nation's culture:

to engineer, in the words of James Day, a “medium dedicated to a purpose loftier than light entertainment and more enlightening than ads for painkillers and detergent.”<sup>6</sup>

Defying the prevailing, nineteenth-century liberalist philosophy in American broadcasting, and withholding channels from the whim of the free market, may seem like a fairly radical step for the otherwise staid and orderly FCC, yet viewing the agency’s ultimate decision to do so within the context of national education policy, makes the act seem much more reasonable. Though not counted among the various “Postwar Initiatives” in Diane Ravitch’s foundational history of U.S. education in the twentieth century, *The Troubled Crusade*, the reservation of channel frequencies across the entire nation fits right alongside the initiatives Ravitch does observe. For instance, the FCC’s unilateral action roiled commercial broadcasters at the national and local level who viewed federal overreach into local decision making with suspicion and contempt, believing that their inherent motive to serve viewers and the public interest would impel them to self-regulate their content beyond any need of government meddling. However, the social and cultural ferment of the postwar years, combined with the baby boom’s impending demographic burden on educators across the nation, necessitated more radical and sweeping changes in American education, such as the GI Bill.<sup>7</sup>

It was not long after the television industry began in earnest in the U.S. that the FCC found its initial scheme for arranging broadcast channels across cities and states to

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<sup>6</sup> James Day, *The Vanishing Vision: The Inside Story of Public Television* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1995), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1983), 5-6, 26-28. Other notable opponents to federal support for schools included the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Daughters of the American Revolution. Ravitch notes that “every time the issue [of federal funding] was raised, different coalitions formed, depending on how these questions were framed in potential legislation.”

be technologically inadequate. Channel interference became common and was twofold: receivers in one area tuning into a channel 3 would see some of the programs of another channel 3 of an abutting signal area, even if the two had been deemed initially to be at a safe distance from one another. Likewise, channels too close in number (3 and 4, 4 and 5) could easily bleed into one another when broadcasting in the same signal area. The FCC's ambitious corrective of this era came in the form of a "freeze:" beginning in 1948 all permits for new channel licenses were put on hold, pending a major reevaluation of the nation's broadcast landscape. The "TV Freeze" and the two circulars distributed by the FCC following the eventual thaw in 1952 (given the unglamorous titles "Third Notice of Proposed Rule Making," and the "Sixth Report and Order") are remembered primarily as the initial beachhead for public television's evolution, though the FCC was not motivated at first by any need for an alternative to commercial television. In fact, the agency would only be apprised of this need by educators two years after the freeze began.

The case for an alternative made before the FCC, delivered in the closing months of 1950, represents a remarkable cooperative effort from a number of interested organizations. Drawing from a wealth of experience accumulated from years of educational radio broadcasting, an ad hoc committee including the American Council on Education, the National Education Association, the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, and the National Association of Educational Broadcasters, testified to the need for educational, noncommercial TV, and discussed how it should be distributed. Plaintiffs were committed, in the view of one historian of public television, to an educational philosophy known as the "Wisconsin Idea:" a holdover from the early La Follette years in the Badger State. The "Idea" had numerous applications in state

governance and society, but in the area of education, one of the movement's earlier chroniclers observed an "increasing spirit" in Wisconsin, and a demand "that the university should serve the state and all of its people and that it should be an institution for all the people, and not merely for the few who could send their sons and daughters to Madison." This sine qua non was originally intended for the state's agricultural extension office, but it carried over into other university functions, including Wisconsin's university radio broadcasting.<sup>8</sup> By invoking this progressive philosophy before the FCC, these educators demonstrated an earnest belief in a public university's duty to serve all people within its state's borders. It was a natural extension of this belief to hold that colleges and universities ought to perform the same function with television, though on a national scale.<sup>9</sup>

Cities or communities which already featured the presence and competition of three or more commercial broadcast channels would be granted a reservation for an educational channel (if there was no such station already in operation) to offer, as an alternative, "the high quality type of programming of an entirely different character from that available on most commercial stations." Areas with only one or two established channels would not receive such a reservation, unless the area fit the FCC's criteria as "primarily educational centers," by which they meant colleges and universities, for the most part. The Third Notice and the Sixth Report and Order illustrated the FCC's strong sympathy for educational institutions. The FCC rightly recognized that those institutions

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<sup>8</sup> Charles McCarthy, *The Wisconsin Idea* (New York, N.Y.: The MacMillan Company, 1912), 132 (quotation); Randall Davidson, *9XM Talking: WHA Radio and the Wisconsin Idea* (Madison, Wisc.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 46.

<sup>9</sup> Robert J. Blakely, *To Serve the Public Interest: Educational Broadcasting in the United States* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1979). 5;

had also established themselves as skillful producers of educational content in AM and FM broadcasting in spite of the largely commercialized development of radio.

Furthermore, the FCC was attentive to educators' need of additional time to apply for these reserved channels, since the public service model of school administrations moved at a much slower pace than for-profit businesses, and the need of educational stations for a revenue stream other than commercial advertising and network affiliation.<sup>10</sup>

James Day's *The Vanishing Vision*, both a well-researched history of public television and a memoir from an important insider in the medium's development, looks back on the Sixth Report and Order with general disdain. Although he and the "public television fraternity" he represents are grateful for the FCC's offer of available channels to noncommercial interests, Day in writing his book was moreover critical of the decision, feeling that the FCC fell short of truly securing an educational, noncommercial alternative for the entire nation. By offering the blessing of educational or public broadcasting to only established educational institutions, the FCC laid the groundwork, in Day's view, for a generally "balkanized" landscape of public television in the United States—that is, a fairly dense array of public stations across the country lacking in unified, common purpose, and historically reluctant to pursue one. Following the freeze, the drive to secure and activate the reserved channels "was in every case a local battle fought by local leaders to overcome purely local problems," as Day describes, but

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<sup>10</sup> "Sixth Report and Order," 17 Fed. Reg. 3905, 3908; 41 FCC 148, 158, April 14, 1952, in Frank J. Kahn, ed. *Documents of American Broadcasting* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1984), 184, 186; "Third Notice of Proposed Rule Making (Appendix A)," 16 Fed. Reg. 3072, 3079, March 21, 1951, in Kahn, ed. *Documents of American Broadcasting*, 181-182.

victories in securing these channels left the victors with an apparent “heady feeling of proprietorship,” one that could “slip easily into destructive provincialism.”<sup>11</sup>

Other proponents of public broadcasting shared James Day’s frustrations around the unfulfilled dream of a national public television network as robust, concerted, and energetic as the commercial networks. Yet this pattern can cause one to overlook the meaning and importance of a successful local or state network, such as those that operated within or adjacent to the mountainous region of Appalachia, or other rural areas. The public broadcasters who succeeded in activating channels following the FCC freeze addressed genuine educational needs in communities they were charged with helping. That charge might be laid at the feet of an established “educational institution” recognized by the FCC in the early 1950s (as in the case of the consolidated University of North Carolina); a new state education authority specifically created to offer a television service (as with several other states); or with independent operations not beholden to state or community boundaries, but with a general calling to serve rural and urban populations alike within a given region. Across this spectrum these “provincial” broadcasters’ successes and failures testify to the importance of smaller operations in public broadcasting. These actors tackled educational disparities in disadvantaged regions and across the nation. North Carolina would answer to this calling, but by the nature of its network being endowed within its University system, it took longer for that service to be fully realized.

### **Bringing ETV to North Carolina**

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<sup>11</sup> Day, *The Vanishing Vision*, 6, 41.



Gray and his vice president, William D. Carmichael, were among the dozens of educators who expressed interest in starting a television service in the Sixth Report and Order era. Though they worked primarily in offices at the university in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, the position of president of the consolidated University of North Carolina was less than two decades old when Gray took office. While the consolidation for the entire state of North Carolina included at that point only the university at Chapel Hill, the State College in Raleigh (later North Carolina State University), and the Women's College at Greensboro (later University of North Carolina at Greensboro), Gray and Carmichael's multi-site leadership roles encouraged them to think of the possibilities of a statewide network, organized and administered under the banner of the consolidated University.<sup>12</sup> Ideas and strategies for how educators could make use of the reserved channels and possibly create such networks were well circulated by the end of the freeze in 1952. Gray received a report from E.A. Hungerford of the General Precision Equipment Corporation, delivered initially to a group of prospective educational broadcasters at Pennsylvania State College in April. Hungerford primarily detailed the requisite equipment and facilities needed to begin producing television, stressing that television, while relatively new and untested in an educational context, would be an enduring asset to institutions that decided to use it. "In these days when new dormitories or schoolhouses run up to \$4,000,000," Hungerford observed, "a television station is really a relatively small educational investment."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Snider, *Light on the Hill*, 238, 250.

<sup>13</sup> E.A. Hungerford, Jr., "Design Plans for Educational TV Stations," April 20, 1952. box 3, folder 59. Office of President of the University of North Carolina (System): Gordon Gray Records, University Archives, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

As it discussed the technological aspects of activating the educational channels, Hungerford's report touched on the more pressing issue facing interested educators at this time: the frequencies of the available channels. While the Sixth Report and Order noted that the FCC's purpose with the freeze was to avoid a "haphazard, inefficient or inequitable distribution" of television licenses, this elided the fact that the FCC had already allowed an inequitable distribution of channels prior to the freeze. Most of the licenses granted prior to the freeze had been in the more established and coveted VHF (Very High Frequency) range of channels. Some communities after the freeze would receive public broadcasting channels on the VHF range, but most of the new channels available for licensing were in the newer, largely untested Ultra High Frequency (UHF) range.

Essentially, the shift towards UHF configuration was undertaken in the interest of avoiding crossed signals in particular areas. VHF channels had greater range, but a weaker signal, while UHF signals were limited to line-of-sight transmission. UHF could easily be interrupted by tall buildings and natural obstructions like hills and mountains, but offered a stronger signal if the two points could be properly positioned. Part of the FCC's concession to the "educational centers" receiving channel assignments was the guarantee of a VHF channel, meaning that those communities would have greater range in their educational broadcast. The development of signal repeaters, translators, and more advanced transmitter equipment would later minimize many of the practical differences between VHF and UHF. But to the University of North Carolina in 1952,

when most television sets available to consumers were not even designed to receive UHF broadcasts, an available VHF channel seemed like a true competitive advantage.<sup>14</sup>

Gray convened a conference at Chapel Hill in early June of 1952 to discuss the idea of an educational television (ETV) station or network operated by the three institutions of what Gray termed the UNC “Family.” Inviting not only the relevant administrators and faculty from the three institutions in the University, Gray also set places at the table for local politicians and educators from cities beyond the Research Triangle area, as well as local business leaders, whose personal and financial support Gray knew would be critical for getting a noncommercial station up and running. Advance programs distributed to attendees stated that the conference’s purpose would be “to acquaint key personnel of the three units of the University with the accumulated ‘facts’ of TV as they relate to education in general and to institutions of higher education specifically.” Apart from the crash course in ETV, the conference also invited participants to consider how ETV could “be used to increase interest and to gain further support for the activities of the University of North Carolina,” either through simply reaching more of the general population of the state of North Carolina, or by “regularly drawing a much larger group of North Carolinians into actual participation in the activities of the University.”<sup>15</sup>

The conference featured a presentation by FCC Chairman Paul Walker. Prior to the gathering Gray’s office had “introduced” attendees to the Chairman by sending each a

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<sup>14</sup> “Third Notice of Proposed Rule Making (Appendix A),” in Kahn, ed. *Documents of American Broadcasting*, 182; Day, *The Vanishing Vision*, 22.

<sup>15</sup> Logan Wilson, “Memorandum to President Gordon Gray,” May 16, 1952. box 3, folder 59. Gordon Gray Records.

copy of a speech he had made the previous month. The circulated speech was a particularly sanguine address Walker had delivered<sup>16</sup> to a meeting of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters. In that speech the FCC Chairman told educators that with the available television channels, they had “every cause to celebrate.” They were now the “inheritors of a highly valuable portion of that ethereal public domain—the radio spectrum.” Walker assured his audience, moreover, that the plan of the Sixth Report and Order was “calculated to get stations and service into the smaller towns and rural areas.” Assuaging any prospective licensees about the unfamiliar territory of UHF channels, Walker noted that he had personally seen that the differences between the UHF and VHF bands were “not nearly as significant as some had thought.”

Walker was also confident that ETV had the potential to change the education landscape in states like North Carolina. He recognized TV’s potential as a resource for adult education: “let skeptics consider,” he argued “how many American adults even now are seeking education in their spare time. And not by television, but by attending classes after a hard day’s work. Four million Americans are in such classes now. One million are taking correspondence school lessons.” And whether or not ETV could provide equal benefit to both school-age and adult students, Walker expressed his faith in the FCC’s endowment of educational channels to local institutions, averring that the “educational stations can assure a community’s democratic control over its educational process,” and that “a community with such a station need not depend for its educational television material upon the desires of a commercial network, nor upon the desires of other

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<sup>16</sup> Paul A. Walker, “Address At the Annual Luncheon Meeting of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters At the Institute for Education by Radio-Television,” April 18, 1952, box 3, folder 59, Gordon Gray Records.

independent program sources.”<sup>17</sup> Regardless of the FCC’s preference for a potential national noncommercial network, Walker’s remarks indicate that the agency did feel very strongly about the unique benefits of a local operation.

From the outset of the conference at Chapel Hill, participants were encouraged to be congenial and receptive, but also thoughtfully critical of the actual need for ETV in North Carolina: Chancellor Edward Graham of the Women’s College remarked at the opening session that the conference was to be “a seminar and club smoker—not a rally.” All the same, the general tone of the sessions was one of optimism and enthusiasm for a potential station or network in North Carolina, with presentations from Gray and Walker, but also from the director of the Joint Committee on Educational Television--the primary lobbying organization behind securing channel reservations--a professor of psychology at Western Reserve University who researched learning by television, and Arthur S. Adams, president of the American Council on Education (ACE). In Adams’ presentation, the ACE president remarked that he had personally been convinced of ETV’s potential when he witnessed a TV course in comparative literature, “taught by a dynamic teacher,” which “reached people who had never been interested in literature—and it started a run on the library for books mentioned in the lecture.”<sup>18</sup>

One of the most telling moments of the meeting came when UNC president Gray addressed the conference with what he saw as the underlying choice North Carolina faced with regard to the available educational channels. Eight such reservations were made

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<sup>17</sup> Walker, “Address At the Annual Luncheon Meeting of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Spearman, “Summary of the Consolidated University of North Carolina Educational Television Conference, June 3-4, 1952, box 3, folder 59, Gordon Gray Records.

across the entire state, including three in the immediate area of the consolidated University—UHF channels in Greensboro and Raleigh, and one VHF channel in Chapel Hill. As Gray saw it, the consolidated University’s efforts toward providing ETV to the whole state would be limited to any or all of those three channels. Communities beyond the Research Triangle area had reserved channels, but no institution in those areas fell under the Consolidated University banner at that time. Furthermore, Gray did not feel that startup funds and public support could be marshaled in those communities as reliably and quickly as it had in Chapel Hill, and the FCC would not hold the channel reservations for educational institutions longer than a year. Nevertheless, Gray made his enthusiasm for reserving of the immediate-area channels and creating a station for the Consolidated University very clear, advising that such a project would exemplify the duty of the University to “be the brain, nerve center, the heart and the will and the conscience of the State.”<sup>19</sup>

In the time for questions after Gray’s address, one prescient issue was raised by Mark Lassiter, a trustee of UNC and a native of Snow Hill, North Carolina, a town with a population of a little more than a thousand in the eastern part of the state. After asking for a quick clarification of the number of people and homes the proposed station would cover in the research triangle area, Lassiter offered a fundamental criticism of how Gray and others had visualized the entire endeavor of ETV in North Carolina to that point:

“Another thing I would like to call your attention to is the center of population. It’s the center of your educational activities. It’s the center of most everything you’ve got. I thought education was more or less basically for those further away from it. I think you ought to go east and west and forget those who have all the

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<sup>19</sup> Transcript of Gordon Gray’s remarks at June Television Conference, June 3-4, 1952, box 3, folder 59, Gordon Gray Records, 1.

educational advantages, who are surrounded by them...If you're going to specify it for those who already have unusual advantages, I don't know where you're going to get much advantage out of having it...if you're going to basically centralize everything in the central Eastern part of the state, then somebody has to sell me on the idea right quick, whether it's advantageous to the state or not."

Gray offered a terse reply, "That is one of the problems that we have to face."

Immediately after, another person in the audience asked about the concept and usefulness of "satellite stations." In the early 1950s, "satellite," in the television context referred to microwave links between television studios that allowed direct relays of programming so that other stations could carry the same programs without having to receive physical film copies—a system that would eventually be the basis for many television networks prior to cable and low-earth orbiting satellite networks. At the North Carolina ETV conference of 1952, however, Gray gave an equally terse explanation of the idea and dismissed it as "an academic question at the moment" before cutting off the session so that it could move on to breakaway discussions.<sup>20</sup>

One can look with a little sympathy on Gray's reluctance to truly consider how ETV could be extended to the fullest extent the FCC had arranged in the state of North Carolina. Television was still in its infancy, educational television had barely been conceived, and the idea of a unified public media service owned by a state agency flew in the face of the radio industry's customary practices, and the larger politics of media in the United States to that point. In the early years of WUNC-TV's operation, Gray and his successors satisfied some of the calls for larger state coverage by licensing some of the programs they produced to commercial broadcasters that reached the more rural sections

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<sup>20</sup> Transcript of Gordon Gray's remarks at June Television Conference, 5-6.

of eastern and mountainous western North Carolina. In the early days of television, few commercial stations had any programming to fill the morning and early-afternoon hours of the typical school day, so they were happy to carry educational programs during that time as an easy means of promoting their brand and service. Yet as the broadcast industry expanded, those time slots quickly gained demand, and the friendly door to ETV producers slammed shut.

UNC decided to activate only channel 4, in the VHF band, since the UHF reservations in Greensboro and Raleigh would be largely redundant signal-wise. It would be nearly a decade before WUNC-TV began the process of acquiring the necessary licenses and infrastructure to offer their “state” network beyond the Research Triangle area. On one occasion, in 1953, after planning and fundraising for WUNC-TV was underway, Gray was contacted by J.D. Messick, President of East Carolina College (later University) in Greenville, in regards to the coastal areas of the state’s separation from the proposed signal area for WUNC-TV. In a historically impoverished part of the state, Messick contended “if one educational channel is to be located in NC I think it should go to the University, but if there are others I think that East Carolina College is so situated that it should be considered for the next.” He continued, “I think we should all be interested in the entire state, instead of just the Piedmont area, or from Raleigh to Winston [Salem], where five channels would certainly give over coverage, or circles within circles.” To these remarks, Gray suggested Messick contact state legislators or the governor’s office, and not his own. “While the University is, of course, eager to cooperate with any other educational telecasters and all commercial telecasters,” Gray averred, “I think we have made it plain that we disclaim any interest in having



responsibility for a television operation other than the one which might be under the auspices of the University. I believe that we would not feel it our prerogative to influence the location or construction of other television stations.” Such was the legacy Gordon Gray ultimately left to WUNC-TV: an earnest supporter of the field of educational television, and one quick to extol the benefits his institution was offering as the state network, but just as quick to shrug off his potential role in creating legitimate statewide coverage as too expensive, and not his “prerogative” anyhow.<sup>21</sup>

Whether or not Gray seemed duplicitous in his desire for true state-wide coverage, his genuine talent as a promoter of ETV was on display in the months leading up to WUNC-TV’s first airdate. He and UNC Chancellor Robert B. House delivered a series of presentations to deans, directors, and department heads at each of the member schools in late 1953, outlining the present need for the new medium, the potential it carried to improve and transform the service performed for the community by the University, and some of the obstacles still facing television educators in North Carolina. The Consolidated University administrators knew that the launch of WUNC-TV would depend upon the cooperation and enthusiasm of many of the rank-and-file teachers and staff within the system. Gray’s promotional efforts were buoyed by an article published in the *Winston-Salem Journal Sentinel* in October, whose author, Chester S. Davis, beamed in his title that North Carolina was “taking the lead in [the] field of educational television.” As president of the publishing company that owned the *Journal Sentinel*, Gray likely pushed for such an article to be run, though he assured colleagues in letters

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<sup>21</sup> J.D. Messick to Gordon Gray, March 11, 1953; Gordon Gray to J.D. Messick, March 20, 1953, box 3, folder 70, Gordon Gray Records.

that he had “relinquished all day to day supervision and contracts” prior to becoming UNC President, and was then “simply a stockholder.”<sup>22</sup>

The newspaper article may have helped in generating interest on behalf of WUNC-TV, but it also forecasted many of the hurdles that educational television operators would face in establishing and maintaining their service. For one, the article noted, ETV had the ability to design courses and educational content with a more targeted audience (the author gives a hypothetical example of “a program designed to give doctors a refresher course on some highly technical phase of medicine”), but the reality was that ETV would generally exist in competition with commercial stations for viewer interest—as the author elicited, “Dials that click on educational TV can click back to a commercial program just as quickly.” More importantly though, the article spelled out the issue of funding. The connections Gray made through his initial conferences on ETV had yielded enough donations to help pay for equipment and installation, but Gray and his donors knew that for the experiment to last longer than a year or two, consistent public support would be needed. “You can’t expect private individuals and foundations to pay the operating costs,” the article cautioned, “they came into the picture solely for the purpose of giving the university a chance to prove that educational TV is worthy of the support of the General Assembly,” and that WUNC-TV at that point could still be considered a “gamble.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Gordon Gray to Robert Schenkkan, memorandum, 9 November 1953, box 3, folder 62; Chester S. Davis, “North Carolina Takes the Lead in Field of Educational Television,” *Winston-Salem Journal Sentinel*, 11 October 1953; Gordon Gray to William Benton, 8 May, 1951 box 3, folder 69, Gordon Gray Records.

<sup>23</sup> Davis, “North Carolina Takes the Lead”

Fortunately for ETV enthusiasts, the North Carolina general assembly was at that time receptive to the prospects of new media in the state's education system. Enacted by the General Assembly in 1949, the North Carolina Communication Study Commission had been at work evaluating local opinions and positions on radio, film, and television as possible education aids. Their report, issued in 1953, treated the spread of new communications media as nothing less than a revolution in the way Americans received information and functioned in society. Chairman Sam Lattimore strongly emphasized, "*an informed people cannot be politically enslaved,*" and as a consequence, "we are an informed people because our medias of mass communication enable us to keep that way and to transmit quickly to our fellow citizens our hopes, our fears and wishes." Lattimore's "inescapable" conclusions held that an educational system that did not incorporate all available tools in modern communication would be "lacking in both depth and completeness," and that North Carolina's present failure to offer statewide the benefits of these new technological media meant the state was "falling behind in its meeting of the challenge of remaining free by keeping ourselves educated and informed."<sup>24</sup>

A similar commission had been established by Governor William B. Umstead in 1953, with the more specific purpose of exploring radio and television activities in the state's education system. At a public hearing in February with invited speakers from the Joint Committee on Educational Television (JCET), the primary group that had lobbied the FCC for ETV reservations, Gray presented his office's progress toward realizing

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<sup>24</sup> Sam Lattimore, "A Report to the Governor and General Assembly by the North Carolina Communication Study Commission," 6-7, box 3, folder 70, Gordon Gray Records.

WUNC-TV, reiterating his rationale for limited transmitter offerings by the Consolidated University at that time, but also giving an assurance that his staff had been assiduously pursuing startup support from donors across the state and from national foundations. The majority of the hearing though featured questions from commission members, who represented communities from all other parts of the state, to the JCET presenters. Like Mark Lassiter and J.D. Messick, these members generally seemed frustrated in their questions, knowing that the area around Chapel Hill would likely be an exclusive enclave for ETV for the foreseeable future. L.W. Jenkins of East Carolina College shared his superiors' puzzlement over the apparent situation: "How," he asked in regards to the multiple options the consolidated University held in ETV, "does it make good sense to have an overlapping of stations in one part of the state and exclude another large section of the state?" Walter Emery and Earle Minderman, of the JCET and the National Citizens Committee for Educational Television, respectively, could respond only with the suggestion that those uncovered areas explore their own operations, knowing full well that the state government was not likely to fund more than one such experiment.<sup>25</sup>

One committee member from Asheville raised an important and hopeful point in the hearing, however. Emery and Minderman, seeking to assure the peripheral representatives that the benefits of ETV would not be entirely lost on their communities, explained that while no educational broadcast channels were ready to be reserved in those areas, studios like those on UNC campuses that were producing educational films could

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<sup>25</sup> "Public Hearing of The State Educational Radio and Television Commission Held in the Senate Chamber, State Capitol Building, Raleigh, North Carolina, February 12, 1953," box 3, folder 70, Gordon Gray Records. James Clark of Elizabethtown articulated the local representatives' unfortunate position, asking "If we should come to the position of feeling that we could not ask the state for more than a certain amount of money, our problem would be, 'Should we accept one or two or more of these stations and ask for funds.' This is going to exclude a great portion of the [available] stations if it is on that basis."

share duplications of those recordings with interested local educators. Barry Morris of Asheville built upon that idea and reported to the committee that he had seen “several cases where commercial stations have helped promote educational stations.”<sup>26</sup> In making this statement on behalf of the commission’s guest, he spoke to a certain resource ETV producers made common use of in the early days of television. The reality for many local commercial stations throughout most of the 1950s was the issue of insufficient material: though it would be unthinkable by today’s incessant glut of televised content, stations in the early days found themselves with not enough programming to fill all hours of the day. Thus many commercial stations, including some in western North Carolina, were generally agreeable to arrangements where educational programs produced elsewhere could be aired in the morning hours for local schools’ benefit. These arrangements faded after the demand for advertisement space grew slowly into those morning hours, but for upstarts in ETV, these friendly arrangements served for years as a de facto means of broadcasting educational programming beyond the range of a central transmitter.

By September of 1953, UNC had its application for channel 4 submitted and approved. From there it fell to the consolidate University to generate roughly one million dollars needed to construct studios and prepare a site for the antenna on Terrells Mountain near Chapel Hill. Publicity generated from positive news coverage of the new channel, as well as Gray’s connections with former business colleagues, together paid dividends in the form of generous startup contributions from large private firms in central North Carolina. A slew of thank-you notes sent by Gray to various “public-spirited

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<sup>26</sup> “Public Hearing of The State Educational Radio and Television Commission,” Gordon Gray Records.

citizens” shows strong support from the state’s business community, including the tobacco fortunes of the Reynolds Foundation, Carolina Steel & Iron, and Wachovia Bank & Trust of Winston-Salem. Gray’s correspondence during the initial fundraising gives the impression that the University had surprisingly little trouble in securing startup funds and the modest \$217,000 biennial operating budget. This early ease in birthing WUNC-TV appears in stark contrast to the beginnings of other, forthcoming public television operations in the region.<sup>27</sup>

### **UNC Partners with Ford**

In spite of the comfortable support Gray and Carmichael found at first for WUNC-TV within the state, their campaign looked with ambition beyond North Carolina donors, toward potential support from larger philanthropic agencies. Here they found success and failure, however. The Carnegie Foundation, an integral agent in the structure of American higher education, would in the 1960s emerge as a pivotal player in the development of public television nationally. Carnegie had not adopted this stance in the 1950s, and they dismissed WUNC-TV’s request for support in 1955, citing a general wariness of how well ETV “fit in with any of their ongoing programs.” By contrast, the Ford Foundation, itself a fairly new institution, had been making visible and substantial investments in ETV since the previous decade.

Education historians Mark Garrett Cooper and John Marx observe a certain ambiguity in Ford philanthropy with regard to its support for television—in many instances that support was aimed at fostering across the world a robust and engaging

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<sup>27</sup> “Finances: Consolidated TV Fund, 1952-1954,” box 3, folder 63, Gordon Gray Records.

educational alternative to commercial television, as well as a useful component in formal instruction. Yet Cooper and Marx observe that Ford also supported more abstract and revolutionary imaginings of television and electronic media, most notably a 1953 clinical study of television teaching conducted by Marshall McLuhan, who would later win celebrity status for his iconoclastic views on the effects of television and the oft-repeated expression “the medium is the message.” Any sampling of Ford’s grants and research projects in the area of television reveal, however, that more development was being effected by the organization through minor investments among the rank and file of educational institutions (primary through post-secondary) and less through the high-minded, oracular projects of McLuhan.<sup>28</sup>

The bulk of Ford’s support for ETV in the 1950s appeared under three major initiatives: the Fund for Adult Education, the Fund for the Advancement of Education, and National Educational Television (NET). The former, as its name suggests, was geared more toward continuing education for working adults, or, as its first director ambitiously described, “that part of the educational process which begins when formal schooling ends,” for which the Fund would “try to cultivate in adults the desire to continue education throughout life.” Adult education programs supported by Ford were aired on NBC as early as 1951, but for most of the decade the Fund supported television operations of educational institutions and community organizations. The Fund for the Advancement of Education was at first intended to offer conventional resources and funding to primary and secondary schools, but eventually it incorporated ETV as an

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<sup>28</sup> Mark Garrett Cooper and John Marx, *Media U*, 124.

important tool for improving the nation's schools.<sup>29</sup> NET was a forerunner of sorts to PBS, producing kinescopes of programs that could be distributed and used by interested local stations.

WUNC-TV made multiple appeals for Ford support throughout the 1950s. A few months after the initial ETV conference at Chapel Hill, Gray wrote to Ann Spinney of the Fund for Adult Education, unsure of exactly how or to what extent FAE could support a station in such conceptual infancy. That request being denied, Gray applied again in March, 1955, a few weeks after the station made its first broadcasts, with much more credit and progress on display, but still emphasizing the lingering doubt as to how consistent state funding would be. The state budget guaranteed funding for the station through the end of June of that year, but Gray informed William McPeak of the Ford Foundation that the station was in a state of suspense. "If the appropriation is not made," Gray assured, "then about one million dollars in equipment and studios, in addition to extensive planning of programs and several months of actual experience in educational television, will likely be forced to go on a standby basis."<sup>30</sup>

A brief report of WUNC-TV's two years of development was attached to Gray's 1955 letter. It shows the considerable investment and progress the Consolidated University had put toward ETV to that point, evident specifically in the diversity of programs channel 4 had been showing on a regular basis for its first six weeks.

Appealing directly to Ford's initial ETV goal of adult education, the report asserted:

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<sup>29</sup> C. Scott Fletcher, "The Program of the Fund for Adult Education," *Adult Education Quarterly* 2, no. 2, (December 1951), 59, 62; Blakely, *To Serve the Public Interest*, 84-86.

<sup>30</sup> Gordon Gray to Ann Spinney, October 10, 1952, box 3, folder 66, Gordon Gray Records; Gordon Gray to William McPeak, March 4, 1955, box 3, folder 65, Gordon Gray Records.



“WUNC-TV’s basic axiom is: ‘Daytime is earning time; night-time is learning time,’” and “whether farmer or factory worker, lawyer, doctor, textile worker or banker, the average man must earn his living during the day and get his schooling at night.” The daytime schedule of classroom instruction and programming for “homemaker, child, and teen-ager,” was briefly acknowledged in the report, but the clear focus was on the informative and stimulating programs available in the evening.<sup>31</sup>

Within the descriptions offered to Ford of the first programs WUNC-TV studios were producing, it is also clear that the station had taken fairly seriously its goal of drawing from the specialties of each member institution. From the State College in Raleigh, studios had, congruent with its role as land grant institution, produced series such as “Today on the Farm,” an agriculture news and education program; “Who Knows,” a documentary series exploring “the scientific marvels with which we are surrounded in our daily lives;” and “Picture of Health,” which in its focus on preventive medicine addressed, in the words of the station, “the most significant weakness now apparent...in the area of public education,” through “a scientific program, but [one] intelligible to the layman.”<sup>32</sup> Chapel Hill offered up its expertise with such programs as “Hands Across the Sea,” in which the dean of the law school hosted and narrated “films dealing with the work of the United Nations in other lands.”

The earlier, now outdated definitions of the University were also evident in the report, including “Dr. Bernard Boyd and the Bible,” one of WUNC-TV’s most popular programs in the station’s first decade, which flaunted the Establishment Clause in its

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<sup>31</sup> “Educational Television at The University of North Carolina,” March 4, 1955, box 3, folder 65, Gordon Gray Records.

<sup>32</sup> “Educational Television at The University of North Carolina,” 1955.

“illustrations of a faith that the separation of Church and State need not condemn the State University to sterility in recognizing the religious yearnings of the State’s people.” Furthermore, the report to Ford included no promotion of the early programs produced by the Women’s College, which featured such titles as “Diet for a Day,” and, simply “Posture.”<sup>33</sup>

Gordon Gray’s fears about a sudden reduction or elimination of state apportionment for WUNC-TV proved to be unfounded, and from January of 1955 on, the new network set itself to the task of constantly developing new programming and improving its early ideas. Gray’s presidency would also end in mid-1955, to be handed off to William C. Friday. The full breadth of WUNC-TV’s early programming and production need not be examined here, but one specific endeavor stands out for the part it would play in encouraging statewide expansion of the ETV service. Known as the “In-School TV Experiment,” WUNC-TV’s major expansion of classroom instructional courses, beginning in 1957, represented not only a full acknowledgment of the University’s progress by the Ford Foundation (which at that time had shifted its internal ETV focus away from adult education to the conventional classroom), but also for its intention to endow the entire state with equal educational benefits, and not simply the broadcast area of channel 4 in Chapel Hill.

### **The In-School Experiment**

Statewide coverage only emerged as an initiative for WUNC-TV and the Ford Foundation after the first two years of the In-School Experiment, after considerable

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<sup>33</sup> “Educational Television at The University of North Carolina,” 1955.

prodding and protest from educators left outside the boundaries of WUNC-TV and its partnering stations. The initial goal of the experiment, however, as stated in grant application materials submitted by the University and Ford's publicity for the project, was to explore how television could assist teachers and school districts amid the baby boom. Class sizes were ballooning in the postwar decades, and as Ford's energy and resources in ETV research shifted from continuing adult education to improving primary and secondary levels, ETV grants allocated by the Fund for the Advancement of Education (TFFAE) went toward alleviating the tensions within school districts with overstretched resources. It was not lost on WUNC-TV administrators that this crisis affected rural schools without ETV capability in far eastern and western North Carolina, but their focus with this first major support from Ford was on the use of ETV in classrooms generally.

Schools in rural and other peripheral communities across the United States had been dealt certain educational inequities for many years prior to World War II, but Ford Foundation reports on that agency's "National Program in the Use of Television in the Public Schools" made it clear that the baby boom crisis was, in the decade or so following the war, an imminent crisis for all schools in the nation. With an estimated increase of ten million students in the nation's public schools (roughly a 40% jump in the school population), TFFAE supported a handful of television projects across the country, with North Carolina as one of only a handful that experimented with ETV beyond the boundaries of a single city. However, Ford and its grantees did not view television as merely a crutch for overburdened teachers and staff. In their response to the baby boom, which TFAE visualized as "a nation-wide attack on the problems of quantity and

quality,” WUNC-TV was taking part in “an effort to determine whether television, when used as a powerful resource in the teaching of very large classes during part of the school day, can bring about substantial savings in classroom space and teaching positions while at the same time improving the quality of education.”<sup>34</sup>

Correspondence between the Vice President of TFFAE, Alvin Eurich and William Carmichael prior to UNC’s selection as a recipient indicates that while the baby boom crisis was the pressing concern for the overall investment, the Ford Foundation was still hopeful that experiments in ETV could ultimately yield significant new dimensions for state-supported education in places like North Carolina. “What are the implications of television,” he mused, “for redeployment of our resources in the way schools are organized—in cost, in space, in time, in method, in number, in personnel, in content?” Eurich looked favorably, however, on the immediate goals indicated in WUNC-TV’s grant request. These were: 1) enrichment of teaching at participating schools, so that North Carolina’s teachers would, via television, “have at their command the rich resources available in the colleges and universities of the state;” 2) experimenting with television teaching in much larger sections, with the goal of allowing teachers more time to “provide guidance, counseling services, remedial help, and research assistance for the overall improvement” of teaching programs; and 3) “more effective utilization of school buildings” amid mounting enrollments and overcrowded classrooms.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> “The National Program in the Use of Television in the Public Schools: A Report on the Second Year, 1958-59,” The Ford Foundation and The Fund for the Advancement of Education, 2. Jefferson County, Kentucky, which includes Louisville and several surrounding districts, was another recipient from this program. Their experiment consisted of a blend of open and closed-circuit transmissions to elementary and high school classes in a variety of subjects.

<sup>35</sup> Alvin Eurich to William D. Carmichael, July 29, 1957, Ford Foundation Records, The Fund for the Advancement of Education, Series 3, FA #740, box 2, folder 283, 2, Rockefeller Archive Center (hereinafter RAC) (first quotation); “The North Carolina In-School Television Experiment, 1957-1958:

The In-School Experiment's primary offering consisted of four televised subject courses, produced by teachers in studios at Chapel Hill and at the Women's College, for students in grades 8 through 11, with one course for each grade. Participating teachers and administrators attended several weeklong orientation sessions in Chapel Hill in the month before Fall semester. High-school juniors and sophomores were treated to American and World history courses, respectively, while freshmen and eighth graders studied general science and arithmetic. In keeping with the goal of using ETV to reimagine the spaces within school buildings, the experimental classes ranged in size from 90 to 216, and thus had to be held in auditoriums, gymnasiums, and cafeterias, equipped only with standard 1950s-sized television sets. Remarkably though the results and learning outcomes of these courses, measured in preliminary tests in September along with Spring final exams, showed that the television-equipped classes performed slightly better in three of the four courses than their peers in conventional classrooms within the same school district.<sup>36</sup>

WUNC-TV had to acknowledge in its grant report the issue of coverage, noting that of the 19 school districts who first participated, only a few outside the coverage area of WUNC-TV were able to participate, and those few were only able to do so because of an available daytime hour timeslot on commercial channels in the area. Curiously enough, participating commercial broadcasters were all in the western portion of the state, and two of those operated in Appalachia: WSOC in Charlotte, WSJS in Winston-

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Final Report, July 1, 1958," Series Ford Foundation Grants, Reel 0180, University of North Carolina (05900393), microfilm, RAC (all other quotations).

<sup>36</sup> "The North Carolina In-School Television Experiment, 1957-1958: Final Report," RAC. Variance in test scores was minimal: American history and general science only saw improvements in the first year of little over one percentage point. Arithmetic scores improved by nearly five percentage points, while world history scores declined by about two points.

Salem, WLOS in Asheville, and WCYB in Bristol, Tennessee, near the state line.

Administrators in the University also recognized the certain incidental consequence of offering their courses over open-circuit television, estimating that, in actuality, over 100 schools and roughly 7,000 students were taking advantage of the broadcast courses, despite the fact that there were only 55 schools and 3,000 students officially registered for the courses in the 1957-1958 school year. Furthermore, the grant report noted

“because this program was carried over an open circuit, it is easily possible that several thousand parents and other citizens viewed the program and had the chance to learn for the first time what was being taught to their high school population. Many communications, written and oral, came to the office from adults all over the state who listened in occasionally or more or less regularly.<sup>37</sup>

It is hardly surprising that WUNC-TV included a large collection of such “communications” in their grant re-applications, or that the Ford Foundation would graciously accept such comments and use them to publicize the positive benefits being realized through ETV experiments. And some of these comments do actually suggest a lot of new educational benefits and opportunities being offered in communities across the region, including not only North Carolinian students, but also some schools in Virginia, Tennessee, and South Carolina. Local teachers praised the new methods they saw being used by their in-studio colleagues, students found themselves engrossed by the novelty of the experience and refreshed by the dual presentation between local and in-studio teachers, and numerous comments attested to the new fluid boundaries between living room and schoolroom. A 21-year old student with a learning disability, “having never been to school but being taught at home and having reached the 11th grade,” reportedly

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<sup>37</sup> “The North Carolina In-School Television Experiment, 1957-1958: Final Report,” RAC.

“asked for material and wrote in appreciation of the opportunity,” while another report mentioned that “requests for [course] material were so numerous at a city library and its several branches that the librarian asked the studio teacher for a bibliography.”<sup>38</sup>

Yet the potential benefits that ETV could offer rural school districts, as well as the sincere hope that the benefits of the In-School Experiment could soon be offered to the more disadvantaged, peripheral communities in the state, were never far from North Carolina educators’ minds during the late 1950s. Writing for the *North Carolina Parent Teacher Bulletin*, one of the studio science teachers, “Mrs. S.E. Denton,” looked with favor and optimism at the “designated ‘unofficial’” schools that received the WUNC-TV courses, celebrating the fact that “these small, oftentimes rural schools” were now receiving “the same telelessons and instructional materials as the official schools.” Elsewhere, one of the experiment’s directors, Charles W. Phillips, noted to Ford in a midterm assessment of the project that the University was often reminded of the difficulty of negotiating additional broadcast time “beyond the coverage area of Channel 4” with interested commercial broadcasting partners. To that end, Phillips observed that other station personnel had also been exploring early models and designs of translators, which decades later would be a standard instrument for carrying television signal beyond the reach of a central transmitter.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “The North Carolina In-School Television Experiment, 1957-1958: Final Report,” RAC.

<sup>39</sup> S.E. Denton, “Science Teacher Tells of Advantages,” *North Carolina Parent Teacher Bulletin* (1958-1959), 13, Ford Foundation Records, The Fund for the Advancement of Education, Series 3, FA #740, box 2, folder 287, RAC (first quotation); C.W. Phillips to John J. Scanlon, December 31, 1957, Ford Foundation Records, The Fund for the Advancement of Education, Series 3, FA #740, box 2, folder 283, RAC (second quotation).

Yet in the context of the In-School TV Experiment, even amid the modest and hopeful successes of the first few years of the program, discontented voices were beginning to mount against the current offering of WUNC-TV. One household that felt notably critical of the network's lack of reach at the time, though it received the broadcasts crystal clear in its location, was the governor's mansion, home at that time to Luther Hodges. Toward the end of the first year of the In-School Experiment, Hodges wrote to William Friday. In that year and the two preceding it, Hodges felt, "educational television...has proven itself as an educational service to our people." Following his congratulations though, Hodges plainly observed, "WUNC-TV on channel four does not cover the entire state. The east and west cannot benefit from this service." To that end, Hodges expressed his hope that Friday's upcoming visit to Capitol Hill to testify in a committee hearing (on the "Magnuson bill") would be fruitful for the east and west's prospects of receiving public television.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Magnuson Bill, and Terry Sanford's North Carolina Fund**

Referencing "Magnuson," Hodges meant Warren Magnuson, the U.S. Senator from Washington and one of the most prolific legislators of postwar liberalism. Remembered primarily for contributions to environmental preservation, public works, and the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, Magnuson was also a bastion of support for public television. In the late 1960s he would introduce the formative legislation for the Public Broadcasting Service and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, but while that

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<sup>40</sup> Luther Hodges to William Friday, April 21, 1958, box 10, folder 259, University of North Carolina Television Network Records #40258, University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



act gave the U.S. its primary vehicles and cultural standards of educational television, the infrastructure and reach of public television stations and early networks that were needed to carry PBS would not have existed without the earlier, less known, Educational Television Facilities Act of 1962. Though its achievements seem rather modest compared to PBS—its main provision was merely to offer matching grants for securing channels and constructing transmitters and studios—the Facilities Act proved to negate the major issue of startup funding that prevented areas like western North Carolina from sharing in the benefits of ETV, and it would eventually provide the main impetus for WUNC-TV’s expansion.<sup>41</sup>

Though it foundered in House committees several times before its eventual passage, the Facilities Act’s first introduction in 1958 was nonetheless an opportune time for several reasons. For one, public stations and early network operations like WUNC-TV had proved to be remarkably popular and effective in communities nationwide, but many educators had also felt that the benefits of the new medium had roughly conformed to the same distribution of educational resources that existed prior to ETV. A memorandum given to Magnuson by a representative of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters admitted that “an obvious argument could be made that the population of New York or California required a greater allocation of funds [for ETV] than the smaller population of Rhode Island or Mississippi,” but that action needed to be taken to bring the country back to the organization’s “original concept that all states must be treated equally.” The FCC’s original goal following the channel freeze of endowing

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<sup>41</sup> Shelby Scates, *Warren G. Magnuson and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century America* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1997), 4-6; W. Wayne Alford, “The Educational Television Facilities Act of 1962,” *AV Communication Review* 15, no. 1 (Spring, 1967), 77.

urban areas and “educational centers” with ETV’s benefits had not spurred investment toward spreading that wealth beyond those original allocations.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, initial postwar projections for the expanse of television offerings in the 1950s had not come to fruition. In the FCC’s rationale behind the channel freeze, educators needed to act with all speed to secure the reserved channels, because once the reservations were lifted and the channels reverted back to open application, the fear was that commercial interests would gobble up the entire spectrum and leave no possible opening for educators in the foreseeable future. That fear proved to be unfounded—of the original 242 channels set aside for noncommercial or educational use in 1952, only a fourth of those would be in use by the end of the decade.<sup>43</sup> Outside of the conversation around local ETV stations, the Facilities Act also benefitted from the concurrent defense education bill working its way through Congress. Ostensibly about filling the supposed gap in science education and development between the U.S. and the Soviet Union following Sputnik’s orbit, the National Defense Education Act of 1958 served, as historian Wayne Urban observes, to expand Americans’ interest in federal involvement in education. The ETV Facilities act certainly benefitted from emerging in the same congressional session as NDEA, as communication scholar Wayne Alford observed, and Title VII of the latter act would also offer a grant program for schools to apply for ETV equipment.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Alford, “The Educational Television Facilities Act of 1962,” 78.

<sup>43</sup> Alford, “The Educational Television Facilities Act of 1962,” 77; U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, “The Educational Television Facilities Act of 1962: An Explanation of Public Law 87-447.”

<sup>44</sup> Wayne J. Urban, *More Than Science and Sputnik: The National Defense Education Act of 1958* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 2010); Alford, “The Educational Television Facilities Act of 1962,” 78. See also Barbara Barksdale Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War: The Sputnik Crisis and National Defense Education Act of 1958* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1981).

The intermittent years between the ETV Facilities Act’s first committee hearing and its eventual implementation in the mid-1960s were also a critical period in the history of Appalachia, and mid-century liberalism as well. As is often recounted in histories of the War on Poverty era, the primary election campaign tour of West Virginia by John F. Kennedy in 1960, captured in television news footage and magazine photography, initiated a period of intense fascination and concern for poor communities like those seen in the Mountain State—what anthropologist Allen Batteau would later term as a new “invention” of Appalachia in the national consciousness. The visual exposé of Appalachian poverty in Kennedy’s visit was reproduced by other news outlets and publications numerous times throughout the 1960s. The images had as contemporaries a large number of popular books diagnosing the apparent paradox between national prosperity and extreme poverty at the local level, including Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society* (1958), Michael Harrington’s *The Other America* (1962), and, specifically focused on Appalachia, Harry Caudill’s *Night Comes to the Cumberland: A Biography of a Depressed Area* (1962). Appalachian areas like western North Carolina assumed center stage in the publicity for the broad range of antipoverty programs initiated by Kennedy and his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson.<sup>45</sup>

If the Facilities Act were judged purely on the merits of how it benefitted Appalachia and underserved areas themselves, the legislation would pale in comparison to the more ambitious Great Society programs that were to follow in the Johnson

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<sup>45</sup> Allen Batteau, *The Invention of Appalachia* (Tucson, Az.: University of Arizona Press, 1990); Ronald D Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2008); Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, eds., *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Edward Slavishak, *Proving Ground: Expertise and Appalachian Landscapes* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018).

administration, such as the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Office of Economic Opportunity. Through the provisions of the Facilities Act, unused television channels in underserved areas could be put to use for educational broadcasts, but only on a matching funds-based grant from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. While some areas in western North Carolina may have benefitted to that point from commercial stations' cooperation in airing ETV programs, the prospect of those areas creating a new local ETV services for themselves was simply unfeasible. As historians James Leloudis and Robert Korstad observe in their study of four counties in 1960s western North Carolina, school systems in the area allocated nearly half of tax revenues to schools and still struggled to meet state and national standards, a crisis largely due to the fact that the U.S. Forest Service (a major landholder in the region) had operated for decades with no contribution whatsoever to the county's public funds.<sup>46</sup>

Arguably, the Facilities Act of 1962 achieved its most fruitful implementation with cases like North Carolina, where the state government (and in this case, the University) recognized the value of activating unused ETV channels, and also interconnecting them to form a state network. William Friday had testified to that extent in the initial hearings on the bill in 1958, noting that such assistance from the federal agency would allow the consolidated university to make ETV available to all 100 of North Carolina's counties. For the first six years of WUNC-TV's operation, Friday had

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<sup>46</sup> U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, "The Educational Television Facilities Act of 1962: An Explanation of Public Law 87-447;" Robert R. Korstad and James L. Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs: The North Carolina Fund and the Battle to End Poverty and Inequality in 1960s America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 234. Korstad and Leloudis specifically follow the organization WAMY, which represented four counties in western North Carolina: Watauga, Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey. For further discussion of the issue of the Forest Service and property tax revenues in this region, see Kathryn Newfont, *Blue Ridge Commons: Environmental Activism and Forest History in Western North Carolina* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 101-104.

counted on the friendly cooperation of commercial channels in areas on the state's periphery, but a December 1961 report within the state Board of Education (which had happily accepted the new televised curriculum coming out of the University) found that this era of cooperation was coming to an abrupt end. In that report, Elmer Garringer, superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools, noted that one commercial operator in the city of Charlotte would carry WUNC programs for another three years, but that others serving western North Carolina had notified him of their intent to withdraw WUNC-TV programs by the end of the current school year. "We must have, as soon as can be accomplished, a state-wide network," Garringer reported in the Board of Education's committee hearing. It was not fair or right, he said, "for only a few to be privileged by using television."<sup>47</sup>

It was apparent also that the popularity and enthusiasm surrounding ETV expansion was not limited to the inner circles of the state's University or government. One viewer in Montreat, near Asheville, wrote in September, 1961, to WUNC-TV's director, John Young, asking for thoughts on the yet-to-be-passed Magnuson bill, or if anything had been done to further expand the signal coverage:

"With the schools and colleges opening again, we always have a special feeling of regret that the whole State is being deprived of the advantages which by their accidental location, are open only to certain areas. Reading the TV Guide, it is clear that we are missing some wonderfully fine programs from WUNC—and there seems to be little we can do about it. Certainly it seems hardly fair to stop short of the State lines."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Alford, "The Educational Television Facilities Act of 1962," 79; "Minutes—Advisory Committee on Educational Television," December 13, 1961, box 11, folder 275, University of North Carolina Television Network Records.

<sup>48</sup> John P. Williams to John Young (first quotation), September 28, 1961, box 9, folder 228, University of North Carolina Television Network Records; A. Hartwell Campbell, "Educational Television....Editorial," May 19, 1963, box 9, folder 228, University of North Carolina Television Network Records.

Similarly frustrated sentiments surfaced in editorials all over the state in the following months. In May of 1963 a station manager of a commercial broadcaster serving the eastern NC cities of Greenville and Wilmington made an impassioned plea for a state network in a Sunday night broadcast, charging that “in the eastern and western portions of our state, we find that most of the people are deprived of the advantages of educational television.” The manager went on to reason, “if we can spread throughout the state the advantages which are being shared presently by some of the people, we will have a much better chance of raising the standards of education throughout the entire state.”

Some of the remarks over a lack of ETV coverage were more scathing, specifically targeting state legislators who might have spoken in opposition to expanding the network, or those who felt that the time was not right to do so. In an editorial appearing in May of 1963 in the *Asheville Citizen*, titled “Solons Would Prolong Educational Blackout,” the paper excoriated a legislative subcommittee that balked at providing the necessary matching funds for network expansion. “The fact that the state now operates an educational TV station—WUNC-TV in Chapel Hill,” the paper asserted, “means absolutely nothing to the children in the West, the East, and in many other areas of North Carolina where the signals from Chapel Hill cannot be received.” The fact that, in actuality, the majority of students in the state could not access WUNC-TV, “contravenes the whole principle of educational opportunity,” the Citizen reasoned.<sup>49</sup> The

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<sup>49</sup> “Solons Would Prolong Educational Blackout,” *The Asheville Citizen*, May 18, 1963, May 19, 1963, box 9, folder 228, University of North Carolina Television Network Records.

*Charlotte Observer* added weeks later that educators in their city had, after the two years of the In-School Experiment, been completely “sold on the medium’s direct benefits to education,” and saw with all certainty that a “mountains-to-the-sea network” would improve the state’s educational system. Many other editorials were published to that effect across the state in the months following the Facilities Act’s passage.<sup>50</sup>

The pejorative reference to North Carolina’s “solons,” or legislators, showed that the editorial comments were directed at representatives and senators, but many of the calls for network expansion were also directed at Governor Terry Sanford, whose ascendency to the executive office was advanced largely on an educational reform platform. His book-length reflection on his governorship, *But What About the People* (1966), was premised largely on education. His preface assured: “woven inevitably through this entire story is the thesis that state government must assert broader responsibilities for education,” and that strengthening this mantle would not only yield more effective service toward the public by government, but would also make that service “more viable in the advancement of its democratic purposes.”<sup>51</sup> Sanford’s text had numerous favorable reports on the expansion of WUNC-TV, his personal fondness for ETV as a new and effective educational tool, and recommendations that other states and school districts appreciate the value of the medium. His faith in educational television’s ability to evolve and adapt to new production and teaching strategies meant, for him, that the medium would be “enhanced constantly by imaginative development.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> “Great Leap Forward in ETV,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 16, 1963. Other statements include “Will the State Spurn an Educational Bargain,” *Asheville Citizen*, May 31, 1963, and “What’s In A Word?,” *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, N.C.), June 16, 1963.

<sup>51</sup> Terry Sanford, *But What About The People?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), xv.

<sup>52</sup> Sanford, *But What About The People?*, 47.

Taking office in 1961, Sanford appointed his own commission the following year to investigate the prospects and effectiveness of ETV to that date. The commission recommended that immediate steps be taken to ensure that the entire state receive WUNC-TV's programming, saying that statewide coverage was of "elemental importance," and "necessary and proper for achieving the comprehensive educational results desired through instructional programs for young people and adults."<sup>53</sup> So convinced of ETV's benefits was Sanford, that he included it as part of his ambitious North Carolina Fund, an ambitious antipoverty research and action agency profiled extensively in Leloudis and Korstad's book on the era. In that account, Sanford's North Carolina Fund, a systematic and innovative response to persistent poverty in the state, is juxtaposed with the concurrent and more heavily publicized stand by George Wallace to prevent desegregation in Alabama's public schools. Thus, while Wallace and many other southern governors were working to minimize and restrict access to public education, Sanford, by contrast, used tools like WUNC-TV to promote widespread and greater access to the state's educational resources. In a statement on the North Carolina Fund's "Long-Range Plan for Communications and Public Relations," the public information wing of the organization outlined how television could "awaken, educate, and call to action" the general public in North Carolina toward antipoverty campaigns.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> "Report of the Governor's Commission on Educational Television," October 10, 1962, box 11, folder 275, University of North Carolina Television Network Records.

<sup>54</sup> Korstad and Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs*, 1-3; Billy Barnes, "The North Carolina Fund Long-Range Plan for Communication and Public Information," 3-4, undated, box 10, folder 233, University of North Carolina Television Network Records. Barnes's enthusiasm for television's potential to bolster the efforts of the North Carolina Fund and build participation registers on a spiritual level. He writes "an ignored, uninformed, population will let such a program drop with a dull thud." By contrast though, "an alerted, impressed, socially and spiritually-awakened group of voter-taxpayers will volunteer their professional and nonprofessional services to Fund programs in the next four years, and then be willing,



It is tempting to read into Governor Sanford's vision for ETV a certain strain of paternalism, wherein the yet-unconnected homes and individuals in the far corners of the state are supposedly lost in some backwards, pre-modern state without public television, and have only to be connected in order to become functioning, modern North Carolinians. Leloudis and Korstad observe this line of thinking, and they link the trajectory of the North Carolina Fund to that of many other War on Poverty-era initiatives. This common narrative holds that many antipoverty programs were started under the notion of a culture of poverty amid impoverished communities, and the assumption that poor people need only accept the tutelage of enlightened state programs before they can escape the bonds of poverty. After that initial assumption, many government agents and volunteers sent to work in poor communities steadily realized that larger injustices were at play, and the top-down reform model steadily morphed into more radical, grassroots calls for social justice and economic restructuring. Sanford's hopes for ETV seem to fit along the former, culture-of-poverty phase: he remarks in *But What About The People* generally about the uneducated in North Carolina as an "inventory of weakness," for whom the potential of advancement in the state has been "swept away in wasted lives...like silt in a great river washing out to form a useless marshland."<sup>55</sup> It is easy to see how a broadcast television network could be viewed within this paternalist attitude toward the poor and disaffected communities that lacked WUNC-TV signal.

Yet while Sanford and others within state government appeared to have such convictions in their campaign for a state network, it is worth noting that within WUNC-

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conceivably even anxious gradually to take upon themselves the responsibility for their own citizens and their own local problems," 3.

<sup>55</sup> Korstad and Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs*, 5-6; Terry Sanford, *But What About The People?*, 4.

TV's operations, such a strict, top-down application of the network's benefits was not the intended model. Evidence of this can be seen in discussion over how to expand the network, as considerable attention was given to how South Carolinians' network was being constructed. Schools in the Palmetto State were at that time looking forward to being connected via a closed-circuit network, one not dependent on receiving reliable television signals from adjacent radio transmitters. Rather, schools would be directly linked to a cable network administered by the department of education that covered the entire state simultaneously. Closed-caption networks had been implemented in urban areas and smaller states, and were attractive not only for their greater signal reliability, but also for the fact that they could be effected without the laborious process of applying to the FCC for available channels. Commissions studying ETV in North Carolina kept close watch on how their neighbors to the south were advancing.<sup>56</sup>

Closed-circuit connectivity failed to gain traction in North Carolina, for the obvious reason that it would negate the work WUNC-TV had done to that point in the way of adult education and general cultural programming. The station directors also objected, however, on the basis that they envisioned a state network that could grant more autonomy to the individual subregions of the state in programming, and the strictly centralized control of programming in South Carolina seemed far too inflexible for what they hoped to do. Voicing his concern to the state Board of Education, John Young,

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<sup>56</sup> "Report of the Special Subcommittee to Investigate Educational Television in South Carolina, box 11, folder 275, University of North Carolina Television Network Records; Robert Taggart, "The Promise and Failure of Educational Television in a Statewide System: Delaware, 1964-1971," *American Educational History Journal* 34, no. 1 (2007), pp. 111-122. The state of Delaware opted for a closed-circuit network, only to scrap that infrastructure within a few years because of high maintenance costs for the cable and legislative criticism over the availability of programming. South Carolina would also change to conventional broadcast transmitters in later years.

station director in Chapel Hill, wrote that “the goal of reaching every school and home in North Carolina requires a broadcast service, as opposed to a closed circuit system.” Microwave links between various transmitters would allow for instantaneous sharing of programs between production centers, and although engineering surveys suggested that a great deal of transmitter infrastructure was needed to give satisfactory coverage to “areas of difficult terrain,” the point of emanating broadcast signals from different areas, Young insisted, was to allow the service to be “modified as desirable.” Furthermore, he assured, the broadcast system was “so designed that the transmitters in the eastern part of the state, those in the western part of the state, and those in the central section could be programmed separately,” and so that “programs from any production center could, when recorded on magnetic tape or film, be used on the system.” Though production capabilities in the peripheral areas of the state might not have been ready to produce the same quantity of programs as the Consolidated University was then creating, Young made it clear that local areas should be given the authority under a broadcast network, and not a closed circuit system, to produce and arrange content according to local needs.<sup>57</sup>

### **Finally Expanding**

The 1963 North Carolina General Assembly approved capital outlay funds for new transmitter sites and increased operating funds for WUNC-TV, and although the complete acquisition and activation of the new sites would take several decades, the state

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<sup>57</sup> John Young, Memorandum to Board of Education Advisory Committee on Educational Television, January 25, 1963, box 11, folder 275, University of North Carolina Television Network Records.

thus made an important commitment towards equal educational opportunity for all residents. Beginning in 1965, the vicinity of Columbia, NC, a 14-county radius and an estimated 207,000 residents would be guaranteed receipt of all the ongoing In-School TV Experiment Courses, as well as several hours a week of teacher inservice educational programming. By 1968, in western North Carolina, residents in the range of Linville, Asheville, and Concord, an addition of 30 counties and nearly 1.5 million people, would also receive these programs, as well as college courses in education, world and U.S. history, and many other general programs on their state's culture and public affairs.<sup>58</sup> Though grudges against Chapel Hill and the Research Triangle area could linger, owing to the fact that this area called itself the "state" network range for the first decade of WUNC-TV's operation, communities in eastern and western North Carolina could mark this occasion as an important moment when the state affirmed its duty to provide equal educational benefits to all schools and homes within its borders.

As with all public broadcasting ventures in the United States though, WUNC-TV's operation from the 1960s onward was never totally smooth sailing. Many of the same criticisms and suspicions that have surrounded PBS since its inception materialized within the first few years of the expanded WUNC-TV. When station directors implored the legislature to purchase and operate its own transmitter and interconnective equipment, a collection of private telephone companies working in North Carolina, including Southern Bell and several local companies, lobbied the state to instead contract with their

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<sup>58</sup> "Educational Television Statewide Expansion: Phase I Progress and Status," May 23, 1968, box 9, folder 229, University of North Carolina Television Network Records; "A Description of Six Categories of Programming as Broadcast by University of North Carolina Educational Television," August 16, 1966, box 9, folder 229, University of North Carolina Television Network Records.

services and rent the necessary equipment. Their dismissal of the idea of a state-owned network cut to the very core philosophy of the idea of public media in general, phrased in something like a veiled threat if the state proceeded to buy its own equipment. If the state “should decide to get into communications on such a scale,” the operators warned, “the State would then be in direct competition with private industry whether or not it so intended. We respectfully submit that this kind of competition is not in the best interests of the State of North Carolina.”<sup>59</sup> WUNC-TV was also met with repeated rebukes by conservative legislators over the supposedly radical content being aired and instructed to young, impressionable minds. A lawmaker quoted in one of the editorials on the Facilities Act barked, “I don’t want history being taught by someone from Chapel Hill,” and later in the decade many North Carolinians spoke out in favor of South Carolina’s network when it publicly removed from its schedule a program produced by the Ford Foundation on race relations in the South, since the program was deemed too provocative.<sup>60</sup>

Still, the case of North Carolina’s network and the steps taken to expand its range are a testament to the importance of recognizing the need to attend to local and peripheral areas’ education systems. In the next chapter, one minor player from the early years of WUNC-TV’s development would address these concerns full-on, with a novel method of delivery and program development. This new system would emphasize total and

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<sup>59</sup> “Communications for North Carolina,” 41, box 11, folder 263, University of North Carolina Television Network Records.

<sup>60</sup> “No Place for Censorship,” *Greensboro Daily News*, June 15, 1963, box 9, folder 228, University of North Carolina Television Network Records; “Public Television Blackout Disservice to S.C. People,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 11, 1967, box 9, folder 229, University of North Carolina Television Network Records.

immediate coverage, in a six-state region rather than the confines of one individual state. In doing so, it would turn heads not only for being the most ambitious project in ETV, but also as one of the most astounding and peculiar experiments in television history.

### CHAPTER 3. "MAXIMUM LEARNING CONDITIONS:" EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION VIA AIRPLANE AND THE BEGINNINGS OF AN APPALACHIAN COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

In March of 1953, two years before WUNC-TV would go live for the first time, then-UNC President Gordon Gray exchanged a few letters with one particularly eager and sympathetic supporter of educational television. John E. Ivey, Jr. was then serving as director of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), a nonprofit interstate agency designed to share and coordinate resources between higher education institutions in sixteen states across the southern U.S., North Carolina included. Citing the recent establishment of the Ford Foundation's Educational Television and Radio Center at Ann Arbor, Michigan, which would produce kinescoped programs and distribute them to all ETV facilities receiving Ford support, Ivey proposed to Gray the need for such an exchange program specifically designed for the South. An agreement between the Board and the universities within the states represented by the Board was necessary, he believed, to produce "programs which would best fit the needs of the region and the nation, and which would be of superior quality." Ivey's overture to Gray did not go into detail on what regionally-specific elements of ETV were lacking, but it was clear that he shared in UNC's belief that regional networks were necessary as television media proliferated.<sup>1</sup>

Gray's response expressed interest but moreover a noncommittal stance, since the ability of WUNC-TV to produce programs for sharing in such a regional program was

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<sup>1</sup> John E. Ivey, Jr. to Gordon Gray, March 16, 1953, box 3, folder 62, Gordon Gray Records. The Southern Regional Education Board, founded in 1948, was primarily focused on improving the overall quality of higher education in the South and addressing shortages of certain professions in that area. For more on its earliest activities under Ivey, see George F. Gant, "The Southern Regional Education Program," *Public Administration Review* 12, no. 2 (Spring, 1952), pp. 106-111.

hardly assured at that point. To Ivey, Gray replied “with confidence that the University of North Carolina is interested in participating in any joint program of educational television with Southern universities, or universities anywhere,” but he later confided to R.B. House, UNC Chancellor, that “we should go slow with respect to this project, especially since we don’t know where we stand ourselves,” and that future replies to Ivey should be favorable, but noncommittal.<sup>2</sup>

In the career of John Ivey though, thinking in terms of region and regional transformation was a common thread. A UNC alumnus himself, Ivey had earned a doctorate in sociology from Chapel Hill, and taught courses there from 1941-1948, both in sociology, and city and regional planning. For a brief stint during that period, he served as “Specialist in Education Evaluation” for the Tennessee Valley Authority, taking part in that herculean and holistic effort to transform an impoverished part of the southern mountains into a fully functioning and modern economy. After his time at UNC he spent two years as Executive Vice President at NYU. He not only served as the first director of the Southern Regional Education Board, but he actually helped to found it, along with a national institute for exchanging learning resources.<sup>3</sup> SREB would eventually incorporate television programs and other digital learning sources into its programs, but Ivey’s role in the history of educational television is far more ambitious. The inclination he expressed to Gray for region-specific broadcasting would lead him to create shortly

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon Gray to John Ivey, March 22, 1953; Gray to R.B. House, March 29, 1953, box 3, folder 62, Gordon Gray Records.

<sup>3</sup> “Biographical Data on Dr. John E. Ivey, Jr., President: Learning Resources Institute,” Reel 0207, Grants O-R, FA 732F, Purdue Research Foundation (06000035), Ford Foundation Records, Rockefeller Archive Center.



thereafter one of the most sweeping, monumental, and—to present day observers—peculiar undertakings in the history of television.

The Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction (MPATI) adapted an idea first introduced by the Westinghouse Corporation for commercial broadcasting to ETV. Rather than simply coordinating the exchange of ETV programs among participating local stations, Ivey initiated instead a program where programs could be broadcast directly to interested schools over a six-state region, circumventing the need for established stations and transmitters in local areas within those states. As for how it worked, the name says it all: a decommissioned military aircraft would take off daily from an airfield near West Lafayette, Indiana, and Purdue University, extend an “umbilical” transmitter antenna from the underside of the plane mid-flight, and broadcast classroom instructional programs throughout the day as the plane flew in arranged patterns over the six states.

The MPATI system was briefly considered as an option by which educational television and other noncommercial broadcast programs could be distributed to the Appalachian region. Ivey hoped from the beginning that his system would catch on in popularity and recognition, and consequently be replicated in other disadvantaged regions—and he was not alone in that thinking. Like WUNC-TV, Ivey’s airborne television system relied on key support from the Ford Foundation, only the funding records show that MPATI received far more support from Ford than North Carolina did, indeed more than any single state or station had received to that point. Along with its curious similarity to another Cold War-era institution, the Strategic Air Command, as well as for the agency’s thorough articulation for exactly where and how educational

television should be applied to benefit rural areas, MPATI represents better than any other historical era a moment of apparent, palpable need for region-specific public broadcasting.

In spite of the support behind MPATI and its wide recognition, the planes were only in operation for less than a decade. Its shuttering in 1971 was due to many reasons: one being that the fantastical method of delivery by which it operated was soon eclipsed by the development and higher fidelity of cable access networks and satellite technology. More importantly though, Ivey's program faltered after it initiated a discourse among educational and public broadcasters as to how public television should be administered. Outside of the technological possibility of delivering educational broadcasts without the laborious and expensive process of securing a local channel permit and building local production facilities, the question emerged as to whether or not this was the ideal method. Ivey withstood legal challenges to his authoritative claims over public television in the areas the airplane covered, but plaintiffs in that suit, the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB), argued adamantly that local channels and production studios had the better insight as to what kind of programming was needed in particular communities. In a slightly ironic twist, the members of NAEB appealed to localism, much in the same way that local school districts and communities challenged them as they offered programming in their own broadcast areas.

Furthermore, the general conversation around educational television in the United States continued to change. Though the Ford Foundation had in the late 1950s shifted its support away from general interest programs and continuing education in the home toward classroom applications and instructional television, the luster surrounding the idea

of TV-equipped classrooms began to dim in the mid-1960s. MPATI, which had staked its position so firmly on the side of classroom instruction, was increasingly swept aside in favor of a growing appreciation for the idea of truly “public” television. Other historians have dwelled on the historical curiosity of MPATI and its meaning, even going so far as to uncover how Ford considered applying this model of ETV in other regions.<sup>4</sup> Still yet to be fully appreciated though is the meticulous regional planning MPATI’s directors oversaw for this experiment, and the alternative but no less radical plans proposed for other struggling regions. One such place in this latter category, was Appalachia. Thus, while the planes never flew over North Carolina or Appalachia, their role in the region’s history is undeniable.

The MPATI system, in spite of its short life span and curious appearance, has not gone unnoticed by historians interested in television and education. Allison Perlman, author of *Public Interests: Media Advocacy and Struggles Over US Television* (2018), chronicles the history of the program in an earlier article in *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. In her examination of how Ivey and others involved in the MPATI used their system to “counter entrenched understandings of the object of television” by the use of mobile airborne transmitters, Perlman also observes how the program’s approval was so dependent on the notion of a needy region—in this case, the Midwest.<sup>5</sup> Perlman expertly establishes and illustrates this connection (most notably in the contemporary she quotes for his analogy of the MPATI as “educational crop-dusting”), but the success of

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<sup>4</sup> Allison Perlman, “Television Up in the Air: The Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, 1959-1971,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25 (No. 5).

<sup>5</sup> Perlman, “Television Up in the Air,” 493.

the MPATI as a region-specific endeavor deserves further consideration in two particular areas.<sup>6</sup>

For the first, Perlman's observation that MPATI founders "intended for it to serve as a model for other regional educational systems in the United States" is accurate, but Perlman does not explore how this prototype was meant to be replicated in other regions.<sup>7</sup> Ford's substantial investment in the program indicates their earnest attempt to improve education systems across the Midwest (a cause they had dedicated themselves to well before television and radio), but the organization also encouraged Ivey and his colleagues to develop their system with the goal of fully transforming ETV and educational aid writ large.

Further investigation into Ford's ETV activities during this period reveals how the medium of television was increasingly perceived as an instrument of economic and social development in impoverished areas worldwide, particularly in third world nations. During this same period, Appalachia was also gaining recognition for its apparent similarities to third world environments, and it received aid through the Appalachian Regional Development Act (and the agency it created, the Appalachian Regional Commission) in a sort of domestic Marshall Plan redux.<sup>8</sup> The committee tasked with planning ETV's role in the mountains under the ARC's aegis did not consider the MPATI

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<sup>6</sup> J.J. Scanlon, "Classroom TV Enters a New Era," *Saturday Review*, May 20, 1961, 51. Quoted in Perlman, "Television Up in the Air," 485.

<sup>7</sup> Perlman, "Television Up in the Air," 489.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald D Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 177. Eller likens the Appalachian Regional Commission to the Marshall Plan for its strategies of immense capital investment and infrastructure, technocratic regional development, and its direction by "a cadre of confident young bureaucrats and professional planners."

as a serious option, but specifying where the MPATI fell short of ARC's expectations is an instructive narrative for the broad issue of educational reform in Appalachia.

Perlman also addresses the concept of a distressed Midwest region in the MPATI's history in her explanation of the airplane experiment's failure. In her view, praise is due to the MPATI for its confrontation and defiance against "localism," and its demise is lamentable because it could not overcome the entrenched interests of local school districts and the NAEB's preference for localized ETV operations over coordinated, interstate networks.<sup>9</sup> It was a tragedy that the region did not fully realize what benefits it could potentially reap from a centralized service like the MPATI, and that subsequent development of public television fell short of the glory envisioned by John Ivey and his colleagues.

Perlman's point is not without merit, but coming down so squarely on one side of the spectrum between local and centralized planning in education obscures the more moderate balances educators strike on a daily basis. The NAEB's claims that local station operators or state networks could better serve disadvantaged areas cannot easily be placed in the same category as provincial, conservative school administrators.

### **Stratovision: First in Flying Television Antennae**

The technology and equipment involved in MPATI was first introduced a decade prior to the educational program as "Stratovision." The idea of broadcasting television via airplane rather than fixed transmitter installations was developed by the Westinghouse Electric Corporation in the final months of the Second World War. In spite

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<sup>9</sup> Perlman, "Television Up in the Air," 490.

of how peculiar the functional model of television via airplane may seem to present observers, historian James C. Foust in his study of Stratovision notes that this method once held the full faith and enthusiasm of the FCC and commercial broadcasters for very practical reasons. Chief among these were the issues of interconnection and simulcasting, or the networks' ability to carry the same program simultaneously at all affiliated stations across the nation. As WUNC-TV faced the problem in the mid-1960s of how to share programs across multiple transmitter locations, so did commercial networks grappling with how to connect their many affiliated stations in the late 1940s. WUNC-TV chose, at considerable cost, to build microwave links between each transmitter location in North Carolina. Commercial networks had the same option of building microwave links for their nationwide reach, but along with the FCC, they initially considered Stratovision as a much cheaper alternative.<sup>10</sup>

Through late 1948, Westinghouse conducted three dozen flight tests of the Stratovision relay program, and by and large the company found the idea to be much more successful than many had expected. Test flight patterns centered on Pittsburgh, with the plane relaying the Steel City's local broadcasts during the day and signals from a Baltimore station during the evening. One of the more publicized tests was hosted by a country club in Zanesville, Ohio, where viewers with only standard home television equipment located 130 miles from Pittsburgh and nearly 300 miles from Baltimore, were able to pick up, a quality signal of the Baltimore station's coverage of the Republican National Convention. Program sponsors assured the event's attendees that "anyone with

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<sup>10</sup> James C. Foust, "The 'Atomic Bomb' of Broadcasting: Westinghouse's 'Stratovision' Experiment, 1944-1949," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 55, No. 4 (2011), 514-515.

a television set within 250 miles of Pittsburgh could have tuned in.”<sup>11</sup> Other high-profile demonstrations included prize fights and one game in the 1948 World Series.

Foust notes that in spite of the considerable buzz Stratovision was generating following its tests, Westinghouse engineers were met with mixed reactions after making their case to the FCC. One thing for certain was the practical use of an airplane system to reach the millions of households that were then out of reach of the handful of operating stations at that time. Walter Evans, Westinghouse Vice President, made this point his primary argument in the Commission hearings. He contended that the “most attractive feature” of Stratovision was “that it is the only way that we know of, or have heard advanced so far, that anyone other than in metropolitan or suburban areas are going to get television.” To Evans’s knowledge, Stratovision was “the only way that we know of that farmers in the rural communities, and those in the smaller towns, are going to get television service in the foreseeable future.” Evans did not undersell the portentousness of his company’s creation, and he made the case that the new concept could fundamentally alter the landscape of airwaves in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

Commissioners recognized the benefits airborne television could offer rural areas, but they were unwilling to entertain the system’s potential challenge to the accepted logic of radio and television licenses. Moreover they were concerned that granting a Stratovision plane license to retransmit broadcasts hundreds of miles away could lead to signal interference with ground-based stations already licensed to operate in that area, or

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<sup>11</sup> Foust, “The ‘Atomic Bomb’ of Broadcasting,” 520; “Plane Telecasts Session: Stratovision Takes It 300 Miles From Ground Station,” *New York Times*, June 24, 1948 (quotation).

<sup>12</sup> “Utilization of Frequencies In The Band 475 to 890 Megacycles For Television Broadcasting,” (1948), Box 266-286, Docket 8976, FCC Docketed Case Files, NARA II, quoted in Foust, “The ‘Atomic Bomb’ of Broadcasting,” 519.

at least undermine the autonomy of the latter's programming. The Commission denied Westinghouse's applications to carry the commercial broadcasts of any station, but approved the viability of Stratovision as a legitimate means of special projects in television broadcasting, should any such later endeavor be developed. The Commission's report affirmed the primacy of local ground-based stations in their approval process, and even though Stratovision would, in their view, "be a most useful instrument in providing service to the sparsely settled rural areas of the country," the demand for the airplanes' service in those rural areas had come from the metropolitan areas, and not the rural residents themselves.<sup>13</sup>

Stratovision was barred from carrying commercial broadcasts, but they would eagerly sign on to the noncommercial, educational project being developed years later in West Lafayette, Indiana, by the Purdue Research Foundation. By the time Westinghouse entered into a contract with MPATI and Purdue, nearly a decade after the FCC's decision, Stratovision was merely a patented system; if Purdue wanted to use Stratovision to conduct its ETV experiment, the university would have to provide two aircraft for Westinghouse to modify and equip with umbilical antennae and other onboard hardware. Westinghouse's proposal to Purdue, submitted in December of 1959, shows a clear desire to act efficiently and expeditiously. Should the aircraft be submitted to Westinghouse's Maryland facility by January of 1960, the modifications and broadcasting capability

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<sup>13</sup> "FCC Studies Stratovision: Hears Pro and Con on Television Plane Relays in Pittsburgh Area," *New York Times*, July 27, 1948; Federal Communication Commission, *Third Notice of Proposed Rulemaking* (March 21, 1951), quoted in Foust, "The 'Atomic Bomb' of Broadcasting," 521.



would be ready in time for a July test flight and full operation beginning with the 1960 fall semester.<sup>14</sup>

### **Developing MPATI**

As seen in the history of WUNC-TV, the Ford Foundation's investments into ETV shifted increasingly in the 1950s toward instructional television and away from general audience programming. MPATI can thus be considered a high watermark for instructional television, as grant applications and correspondence between Purdue, MPATI, and the Ford Foundation reveal an enormous investment in the early 1960s, followed by a complete abandonment of the project by the end of the decade. It is also clear from communication within these various organizations that while the plight of rural Midwestern schools spurred the interest and sympathy of the various organizations and investors, MPATI was conceived as merely a prototype for similarly ambitious television projects in other disadvantaged regions. In this regard, the noncommercial, philanthropic interests behind MPATI were similar to the commercial interests that first explored Stratovision: both envisioned airplanes ushering in a new era of telecommunications and connectivity between rural and metropolitan areas.

Much like the regions of North Carolina beyond Chapel Hill and the Consolidated University, the educators who first convened on the idea of an airborne television service in the Midwest were concerned that the benefits of rapidly-developing instructional television programs would bypass many rural and struggling urban schools. In their

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<sup>14</sup> "Proposal For Airborne Educational Television: Presented to Midwest Council on Airborne Educational Television," 1-3, Reel 0207, Grants O-R, FA732F, Purdue Research Foundation, Ford Foundation Records.

initial funding request to Henry T. Heald of the Ford Foundation, the early members of the Midwest Council on Airborne Educational Television cited three major obstacles to providing instructional television to schools. Similar to WUNC-TV's critics, they observed that though ETV stations operated in the Midwest's urban centers, "a large majority of school children, particularly in small towns and rural areas where educational help is needed most, are beyond the reach of these ETV stations." They also cited the closed-circuit networks some areas had constructed to reach schools outside a station's reach, but to the collective interests of a new Midwestern consortium of educators, this method would be too expensive to implement throughout the large area they oversaw.<sup>15</sup>

The third obstacle noted in this appeal to Heald of the Ford Foundation shows the beginning of MPATI's divergence from local ETV broadcasters. The Midwest council made the novel argument that even if the disadvantaged schools across the region were to receive the broadcasts of the existing ETV stations, the programming of those stations was inadequate to the task of aiding those schools. "A single open-circuit channel," they remarked, "cannot serve a very significant portion of the whole curriculum or grade spectrum," limited, as such channels were, to "a maximum of 12 half-hour units of instruction in a six-hour school day, enough for only one half-hour per day at each grade level." Here they noted a unique advantage of Stratovision: the airplanes were capable of broadcasting six channels simultaneously.<sup>16</sup> Thus they set their sights on how MPATI could serve every grade level, including some college courses, at a given time every day of the week.

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<sup>15</sup> Clarence Foust to Henry T. Heald, August 21, 1959, p. 4, Reel 0205, Grants O-R, FA732F, Purdue Research Foundation, Ford Foundation Records.

<sup>16</sup> Clarence Foust to Henry T. Heald, August 21, 1959, p. 4-7.

Initial correspondence between the Midwest Council on Airborne Television and Henry T. Heald of the Ford Foundation also revealed an interesting and new perspective from the former on schools the airplanes would reach during the day. Not only would the instructional broadcasts serve as a helpful resource to schools that lacked the resources and advantages of urban and other wealthier districts—it would also improve the qualities of the teachers working in the disadvantaged schools. Frederick Hovde, President of the Purdue Research Foundation said the tentative educational program was “designed to bring courses of the highest possible quality to the schools and colleges in the area served.” This would include courses that smaller and disadvantaged schools could not offer otherwise, but he also stressed that MPATI would “offer courses which are customarily offered in all schools, but whose quality is generally in need of substantial improvement.”<sup>17</sup> Educational broadcasters had for years attested to the benefits ETV would provide to schools that were lacking in wealth and resources, especially in light of the burdens schools had to bear as a result of the baby boom generation. MPATI though took this concern a step further by assigning some of the blame for poorer performance in schools on the teachers themselves.

The slight towards teachers in the rural Midwest and in struggling urban schools in the region is subtle, but it reflects some of the dissent between local interests and the central authority of MPATI that would accumulate mutually over the course of the 1960s. Evidently this condescension toward local teachers and administrators was present in other investments Ford was making into ETV in that decade. Henry Heald’s address to a

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<sup>17</sup> Frederick L. Hovde to Henry T. Heald, October 31, 1959, p. 4-5, Reel 0205, Grants O-R, FA732F, Purdue Research Foundation, Ford Foundation Records

national parent-teacher association conference in New York City in early 1960 conveyed his enthusiasm for ETV and other technological improvements in U.S. education, but his remarks were laced with similar jabs at schools near the conference site. An “educational revolution is beginning to sweep the United States,” Heald remarked: one where “traditional academic walls are beginning to break down between the university campus and the school classroom, and between academic fields.” There was, however, a “loss of perspective” to this revolution, and he identified struggling New York City schools as “one of the most dismal examples.” He lamented further: “there is no mystery about why India and Africa lack first-class educational systems. But it is discouraging that New York—so richly endowed with human and material resources—is educationally undeveloped.”<sup>18</sup>

Much of the planning within MPATI development thus revolved around teacher inservice training, with the intent that teachers in struggling Midwestern schools could be better acclimated to the technological revolution underway. Furthermore, if teachers and schools in the Midwest showed marked improvement through the use of MPATI courses, then those courses and new airborne networks could easily be pitched and implemented in other regions. In John Ivey’s press release for his other educational agency, the Learning Resources Institute, he notes that “while the technical aspects of the airborne project are tremendously important, the educational and public administration efforts which must accompany such a project are just as vital.” The combination of a corps of teachers continuously improving their skills through studying and implementing

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<sup>18</sup> “President Henry T. Heald Address to Annual Conference Luncheon of the United Parents Association,” January 9, 1960, folder 165, box 6, FA 1322, series 1, Ford Foundation Records.

television courses, along with the interstate cooperation needed to sustain a project like MPATI, was the ideal achievement for Ivey. Doing so, in his view would open up the possibility of “adapting the airborne television technique of the Midwestern experiment for underdeveloped countries which are seeking ways to break through the ‘illiteracy barrier.’”<sup>19</sup> Replication was key for Ivey and other members of the MPATI council: the plight of schools in the Midwest was the prime motivating factor, but they had to demonstrate MPATI’s benefits and sustainability to the schools themselves, their colleagues, and Ford Foundation directors looking to develop similar experiments in other areas.

In Spring of 1960, MPATI conducted a nationwide “audition” for teachers interested in providing courses for the program. Over 300 teachers submitted kinescope recordings and 88 were eventually chosen as participants, as “the nation’s most outstanding teachers,” by MPATI’s standards. Very clearly the Council meant for its initial demonstrations to feature Midwestern teachers, since 13 of the 16 teachers who would produce courses for the trial run were from schools in the region. Nearly all of the initial teachers had experience in producing ETV programs. The selection panel was chaired by a veteran producer of an early NBC educational program, so it is also likely that standards for the “audition” included some measure of on-air personality and performance. The first courses selected also displayed a wide variety in subjects and

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<sup>19</sup> “Press Release From Learning Resources Institute,” December 21, 1959, p. 6, Reel 0207, Grants O-R, FA732F, Purdue Research Foundation, Ford Foundation Records.

teaching level: a mix of elementary through university instruction, and subjects ranging from mathematics and history to drama, foreign languages, and elementary music.<sup>20</sup>

The initial demonstration courses for MPATI, transmitted by the aircraft, would not begin until the Spring Semester of 1961, but the summer of 1960 saw a number of workshops hosted by the agency for teachers in schools that planned to incorporate MPATI courses in the curriculum. The nineteen host sites for these workshops—all institutions of higher education—demonstrate that MPATI had attracted a very distinguished company of supporters to serve as “resource institutions.” Area educators could attend workshops at a number of adjacent schools, including Purdue, Notre Dame, Northwestern University, DePaul, Ohio State University, the University of Wisconsin, and many others. Institutions serving as hosts designed the workshops “to acquaint Midwest school systems with the potentialities of using television in the classroom, to describe and discuss the airborne program, and to outline needs for receiving equipment,” all with an attentive eye toward “the local needs and interests” of the adjacent schools. The press release announcing the workshops though, reiterated the same subtle indictment of the participating schools, noting that “the primary objective of the workshops, as well as that of the airborne project itself, is to help improve the quality of instruction in the classroom.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “Press Release From Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction,” July 5, 1960, Reel 0207, Grants O-R, FA732F, Purdue Research Foundation, Ford Foundation Records.

<sup>21</sup> “Press Release From Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction,” June 27, 1960, Reel 0207, Grants O-R, FA732F, Purdue Research Foundation, Ford Foundation Records.

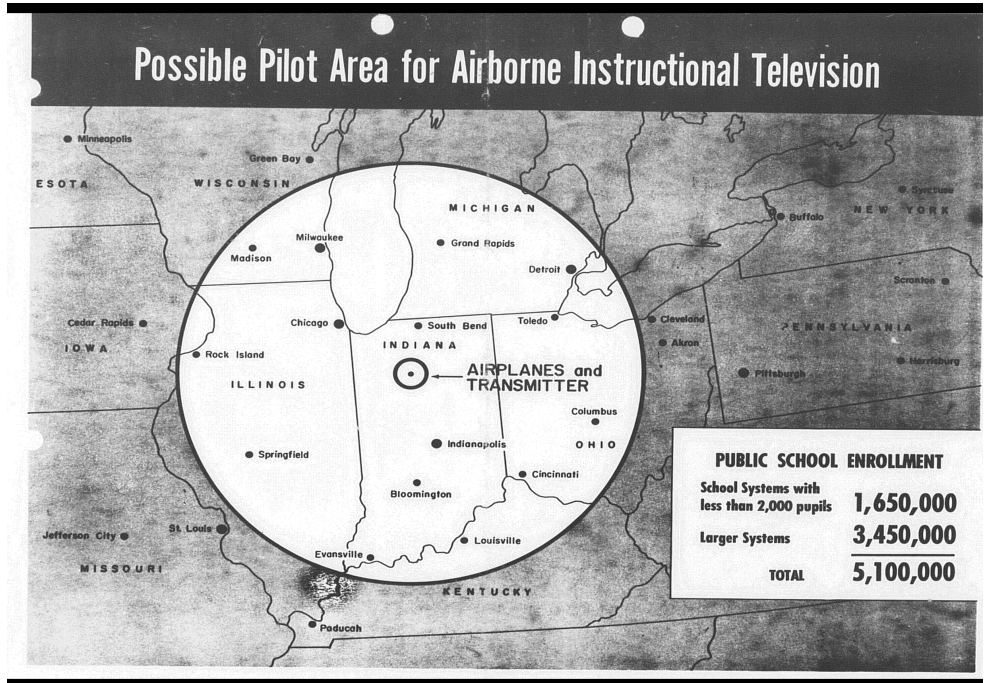


Figure 1: Estimated Reach of MPATI Signal

Proponents of MPATI (or of ETV in general) seldom gave any specific or exact diagnoses for where schools or teachers were falling behind. In MPATI's "Manual for Area Coordinators and Area Committees," circulated in October of 1960, some specific setbacks were noted, such as a lack of foreign language course offerings in many of the participating states, and also the considerable portion of mathematics and science teachers' college degrees that were based in subjects other than the ones they were currently teaching. For the most part though, MPATI highlighted the impending baby boom generation as the greatest threat to education systems in the Midwest. A troubling figure given by the manual held that "if all the graduates of our [midwestern] liberal arts colleges were to enter the teaching profession in 1970, we would still not have enough qualified teachers to take care of the demand for teachers in the elementary and secondary schools."<sup>22</sup> Under-resourced schools in the urban and rural Midwest may have felt this crisis more acutely than their more well-off neighbors, but MPATI stressed that the entire nation was facing this problem.

A case can also be made that MPATI, in spite of its lack of specificity in identifying problems, benefitted from the wave of enthusiasm for educational reform that followed the test of the Soviet Union satellite, Sputnik. Many historians of American education consider the late 1950s and early 1960s as a prolific moment for investments into educational reform, citing a general fear that American schools were not producing graduates as imaginative and technologically savvy as their Soviet counterparts. The

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<sup>22</sup> "Manual for Area Coordinators and Area Committees," October, 1960, 1-2, folder 755, box 71, FA 1395, series 4, Ford Foundation Records.



visionary tone employed by Ivey and other MPATI boosters certainly fits along the “missionary zeal” Diane Ravitch associates with the post-Sputnik era in *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980*, where “on all educational fronts, innovation was the watchword,” and “new technology, it was believed, had made the traditional, egg-crate school obsolete.”<sup>23</sup> MPATI, as an extension of Purdue University’s Research Foundation, also exemplifies John Thelin’s description of this era in higher education, as the four million dollars Ford gave to initiate MPATI was but one token in what Thelin calls the grant “bonanza” of the 1950s, especially since it aimed at such conspicuous efforts in scientific and technological innovation.<sup>24</sup>

Assurances for how MPATI could redress the struggles of disadvantaged schools also figure in the discourse of the era’s key educational figureheads. During the “educational crisis” following Sputnik, the name on the lips of every reformer was James B. Conant, former president of Harvard University and author of a number of critical studies on United States education. The most popular of these, *The American High School Today* (published 1959) gave a range of recommendations for local schools, including “small high schools” (a category Conant largely applies to small schools in rural areas), and large city high schools situated in primarily working-class communities.

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<sup>23</sup> Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 232-233. For more recent treatments of the era, see Wayne J. Urban, *More Than Science And Sputnik: The National Defense Education Act of 1958* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 2010), and Thomas D. Fallace, *In the Shadow of Authoritarianism: American Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> John R. Thelin, *History of American Higher Education*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 277-279.

In both of these cases, Conant argued, schools in the U.S suffered from a dearth of course offerings. Urban, working class schools, affected as they were by a sudden shift toward suburbanization and a longer shift toward vocational school, were not able to offer the same “comprehensive” education as schools in wealthier and suburban districts, and were thus, according to *The American High School Today*, stunting the socioeconomic prospects of their students.<sup>25</sup> The plight of the “small high schools” was much more dire, however, in Conant’s view. Curricular options for schools with graduating classes of 100 or fewer made for, in his evaluation, an instructional program “neither sufficiently broad nor sufficiently challenging,” and such a school, he said, “uses uneconomically the time of administrators, teachers, and specialists, the shortage of whom is a serious national problem.” The answer to Conant was consolidation, or “reorganization:” get rid of small schools and find a way to bring a sufficient amount of students together from far-flung rural areas.<sup>26</sup>

In light of Conant’s recommendations, MPATI’s offerings seem tailored to school systems looking to implement these changes. One of the first promotional bulletins sent to schools, titled “A Regional Exploration in Education,” did not attempt to mask the fact that it was offering its services at a fee. It did, however, insist that compared with the drastic investment many schools needed to expand course offerings, deal with increasingly large class sizes, and continually train and aid teachers, MPATI’s new and unconventional model could help with all these burdens at a much lower relative

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<sup>25</sup> James Bryant Conant, *The American High School Today: A First Report to Interested Citizens* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), 90-91.

<sup>26</sup> Conant, *The American High School Today*, 77-80.

cost. Both at-risk categories outlined by Conant could benefit: working class and lower-income schools in urban areas, and smaller schools in rural areas could add to their curriculum without major revenue increases or personnel additions. Most notably, the latter could do so without broaching the laborious and often bitter process of consolidation, and MPATI acknowledged that over a third of the students in its proposed broadcast area were “in school systems of less than 2,000 pupils” and “for the most part...too small to provide a satisfactory education under present conditions.”<sup>27</sup>

In developing courses to carry over a six-state region, MPATI proceeded with great sensitivity in its status as a centralized ETV authority. In communications with the Ford Foundation, Ivey and his colleagues made it clear that their service offered needed improvements to teachers and schools in the Midwest, but they were also quick to point out that their services would not stifle the autonomy and potential creativity of teachers in local areas within the broader Midwest. Amid the discourse and uncertainty in U.S. education following Sputnik, MPATI acknowledged the need for better knowledge transfer from university faculty and distinguished primary and secondary teachers throughout the nation, but they insisted on local schools’ ability to communicate observations and course ideas back to MPATI planners through area resource committees.

The manual for these area committees made it clear: “community representation and participation in the execution and management of the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction are of key importance to the success of the project.” Area resource

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<sup>27</sup> “Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction: A Regional Exploration in Education,” 1960, 8-10, folder 765, box 71, FA 1395, series 4, Ford Foundation Records.

committees, located mainly in colleges and universities, were to be directed by an officer appointed by MPATI who would gather reports and recommendations to the central committee. Area coordinators were expected to ensure a good representation in their area committees of teachers and administrators from local schools, but they were also encouraged to consider other community representatives, such as “state educational associations, parent-teacher groups, legislators, educational television stations, adult education, chambers of commerce, civic groups, service clubs, and other community organizations.”<sup>28</sup> The kinds of participants, the manual noted, would vary between the different subregions, but directions for composing the area committees showed clearly MPATI’s desire to effect a regional transformation, one that all members of the local communities should observe.

Still, Ivey and his colleagues were careful not to present MPATI courses as an imposition on schools that might have been skeptical, or were unable to secure membership in the MPATI program. Nor did they think that the MPATI courses should be the exclusive benefit of the schools that formally subscribed to them. Area coordinators were informed that “participation of schools in MPATI is voluntary and the extent of participation optional,” and that any participating school “may use as many or as few classrooms of the telecasts as it wishes and may equip as many or as few classrooms for television as it chooses.” Printed materials that went along with MPATI courses were licensed for use in the schools that paid for them, but aside from the fact that MPATI broadcast channels were in the UHF bandwidth range, there were no specific technical modifications necessary to receive a Stratovision signal--MPATI freely

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<sup>28</sup> “Manual for Area Coordinators and Area Committees,” 30, Ford Foundation Records.

acknowledged that schools and homes could and likely would use them without paying. “There is no reason,” the area committee manual cautioned, “why any school may not proceed independently to equip itself and make use of the telecasts without dealing with [MPATI].” In this sense, area staff members were expected to act as salesmen, making the case to schools that the full benefits of ETV would go to subscribers, since those schools had the area committees’ resources of “consultation, printed materials, and other assistance.”<sup>29</sup> MPATI had received a generous investment from the Ford Foundation, but the agency’s survival depended on maintaining the attractiveness of the courses as well as these auxiliary subscriber benefits.

These auxiliary materials reveal that MPATI was not content to merely suggest that teachers have a television set in classrooms that they could use at their discretion-- they believed that instructional television would revolutionize the order and function of the American classroom. The guidebook distributed to participating schools, *Using Television in the Classroom* (1961) offered extensive recommendations for how teachers could arrange their classroom environments for an optimal learning “climate” with television as a resource, and it also considered thoughtfully the question of how best to process the material offered in telecasts among typical American schoolchildren. For one, participating teachers would have to be conscious of how classroom spaces were set up, in order to effectively utilize television to scientifically ensure “maximum learning conditions.”<sup>30</sup> More broadly, teachers working with MPATI telecasts were encouraged to think of the “studio teachers” in the programs as colleagues or partners. “Under such

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<sup>29</sup> “Manual for Area Coordinators and Area Committees,” 35, Ford Foundation Records.

<sup>30</sup> Mary Howard Smith, ed., *Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction: Using Television in the Classroom* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961), 53

circumstances,” the guidebook assured, “the studio instructor and classroom instructor can help each other be as effective as possible--probably more effective than either would be alone.” The indirect, but regular communication between participating schools and local resource centers would be the foundation for this partnership, allowing “a splendid opportunity for cross-fertilization of ideas and for becoming familiar with different points of view and different approaches.”<sup>31</sup>

The extent to which MPATI detailed how classrooms should be arranged in order to optimize learning is impressive. Of course, the television sets schools needed to install in order to use televised lessons (“21 to 24 inches in size are usually recommended...mounted high enough for good viewing”) were expected to have high-quality, uninterrupted signal reception, but overall recommendations were more comprehensive. According to the guidebook, students should be seated “no nearer than 8 feet from the screen, no farther than 21 feet from a 21-inch screen,” in sound-dampened rooms with good lighting, but not so bright as to leave a glare on the television during broadcasts. The guidebook also stressed that however useful a tool MPATI programs would be to the classroom teacher, they should also be supplemented with plenty of more conventional classroom equipment, including reference books, maps, globes, and charts, and other audio-visual aids for learners. Such accoutrements were expensive and likely cost-prohibitive for a number of schools in MPATI’s territory, but the guidebook stressed that they were needed in order to fully “reinforce and expand the television part of the lesson.” MPATI planners were not ignorant of schools that could not afford all of the

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<sup>31</sup> Smith, ed., *Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction: Using Television in the Classroom*, 23.

recommended auxiliary classroom resources, but they reasoned that “a scarcity of these aids will emphasize the teacher’s need to make optimum use of the telecasts, since the studio teacher will utilize many of them in his presentation.”<sup>32</sup>

Ivey’s report to James Armsey, education director of the Ford Foundation, displayed a clear optimism for the willingness of schools to buy into the program: over 8,000 teachers were expected to take part in the area workshops in the summer of 1961. Tensions over funding and financing suffused nearly all communications between MPATI and Ford over the course of the decade. It was eminently clear that though Ford had made a generous grant of over seven million dollars for the experimental period of 1959-1962, they fully expected MPATI to be self-sufficient by 1964.<sup>33</sup>

Ford’s rationale on the matter dates back to an internal memo from 1957, titled “The Economics of Educational Television,” which did not minimize television’s potential as a transformative medium, but made clear that Ford did not intend to be the primary benefactor for ETV. Signs of success for ETV, in the memo’s perspective, would not only include a clear ability to communicate and instill information in viewers, but would also be seen in an acceptance by other possible “foundations” of financial support. Ford would not abandon its support entirely, but it expected that ETV would have to attract support from other sources “for risk capital to undertake new and experimental educational television ventures,” like MPATI, “which have promise of broadening and deepening its benevolent influence on our American culture and society.”

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<sup>32</sup> Smith, ed., *Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction: Using Television in the Classroom*, 53-61.

<sup>33</sup> John Ivey to James E. Armsey, June 13, 1961, p. 2, Reel 0205, Grants O-R, FA732F, Purdue Research Foundation, Ford Foundation Records.

MPATI participants and administrators may have received in the early stages of the program some remarkable advances in educational resources, but their benefactors impressed upon them and all others in the “educational television movement” the need to “extricate” from an “over-riding dependence--in terms of day-to-day operating funds--on philanthropic support.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Ford Investment in Other Nation’s ETV**

MPATI’s aspirations toward regional transformation were not unique among Ford Foundation ETV projects, and here it is worth examining the global scope of Ford’s investment into the new educational medium. In addition to grants and technical assistance to nearly every ETV station working across the United States, Ford also supported dozens of other nations eager to use television to overcome their educational deficiencies. Nothing so spectacular as Stratovision was used in other nations, but reports of ETV projects from abroad regularly focused on television’s benefits for the whole country, rather than individual cities or provinces. This indicates that Ford felt in these cases that broadcasts could engender a large improvement across multiple local school systems.

Investment by Ford into ETV overseas lasted well into the 1970s, but the contemporary operations to MPATI have many of the same characteristics. General programming, with the aim of reaching both school-age children and adults, was viewed as an ideal eventual goal, but the emphasis was certainly on classroom instructional

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<sup>34</sup> “The Economics of Educational Television” Internal Memorandum, 1957, Virtual Vault Report No.010504, Rockefeller Archive Center.



aid. Such was the case for Ford's investment into ETV in the United Arab Republic (UAR), the short-lived union of Egypt and Syria. A report to Ford on the growth of television in the UAR noted that broadcast availability was expanding swiftly in both states: matching, in the observer's view "the speed and scope [of] the early spread and acceptance of TV in the United States."<sup>35</sup> Offerings from Egyptian and Syrian stations were at the time mostly "entertainment-based," but the report noted a respectable and growing commitment by the UAR Ministry of State to educational programming. ETV programs ran for an average of two hours per day, and came in four categories: literacy training (including foreign language), technical training, agricultural training, and "school use (cultural enrichment)." However favorably the report's authors looked on these general broadcasts, though, they insisted that the UAR would have to formally incorporate ETV into its Ministry of Education, and conceive of ETV first through the classroom environment. Until that agency was firmly in control of UAR's ETV operations "with clear responsibility and authority," the authors averred, "ETV in the UAR cannot really be 'educational' in the sense of systematic, sequential, televised instruction."<sup>36</sup>

The Ford Foundation construed its role in other nations' ETV services as that of a consulting firm and not a benefactor, even though the technical expertise and equipment were the ultimate prize sought by nations who applied for their services. As in the case of MPATI, the terms of any agreement between the Ford Foundation and developing countries held that beneficiaries must demonstrate self sufficiency and the potential for

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<sup>35</sup> "Educational Television in The United Arab Republic" internal memorandum, August 2, 1961, p. 1, Virtual Vault Report No.008314, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>36</sup> "Educational Television in The United Arab Republic," 8.

growth. The UAR certainly demonstrated the latter. “Because of the flat terrain and favorable atmospheric conditions,” the Ford representatives noted, transmitters already in operation in the UAR had the potential to reach 70 percent of the population, and after a few years of receiver importation and production were projected to reach 500,000 homes and schools.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, Ford looked favorably on the ETV pilot project underway in Colombia, which, after a trial run of six months in the school district of the capital, Bogotá, and surrounding area, was prepared to begin expanding into 1,500 additional primary schools in the surrounding rural areas.<sup>38</sup>

Ford’s involvement in Colombian ETV was much more befitting their intended role as consultants, as they were only brought into assess what the Colombian Government had to that point demonstrated in the way of ETV, and broker an arrangement between Colombia and their prospective benefactors, the Peace Corps and the United States Agency for International Development. In this arrangement, the Ford Foundation hefted its considerable reputation as a developer of educational television, offering unyielding criticism of where the fledgling Colombian ETV broadcasts succeeded and failed. They did not dismiss the Latin American nation entirely out of hand, but strongly suggested to their U.S. Government colleagues that a number of “crucial” problems needed be addressed before aid was extended. These issues bear a striking similarity to the problems John Ivey and the MPATI board envisioned and so stringently sought to avoid. Colombian ETV, in Ford’s view, suffered from “a seeming multiplicity of purposes,” and “a lack of any specific evaluation procedures” for how

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<sup>37</sup> “Educational Television in The United Arab Republic,” 3.

<sup>38</sup> Clifton Mitchell, “Educational Television in Colombia” internal memorandum, March, 1963, p. 4, Virtual Vault Report No.008314, Rockefeller Archive Center.

effective their educational broadcasts would be long term. There was also an apparent “ambiguity as to who or what body shall assume authority and responsibility,” as the impetus for an ETV program had come moreover from the state communications administration, and did not establish a clear partnership with the schools and teachers they were meaning to serve. Most damning of all though, was the report’s observation of “a lack of adequate and clear plans for continuation after U.S. funds are expended and agency support is withdrawn.”<sup>39</sup> This fate would overtake MPATI and many other ETV ventures, and its mention with regard to Colombia gave a clear red flag to any prospective philanthropic agency.

India’s foray into ETV began years before these other nations, and like stations in the United States, saw substantial NGO investment, both from the Ford Foundation and UNESCO. The newly independent Indian government initially requested help in acquiring a small supply of television receivers, but consultation with James Armsey of the Ford Foundation led to a much more ambitious project. The first objective recommended by Ford was to specifically provide, by 1961, televised lectures and demonstrations for all secondary-level science classes in Delhi. This would require far more than television equipment--the municipal government of Delhi had yet to even provide electricity to all schools.<sup>40</sup> Power for lights as well as the equipment and supplies needed for fully functional science classroom laboratories would be incredibly expensive, and it would likely take years before any semblance of uniformity across a school system

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<sup>39</sup> Mitchell, “Educational Television in Colombia,” intro, p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> “Educational Television in India” internal memorandum, February, 24, 1966, p. 42, Virtual Vault Report No.008314, Rockefeller Archive Center.

in a city like Delhi. Television, it was believed, could quickly shore up some of the disparities while larger capital improvements were underway.

Reports filed with the Ford Foundation on the ETV activities of different nations vary somewhat in their thoroughness. The observation on the use of ETV in classrooms in Niger, for instance, produced a report of only a few pages, with brief, straightforward statements on what television-capable classrooms looked like, and how well they appeared to be improving the learning of the students. “The children seemed lively and interested,” the report remarked. “They talked back to the television teacher or the television demonstrator while the program was in progress,” and were similarly “lively and talkative after the television program was over.” Pressing technical issues were noted, along with some apparent shortcomings in the educational programs produced in Niger, but overall “the impression gained was that the television education was working well and was particularly suitable to a country such as Niger.” By contrast, the report on ETV in India is a tome, with hundreds of pages devoted to the specific applications of ETV in that nation, as well as broad, philosophical analysis of how ETV could effect positive change in developing countries.

India’s experiment in ETV, as the 1966 report made clear, was purposed more toward improving the quality of teachers, many of whom were coming into the classroom with training inadequate to the standards set by local school directors in Delhi. That, along with the rising populations of students in Delhi’s schools, were the main concern, and the report did not project how ETV’s use in a city might compare to rural areas. The author of Ford’s report noted that the successes and failures of ETV in Delhi would “prove useful...when the time comes for its expansion to Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, and

other cities.”<sup>41</sup> Unlike the visions MPATI proffered of an uplifted and transformed Midwest region, Ford’s contemporaneous prospects for ETV in India were limited to the metropolitan centers.

### **Making the Pitch**

MPATI bore the same scrutiny given to these developing nations by the Ford Foundation, and thus they doggedly pursued the two general goals seen in the reports on ETV in the developing world: financial self-sufficiency and close consultation with educational authorities at state and local levels throughout the Midwest. Their credentials in the latter were well established through the workshops for participating teachers and input from higher education institutions and school districts. And while the initial investment by Ford gave MPATI a comfortable starting point as it established its own nonprofit status apart from the Purdue Research Foundation, Ivey and Brownell knew that if the system didn’t firmly catch on in two or three years, their grand experiment would be shuttered. MPATI’s ledger dated July 1, 1962 showed the considerable asset of over 5 million dollars from the Ford Foundation and other contributors, but expenditures would claim that amount in a few years’ time. The cost of the planes stood out particularly—over \$550,000 every six months would go to maintenance of the aircraft and licensing fees to the Westinghouse Corporation for use of the Stratovision patent. The trial semesters had earned MPATI a decent amount of revenue through subscriptions

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<sup>41</sup> “Educational Television in India,” 18.

and sale of taped programs and other learning materials, but it was clear that the organization would have to consistently expand their service in order to stay afloat.<sup>42</sup>

MPATI's progress in the 62-63 school year can be seen in their status report to Ford in May of 1963. Though the statement is forthright in the areas where the service had fallen short, overall it assured the Ford Foundation that "the original concerns regarding the establishment of the system have been alleviated."<sup>43</sup> Their success is most evidently felt in the reliability of their technical equipment. A number of schools had reception difficulties, largely due to the fact that receivers at many schools did not have UHF capability, or staff on site did not know how to access MPATI's programs or other broadcasts in the upper channels. Large cities also proved to be problematic for reception, as taller buildings blocked signal transmission and had to be equipped with new repeater devices called "translators" to accommodate for the interruption. Still, with quick fixes for these transmission difficulties, MPATI was confident that signals could be received consistently in areas 210 miles from the plane's daily flight pattern in central Indiana. Furthermore, the report noted, the intensive focus on producing high quality programs in consultation with the schools they were serving had raised MPATI's profile nationwide, and the central office was also distributing taped versions of their courses to schools in 15 cities outside the Midwest for an additional 4,000 schools reached.

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<sup>42</sup> "Airborne Television Instruction Fund (A Fund of Purdue Research Foundation) Statement of Assets, Liabilities and Fund Balance, June 30, 1962" Series Ford Foundation Grants—L to N, Reel 0230, Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, Inc., September 12, 1962 – September 11, 1966, Ford Foundation Records.

<sup>43</sup> "A Report to The Ford Foundation on the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, Inc., May, 1963," p. 1, Series Ford Foundation Grants—L to N, Reel 0230, Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, Inc., September 12, 1962 – September 11, 1966, Ford Foundation Records.

The critical area for MPATI was membership. Though the agency freely acknowledged that all schools in the broadcast area could receive their programs without paying, they would still have to convince school districts and higher-ed institutions of the benefits of MPATI's interstate network. "The 1,200 schools and colleges attracted into membership by these services," the 1963 report observed, "are still a relatively small portion of the 15,000 schools and colleges" across the Midwest. "It is recognized," the report continued, "that this number must multiply several times over before the organization can achieve self-sufficiency." Ivey and Brownell did not imagine that the majority of schools in the region would become members, but they issued the reasonable goal that with a rate increase of 25 percent gradually over three years, along with 4,400 new member schools over that same period, MPATI could, by the end of the 1967 school year, operate self-sufficiently.<sup>44</sup>

The chief strategy for expanding membership ranks, in MPATI's view, was to expand course offerings. Data collected from member schools through the first year of operation were considered by a scheduling committee at MPATI headquarters, in order to orchestrate a course schedule that would be most useful to all member schools (12).<sup>45</sup> With the two UHF channels initially allocated, MPATI had produced a wide array of courses to fit this daily schedule, ranging from high school history and literature courses, to elementary-level music and foreign language courses, to junior-high science and civics

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<sup>44</sup> A Report to The Ford Foundation on the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, Inc., May, 1963,"p. 7.

<sup>45</sup>"MPATI'S Educational Program: Supplementing 'A Report to The Ford Foundation on the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, Inc., June, 1963,'" p. 12, Series Ford Foundation Grants—L to N, Reel 0230, Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, Inc., September 12, 1962 – September 11, 1966, Ford Foundation Records.

courses. However broad the offerings may have been, program directors were not content to limit themselves to a two-channel system, since this engendered dizzying leaps between different subject matters and grade-level specifications across thirty-minute segments. Thus the goal for MPATI during these critical mid-1960s membership drives was to expand from two to six broadcast channels. An internal memo regarding the six-channel goal emphasized this crucial need, noting a substantial number of schools that had expressed favor toward the first two “experimental” years of the program, but had otherwise “delayed membership in the program until a wider range of materials is available.”<sup>46</sup>

As was the case facing educational broadcasters nationwide in 1952, MPATI’s goal of expanding their platform depended on a favorable ruling from the FCC. Local ETV stations had sprung up across the country in the intervening years, and had MPATI offered conventional, individual applications for channels in their area, they likely would have been granted those stations without much resistance. Their omnibus six-channel application, submitted in January, 1963, however, raised eyebrows at the Commission, and would ultimately require more than the expected deliberation period of one year.<sup>47</sup> Still, Ivey and his legal counsel felt confident going into the hearings for a number of reasons. The National Bureau of Standards, the federal government’s chief agency for consumer and commercial technology, filed a comment in their case affirming airborne television as the best use of available channels in the Midwest, and over a thousand

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<sup>46</sup> “Revised Plans for Developing Six-Channel Broadcast Equipment,” p. 1, Series Ford Foundation Grants—L to N, Reel 0230, Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, Inc., September 12, 1962 – September 11, 1966, Ford Foundation Records.

<sup>47</sup> “Revised Plans for Developing Six-Channel Broadcast Equipment,” p. 10.



endorsements from schools and educators in the region were received in support of the six-channel reservation.<sup>48</sup>

### **Challenge to MPATI**

The most outspoken opponents to MPATI's expansion were representatives of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters, and their testimony before the FCC against MPATI represents the most ironic and unfortunate aspect of the latter agency's brief history. Hardly a decade after the NAEB had stood before the FCC as newcomers arguing against established interests in commercial television broadcasting, they now acted as the establishment in noncommercial broadcasting, rejecting the rise of another new player following in their footsteps. The criticisms leveled at MPATI were not without merit: for all the airborne project's ambitions toward regional organization and improvement, they had yet to clearly demonstrate that their new medium would gain enough traction and support from the entire Midwest. Furthermore, MPATI's insistence on broadcasting exclusively in-class instructional programs was increasingly in doubt as the most effective use of noncommercial television airwaves.

Robert J. Blakely's early history of educational broadcasting, *To Serve the Public Interest* (1979) notes that the rift between strictly instructional TV and less formal mass-interest educational programs had been building in the years before MPATI took off.

The strong enthusiasm for ITV, Blakely observes, derived mainly from the uncertainty

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<sup>48</sup> "Revised Plans for Developing Six-Channel Broadcast Equipment," p. 10; "Reply Comments Submitted by the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, Inc., before the Federal Communications Commission in the Matter of Amendment of Part 3 of the Commission's Rules Governing TV Broadcast Stations to Authorize the Use of Airborne Television Transmitters," Series XII FA # 633, Box 19, Education and Research Division Program Files, Ford Foundation Records.

surrounding Sputnik and the postwar “educational crisis” narrative, as well as a “sheer mass” of “skillful publicity” on the part of ITV proponents like MPATI, Hagerstown School District, and the South Carolina network.<sup>49</sup> Blakely’s perspective is not only that of a historian: he served as assistant director of the Ford Foundation’s Fund for the Advancement of Education through 1961. Amid the praise poured out on television’s potential to radically transform classroom performance, many educational broadcasters demurred. ITV, they felt, was a worthwhile endeavor within educational television, but to privilege it at the expense of general ETV programming, which could be viewed and appreciated by audiences of all ages and educational attainment, belied the fundamental purpose of educational and noncommercial broadcasting.

Contrary to the daytime-only, school specific programming supported by MPATI, educational broadcasters at other stations across the country favored the idea of ETV as a side-along, primetime alternative to popular commercial programming. Colleagues throughout educational broadcasting tossed around the idea of ETV as a “fourth network” to the commercial giants of NBC, CBS, and ABC, and although they did not seriously believe that they could come anywhere close to the ratings of commercial broadcasters, the idea persisted as an aspirational goal.<sup>50</sup> A study released by Stanford University in 1963, *The People Look at Educational Television: A Report of Nine Representative ETV Stations*, confirmed that for most viewers, ETV functioned essentially as a “fourth

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<sup>49</sup> Blakely, *To Serve the Public Interest*, 138, 141.

<sup>50</sup> Blakely, *To Serve the Public Interest*, 143. Referring to noncommercial television as the “fourth network” owes mainly to the Ford Foundation’s National Educational Television and Radio Center (NETRC), which produced a large amount of programs for distribution to local stations. John F. White, president of the center, was the most outspoken for a fourth network, and advocated for the Ford Foundation to produce enough programming to rival the commercial networks, but he was not granted sufficient funds to meet that goal.

network,” one that could offer more interesting and stimulating programs in the primetime evening hours. In a survey of 52 ETV stations nationwide and profiles well-established stations in nine U.S. cities, the study found that in-school or instructional programs were common across the ETV landscape nationwide, the majority of virtually all stations’ programming was intended for mass viewing. Of the nine profiled areas, only Pittsburgh devoted more time to instructional programs than general interest—58% of its weekly schedule, compared to a 37% national average. By this measurement, MPATI’s 100%-instructional stance made the airborne operation seem particularly out of touch.<sup>51</sup>

The study also found that ETV viewers nationwide were generally a small but dedicated subset, often with white collar employment and higher education. The report’s section “Who is in the audience?” cross-referenced these findings with other indicators of literacy, finding that frequent ETV viewers were also more likely to attend concerts, lectures, civic meetings and discussion groups, and also to receive information via print sources in addition to television. The authors were quick to point out though, that the trend among ETV viewers toward higher social status was just that: the educational programs were not exclusively seen by “eggheads” or the “snobbish” as critics usually charged—they maintained a small but loyal “blue-collar” following as well. Though the study’s authors offered the stark conclusion that ETV’s ambition “to be the device by which the less educated members of society can make up for missed opportunities” had “not so far proved to be,” they remained hopeful that ETV, if it made further attempts to

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<sup>51</sup> Wilbur Schramm, Jack Lytle, and Ithiel de Sola Pool, *The People Look at Educational Television: A Report of Nine Representative ETV Stations* (Palo Alto, Calif., Stanford University Press, 1963), 37.

reach and entice less educated people, could still achieve that goal. So long as ETV retained its reputation as a haven for people with higher education, employment, and cultural distinction, the authors reasoned, “people who *do* have all or most of these characteristics will probably find their way to educational television unassisted.” But, the authors indicated with a clear, patronizing note, “those who do not have all or most of these characteristics must often be helped to find the way.”<sup>52</sup>

These conclusions of *The People Look at Educational Television*—that ETV reached a far greater number of people with general interest programs in the evening, and that more work was needed to reach and aid working class households and lifestyles—suffused the report filed by the National Association of Educational Broadcasters against MPATI. On its face, the challenge to MPATI was based primarily on the technical aspects of the proposed six-channel application: an omnibus application for specific channels across six midwestern states entailed the risk of signal interference and would admittedly require a change to FCC rules regarding channel reservations. The NAEB stressed, however, that these technical considerations amounted to a larger philosophical challenge to the accepted wisdom of improving education in the Midwest. Though they deemed MPATI’s course production and regional collaboration system worthy of praise, NAEB charged that further channel reservations for the airborne project posed a certain “technical problem,” one “directly related to a number of important utilization considerations both in the schools and among potential home viewers.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Schramm, Lytle, and de Sola Pool, *The People Look at Educational Television*, 88-90.

<sup>53</sup> “Report of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters on the Proposed Expansion of the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction,” p. 5, Series Ford Foundation Grants—L to N, Reel 0230, Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, Inc., September 12, 1962 – September 11, 1966, Ford Foundation Records.

The NAEB would not directly criticize instructional television as a whole—after all, many stations in their ranks offered classroom programming during the day as well—but they charged that MPATI’s effort to improve educational prospects in the region were empty as long as no programs were made available in the evening and signal from the airplane could not easily be received on all home television sets. “If airborne television is to make a comprehensive and significant contribution to meeting educational needs,” the report stressed, “it must be of a quality and stability that will make out-of-school, off-campus and general home reception possible for any program at any time” as well as the local, land-based stations the NAEB represented. Limiting reception and use of programs so squarely to school buildings made MPATI merely, in the NAEB’s view, a “point-to-point” communication service, something anathema to the FCC’s general philosophy of broadcast media. Furthermore, the NAEB observed that some MPATI subscriber schools could not serve the specific needs of their students if they could not access the broadcasts on their home sets. Distance education, or “off-campus instruction,” were “innovations...occurring constantly in great depth” in NAEB’s estimation, and by excluding them, MPATI limited schools like the Chicago City Junior College, who “could not serve its large enrollment if the [MPATI] signal could not be received adequately on home television receivers.”<sup>54</sup>

Considerations for where and how ETV broadcasts should be viewed in order to maximize educational improvement were the more reasonable of NAEB’s challenges to the airborne program. Another, less reasonable tack used to discredit MPATI, however,

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<sup>54</sup> Report of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters on the Proposed Expansion of the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction,” p. 7-8.

was one also used at roughly the same time by staunch conservatives in opposition to racial integration in schools, busing, and district consolidation. “There is no question,” the NAEB warned, “that a six-channel TV service controlled from a single point and distributed over a six-state area leaves little room for any local control, except to use or not use the materials which are transmitted.”<sup>55</sup> Their point here carefully sidesteps the reality that it would have taken many years to guarantee ETV transmissions for the entire area MPATI covered if each local area within those six states had to secure a ground-based educational channel for themselves. But this point made by the NAEB was both hypocritical and ironic. The established educational broadcasters praised MPATI on one hand, for their muscular system of attending to local issues within the large area they covered, and allowing those issues to reach the ears of the central administrators; on the other hand they stoked conspiratorial fears that midwestern schools would be in the grip of an inattentive centralized authority. Historian Campbell Scribner has detailed the prevalence of an impassioned defense of local control of schools, emphasizing that it extended well beyond the assumed intolerant South, and into school districts all across the nation.<sup>56</sup> The irony in the NAEB’s position was that their own members were often accused by local communities of essentially the same crime when local stations ran programs with messages about Black history and integration.

Altogether, the NAEB informed the FCC that the airborne television experimental service was a laudable one, but it had not been as successful as originally thought, and

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<sup>55</sup> Report of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters on the Proposed Expansion of the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction,” p. 12.

<sup>56</sup> Campbell F. Scribner, *The Fight for Local Control: Schools, Suburbs, and American Democracy* (Ithaca, Ny.: Cornell University Press, 2016), 4-5.

further accommodation to it could set a radical new precedent that the federal bureaucracy was not able to administer. In contrast to MPATI's reports to their Ford Foundation benefactors, which emphasized a modest but diligent drive for new member schools, NAEB took the more pessimistic outlook that "there remain nearly 90% of schools in the area which do not participate in the programs, and there is no indication at the moment that these schools will automatically become participants if the airborne service is expanded." Reporting on the FCC proceedings, the *Louisville Courier-Journal* signaled that in spite of the bubbling demand for new ETV operations around the nation, the FCC was largely uneasy about MPATI's potential monopolizing of the region. The future of the "wild-blue-yonder" MPATI program, the *Courier-Journal* quipped, was "up in the air."<sup>57</sup>

### **The Appalachia Plan**

Here it is worth noting that, roughly concurrent to the FCC's deliberation on the future of MPATI, another ambitious, region-specific, administrative program was being introduced to the American public by the NAEB but through the newly minted Appalachian Regional Commission. The ARC, created in 1965, was the culmination of two decades worth of antipoverty and economic development ideology, spurred by a broad fascination with the mountain region's apparent poverty and underdevelopment. Though most of the Commission's high profile initiatives focused on physical

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<sup>57</sup> Report of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters on the Proposed Expansion of the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction," p. 5 (first quotation); Gordon Englehart, "F.C.C. Ruling May Force Airborne E-TV To Crash," *Louisville Courier-Journal Indianapolis Bureau*, Series Ford Foundation Grants—L to N, Reel 0230, Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, Inc., September 12, 1962 – September 11, 1966, Ford Foundation Records.

infrastructure and transportation development, improving education was no less a significant factor in the ARC's formative legislation. Historian Glen Taul notes that in one of the centerpiece documents behind ARC's creation, the Eastern Kentucky Regional Planning Commission's "Program 60," education was viewed as an essential component of any civic drive to boost the region's overall socioeconomic status. "Integrating development into educational programs and projects," was one of the "major thrusts" of Program 60, Taul writes. Doing so would produce the needed "accessibility and flexibility in responding to the needed skills of the region's economy." The most widely known education programs offered by the ARC were vocational training centers and courses, but there has been a rich, varied tradition of ARC education programs beyond workforce training ever since the agency began.<sup>58</sup>

From the start, the Appalachian Regional Commission was willing to entertain new and innovative programs for improving schools, as well as unconventional means of implementing them. The common diagnosis for poor schools in the mountain region was a property tax base inadequate to support schools. The low tax bases could be attributed to any number of factors: from the morass of different states' systems of assessment and property valuation, as detailed in the extensive landmark study, *Who Owns Appalachia?: Landownership and Its Impact* (1983); or the corrupt and recalcitrant county school administrators Ronald Eller discusses in his history *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (2008).<sup>59</sup> Though the ARC fielded a number of innovative strategies for improving

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<sup>58</sup> Glen Edward Taul, "Poverty, Development, and Government in Appalachia: Origins of the Appalachian Regional Commission" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 2001), 106.

<sup>59</sup> The Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, *Who Owns Appalachia: Landownership and Its Impact* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 43; Ronald D Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 244.



education, they often chose not to address these more structural issues head-on, preferring, Taul notes, roundabout approaches, such as “advocating a state sales tax and more efficient administration and organization of school systems and by seeking federal aid.”<sup>60</sup> Within this ad hoc approach to Appalachia’s educational shortcomings came an ambitious proposal for ETV in the region, tentatively titled “Appalachian Regional Communications System: A Plan to Open Appalachia to Educational Development.”

The proposed system, prepared for the ARC by the National Association of Educational Broadcasters and drafted by the Kentucky Authority for Educational Television, framed its necessity in several obvious Appalachian stereotypes. “In several meaningful ways,” the NAEB politely stated, “Appalachia is a closed society:”

“Practically all migration is outward. This lack of movement from the outside means that new ideas have little immediate impact on the local culture. Such a lack of competition of ideas in these societies is a strong deterrent to cultural growth and development. Education of the people of all ages is suggested as the answer to cultural and factual deprivation in the region.”<sup>61</sup>

The image of an isolated Appalachia has been shown by a number of historians to be an especially serviceable rhetorical device. David Hsiung and many others illustrate how these exaggerated claims about the Appalachian region led to mismanagement of aid projects and ultimately cause further injustice, while more recently Edward Slavishak has profiled how individuals and aid organizations capitalize on the specific notion of an isolated Appalachian “proving ground.” The figures profiled by Edward Slavishak,

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<sup>60</sup> Taul, “Poverty, Development, and Government in Appalachia,” 106.

<sup>61</sup> “Appalachian Regional Communications System: A Plan to Open Appalachia to Educational Development. A Report Prepared for Ad Hoc Appalachian Broadcast Committee of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters,” p. 2, box 9, folder 231, University of North Carolina Television Network Records.

including recreations entrepreneurs and social science researchers, reinforce the notion of Appalachia's isolation in order to bolster their own credibility and expertise. In the same way, the NAEB's proposal prefaced their case for a regional communications system by arguing that "to be helped, Appalachia must first be reached." They did not elaborate on how exactly Appalachia was isolated from a mainstream American culture, but it was a fact assumed by many Americans, and the NAEB posed that they were uniquely qualified to help breach that isolation.<sup>62</sup>

The NAEB's proposal for an Appalachian Communications system presented a remarkably ambitious case for educational development and justice however, in spite of its use of a tired Appalachian stereotype. What's more, the drafters of the proposal seemed aware that the bulk of the ARC's program funding would go to infrastructure and business-related projects, and this they deemed insufficient to the task of fully developing Appalachia. "The people of Appalachia will have to be reached by more than roads," the report reasoned, "if the roads themselves are to serve their ultimate purpose." A robust communications system, the NAEB argued, would give Appalachians "the benefit of the best educational opportunities for their children, and the best and most up-to-date training for their children's teachers." Public broadcast media offered these benefits to school systems, teachers, and pupils, in the NAEB's view, but through a constant flow of educational programming running simultaneously alongside commercial broadcasters, the proposed Appalachian communications network would also reach Appalachian residents

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<sup>62</sup> David C. Hsiung, "Stereotypes," in Richard A. Straw and Tyler Blethen, eds., *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 103; Edward Slavishak, *Proving Ground: Expertise and Appalachian Landscapes* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 3, 115.

of all ages and walks of life. “Some will need to develop latent talents through education, while others will want to flesh out basic skills with re-education,” the NAEB observed, but to “assure the kind of participation the [ARC] program envisions, there will have to be a steady and massive stream of communication.” Providing the necessary aid and economic development envisioned by the ARC, the NAEB argued, could not be done without such a network.<sup>63</sup>

Educational broadcasters here were referring to roughly the same sorts of ETV programs they had been producing for the past two decades, but in their pitch to the ARC for a new “communications system,” they were clearly developing new regional and national aspirations for noncommercial media, much as MPATI and Westinghouse had done previously. The NAEB’s plan for coverage in an Appalachian network differed from MPATI in two significant ways: interconnection of all public media sources then in operation, and activation of unused channel space in all parts of the Appalachian region. The interconnection plan took its inspiration from the general structure of the ARC, wherein governors and legislators from the 11-state region would collaborate in forming strategies and coordinate the best possible use of new funds and programs for the region. Likewise, the NAEB acknowledged that Appalachia was being served already in many areas by dedicated local stations, but that these could expand their service to the region if they shared locally produced programs and developed new programs in concert. Educational television stations would likely serve as the flagship for the Appalachian communications system, but the NAEB insisted that educational radio stations also be

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<sup>63</sup> “Appalachian Regional Communications System: A Plan to Open Appalachia to Educational Development,” 3-4.

involved, since these were not merely archaic predecessors to television: their medium had its own virtues and uses independent of television, and could be operated much cheaper than the latter.<sup>64</sup>

More ambitiously, the NAEB proposed that the ARC not only interconnect existing stations, but also activate unclaimed channels in the Appalachian region, ensure that every community in the region, no matter how rural or removed from an urban center, would have access to this new resource. Herein lies the most crucial difference between the models of the NAEB and MPATI. Where MPATI and Westinghouse offered air transmitters as an alternative to ground-based stations, with the rationale being that the costs of activating channels in all peripheral areas of regions like the Midwest were prohibitive, the NAEB impressed upon the ARC that funds were now available that could overcome that very burden. Provisions in the ARC's formative legislation would be necessary, but not sufficient to create new stations, but a host of other federal programs that had been initiated in the past five years could contribute funds that would make the startup cost almost negligible. The ETV Facilities Act of 1962 had helped North Carolina and other states expand their own operations toward full state coverage, and the NAEB were confident that it would be just as vital in an Appalachian network. Furthermore, various subsections of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), the National Defense Education Act (1957), the Vocational Education Act (1963), Manpower Development and Training Act, and the Nurse Training Act (both

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<sup>64</sup> "Appalachian Regional Communications System: A Plan to Open Appalachia to Educational Development," 6. The general course of producing radio programs was obviously cheaper than producing television, but one other cost saving measure alluded to in the proposal was that many television transmitters were being installed on existing radio transmitter towers. If the ARC elected to activate unused channels for new ETV stations, the NAEB contended, establishing those stations would be much cheaper and more collegial if they shared space with radio producers.

1964) were earmarked toward audiovisual media facilities. With these funding sources, the ARC could activate new stations and also offer numerous options for people in the region to access and use network programs. The goal laid out by the NAEB was clear and emphatic: to offer “at least two channels of instant communication to practically every home and school, and any number of public meeting places, throughout the entire Appalachian region.”<sup>65</sup>

The most outstanding difference between the proposed Appalachian network and MPATI though, was the insistence on program variety, rather than a singular focus on classroom instructional aid. The NAEB did include ITV as part of their proposal, affirming the ability of educational programs to “stimulate accelerated growth in elementary and secondary education by bringing rich resources into the classroom which could be brought into the schools in no other way.” Moreover the proposal touted ETV for its potential to reach and educate people at all ages and degrees of educational attainment. A number of stations around the country had seen success in programs produced for preschool children, for instance, and the NAEB saw “special significance” in an Appalachian network’s ability to “help the pre-school child by exposing him to experiences he will encounter in school books but not in his own environment.” Elsewhere they remarked that ETV would serve working class Appalachians by offering them training and professional development opportunities at home, and they listed such

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<sup>65</sup> “Appalachian Regional Communications System: A Plan to Open Appalachia to Educational Development,” 4 (quotation), 7.

courses then in production by stations in other parts of the U.S., including “Typing,” “Small Business Management,” and “Basic Electricity.”<sup>66</sup>

Other program ideas pitched in the proposal were in line with the NAEB’s larger argument that economic development without education and “human development programs” such as what they outlined for their communications network, would be incomplete. An Appalachian noncommercial radio and television network, they argued, could expand communications on public affairs and engender a sort of “Town Meeting of the Air” space for interested viewers. The ARC, along with other contemporary federal programs in the War on Poverty era, was hard at work in promoting economic and social development in Appalachia, and the NAEB’s plan would provide partnership opportunities to local citizens, such as the “how-tos of setting up a Community Action Program,” or the “role of a Local Development Organization as outlined in the Appalachian Regional Development Act.”<sup>67</sup> This way, Appalachians could lend a hand and have a say in the massive undertaking going on in their region.

The NAEB’s proposal undeniably banked on a number of stereotypical assumptions about Appalachia’s isolation, and was given to a clearly patronizing tone, such as when it stressed that “the people of Appalachia will need to be prodded, reminded, stimulated, and restimulated” by educational media.” What’s more, the NAEB’s end goals of “motivate[ing] the communities of Appalachia to want more and

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<sup>66</sup> Appalachian Regional Communications System: A Plan to Open Appalachia to Educational Development,” 8-9.

<sup>67</sup> Appalachian Regional Communications System: A Plan to Open Appalachia to Educational Development,” 11-12. The proposed “Town Meeting of the Air” function actually required some use of closed-circuit systems. The NAEB posed that some homes or other sites could be equipped as communication points and allow participants to discuss pressing issues with other community members, both in their group location and with all other connected groups. The “meeting on the air” idea would be rehashed in later ARC communications proposals. (See Chapter 4)

better educational resources than they have,” and “making the people of Appalachia see the desirability spending more money on education,” glossed over the historic campaigns from within the region to secure a more equitable education system.

But the critical point within the NAEB’s idea for an Appalachian communications system was the audacity of its proposed benefit. The document’s conclusion stated simply and emphatically:

“the educational services of the Appalachian Regional Communications Network should seek to provide the people of Appalachia with all the educational advantages and educational stimulation which is common to the rest of the country, insofar as it is possible for these media to do this.”<sup>68</sup>

This sentiment was not far removed from what MPATI was then seeking to offer the Midwest—only the breadth of programming and delivery method distinguished the two systems. Both, unfortunately, would be denied their opportunity to effect this transformation.

## **Grounded**

All told, the FCC deliberations on MPATI’s application for four additional UHF channels lasted for over two years, only to end with a denial. The two channels then being used by the airplanes during school hours would still operate, but MPATI staff knew that without the promise of expanded curricular options, their service would likely not be able to draw in enough new members to be self-sustaining. Polling data gathered by MPATI toward the end of their operation show that schools who had signed on as members were wholly invested, limiting their access to instructional television

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<sup>68</sup> Appalachian Regional Communications System: A Plan to Open Appalachia to Educational Development,” 9.

exclusively to MPATI. Some did so out of faith in the MPATI method, others simply had no other option. Spirited appeals were made to the FCC by MPATI members and the organization's officials in light of the impending decision. Mildred Meredith, a Special Education teacher assigned to the Central State Hospital by member-institution Indianapolis Public Schools, wrote to the chairmen of both the FCC and the Ford Foundation, pleading for the continuation of MPATI.

To William Henry, the FCC Chairman, Meredith admitted that the technical considerations of their decision were immaterial in her view when compared to the larger human impact. "My immediate concern," she emphasized, "is on the receiving end, the viewing, the consequences, the practical applications of making easily available more and more education to more and more of our human resources in the world." The resources MPATI was making available to her students and others throughout the Midwest should not have been, in her view, "for the elite alone, but for the disadvantaged, the handicapped, the mentally and physically ill, the juvenile delinquent, " and, in her more broad definition, "the learner in all walks of life where the diversity of interests and abilities have opportunity to be utilized in the enrichment of our way of life in our form of democracy."<sup>69</sup> The same idea was present in Meredith's statement to Henry Heald of the Ford Foundation: "perhaps the unique thing about Airborne Television is that it is accessible—equally accessible not only to public and parochial schools, but also to hospitals, prisons, and other institutions which carry on educational programs." To this passionate defender of MPATI, it was clear how for all its inadequacies, MPATI had

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<sup>69</sup> Mildred Meredith to William Henry, March 26, 1964, Series Ford Foundation Grants—L to N, Reel 0230, Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, Inc., September 12, 1962 – September 11, 1966, Ford Foundation Records.



reached these “all too often neglected groups,” who otherwise would have likely been ignored in the Midwest region.<sup>70</sup>

For its part, MPATI suggested to the FCC and Ford a number of alternative means of keeping their service viable. Responding to the concerns brought to the Commission by the NAEB, MPATI proposed in 1964 a compromise wherein the four additional channels could be split between MPATI’s in-school programming during the day and programs produced by other local noncommercial broadcasters during the non-school hours. For those at Ford who were monitoring the steady progress of satellite television development, John Ivey posed in November of 1966 that Airborne Television’s service was actually very similar to the envisioned satellite system, and that a partnership between MPATI and a satellite system would yield “potentials of considerable magnitude.” In a meeting one year later between Ford and MPATI staff, the immediate issue of dwindling membership revenues was met with a suggestion that the six state governments in the MPATI flightpath enter into a joint-funded educational compact, so that member dues would not have to be scrounged solely from the budgets of individual school districts.<sup>71</sup> None of these pleas served to prevent MPATI’s imminent demise.

Internal memos shared within the Ford Foundation after the FCC’s decision show that MPATI, once the exciting, visionary new tool in educational media and technology, had now become more of an albatross in the Foundation’s view. A scathing memo by

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<sup>70</sup> Mildred Meredith to William Henry, March 26, 1964.

<sup>71</sup> Genshaw, “A History of the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction,” 120; Ben A. Bohnhorst to Howard R. Dressner, November 17, 1966, Series Ford Foundation Grants—L to N, Reel 0230, Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, Inc., September 12, 1962 – September 11, 1966, Ford Foundation Records.

Fred Crossland, Program Officer in the Division of Education and Research, was attached to MPATI's funding report in August of 1965. Crossland let loose his disdain for classroom-specific broadcasts, arguing "the bloom is off TV instruction." "Five years ago," he mused, "there was something glamorous about a DC-6 dropping pearls of wisdom from on high and students glued to TV sets," but now "youngsters are a lot more sophisticated and blasé about the electronic and space age." Recalling the "centralized-control" criticism the NAEB had hurled at MPATI years earlier, Crossland charged: "I have no idea how good the existing 28 [MPATI] courses are, but I am worried about the tyranny they might impose." Generally, Crossland's memo looked past the positive change MPATI had attempted and straight at the bottom line. There was the classic "permanent pensioner argument" in his view. Perhaps the airborne channels were creating some positive change in the Midwest, but since they were neither profitable nor self-sustaining, letting them continue would be, in the Foundation's view, a waste of Ford's time and resources.<sup>72</sup>

The Spring semester of 1968 would see the last flight of the MPATI transmitter planes. In the preceding Fall, the Ford Foundation was unsympathetic to one of the final pleas from MPATI, in which General Manager Ben Bohnhorst presented data to emphasize that 75% of member schools in the program, comprising roughly 13 million students, relied solely on MPATI for their instructional television components. There may have been some growing discontent or skepticism with regard to MPATI among these schools by this point, but Ford's hard cutoff for funding meant these schools would

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<sup>72</sup> Fred E. Crossland to Frank Bowles, August 6, 1965, Series Ford Foundation Grants—L to N, Reel 0230, Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, Inc., September 12, 1962 – September 11, 1966, Ford Foundation Records.

have to scramble to shift their supply of instructional material. Bohnhorst also noted that “nearly 1,000 schools enrolling nearly 375,000 students are in effect out of range of any other current ITV service.” MPATI continued to operate through 1970 as a distributor of educational films, in spite of fact that the “Airborne” in their name was functionally null. Ford Foundation by that point had reduced its support for film producers, in favor of consolidating their money and energy toward their own production companies Public Broadcast Laboratory and National Educational Television. By mid-1971 MPATI was dissolved, its assets donated to the Great Plains National Instructional Library, another educational film organization housed at the University of Nebraska.<sup>73</sup>

In Appalachia, the National Association for Education Broadcasters’ plan for a “mass communication network” of educational television and radio services, also founded in the mid 1960s. In August 1966, ARC Executive Director Ralph Widner sent to the region’s state representatives the Commission’s report on the NAEB proposal. Boyd Fellows, the report’s author, had attended all meetings of the NAEB committee tasked with creating the Appalachian network, compiled extensive data on television ownership and channel availability throughout the region, and conferred with influential figures in educational broadcasting located outside the region. Fellows spoke very highly of educational television and its potential to offer meaningful service to communities in Appalachia through the Commission, but he ultimately concluded that the ARC “should not consider establishment of an interconnected network” in the region.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ben A. Bohnhorst to Howard Dressner, October 25 and 31, 1967, Series Ford Foundation Grants—L to N, Reel 0230, Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, Inc., September 12, 1962 – September 11, 1966, Ford Foundation Records; Genshaw, “A History of the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction,” 104-105.

<sup>74</sup> Boyd W. Fellows, “Educational Broadcasting as a Tool for Appalachian

Fellows' reasoning is particularly ironic, in light of the localist arguments employed by NAEB to discredit MPATI during the latter's drive to expand. His report is tragic, however, for the number of misconceptions it held about what the proposed Appalachian system intended to do. The NAEB did not propose that the interconnected network in Appalachia would impose a uniform programming schedule across the entire region, as MPATI did, but Fellows described the proposed Appalachia plan as though that were the case. Appalachians may have needed, in Fellows' view, a "steady diet of meat and potatoes [educational] programming," but the question of what should be shown and at what time in each area "requires a local judgment."<sup>75</sup> He understood very well that the various stations merely had an interest in sharing programs amongst each other via microwave links, and not dictating what other stations should show, but his recommendation denied the usefulness of such a system. Overlooking the fundamental *regional* ideology of the ARC, Fellows assumed that a program produced in one mountain state would not be truly applicable in another mountain state and thus not worthy of sharing. With no evidence or investigation, Fellows simply reasoned "for example, Pennsylvania State history programs would not be as valuable in eastern

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Development: A Report to the Appalachian Regional Commission," June 30, 1966, 22, box 612, folder 1, Papers of the Appalachian Regional Commission, University of Kentucky Special Collections Research Center. The bulk of Fellows' report affirms a number of the claims NAEB made about educational programs and their production at existing stations. Echoing the findings of *The People Look at Educational Television*, he observes generally that too much of the programming on educational stations was tailored for certain types of viewers—students in classrooms and home viewers of particular social and educational attainment. Crediting the NAEB's construal of their proposed system as one of "mass communication," instead of simply television, Fellows found the fact "that most educational broadcasters do not think of their stations as mass communication media," to be their "fundamental fault." What was even worse, he noted, was how many of these programs were even further out of touch with the "basic educational needs" of rural, working class communities across Appalachia.

<sup>75</sup> Fellows, "Educational Broadcasting as a Tool for Appalachian Development," 8 (first quotation), 2 (second quotation).

Kentucky as they would be in Pennsylvania,” and thus the interconnected system deemed unnecessary.<sup>76</sup>

The most upsetting oversight in the recommendation against an Appalachia-specific network is Fellows’ omission (or simple ignorance) of the NAEB’s proposal to activate all available channels in the region and provide service to all areas in the mountains. The tone in the report is hopeful, particularly in the exhaustive data compiled on operational ETV stations in the region and the surprisingly high percentage of television ownership in Appalachia, where counties with the lowest estimated rate of TV households still boasted rates of over 50 percent. But the maps included in the report of ETV stations operating in the region, intended to show that most of Appalachia is already reached by at least one station, still plainly show large areas where no signal was available.<sup>77</sup> Large portions of central Appalachia (eastern Kentucky, southwestern Virginia, and West Virginia), bereft of major metropolitan centers, as of 1965 had no such educational resources. But even the smaller swaths of Appalachia that were just beyond the reach of a signal spoke for this oversight. Historically these peripheral areas of the Appalachian Mountains had been excluded from available educational resources, and the Fellows report showed that, in the case of ETV, this inequity would continue.

## **Conclusion**

The demise of these two regional experiments in educational media was overshadowed by perhaps the most triumphant moment in the history of educational or

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<sup>76</sup> Fellows, “Educational Broadcasting as a Tool for Appalachian Development,” 10.

<sup>77</sup> Fellows, “Educational Broadcasting as a Tool for Appalachian Development,” Appendix, pp. 1-34.

noncommercial television: the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. Spurred by the influential publication by the Carnegie Corporation's Commission on Educational Television, *Public Television: A Program for Action*, the Act provided for the structure of the U.S. public television service which has survived to the present day: not the brightest star in the Great Society constellation, but an influential one nonetheless. Though the legislation would result in the creation of public media's most recognizable player—PBS—the direct creation of the Act was the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a government-supported funding mechanism for existing noncommercial stations and groups seeking to establish new stations. The struggles of MPATI, the proposal for an Appalachia-specific network, and the struggles of many other stations illustrated Lyndon Johnson's messaging for the legislation: "practically all noncommercial stations," he stressed, "have serious shortages of the facilities, equipment, money, and staff which they need to present programs of high quality."<sup>78</sup> The CPB would not, of course, put educational stations on a permanently safe footing funding-wise, but it became their major benefactor, easing the tense struggle for the support of philanthropies like the Ford Foundation and the host of other government programs that previously supported ETV.

*Public Television: A Program for Action*, the de facto manifesto of public broadcasting, reiterated more specifically some of the virtues and hard-learned lessons of MPATI and the NAEB. The Carnegie-funded commission that authored it, including Terry Sanford of North Carolina and James B. Conant of Harvard, recognized for one that the national attitude toward the instructional television model favored by systems

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<sup>78</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "President Johnson's Message to Congress," in Frank J. Kahn, ed., *Documents of American Broadcasting*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 252.

like MPATI, while approving, was generally “ambivalent.” Too often, they felt, stations had limited themselves to “ancillary” classroom programming for their educational offering, not fully realizing the full potential of television media to educate an interested public. In this way, they mirrored the decision made by the NAEB to refer to their proposed network as a “mass communications” system, not an educational television network. The Carnegie Commission insisted on their preferred term “public” rather than “educational” because the latter, they felt, lacked the full perspective on what the public could gain from televised media. The proposal heralded:

“this is a proposal not for small adjustments or patchwork changes, but for a comprehensive system that will ultimately bring Public Television to all the people of the United States: a system that in its totality will become a new and fundamental institution in American culture.”<sup>79</sup>

The creation of a new fundamental institution may not have reached the heights Lyndon Johnson and the Carnegie Commission foresaw, but their strong belief in the medium permanently shifted the conversation. “Public” supplanted “educational” as the normative term, signifying that all people living in the nation deserved access to the resource, rather than depending on established educational and philanthropic institutions to provide it.

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<sup>79</sup> *Public Television: A Report for Action. The Report and Recommendations of The Carnegie Commission on Educational Television.* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Bantam, 1967), 3-4.

## CHAPTER 4. “THOSE WHO NEED IT MOST ARE OFTEN THE LAST TO GET IT:” BUILDING AN EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION NETWORK IN KENTUCKY

This chapter turns to the case of Kentucky Educational Television (KET). As with the previous chapters, it will focus on the conditions surrounding the network’s inception, the difficulties faced in creating the network, and the services it was built to provide for the communities in its purview. The most significant aspect of KET’s history as opposed to other state-level networks, was the insistence of its founders on total statewide coverage and equitable reception in every community of Kentucky. The Bluegrass State entered into the realm of state-level broadcast television relatively late compared to other state networks, but this afforded KET the advantage of surveying the field and reflecting on educational television’s true successes and missteps. If the observer at the Ford Foundation of ETV projects like MPATI was right in saying that “the bloom was off” educational television, and the early enthusiasm for the medium had faded by the mid-1960s, then KET had the benefit of taking a more reasoned and holistic perspective on how ETV could genuinely meet the educational needs of Kentuckians. KET’s founders had plenty of time to study this issue—indeed more than they initially intended to have—since coordinating the structure of the network, wrangling of favorable legislators from a diverse political spectrum, and the drive for local support, took nearly a decade.

The process of raising support for an ETV network, especially when scrutiny of the medium had steadily mounted, signifies another important aspect of KET’s history. In a state like Kentucky, where the inequalities and malfeasances of the state’s education system had been a perennial issue before legislators, governors, and all of the commonwealth’s citizens, the question of how to pay for an ETV network and who would oversee it, was a contentious matter. General support for the notion of a statewide



ETV network in Kentucky could be relied upon, but in a state experiencing vast economic inequality, even the seemingly insignificant budget for such a project sparked controversy amid intensely tight-fisted debates over school building improvement funds, teacher salaries, and property tax revenues. North Carolina, which did not intend from the beginning to provide ETV to the entire state, vested control of its network with the consolidated state university system: an uncontroversial decision at the time, but one that ultimately tied control of the network to higher education professionals. Kentucky, taking stock of the systems in place in other states, opted to house its network in a separate department within the state government, independent of the state's colleges and universities, but dedicated to remaining collegial and receptive to their expertise. More significantly though, KET's founders insisted on being separate from the state's conventional departments of public instruction—its state and district superintendents and teacher association. At the network's founding, this decision drew suspicion from the traditional powers within the state's education system, and required KET's early advocates to demonstrate their good faith in taking even a minute slice of the state's education budget.

This chapter also makes the case that KET's genesis, like that of WUNC-TV, bears a special connection to the Appalachian region. O. Leonard Press, the person often credited as the founder of KET, recalled his inspiration for creating a statewide network as the result of witnessing poverty and educational inequality in the mountains of eastern Kentucky. No explicit mention of Appalachia can be found in the state's charter for the network, but the mountains were clearly on the minds of the people who advocated for the network and spoke on its behalf. These appeals are often littered with references to

the difficulty of getting television signal and valuable educational programs to all the “hills and hollows” of Kentucky. Indeed the difficulty of guaranteeing signal to all parts of eastern Kentucky was a major challenge in the creation of KET, for the simple fact that the sharp terrain of hills and mountains in that region did obstruct signals from transmitter towers. More ETV transmitter installations were necessary to overcome these barriers, but KET’s founders were inspired by the fact that previous generations of educators had attempted to overcome the geographic and technical barriers facing Kentuckians in peripheral areas. They felt they had been granted a revolutionary new tool in this endeavor, and while they never considered themselves experts in its use, they shared the conviction that ETV had to be held in common by all people in the state.

### **Beginnings at the University of Kentucky**

As an educational agency, KET operates independently of higher education institutions in the state, but the University of Kentucky in Lexington was responsible for gathering many of the network’s early advocates and founders. This was done under the Department of Radio, Television, and Film, an outgrowth of its predecessor, the Department of Radio Arts. The culture in this newly minted department could only be described as makeshift: teachers with professional experience in broadcasting and studio production but little in the way of graduate degrees or academic credentials. Leonard Press and his colleagues drew on the experience of the university’s investment in educational radio, however, to visualize the ways an educational television network could benefit the state of Kentucky, and not simply the immediate urban communities of Lexington and Louisville.

Born in 1922 to a family of eastern European immigrants in Massachusetts, Leonard Press had developed an interest in radio communications from a very young age. Following the United States' entry into World War II, Press opted to join the Army Signal Corps and gained rapidly a basic understanding of the mechanics of electronic communication. He later admitted to having a poor aptitude for these technical aspects, at least until he was asked to help tutor some of his fellow company men who were even further behind him in understanding. After the war, Press completed his undergraduate degree at Boston University, where he combined his new technical skills in radio with his love of writing, hoping to begin a career in producing programs for radio broadcast or perhaps the rapidly developing television industry.<sup>1</sup>

The nascent and energetic young television industry in the United States afforded Press several high-level university positions, in spite of the fact that he had no graduate degree in what he would eventually be teaching. He was hired by Boston University directly after graduation to produce publicity programs for the university. This was his first experience in producing "telecourses," which he conceptualized as a sharing or a "showcase" of excellent faculty teaching subjects more naturally suited to visual media, such as anthropology and art history. These were carried over a commercial network in Boston, and by 1952 they had given Press enough name recognition to be recruited as part of the faculty at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, a town Press and his wife Lillian, had never heard of before relocating.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> O. Leonard Press, oral history conducted 1998 by Terry Birdwhistell, 1998oh033\_kh26, History of KET Oral History Project, Louis B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries; O. Leonard Press, *The KET Story: A Personal Account* (Lexington, Ky.: The Clark Group, 2008), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 7.

In the Radio-Television-Films department, Press had found a small but energetic cohort of young teachers and professionals. Teaching alongside him were Elizabeth Ellis Taylor, a professor of radio/television performance and stagecraft and daughter to wealthy western Kentucky socialites and philanthropists; and Ronald Stewart, a recent U.S. Air Force discharge from the eastern Kentucky coal town of Jenkins, who had an uncanny talent for engineering the technical equipment used in radio and television. Taylor recalled in a later interview that the RTF department was not seen as a particularly reputable or intellectually rigorous program by colleagues in other more established academic fields, but she took great pride in her work.<sup>3</sup> She, Press, and other teachers and students in the program avidly followed and studied the work of television operations at other schools, as well as the developing production techniques displayed by the major commercial networks. On shoestring budgets, Press produced telecourses for UK students in a variety of subjects that the school used from 1959 to 1965. Press would later refer to the middle and late 1950s at UK as a “period of incubation” for the idea shared by himself and his colleagues for a statewide ETV service.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Taylor, oral history conducted 1976 by Jerry Paul Perry, 1981 OH 086, Kentucky Educational Television Oral History Project, William H. Berge Oral History Center, Eastern Kentucky University Libraries.

<sup>4</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 21.

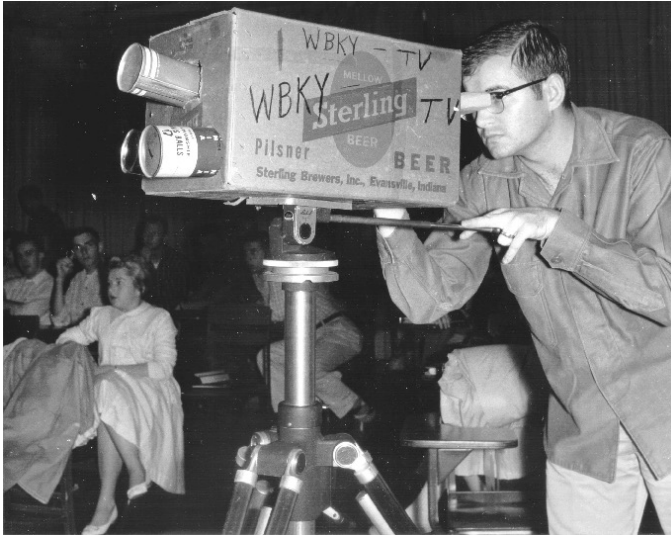


Figure 2: Early Television Camera Training under Press

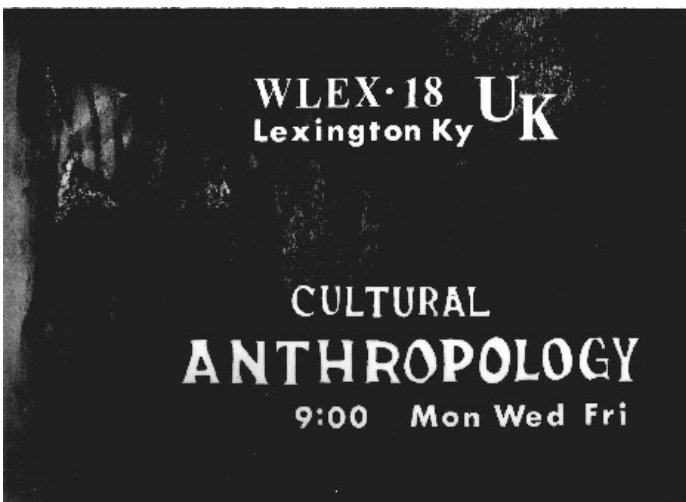


Figure 3: Title for Early UK "Telecourse"<sup>5</sup>

### **The Listening Centers**

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<sup>5</sup> "Radio Today class doing simulated TV show," and "Television billboard for WLEX-TV, UK, and Cultural Anthropology class (taught by Douglas W. Schwartz)," UK Radio Photographic Collection, University of Kentucky Special Collections Research Center. In advance of receiving actual cameras, Press would have students practice with improvised substitutes to get a feel for space and positioning. The second image notes that the course would be available on channel 18, the local NBC affiliate, which granted UK the use of their morning hours for telecourses.

In addition to the familiar and supportive atmosphere Press found in his RTF cohort, he also developed a deep appreciation for the work of his predecessors at the University and the extension-service model of land grant institutions. An experiment in radio undertaken by UK two decades prior to his arrival was especially interesting to him, and he would later claim it as a key inspiration for the television service he helped provide to the state. In the 1930s and 40s the University of Kentucky, along with the state's preeminent radio station, WHAS in Louisville, and a number of local Kiwanis clubs, recognized a disparity in radio ownership between eastern Kentucky and nearby urban areas and worked to rectify it.<sup>6</sup> Elmer G. Sulzer, originally a music professor at UK and later the University's radio studies director, coordinated a program whereby radio sets were distributed to common areas throughout eastern Kentucky for free and public listening. These "listening centers" would host informal gatherings throughout the day with the goal of sharing information and educational programming produced by UK faculty and staff with community members who could not otherwise access the University's resources.

Some of the motives behind the listening center project expressed by WHAS and the *Louisville Courier Journal* were questionable for their clearly patronizing articulation. So too were the evident stereotypes Sulzer and his colleagues held with regard to the people his program was helping. Sulzer stressed that the centers be informal and publicly accessible—general stores, school gymnasiums, and volunteers' homes were

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<sup>6</sup> Terry Birdwhistell, "WHAS Radio and the Development of Broadcasting in Kentucky, 1922-1942," (1981), *Library Faculty and Staff Publications, University of Kentucky Libraries*. WHAS radio is a clear channel station and is granted a more powerful signal than most radio stations, though in the years of its early operation many other radio stations broadcasted with similarly high power. Communities as far as Breathitt County, Kentucky (in eastern Kentucky, over 150 miles away) were able to receive transmissions from Louisville.

typical sites—but they were moreover intended to be controlled, programmatic environments for participants. Center directors, each handpicked by Sulzer as “invariably a man of intelligence and a leader in his community,” would locally promote the station’s benefits, record participant activity, and ensure that radio dials were set to university-approved programs at certain times. In writing about the centers for an academic volume on the use of radio in educational settings, Sulzer included such center director reports as “radio helps to enlarge the restricted mental horizons of these people. Most of them have no idea of modern ways of living and farming. To a large extent, the outside world is a foreign country to them.”<sup>7</sup> Those involved in the listening center program may have acted out of a desire to improve educational opportunities in underserved areas, but at times their enthusiasm for the new medium translated into condescension for the people they meant to help.

Whatever misgivings the program directors may have had about listening center participants, the program achieved remarkable success and popularity in the 1930s and 40s, and during World War II especially. By 1938, the fifth year of the program, Sulzer reported to a radio journal that 26 centers were operating in eastern Kentucky, with “over 100 applications on file” requesting new centers. In 1943, the University’s student newspaper, the *Kentucky Kernel*, reported the number of centers at 78, noting that participating townships and counties could ensure that “no one will have to travel more

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<sup>7</sup> Elmer G. Sulzer, “The Listening-Center Plan in Kentucky,” in Josephine H. MacLatchy, ed., *Education on the Air* (No. 5, 1934), 148-149. One notable center director was Alice Lloyd, who hosted a center for Pippa Passes and Knott County at the Caney Creek Community Center. Lloyd remains a renowned figure today in higher and continuing education, and the Caney Creek Center would eventually be named after her. Her service was not without its own share of detractors, and her reports on listening center activities were similarly problematic. For more on Alice Lloyd and Caney Creek, see P. David Searles, *A College for Appalachia: Alice Lloyd on Caney Creek* (University Press of Kentucky, 1995).

than three miles to reach them.”<sup>8</sup> Center directors also reported that while participants had the option of listening to popular commercial broadcasts at certain times, the educational segments produced by the University were also received favorably. Many of the educational programs were straightforward lectures delivered by faculty, but Sulzer aimed to incorporate topics that local Kentuckians would find applicable, or perhaps even entertaining. Thus, over several visits to the center, listeners might have heard political scientist J.B. Shannon explain the benefits and drawbacks of the Tennessee Valley Authority and its applicability in eastern Kentucky waterways, or perhaps a music and folk theater variety hour produced by John Jacob Niles, UK’s nationally celebrated musicologist of Appalachian folk ballads and songs.<sup>9</sup>

Sulzer discontinued the listening center program in 1948, observing that the prices of radio sets and the difficulty in acquiring them in eastern Kentucky had leveled off to an agreeable rate for most consumers. But the memory of this Appalachian program, its popularity and essential philosophy, were what inspired Leonard Press to campaign for a statewide network of educational television. He learned of the centers while researching for a radio program on Appalachian folk music, observing firsthand how useful the centers had been when he visited Lotts Creek Community School near Hazard, to record music for that program. He and Lillian became close friends with Alice Slone, the school’s founder and director, and later recalled that “in my many visits over the next few

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<sup>8</sup> Elmer G. Sulzer, “The Story of Kentucky’s Famed ‘Mountain Listening Centers,’” *Rural Radio* (April 1938), Box 9, Kevin Parks Early Country Music Research Collection, Berea College Special Collections Library; “More Centers for Listening Now On Tap,” *Kentucky Kernel*, July 2, 1943, accessed via University of Kentucky Special Collections website, [exploreuk.uky.edu](http://exploreuk.uky.edu).

<sup>9</sup> J.B. Shannon, “Kentucky in National and Regional Planning,” Lecture Series Transcript, March 1-April 12, 1937, Folder 15, Box 9, WHAS Radio Scripts Collection, University of Kentucky Special Collections Library; John Jacob Niles, “Salute to the Hills,” Script No. 1, June 1, 1938, Folder 1, Box 10, WHAS Radio Scripts Collection, University of Kentucky Special Collections Library.



years, I was exposed to the intractable limitations of schooling in the mountains.” Of these, the most evident to him were “the difficulty of finding and holding qualified teachers, of getting children to school and in keeping them there, and of raising money to support the schools the state could not or would not.” A full-fledged public network of educational television, in his view, “could, like the old radio listening centers, deliver the best educational resources in the state and nation, and indeed, in the world—not only to eastern Kentucky but to all schools in the commonwealth.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Early Appeals**

The initial inspiration for Kentucky’s network may have been based on a general program where viewers of all ages and educational backgrounds could find something of value and interest, but classroom-specific instructional TV was in vogue during the network’s formative years, and this paradigm held sway with many of KET’s earliest advocates. Prior to KET’s activation, much of the northern half of Kentucky fell in range of the MPATI broadcasts, but the state’s first ETV operation came in its largest city. Jefferson County Public Schools, which oversees most of the Louisville metropolitan area, reserved one educational channel following the FCC’s channel freeze and was a recipient of Ford Foundation support. The district’s superintendent, Richard Van Hoose, would later join Press and the other early advocates for a statewide network.

Van Hoose recalled a rousing speech by Frieda Hennock—ETV’s fiercest proponent among the FCC commissioners in the early 1950s—as his moment of inspiration for the new medium in Kentucky. Reserving the channel and budgeting for

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<sup>10</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 13.

technical equipment took several years of wrangling among city and school board officials, but Van Hoose had assurances from Alexander J. Stoddard, Ford's educational adviser, that Jefferson County would receive high-quality ETV programming. Jefferson County's educational network went live in 1958, and as with many other early ETV stations, the first programs were produced with support and consultation from colleagues in the area's commercial television industry. The NBC affiliate donated studio space and production assistance prior to the completion of Jefferson County's local network. Van Hoose regularly extolled the benefits of ETV in the school district's newsletter, *Your Jefferson County Schools*, writing that with each passing year, ETV development proceeded "with better organization and planning along with better teaching." It was still new and by no means perfect, Van Hoose cautioned, but he was certain that ETV was "highly effective" and was "ushering in a new era of electronics in education."<sup>11</sup>

A goal for ETV commonly invoked by Van Hoose and Stoddard throughout the creation of Jefferson County's network was the "redeployment of teachers." Like the "In-School TV Experiment" then also underway in North Carolina's network, Jefferson County drew from Ford Foundation funds on the premise that local schoolteachers were overworked due to ballooning class sizes. Ford-supported TV instruction in both North Carolina and Jefferson County focused on reimagining classroom space by using TV instruction in larger rooms with more students, but Jefferson County's program also focused on the notion of "team-teaching," or coordination in curricular development,

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Van Hoose to Robert H. Hillenmeyer, March 14, 1986, letter reprinted in Press, *The KET Story*, 16; Richard Van Hoose, oral history conducted 1975 by Jerry Paul Perry, 2003 OH 086, Kentucky Educational Television Oral History Project; Richard Van Hoose, "Faith in Educational Television Has Paid Off," *Your Jefferson County Schools* 3 (no. 3, November 1959), 2, folder titled "Correspondence 1960" box 2, Kentucky Educational Television (KET) Records, 1960-1976, Eastern Kentucky University Special Collections and Archives (hereinafter KET Records 1960-1976).

between the studio and classroom teachers. Looking collectively at Jefferson County, WUNC-TV, and all other grant recipients from the Fund for the Advancement of Education, one Ford publication concluded that “the use of television in teaching large classes has enabled [schools] to serve more students with the able teachers already on their staffs” and also to “get along with fewer new teachers than they otherwise might need.”<sup>12</sup> Such findings would make ETV very attractive to school boards and superintendents burdened by increasing class sizes and strained budgets.



Figure 4: Experimental Television Course in Jefferson County, Kentucky

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<sup>12</sup> “Teaching by Television: A Report from the Ford Foundation and the Fund for the Advancement of Education,” (New York: 1959), 13.

The Jefferson County Superintendent's office was certainly aware of teachers' suspicions that ETV would eventually automate or nullify the role of an in-person instructor. Like the efforts MPATI made toward coordination between "studio teachers" and their in-person colleagues, the county school newsletter stressed that the televised lesson plans had been developed "cooperatively" between representatives from various schools, program producers, and the teachers who would appear in the broadcasts. In addressing the long-term effects of this arrangement, however, Van Hoose's newsletter offered a rather ambiguous response that likely did little to assuage his employee's fears. One column began with the issue plainly stated: "Does educational television mean a change in the role of the classroom teacher?" To this, the columnist replied "perhaps." Moreover, newsletter columns stressed that fears of television sets replacing the personal and nourishing contact between a classroom teacher were unfounded. Above all the television lectures were meant to ease the labor of classroom teachers, give them more time to interact with students and plan meaningful assignments, and cope with the influx of young baby boomers.<sup>13</sup>

Advocates for the statewide network essentially argued along these same lines. The cohort of Van Hoose, Press, and other interested businessmen and UK faculty scored their first major convert in Governor Bert Combs. Born in Clay County, in eastern Kentucky, Combs is often credited as a transformational figure in Kentucky politics, carrying the state's Democratic party from the older New Deal-era liberalism into a more

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<sup>13</sup> "2 Teachers—One In The Studio, One In A Classroom—Are A Team," *Your Jefferson County Schools* 3 (no. 3, November 1959), 3, folder titled "Correspondence 1960" box 2, KET Records 1960-1976; "Both The Studio And Classroom Teacher Have Responsibilities," and "Exchange of Ideas Spreads," *Your Jefferson County Schools* 4 (no. 3, December 1960), 2, folder titled "Correspondence 1960" box 2, KET Records 1960-1976.

progressive program. Combs had an acute focus on the state's struggling education system, and the 3 percent sales tax he secured for the state (the first of its kind) went largely into funds for education improvements. These included a 115 percent increase in the state's overall education budget, pay raises of around 20 percent for Kentucky's teachers, and an ambitious school building and consolidation campaign.<sup>14</sup> Combs would later recall of his first meeting with Press, Stewart, and Taylor on the topic of a statewide ETV network that he was more than a little skeptical about the whole idea. "I had a lot of problems at the time," Combs told attendees of an anniversary celebration for KET twenty years later, "especially concerning education." "The last thing I needed," he said, reflecting on the many serious issues affecting the state's schools, "was some fella who wanted to talk about educational television."<sup>15</sup> Numerous influential interests had affected governors' decisions about Kentucky education for decades, and despite the growing popularity of ETV nationwide, it still faced an uphill battle in the state as the sixties began.

Conventional wisdom in the improvement of state education held that initiatives like consolidation, building construction, pupil transportation, and teacher tenure were the more prudent solution for struggling schools, particularly in the sparsely populated districts of eastern Kentucky. This was the opinion of a study submitted to Combs by the professional management consulting firm Booz, Allen, and Hamilton in 1961. Historian Tracy Steffes has observed how the strategies of consolidation and new school plants held considerable sway in rural education reform from the early twentieth century

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<sup>14</sup> John Ed Pearce, "Foreword" in Robinson, George W., ed. *The Public Papers of Governor Bert T. Combs: 1959-1963* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1979), xx-xxi.

<sup>15</sup> Bert T. Combs, address to KET Advisory Committee, reprinted in Press, *The KET Story*, 29.

onward.<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere in 1960, a legislative committee chaired by Representative Harry Caudill of Whitesburg, who served in the legislature just prior to becoming a nationally celebrated historian and journalist of the Appalachian region, conducted a similar study of the state's education system. In a characteristically Caudill-esque polemic, the committee's report called for sweeping changes to the administrative structure of school districts and county oversight, singling out the endemic corruption and "maladministration" of funds in the eastern Kentucky county of Carter as emblematic of the state's inefficiencies. Caudill would later profile the "near indigent" state of rural schools in Kentucky leading up to 1960 in *Watches of the Night* (1976).<sup>17</sup>

Press recalls Combs's skepticism about the necessity of an ETV network at the start of their first meeting, but he found that the Governor became a quick convert to the idea. Combs had seen the progress made by Richard Van Hoose and Jefferson County in their ETV operations, and Press notes that Combs was "more than receptive to the possibility of extending the educational benefits Louisville seemed to be reaping with ETV to the rest of the state, and especially to his own Eastern Kentucky."<sup>18</sup> The "education governor" Combs would extol the benefits of ETV and Kentucky's need for a network in public addresses throughout his term, often mentioning it explicitly as a vital tool for improving the state's education system. Speaking to the Kentucky Development

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<sup>16</sup> Booz, Allen & Hamilton, "Program and Evaluation Study of Selected Aspects of Kentucky School Education," abridged edition (October 1961); Tracy L. Steffes, "Solving the 'Rural School Problem': New State Aid, Standards, and Supervision of Local Schools, 1900-1933," *History of Education Quarterly* 48, No. 2 (May, 2008), 181-220.

<sup>17</sup> "Report of Special Committee to Investigate Education to the House of Representatives of the Kentucky General Assembly," (Frankfort, KY: Legislative Research Council, March 10, 1960), 4, box 89, folder 1443, John D. Whisman Papers, University of Kentucky Special Collections Library; Harry M. Caudill, *Watches of the Night*, reprint (Ashland, Ky.: Jesse Stuart Foundation, 2010), 205.

<sup>18</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 29.

Council, he listed the need to “mobilize and use the resources of television” right alongside the need for “well-trained, well-paid” teachers in his drive to “make it possible for every child in Kentucky to attend school in a modern classroom.” In an address to the state legislature on the issue of district reapportionment, Combs praised his colleagues for their support of ETV, affirming that “the educational television program authorized by this assembly will soon supplement classroom instruction and give more modern educational methods to our boys and girls.”<sup>19</sup> Kentucky’s constitution at the time prohibited governors from seeking consecutive terms, but Combs remained an adamant supporter of a Kentucky ETV network well after his time in office had expired.

Kentucky’s first major step toward a state network came in the form of a research group commissioned by the legislature in 1960 to determine how Kentuckians could best incorporate ETV into its education system with regards to feasibility and access. The resulting report called for coverage as ambitious as what Combs, Press, and Van Hoose had each envisioned for the network, and the document was widely circulated as a manifesto of sorts for the campaign to obtain that wide-ranging network. Edward Schten, an education and political science scholar working in the Wisconsin extension service, was tabbed to author the report. Schten’s finished work avoided the high-flown enthusiasm and boosterism that had characterized discourse around ETV in the previous decade, preferring concise and straightforward statements on how Kentucky could reasonably use ETV based on the trials and tribulations witnessed by ETV practitioners in other areas around Kentucky and its neighbors.

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<sup>19</sup> “Kentucky Development Council,” and “Extraordinary Session of The Kentucky General Assembly,” in Robinson, ed. *The Public Papers of Governor Bert T. Combs*, 437 (first quotation), 63 (second quotation).

Schten observed three urban-based ETV operations that served Kentucky schools by 1960: Jefferson County, Kentucky; Cincinnati, OH (and by extension, the Northern Kentucky cities of Covington and Newport); and Evansville, Indiana, along the Ohio River near western Kentucky. Other cities and schools in Kentucky used ETV programs that originated in stations in adjacent states, but Schten selected these three for how their respective strengths could be adapted to a network in Kentucky. Praise was lavished on Jefferson County for its “redeployment of teachers” model, though Schten preferred to think of the idea as “television as a teacher aide.” Teachers in the county interviewed by Schten had apparently taken to the new arrangement, as they had found more time to spend interacting with students than they had previously, even as enrollments and class sizes rose. Similarly favorable community and school support was reported in the Evansville system, known officially as the Southwestern Indiana Educational Television Council, which included Daviess County (KY) School District as one of its members. The network was appreciated for its apparent contributions to increased test scores among participating students, but it served also as a model of cooperative effort initiated by the school districts in the area rather than a centralized authority in Evansville or Indianapolis. The Cincinnati area was especially favorable to its station, WCET, since they had been one of the first established noncommercial television stations in the nation. They thus had the most experience in what types of programs served the area most effectively, and respondents truly considered WCET a community institution since it broadcast programs for both school and home viewing.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “Educational Television for Kentucky: Research Report No. 3” (Frankfort, Ky.: Legislative Research Commission, 1961), 20-26.



For all the evidence of ETV's positive benefits in Kentucky's cities by 1960, however, Schten posed Nebraska's ETV network as the most applicable model for Kentucky's consideration, because the Cornhusker State was so dominated by sparsely popular rural areas and farmland.<sup>21</sup> The more serious need Schten observed in Kentucky was the disparity between urban and rural school performance, and since the majority of school districts in Kentucky were in more rural areas, the state's ETV system should primarily be conceived as a means of improving education in those areas. A large portion of the report offered a litany of the issues facing under-resourced schools in rural parts of Kentucky, each of which Schten felt could be directly improved with the introduction of an ETV network. He maintained the same philosophy of localism seen in the previous chapter among members of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters: where in spite of the broad reach of television programs, some attention was still very necessary toward local program specialization. In Schten's view, the "concentration of population, availability of resources adaptable to television instruction, and relatively unified administration of schools" in urban areas tended to make "adjustments to televised instruction easier in Cincinnati than in an area of dispersed population and fragmented school administration." Furthermore, he felt, not all rural areas in Kentucky needed the same types of instruction. Scores on standardized tests in the state were sorted by regions designated as "mountain," or others that were simply "rural," and Schten observed of this divide: "what interests persons in Harlan County may not interest people in Hart County."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "Educational Television for Kentucky: Research Report No. 3," 28.

<sup>22</sup> "Educational Television for Kentucky: Research Report No. 3," 24, 33.

Kentucky's rural areas, mountain or otherwise, may not have been as sparsely populated as those of Nebraska—40 percent of Kentucky's high schools had fewer than 150 pupils, while over 70 percent of Nebraska's had that level of enrollment—but Schten nonetheless envisioned numerous ways ETV could aid Kentucky's rural districts. For instance, compared to the increased enrollments in Louisville and the need there for “redeployment of teachers,” rural counties and “mountain” counties especially, struggled with hiring and keeping qualified teachers and permanent outmigration of the families of those teachers' pupils. Schten found that below-average teacher salaries were more common in rural districts, and while those districts had plenty of teachers with above average qualifications, rural districts did bear a disproportionately high number of the state's teachers with below-average qualifications.<sup>23</sup> An ETV service, Schten reasoned, would not only offer teachers in rural areas the same labor-saving benefits as Jefferson County teachers had seen, as well as the same space for collaboration and collegiality, but it would also offer an in-service training network that put teachers and administrators of all types of district on an equal footing.<sup>24</sup>

Ill-equipped teachers and steadily declining tax revenues due to outmigration of families from rural districts translated, in Schten's view, to a diminished educational experience for students who remained in those schools and graduated from them. He cited poor test scores to illustrate this process, but moreover he framed the issue as an indictment of the state for not adequately providing for its pupils, rather than disparaging the rural students themselves. “No evidence exists,” he insisted, to say that “Kentucky

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<sup>23</sup> “Educational Television for Kentucky: Research Report No. 3,” 12-13.

<sup>24</sup> “Educational Television for Kentucky: Research Report No. 3,” 18.

students are any less intelligent or capable of learning than students in other areas.” It was plain to him that “rural and small-town Kentucky students need help in gaining educational opportunity equal to their urban counterparts,” and ETV would be an effective means of “bring[ing] to them things that they could not otherwise see or know.” Schten’s thinking on ETV belied a clear strain of technocratic utopianism, much like that observed by historian Katie Day Good in her study of visual educational media in the early twentieth century, and could easily be lumped in with contemporary fanciful visions of classrooms as part of the “global village.” Yet for all the gleaming possibilities the report Schten attributed to a potential Kentucky ETV network, he maintained a sober focus on the fact that schools in the commonwealth were inherently unequal, and that television offered a chance to, at least partially, correct the course of the state’s education policy.<sup>25</sup>

There remained, however, the question of how to deliver educational television to rural Kentuckians, a question that bore directly on how much the state would have to pay for a network, but more specifically on the cost of providing ETV to every school and home in the state. Other states’ networks had claimed that their programs could be accessed statewide, but Kentucky’s advocates were not convinced that these methods would adequately address the needs of their state. Their vision of statewide access presented considerable problems, based on demographic and geographic conditions in the state, and in eastern Kentucky specifically, as Schten noted in his commission report. South Carolina’s closed-circuit system loomed large in the industry, since every school in

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<sup>25</sup> “Educational Television for Kentucky: Research Report No. 3,” 16; Katie Day Good, *Bring the World to the Child: Technologies of Global Citizenship in American Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2020), 198.

the state was included in the cable-network design and could receive multiple channels of educational programming simultaneously. It had, however, marks against it for the sheer expenditure the legislature had committed to the project, and for the fact that production was so centralized with little mechanisms for input from local schools. Other states like Alabama and Florida had open-circuit television broadcasts available throughout most of their territory, but Schten observed difficulties among them with distributing programs produced in one part of the state with another. Florida relied on “bicycling,” or the hand delivery of tapes and films between different stations. Alabama used microwave links (as WUNC-TV would later use as well) but had frustrated local districts by the imposed course schedules schools would have to follow in order to use the network.<sup>26</sup>

Schten and other advocates for a Kentucky network insisted on an open-circuit broadcast network, knowing that this option would present costs greater than any state had ever committed in providing ETV. The main difficulty was the persistent divide between VHF and UHF capabilities in the channels then available to Kentucky. In the case of WUNC-TV examined earlier, where the FCC’s redistribution of channel arrangements yielded the Consolidated University a highly sought-after VHF channel, that network could confidently carry their signal to a large amount of the state with only one transmitter. Kentucky had almost no VHF channels in operation, commercial or otherwise, and no chance of being granted any for an educational network. The state had many unclaimed UHF frequencies available, but these had a shorter reach than VHF stations and, as Schten pointed out, “the terrain in the area of desired coverage influences cost significantly.” Central and western Kentucky would require a sizable amount of

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<sup>26</sup> “Educational Television for Kentucky: Research Report No. 3,” 32-33.

transmitter equipment, but it was abundantly clear that configuring a system where all of the mountains of eastern Kentucky received signal would come at great cost, since “hilliness frequently results in the inaccessibility of desirable transmitter sites and can raise construction costs considerably.” In no wise could Kentucky legislators who received the report think of an ETV network as a “money-saver,” since it would clearly involve a capital investment.<sup>27</sup>

### **Implementation**

Tight as Kentucky’s coffers may have been in education funding, the advocates for Kentucky’s network had reason for optimism as they witnessed a favorable rollout of the plan following Schten’s report. The Legislative Research Commission presented its findings in Frankfort in 1961. Combs heralded the ETV plan late that year in his biennial budget address for 1962-1964, and in early ’62 the authorization proceeded fairly smoothly in the legislature. Press recalled in his memoir two notable obstacles to passage of the ETV legislation. While the “imprimatur” of Combs’ approval gave the bill a speedy hearing in the state House of Representatives, the state Senate process was held up briefly by the opposition of Senator Nick Johnson, a Republican of Harlan County. In discussing the bill, the Senator produced statistics of all school facilities in Kentucky that were still operating with outdoor privies and without indoor plumbing, to which he questioned (reasonably) whether the state had its priorities for school improvement in order. “Educational television,” he argued before the Senate, “should be forgotten until adequate indoor plumbing facilities area available in all parts of the state.” Johnson’s

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<sup>27</sup> “Educational Television for Kentucky: Research Report No. 3,” 34.

concern about the dignity of basic school amenities may have been genuine and justified, but since his public opposition was grounded on the image of toilets, his stance earned him little more than a few chuckles from the Frankfort press while the bill proceeded unscathed to the Governor's desk.<sup>28</sup>

The more significant obstacle the ETV legislation cleared was the established education bureaucracy within state government. Press recounts in his memoir a tense meeting between him, Combs, and the stalwart figure of postwar Kentucky politics, Wendell P. Butler, who had managed to overcome the constitutional prohibition on successive terms in office by alternating between Superintendent of Public Instruction and Commissioner of Agriculture for over a decade. Provisions for the ETV bill specified that the network would operate independently of Public Instruction, but Combs nonetheless asked Butler (then Superintendent) if he could redirect 50 thousand dollars of education funds to help start the network. Butler and Combs came from different wings of the hotly contested Kentucky Democratic Party, but in spite of all electoral machinations, Butler himself had scraped and campaigned all the previous decade for expanded education funding, and begrudgingly agreed. He would later be granted a seat in the inaugural Kentucky Authority for Educational Television, the overseeing committee for network operations, where he and his successors would continue to negotiate the ties between ETV and the state's public schools.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 40-41; "Gov. Combs Okays Educational TV Network," *Kentucky Kernel*, February 23, 1962.

<sup>29</sup> William E. Ellis, *A History of Education in Kentucky* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 248; Press, *The KET Story*, 40.

One major difficulty the state authority group encountered was the selection, purchase, and development of transmitter sites for the proposed network. What seemed a fairly routine process for commercial television license operators, or educational broadcasters working in urban, well-populated areas, was fairly arduous for Kentucky ETV proponents. Specific channels had been reserved by the FCC for general regions of the state, but to achieve statewide coverage the Authority had to identify transmitter sites that would yield the best possible range of transmission for sparsely populated and geographically diverse areas. Much of this work fell to Press's colleague Ronald Stewart, the professor of communications technology at the University of Kentucky.

As a native of the mountains of eastern Kentucky, Stewart was intimately familiar with the ways terrain could inhibit clear transmission of radio signals. In the time that he could spare while teaching a full course load at the university, he traveled throughout the state and almost single-handedly mapped out precise locations for the transmitters, work he would later describe as "a labor of love." Reflecting in a later interview on the assurances he received from the FCC while mapping out the sites that Kentucky's UHF frequencies were functionally equal to VHF in terms of range and signal strength, Stewart would describe this opinion as "bullshit." Communities throughout Kentucky, he was sure, would find once the network was activated that the theoretical signal range the FCC predicted would not reliably reach their home sets.<sup>30</sup> Such areas—mountainous ones in particular—would likely require a number of signal repeater devices or additional

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<sup>30</sup> Ronald Stewart, oral history conducted 1976 by Jerry Paul Perry, 1981 OH 085, Kentucky Educational Television Oral History Project, Eastern Kentucky University Special Collections Library.

channel reservations entirely: an expense Schten had not fully accounted for in his report to the legislature.

Nonetheless, the Authority received from Stewart detailed plans for where and how network components needed to be placed, and they faced the task of presenting to lawmakers in late 1962 an even higher cost estimate than had been previously approved. Roy Owsley, an insurance company owner from Louisville and friend to Combs, presented a report to the Governor that frankly detailed the additional expenses. All told, Owsley's report showed that the network would require an additional two million dollars over what Schten had estimated, about a 33 percent increase from the initial estimate. Owsley softened this blow by offering some alternatives the state could pursue, namely a program of phasing in transmitter installations as the state was able to pay for them. This option was essentially the same route taken by North Carolina's network. Kentucky could provide a few cities with ETV stations—potentially a sample of cities that would provide basic services to the eastern, central, and western portions of the state—and add new operations gradually.

Owsley was magnanimous with regard to the state's budget concerns, but he strongly emphasized the Authority's position that the network should be made available to all schools and homes from day one. "Kentucky is in a position of leadership in this matter," the report stressed: "no other state has so comprehensive a plan nor one so well coordinated from the beginning." Furthermore, "acceptance of educational television throughout the Commonwealth," the Authority noted, "depends on its availability



throughout the Commonwealth.”<sup>31</sup> The report also noted that numerous sources of federal assistance to the state could reduce the expense, including the Educational Television Facilities Act of that year, designed to aid states in this very endeavor.

The necessity the Owsley report posited--widespread availability of ETV from the outset to ensure its acceptance--would grow into a mantra for the Authority in the coming years, but likely a much more serious one than they had originally expected. The bonhomie Press and his colleagues had found within the Combs administration, and the assurances by Combs that all branches of the state government were proceeding full steam toward an ETV network, would both give way to a more tenuous situation with the next governor. 1963 saw Press, Stewart, and other members of the Authority finagling through bureaucratic hoops to secure transmitter sites, FCC channel applications, and as much federal matching funds as Kentucky could possibly receive. That year was also Kentucky's gubernatorial election year, and Democrats would retain the office but hand it off to Edward T. "Ned" Breathitt. Press recalls a feeling of optimism derived from the campaign, as Breathitt stated that he was favorable to the ETV project and would continue it.<sup>32</sup> He would find, however, that those campaign endorsements from Breathitt were largely empty promises.

Historian William Ellis writes of Breathitt's campaign that it was largely oriented around the novel sales tax Combs had introduced in his administration. Breathitt supported it, but had a tenuous position in doing so, since both his Democratic primary challenger, A.B. "Happy" Chandler, and his Republican opponent, Louis B. Nunn, felt

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<sup>31</sup> "Owsley Report," May 1, 1962, 8-12, folder titled "Correspondence May-August 1962" box 2, KET Records 1960-1976.

<sup>32</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 61.

the sales tax should be nixed. As Governor, Breathitt highlighted many of the same educational crises and needs as Combs had done, but he tended to view education as a component of the larger goal of economic development, and thus he felt that a more business-like shrewdness and tighter budgets could be applied to education funding. In his inaugural address he reported that the new state tax revenues had “made possible unusual progress,” but that the new resources gained from the new tax structure could only be used “in accordance with priorities...which promise the greater dividends in human and economic process.”<sup>33</sup> Breathitt would later be lauded for his work in dismantling Kentucky’s segregation codes, but Ellis observes that at the same time the governor’s education budget caused “rancor” at the state house, due primarily to teachers’ accusation of insufficient expansion of their benefits. Amid these debates, ETV simply didn’t seem as urgent an issue to the new administration.<sup>34</sup>

The ETV program in Kentucky was not halted entirely, however. More cynical observers of Kentucky politics would recall similar instances of outgoing governors launching ambitious projects, only to leave the burden of funding to their successors.<sup>35</sup> Breathitt also felt simply that activating the network within the first year of his term was hasty. Press’s memoir included an Associated Press report on the delay, which found that “Breathitt said he likes the program, but it’s one that can be delayed since many school

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<sup>33</sup> Ellis, *A History of Education in Kentucky*, 298; “Inaugural Address,” in Harrell, Kenneth, E. ed. *The Public Papers of Governor Edward T. Breathitt: 1963-1967* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 7.

<sup>34</sup> Ellis, *A History of Education in Kentucky*, 298.

<sup>35</sup> Edward Prichard, oral history conducted 1980 by Jerry Paul Perry, 1981 OH 080, Kentucky Educational Television Oral History Project. Prichard, a wily but astute figure in Kentucky and national Democratic politics, had this cynical view of Combs leaving the bill to Breathitt, and observed that such had been the game among Kentucky governors and other officeholders for generations.

districts are not yet prepared yet to use TV instruction in classrooms.” This was a bitter pill to swallow for the Kentucky Authority for Educational Television, since they knew that a handful of ETV networks had operated in Kentucky communities for years, and that the experience of these schools was integral to the ETV authorization already passed by the legislature. What would have been particularly galling for the Authority, however, was the nonchalant impression Breathitt’s quote in the article gave: “since the program hasn’t started, it can be phased in over a longer period of time.”<sup>36</sup> All the entreaties that Press, Owsley, and Van Hoose had made to Combs in the previous years about the need for immediate and full coverage for the network to be at all useful seemed to have been wasted.

Undeterred, the Authority resolved in their annual report of 1963-1964 to address these areas where they felt Breathitt was mistaken. They also set their eyes on 1966, the next meeting of Kentucky’s biennial legislature, as the point where they could make an airtight case to lawmakers and Kentucky’s general population, regardless of the favor of the governor one way or the other, that the state had a definite need for educational television. “While there is no question,” the annual report noted, that “the additional time provided by this delay can be used to good advantage in explaining the program and utilization, it also poses the problem of maintaining momentum.” Denied its first chance at activation, the Authority knew that lawmakers could easily justify putting it off again two years later, and so they committed themselves to assiduously convincing Kentuckians of the benefits of ETV. “This means proceeding on several fronts with an information and orientation program,” the report reasoned:

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<sup>36</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 62.

It means working with and through influence leaders, lay and professional. It means reaching and explaining the program to as many citizens as possible and then enlisting their aid as individuals and through such organizations as they might be associated with.<sup>37</sup>

Thus 1964 and 1965 were the crucial years in which Press and his colleagues in the Authority hustled to gain support for the suspended network. Press recalls those years as “personally energizing...I traveled the state, talked with community leaders, legislators, school administrators, teachers, civic clubs and whoever else would listen.” Speaking tours would be an effective strategy, but there were many other means at the Authority would put to use.

One such resource was Bill Ladd, television critic for the *Louisville Courier Journal*. In between standard critical takes on major networks’ specials and regular programming, Ladd gave ample praise in his column for national developments in ETV, as well as updates on ETV stations in Kentucky and adjacent states. His advocacy for ETV in the state’s most circulated newspaper earned him seats in both the Kentucky Authority for Educational Television and the advisory committee for MPATI. He used his insider knowledge from both to extol the benefits of ETV to Kentuckians broadly while the rest of the Authority endeavored on the ground to build support for the network. When word came that Governor Breathitt’s first budget had eliminated startup funds for the network, Ladd wrote with pithy cynicism in his “TV Almanac” column that “those of us who regard school television as a tremendous educational tool were disappointed, although hardly surprised.” The scope of the state’s proposed network, Ladd admitted, was daunting (“more ambitious than any other,” in his estimation) but he felt readers

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<sup>37</sup> “Annual Report of the Kentucky Authority for Educational Television, 1963-1964,” box 10, KET Records 1960-1976.

should not lose faith in what “the great equalizer” of ETV could still accomplish for Kentucky’s education system. Press would later praise Ladd in his memoir for “beating the drum for ETV with spirited regularity.”<sup>38</sup>

Ladd insisted in his columns on the necessity of immediate statewide coverage rather than gradual implementation—“the original plan is the right one,” he assured, “and it is not all bad that there is a delay.”<sup>39</sup> He affirmed his Authority colleagues’ mantra that “those who need it most are often the last to get it,” and devoted space to highlighting the benefits of ETV around the state and region. This reporting had congruent work done by members of the Authority in the Kentucky Authority for Educational Television Newsletter, a “more or less quarterly” account of progress on raising funds and support for the network, as well as editorials demonstrating what ETV was then already accomplishing in Kentucky.

The Appalachian underpinnings in the network’s rationale were again on display in the Authority’s newsletter articles on the present use of ETV in Kentucky’s schools, with such headlines in consecutive issues reading “Harlan County Schools Using ETV,” and “TV Modern Math Serving Eastern Kentucky.” In Harlan’s school system, it was reported, over half the students in the county were observed using at least one ETV program regularly throughout the week, mostly from the University of Tennessee-

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<sup>38</sup> Bill Ladd, “TV Almanac: ETV Fund Loss Is Disappointing; Plan Right,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, Feb. 10, 1964; Press, *The KET Story*, 28. Ladd, furthermore, was no Pollyanna in his ETV columns. His credentials as a television critic were never withheld as he wrote about ETV programming, and while he could appreciate the benefits of classroom instruction programs during the day, he would also criticize ETV producers’ evening programs for their apparent erudition. In one column (May 2, 1965) he quoted comedian Stan Freberg, saying “there is hope for the great mass of viewers on ETV channels, if ‘there is something between ‘I’m Dickens—He’s Fenster’ [an ABC sitcom] and ‘An Explanation of the Nervous System’ in the way of programming.’”

<sup>39</sup> Ladd, “TV Almanac: ETV Fund Loss Is Disappointing; Plan Right.”

affiliated station in Knoxville. “Modern Math” referred to a program produced by Marshall University’s local station that was incorporated into the curriculum of schools in nearby Ashland, Kentucky. A National Defense Education Act-sponsored grant had covered the cost of TV equipment in Harlan’s classrooms, but the newsletter found that the signal received in the mountains from faraway Knoxville was less than ideal. Still, the article concluded, “they do feel that the University of Tennessee Metropolitan Council sponsored programs are giving their children many experiences that they would not otherwise have had.”<sup>40</sup> This kind of appeal was a well-worn but effective trope for benevolent organizations working in the mountains. What kind of genuine, education-minded reader could refuse such a plea?

The studies collected and printed in the Authority’s newsletter were put to use in orientations and seminars held across the state in 1964 and 1965, as was a promotional booklet titled “Kentucky Educational Television” and circulated statewide. Press and other members took any opportunity to drive across the state and deliver their presentation on how Kentucky could best implement ETV and why the commonwealth needed to do so as soon as possible. Much like MPATI had done a few years earlier with its local conventions, the Authority organized 13 “Area ETV Councils” that served as workshops and open fora for concerned families, teachers, school administrators, and anyone else that might want to take part. The presentations at the area councils primarily expanded on the basic information found in the “Kentucky Educational Television”

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<sup>40</sup> “Harlan County Schools Using ETV,” *Kentucky Authority for Educational Television Newsletter*, No. 3 (Winter, 1964), 1; “TV Modern Math Serving Eastern Kentucky,” *Kentucky Authority for Educational Television Newsletter*, No. 4 (Winter, 1965), 1, both articles available folder “September-December 1965,” box 3, KET Records 1960-1976.

pamphlet, which briefly outlined the many benefits the network could offer. These included: “enriched and extended” primary and secondary educational services; in-service education for teachers; remedial services for high-school dropouts; technical training for the unemployed; anti-illiteracy programming; arts and education for adults; and a supplement to the extension information programs.<sup>41</sup>

Some of the response and criticism to promotional materials and presentations at area councils seemed fairly intuitive and expected, while other voices raised issues the Authority members were all too happy to explain or rectify. Richard Van Hoose’s personal papers include a list of FAQs and some suggested responses. When asked about the expense local schools could expect with a network, the Van Hoose’s notes stressed that the network would operate only on the state budget’s expense, and that supplementary course materials would be provided free of charge. “The only cost to the schools,” the notes emphasized, “would be for receiver installations.” Another more audacious challenge to the network came from an editorial segment on the CBS radio affiliate, WOMI in Owensboro, in July of 1965. There the speaker observed that Owensboro, along the Ohio River in western Kentucky, had been “by-passed” by the planned network just like so many other state-sponsored projects had apparently done in previous decades. The original transmitter layout, the Authority was quick to admit in its response, had left Owensboro on a peripheral edge of more central stations in the

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<sup>41</sup> “Kentucky Educational Television” pamphlet, undated, p. 13, folder “May-August 1967,” box 3, KET Records 1960-1976.

network. They pledged to make sure the blind spot would be corrected, even if it meant installing a new transmitter site directly adjacent to Owensboro.<sup>42</sup>

For the most part though, responses to the Authority's promotion campaign came mainly from teachers attending area council meetings, who, one council convener noted, "had no exposure to any kind of television in the classroom...and needed to be told over and over again that their jobs were not in danger."<sup>43</sup> Press recalled that attendance at the meetings was surprisingly robust, and the exchange clearly yielded a firm support base within the rank and file of the state's education sector. The Kentucky Education Association, the catch-all interest group for both teachers and administrators, had endorsed the network by 1964, and Press notes in his memoir that the Authority's campaign galvanized the many in Parent Teacher Association circles who had expressed interest in ETV previously. The central PTA office, the Kentucky Congress of Parents and Teachers, made it a point to emphasize their endorsement of the network to legislators and the governor, and in the fall of 1965 they concerted their grassroots energy into a Kentucky Educational Television Week. A bulletin distributed to all PTA groups in Kentucky announced that the week would require a "massive publicity campaign...to explain ETV and its benefits to the people of Kentucky through television, radio, newspapers, etc." During the campaign, the bulletin continued, PTA-affiliated "citizens and organizations will be encouraged to write the Governor, and their Legislators, and to call or visit, to urge that the necessary appropriation be made to activate the Kentucky

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<sup>42</sup> "Questions and Answers," undated, folder titled "May-August 1964," box 2, KET Records 1960-1976; "Radio Station Presents an Editorial of the Air on 'A Familiar Pattern,'" July 24, 1965, folder titled "May-August 1965," box 3, KET Records 1960-1976.

<sup>43</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 71. Press paraphrases Marvin O. Wrather, an administrator at Murray State College (later Murray State University), who served as convener for the session.



Educational Television Network.” Calls and letters sent to Frankfort notwithstanding, the PTA campaign also submitted op-eds and letters to the editor in local papers all across Kentucky.<sup>44</sup>

Governor Breathitt may have quietly impeded the network’s progress as he took office, but his speeches and public comments gave the impression that he had been behind it all the way. He would later say that his administration was acutely mindful of its campaign promise of “no new taxes,” and meant to keep it if possible.<sup>45</sup> He lent his imprimatur to the 1964 promotional booklet that the Authority distributed widely during their two-year campaign. The first page of the booklet featured a quote with his praises for the proposed network, how “Kentucky is making all possible progress toward the goal of a quality education for every child in the Commonwealth” and how the ETV network “will hasten this progress by making outstanding educational support available to every school in the state, rural and urban.” Curiously, Breathitt’s endorsement draws attention away from the use of ETV in the classrooms, preferring to highlight the network’s benefits for “out-of-school Kentuckians,” for whom the network could either provide continuing-ed programs for the currently employed, or “basic education skills...to satisfy the employment requirements of an automated age.”<sup>46</sup> Other messages in the booklet attested to the need for adult education, but Breathitt gave the clearest vision for how

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<sup>44</sup> List of resolutions and endorsements by various organizations, folder titled “January-April 1964,” box 2, KET Records 1960-1976; “A Program to Persuade the Governor and the Legislature to Make An Appropriation to Activate the Kentucky ETV Network During the 1966-1968 Biennium,” transcript of bulletin included in Press, *The KET Story*, 262-263. The Kentucky Education Association, it should be noted, did not then consider itself a teachers’ union. A few years later, in the Nunn administration, Kentucky teachers would

<sup>45</sup> Edward Breathitt, oral history conducted by Jerry Paul Perry, undated, 2003 OH 360, Kentucky Educational Television Oral History Project.

<sup>46</sup> “Kentucky Educational Television” pamphlet, undated, 1, folder titled “May-August 1967,” box 3, KET Records 1960-1976.

ETV could specifically contribute to personal educational attainment as a component of economic development, as his campaign had emphasized so strongly.

The combination of grassroots and gubernatorial support signaled that the network would likely have a favorable hearing in the upcoming meeting of the legislature, but Press and the Authority still had to secure crucial external funds for the construction of transmitters. Since no state had ever planned for such comprehensive network coverage, leaving that expense entirely to Kentucky taxpayers would have been viewed as a needless extravagance. As discussed previously with WUNC-TV, states could rely on matching-fund support from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) of up to one million dollars through the ETV Facilities Act of 1962, and the Authority would certainly count on that support. The Appalachian Regional Commission, another federal agency, has also been discussed for its efforts and perspective toward ETV. However, while the ARC's plans in 1966 for a regional communications system through public radio and television were dismissed, they would still contribute significantly to ETV operations in Appalachian states.

In the course of his early years of speaking and dealing with the inner circles of Kentucky state government, Press had developed a friendship with John Whisman, who had also climbed the ranks of an influential state agency. Since his beginnings with the Junior Chamber of Commerce in the early 1950s, Whisman had been a steadfast advocate for economic aid and development in eastern Kentucky and Appalachia in general, authoring the reports that would eventually lay the foundations for the ARC's "total development" strategy. He had seen his efforts grow from a state commission under acting Kentucky governor Harry Lee Waterfield in 1957, to a summit of all Appalachian

states' governors and President John F. Kennedy, to the establishment in 1965 of the monumental ARC, for which he would serve as states' co-chair.<sup>47</sup> He would entertain offers from MPATI and Westinghouse for a potential airborne network in Appalachia, and would oversee the study and proposal for a ground-based, interconnected, "Appalachian Communications System;" but Press recalls that Whisman was no less interested in smaller ETV operations and their effects on mountain communities.

Press did not mince words in this regard. "Educational television was anything but an ARC priority," Press declared in his memoir, "until John Whisman decided that it should be." Whisman's colleagues at the ARC's Washington headquarters stipulated, however, that no funds could be disbursed to stations outside the Commission's boundaries. These were welcome terms for Press and the Authority regardless, since nearly half of their transmitters would be located within those boundaries.<sup>48</sup> For each of these, Whisman managed to secure matching funds from the ARC, which together would amount roughly to a third of the total startup cost for KET. The ARC would later highlight the grant given to Pikeville, Kentucky, for the city's installation of a KET transmitter as a success story in the Commission's overall progress report. Other states in the region would receive ARC support for network installation and expansion. These included stations in Binghamton, New York, and Scranton, Pennsylvania, where the *Scranton Times-Tribune* reported in 1968 that an "educational television 'booster' system" was needed to connect the mountain city to the state's network and to "extend

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<sup>47</sup> Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 46-49.

<sup>48</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 108.

reception to areas not now served.”<sup>49</sup> The next chapter will turn to the ARC’s second and more fruitful attempt at a region-wide system, but even in the absence of such a unified network the Commission valued ETV as a genuine resource in its educational mission enough to remain an instrumental supporter to smaller operations in and around its boundaries.

Proposed matching funds for the network in general, however, did not resolve the Kentucky Authority for Educational Television’s more immediate issue of purchasing land for transmitters. Though the price tag for each site vetted by Ronald Stewart was relatively small compared to the state’s other proposed network-related expenses, the acquisition of land for this purpose had to be done with the meager operating budget granted to the Authority in early 1964. Furthermore, the bureaucratic process of a state agency purchasing parcels of land, no matter how small, in order to sell them back to a different state agency, proved to be more frustrating and time-consuming than originally anticipated. One private Kentucky company stepped in to aid Press and his colleagues by purchasing most of the sites themselves and donating them to the state. It was a seemingly small sum for one company to give compared to what major philanthropic interests had disbursed over the previous two decades, but Press considered the land donation by the charitable wing of the Ashland Oil Company as perhaps the most decisive step in their campaign for a network.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> “Progress Report of the Appalachian Region Development Program,” (March 9, 1965-March 9, 1971), p. 3, box 612, folder 9, Papers of the Appalachian Regional Commission, University of Kentucky Special Collections Library; “Planners OK Financing for WSKG Stations,” *Binghamton Press and Sun Bulletin*, September 25, 1978, 5; “Sentiment Grows That Area Cities Should Be Rated as Single Market,” *Scranton Times-Tribune*, December 8, 1968, 26.

<sup>50</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 112-114. In a public groundbreaking ceremony for construction on the first transmitter site, Press was quoted by the *Courier Journal* reporter as crediting the Blazer family as the

Paul G. Blazer, chairman of Ashland Oil's finance committee, and his niece Lucile were fervent supporters of education and schools. Ashland Oil was headquartered in the eastern Kentucky city of the same name, and there Lucile served, among many other philanthropic endeavors, as chair of the eastern Kentucky Area ETV Council. Though the Blazers generally supported the creation of a statewide network in Kentucky, their special involvement resulted from the cancellation of *Patterns in Arithmetic*, the same televised math program the Authority had highlighted in their state reports as evidence of ETV's effectiveness in the state's schools. Lucile Blazer voiced the frustration of the dozens of school systems that had signed on to the program, as her foundation had helped equip schools to receive it. The Blazers approached the Authority asking how to establish an independent ETV station in Ashland and, finding the cost to be much more than the Oil Company's charitable wing could commit, were persuaded instead to donate the \$30,000 or so needed to secure transmitter sites.<sup>51</sup> In late 1965, Paul Blazer notified Governor Breathitt of the plan, recognizing that the ETV network plan had "tremendous potentialities" in his opinion: "especially in the grade schools of eastern Kentucky, [which] are not adequately equipped and need as much aid as possible." He requested that Ashland's proposal be given "no publicity," but local newspapers covering the purchase of the various sites and construction of transmitters precluded that possibility.<sup>52</sup>

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"vanguard" of the network. "TV Dream Comes Alive on Cold Ashland Hill," *Louisville Courier Journal*, November 20, 1967.

<sup>51</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 94.

<sup>52</sup> Paul G. Blazer to Edward T. Breathitt, November 29, 1965, folder titled "September-December 1965," box 3, KET Records 1960-1976; "Blazer Foundation Donates Tract for Educational TV," *The Advocate-Messenger* (Danville, Ky.), April 21, 1966, 3; "Blazer Foundation Gives Land for ETV Tower," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, Feb. 10, 1964, 18.

In spite of the Blazer's beneficence toward the state, it is regrettable that a part of KET's saving grace in the region came from a fossil fuel company. Though oil extraction and refinement did not have the same painful legacy as that left by coal operators, it still bespoke eastern Kentucky's long history as an energy colony. The ETV network's survival depended, like so many other public television operations, on philanthropic agencies extended from major corporations, with interests that range from questionable to downright unjust. The Ford Foundation could at least point to some degrees of administrative separation from the impact their parent industrial firm was having on the societies the philanthropists were then trying to help, but fossil fuel companies decrying the poor state of education in eastern Kentucky made for a remarkable level of irony. This certainly occurred to Press in his memoir, as he also noted that the transmitter site in the eastern city of Hazard was partially owned by the Kentucky River Coal Company. Possibly to save some face amid the concurrent protests over the company's strip mining in eastern Kentucky, Kentucky River Coal also supported the creation of one of the first Montessori schools in the state. Press felt that KET had the last laugh in their liaison with the coal company however, since KET's support of independent filmmakers (mainly those residing at Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky) would figure into the downfall of the broad form deed, one of the coal industry's most harmful tools. That case will be addressed further in chapter five.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 111; Joan Kay, "Auction Will Aid New School," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, May 10, 1966. For more on the mid-1960s protests against strip mining in eastern Kentucky, see Chad Montrie, *To Save The Land And People: A History of Opposition to Surface Mining in Appalachia* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

## Activation

Going into the new budget session, ETV, as with any year, vied for support and attention among thousands of issues facing Kentuckians. Education issues, however, carried heightened focus in 1966, as the most publicized revenue issue dogging the governor in 1965 involved property tax assessments—the critical figure for how schools in general were funded across the state. A decision by a state appellate court that year had ruled that any property tax assessment at less than 100 percent of the property value (as one state revenue commissioner had been found doing) was unconstitutional. The Kentucky Education Association looked on with a fervent hope that their respective districts could look forward to an unexpected windfall in their budgets. However, Breathitt intervened by calling a special session of the legislature that summer, and in a masterstroke of his “no new taxes” ethos, oversaw the passage of a new law offsetting any increased property tax payments with a roll-back of the maximum percentages districts could levy.

Public hearings around the special session were contentious. KEA made an earnest plea that Kentucky schools deserved greater contributions from their communities, since the state paid well below the national average property tax rate. In his testimony, KEA Executive Secretary J.M. Dobson charged, “to have good schools someone must pay the bill,” and in his opinion, “property taxes are not bearing their fair share of the load.”<sup>54</sup> William Ellis shows in *History of Education in Kentucky* that despite Breathitt’s plan to off-set any major tax increases, the measure ultimately yielded a slight increase in revenue. KEA did not receive the windfall of school funding it had expected,

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<sup>54</sup> Robert Deitz, “School Tax Boost Urged,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, August 27, 1965.

but the Association was grateful at least to have the former corrupt system on its way to being rooted out.<sup>55</sup>

The property tax issue was front-page material for much of August and September in 1965, bringing heightened awareness among Kentuckians for how Breathitt would direct education spending in the second half of his administration. As for ETV, the Authority was well-positioned in this discussion, in part because of the successful publicity campaign orchestrated throughout the Commonwealth, but also because Richard Van Hoose had been named president of KEA. The group had made establishment of a network one of its top platform issues in advance of the legislature, and after his previous budget had resulted in a teacher walk-out, Breathitt was determined to tread lightly around their demands. Among calls for salary increases and building improvements, however, ETV seemingly became less of a fringe issue by the day. Press recalls that business interests had also come around to the campaign and were planning to include ETV as part of their lobbying priorities. Full-page advertisements for the network taken out in newspapers were read alongside favorable op-eds by members of Area ETV councils—all of which made support for the network seem pervasive and firm.<sup>56</sup>

The network was included in Breathitt's budget proposal for 1966-1968, and Press, Stewart, Taylor, Van Hoose, Ladd, and all other members of the Kentucky

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<sup>55</sup> Ellis, *A History of Education in Kentucky*, 304. Breathitt was cognizant, as were many officials within KEA, that even with the underhanded property tax assessments, many rural districts in the state had difficulty operating with small tax bases. Schemes for undervaluing property assessments continued to plague the state, especially in eastern Kentucky, as a 2015 series (February 12 – March 1, 2015) from the *Lexington Herald Leader* would show.

<sup>56</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 98-100.



Authority for Educational Television could look forward to Fall 1968 as the firm date for activation of Kentucky's educational television network. In the meantime, the Authority set themselves about the tasks of building transmitter sites and the central network studios in Lexington, and also preparing staff to produce the programs for use in schools. Press's memoir from these years details dozens of small miscellaneous issues and tasks his team faced, such as identifying the site for the network studios, approving the designs of production studios at the regional universities, keeping tabs on federal funding applications, etc.—generally putting out little fires that might have jeopardized the network as they were sparked. As an associate of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters, Press, along with other ETV producers in the region, was likely consulting on the proposed Appalachian Regional Communications System that would be rejected months later by the ARC.

Breathitt touted his administration's approval of the network in a speech to educators and state personnel as part of the "Governor's Conference on ETV," held in a Frankfort high school gymnasium in May of 1966. Using an admirable but unwieldy reference to *Julius Caesar*, Breathitt praised Kentuckians for rising to the challenge when evidence for ETV's benefits could be seen in states all around them. Doing so, while carefully observing how Kentucky could learn from and build on other states' successes and failures, meant that Kentuckians had heeded Brutus's warning to "take the current when it serves" or else lose their ventures.

While Breathitt affirmed to the conference the benefits children could expect from their schools, his speech continued to steer the focus on ETV's benefits to viewers at home through forthcoming "adult and vocational education" programs. He also

reinforced the connection between the network's construction and the dire situation in eastern Kentucky, noting that ETV would be an "integral part" of the state's "attack on educational problems in Appalachia." Rural counties such as those in eastern Kentucky had, he said, become accustomed to poor television signals from faraway urban areas—in television parlance "they can count on 'snow' all year round," he quipped—but the comprehensive coverage pursued by the state Authority meant that "the ETV station" in these areas "will provide the first and only good picture the people have had." Press recalled that the Governor's conference was at that point a mere case of preaching to the choir, but he felt satisfied that Breathitt had finally come around to belief in ETV's potential.<sup>57</sup>

State ownership of all the network's facilities and equipment, rather than leasing facilities from major telecommunications firms, had from the public's view been a *fait accompli* for the Authority all throughout their campaign for network activation. This would add to the impressive scale of Kentucky's network once it was completed, since no other network in the United States, commercial or otherwise, could claim singular authority over so many television stations. It stands to reason though, that this decision was not made lightly. As seen with North Carolina's network expansion, states with ETV services ventured into uncharted territory with interconnection, not knowing whether it was best to keep control of that service in house or depend on the expertise and resources of telecommunications companies. North Carolina's experience also showed that ETV

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<sup>57</sup> "Governor's Conference on ETV, May 17, 1966," in Harrell, ed. *The Public Papers of Governor Edward T. Breathitt*, 359-361; Press, *The KET Story*, 119.

operators stood the risk of being labeled anti-business or even un-American if they kept their operations entirely state-owned.

Van Hoose and his Authority colleague Kenneth Thompson, a Dean at Berea College, considered the matter back in 1960 when observing South Carolina's closed-circuit network, which leased its infrastructure from the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company. Weighing the pros and cons of such an arrangement, they admitted that South Carolina ETV had activated its network with "low capital outlay, avoidance of responsibility for maintenance, and shifting of the problem of replacing obsolescing equipment into private hands." Considering all the stress Kentucky ETV supporters would encounter in the coming years trying to convince the state to make such an investment, one might be led to believe that Kentucky had missed an opportunity by declining to enter into a private partnership. However, Van Hoose and Thompson's report on South Carolina also noted their own personal belief that in matters of public education, such as ETV, private control to any degree was inherently risky. The contract would presumably require updates or renewals down the road, and the private firm might exact higher charges if the partnership had not proven to be profitable. If ETV was successfully implemented in Kentucky's schools, as they hoped it would, any amount of dependency the schools might form on ETV would "prove difficult in a future year," if that service was contingent on a telecommunications firm's profit margins.<sup>58</sup>

KET's network operations would not be entirely public—the microwave links between the 12 stations were latched on to Southern Bell towers—but the cost of this

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<sup>58</sup> Richard Van Hoose and Kenneth Thompson, "South Carolina ETV Operation (A Report to the Advisory Committee on Educational Television)," folder titled "1960," box 2, KET Records 1960-1976.

transaction was relatively minor compared to South Carolina's agreements.<sup>59</sup> Far more impressive were the bids the state received for the fixed asset purchases of transmitter equipment. In the end, RCA beat out General Electric with an offer of four million dollars for all state transmitter facilities, and RCA would herald the sale in *Broadcasting News* as "the largest single purchase of RCA broadcast equipment" in the company's near 50-year history. Press would lament that one of his colleagues' original ideas for the network was not included: that all schools wishing to receive programs would have the cost of receivers and antennae covered by the state. They would take this up again a decade later, and have it passed under Governor Julian Carroll.<sup>60</sup> For the initial network rollout, however, Ronald Stewart and Field Services Supervisor Paul Smith distributed guidelines for districts on behalf of the Authority which estimated that most schools could install necessary equipment for less than \$2,000. Presumably, any interested classroom could use a standard home receiver, but it was recommended by the state bulletin that schools install "a master antenna system and cabling to the viewing rooms," for which they should "seek guidance and consultation from an individual or firm with experience in this type of installation." The Authority also pledged itself to assist in reviewing any construction bids to make sure districts weren't taken advantage of, and to inspect any home or school that wasn't receiving a satisfactory signal.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> "Southern Bell Construction To Set Record," *The Lexington Herald*, February 7, 1968. The "record" set by Southern Bell refers to the expense the company put toward upgrading telephone infrastructure, which used the same towers KET would lease.

<sup>60</sup> "Kentucky ETV Network Orders 12 Transmitter Plants," *Broadcast News* (October, 1967); Press, *The KET Story*, 34.

<sup>61</sup> Ronald Stewart and Paul Smith, eds. *Receiving ETV In Your School: Guidelines for Equipment*, undated, folder titled "September-December 1968," box 3, KET Records 1960-1976.

For all the wheeling and dealing Press's memoir vividly and assiduously describes of the years leading up to 1966, when the state finally consented to fund the activation of KET, Press is surprisingly nonchalant and succinct with regard to Breathitt's successor, Louis B. Nunn. He was "a novelty for our times," Press wrote of the incoming governor, since Nunn was a Republican. Though Press might have feared the worst for the network he and his colleagues had worked so hard to build, all it took to save it in late 1967 when Nunn took office, was one simple meeting with the Governor. Nunn was prodded to take the meeting by Jim Host, the state's new Commissioner of Public Information and a former broadcasting student under Press at the University of Kentucky. The governor was perturbed to hear from Press that until KET could get a few years' experience producing its own programs, much of their early material would come from National Educational Television (NET) in New York, a bastion of liberal values that rankled Nunn and many other rural, conservative Kentuckians. Still, Press and Host were able to convince the new executive that ETV was a program worth preserving, and though Nunn's first budget shaved off a few hundred-thousands from the 2.6 million the Authority had requested, activation would proceed as planned.<sup>62</sup>

The more cynical observer to Kentucky politics might explain that Nunn was merely content to take credit for a project that his predecessor and opposing political party labored to create but could not see to fruition. Press remembers him, however, as a true believer in the network, evidenced by his determined defense of the network in the face of its detractors. Activated on September 23, 1968, KET started out at roughly the same time as the national public broadcasting structures, the Corporation for Public

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<sup>62</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 133-135.

Broadcasting and the Public Broadcasting Service. As Nunn had intuited in his first meeting with Press, programs produced by those services and circulated nationwide began to generate controversy and outrage among Republicans, most notably within the Nixon administration. Press praised Nunn for his unwavering support of KET “in the face of not a few protests he heard from the private sector, from banks to coal mining to tobacco, just a few of the industries that felt they were under unreasonable attack from public broadcasting—read KET.”<sup>63</sup> Other state and local PBS affiliates in addition to KET, would continue to serve as scapegoats for any upsetting program or series produced by the national headquarters.

Nunn saw KET as a true component of education, an altogether uncontroversial service the state must provide. He would even cite KET as a visual example of a “fixed obligation” for his two-percent increase of the sales tax. “Should we use these TV antennas as lightning rods?” he would quip at a news conference in February, 1968, making light of his critics’ objections, but also affirming that taxpayers had started this investment in 1960, and it was not his place to take it away from them. An editorial on the tax increase in the *Lexington Herald-Leader* emphasized to detractors that the proposal had garnered support from Republicans and Democrats, and that Nunn, with “courage and vision,” planned “to use the state’s money to provide the quality services our state has needed so long.” Press looked back in his memoir on Nunn with gratitude for his defense of the network at a crucial moment, though he had seen that the sales tax increase “killed Nunn’s candidacy in succeeding elections.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 137.

<sup>64</sup> William Bradford, “Nunn Tells Why He Asked Tax Increase,” and “Gov. Nunn’s Fair and Sound Budget,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*, February 17, 1968; Press, *The KET Story*, 140.

Not all of the expected benefits of KET touted by supporters would come to fruition. One particularly ambitious component Press and his colleagues were excited to incorporate into the network was college and university-produced programming. Much of the attention surrounding the network focused on its benefits to primary and secondary education, continuing education and training for adults, and more edifying general-interest programming than what was offered by commercial networks. Plans for instructional television at the higher-ed level were ingrained in the plan almost from the beginning though, as the state hoped to develop television production capabilities at each of its major universities and connect their operations into a sort of ETV consortium. Eastern Kentucky University, Morehead State College, Murray State University, Western Kentucky University would all receive, as part of the construction funds for the network's activation, on-campus television studio facilities, as UK created had years ago. Once course programs were produced, they could be shared interchangeably.<sup>65</sup>

Any of the connected institutions could have pursued television production programs on their own, and there were ample data and evidence on implementing such programs at colleges around the nation. The focus of this part of the network was engendering some level of cooperation and coordination between the schools' general course offerings, as well as an invitation to highlight the regional differences within the state and bring that study to the attention of all Kentuckians. Robert Martin, president of Eastern Kentucky University in Richmond and committee member within the ETV Authority, was the most outspoken proponent of this idea. In his address to Governor

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<sup>65</sup> Ronald Stewart, Kentucky Educational Television Oral History Project. Stewart notes that the University of Louisville and Kentucky State College (later University) also received funding for television course production, though they were not part of the original rollout.

Breathitt's ETV Conference in 1966, Martin praised the spirit of competition between the regional institutions, which he felt had sharpened their offerings and produced better graduates overall. But he did feel that "competition can be carried to extremes," and that colleges ought to "explore means by which they can cooperate in providing programs that would be too expensive to provide on a given campus." By this he referred particularly to upper-division courses where students at one school might seek advanced coursework that would require investments from their own college that administrators could not immediately justify. What seemed to Martin a logical extension of the ETV model from primary and secondary levels to higher education would have radically altered the options for students at any of the connected regional Kentucky colleges.<sup>66</sup>

Funding and control of the consortium system were placed in the hands of the colleges and universities themselves and the state higher education committee, not KET, and these institutions balked at the idea after a few years. "Each institution," Press recalled, "was prepared, even eager, to make its professors available to other campuses via television. But all were loath to accept another institution's teachers on their own campuses." Adron Doran, president of Morehead College (now University) in eastern Kentucky, said in a later interview that the University of Louisville and the University of Kentucky, the most well-endowed members of the consortium, were the least enthused about participating.<sup>67</sup> Parts of the proposed system were used, however. Colleges happily made use of their television production facilities to train students and design

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<sup>66</sup> Ronald Stewart, Kentucky Educational Television Oral History Project; Robert Martin, "Potential for Inter-Institutional Exchange of Curriculum and Other Resources," May 17, 1966, transcript in Press, *The KET Story*, 129.

<sup>67</sup> Adron Doran, oral history conducted 1976 by Jerry Paul Perry, 1981 OH 090, Kentucky Educational Television Oral History Project.



telecourses. The closed-circuit cables laid out to connect the schools would later be used by state hospitals to share training modules in mental health and other areas, and the University of Kentucky used CCTV to transmit courses to the state's community colleges, which the University oversaw until 1997. Ronald Stewart noted in a 1976 interview, just a few years after the program had come and gone, that many university administrators were quietly remorseful about the abandoned program, having only known "how useful it was after it had been taken away."<sup>68</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Kentucky Educational Television would prove to be an immeasurably multifaceted resource to the state's education system, lauded regularly by national organizations of education and journalism throughout its first 50 years of operation. More will be said of these exploits in the fifth chapter of this dissertation, but the years of its development prior to activation are no less noteworthy. The unjust state of education in the Appalachian region of eastern Kentucky and other rural parts of the state, observed firsthand by newcomers to the state like Leonard and Lillian Press and known intuitively by native Kentuckians, was brought to the foreground in significant ways by the campaign for educational television. A better and more widespread example of just and equitable educational technology cannot easily be found.

The ties connecting KET's formation to eastern Kentucky and Appalachia, while not explicitly stated in its charter, are undeniable. Through the present day, appeals to improve the state education system in Kentucky have pointed to the situation in eastern

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<sup>68</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 130; Ronald Stewart, Kentucky Educational Television Oral History Project.

Kentucky, but the architecture of KET stands as testament to a program that achieved real results. UK's listening center program, from which Press and others drew inspiration for a statewide television network, offered an ad hoc solution to one particular disparity in the region. By the 1960s though, calls had emerged for more ambitious, holistic improvements to eastern Kentucky's education system. Important conversations took place in this decade regarding equitable funding for schools and dismantling racial segregation, and ETV became for many states an essential component of their new progressive state education systems.

Eastern Kentucky's terrain posed a unique and expensive challenge to the goal of providing signals to every school and home in the state, but advocates for the network sought out all possible resources to make the network a reality. Many of these advocates were born and raised in eastern Kentucky, and could personally attest to how the region had so often been neglected or overlooked by the state's education system. Some of these supporters, unfortunately, had interests in the fossil fuel companies that contributed to eastern Kentucky's economic woes. Others had little qualm about trading on base stereotypes of Appalachian folk to drum up support for a network. Still, support for an ambitious public education system meant that, once completed and in operation, KET would have the ability to transcend its early ties to these commercial interests and provide a genuine service to the region, which it would do for many decades.

Of course, KET would go on to serve all Kentuckians, not simply those in the eastern mountains or urban areas; and in the years when "the bloom was off" ETV and doubts arose as to how effective and useful the medium would be, Kentucky's ETV advocates acquitted themselves before the public admirably. A number of key grants and

federal subsidies would make construction of the network more palatable to taxpayers, but Press and other members of the Authority for Educational Television worked for many years to convince governors, legislators, district superintendents, teachers, and any other interested Kentuckian that their program was worthy of continued support, and no mere flash in the pan. Teachers were satisfied to learn that schools could acquire television capabilities in classrooms, but mainly they appreciated that the “television teacher” would be used strictly as an aide to the classroom teacher, never as a replacement. Furthermore, the benefits of home education Kentuckians were told they could expect, either as formal training and continuing education programs for adults or informal learning programs for people of all ages, meant that KET deserved a role in state government independent of public instruction or higher education.

Public television is rarely considered a “radical” institution, but its establishment in Kentucky deserved that qualifier for the two major principles laid in its foundation. The first of these was the historical argument made by its proponents. Authority members’ oft-repeated phrase “those who need it most are often the last to get it,” bespoke the long injustice of educational inequality endured by communities in eastern Kentucky and other disadvantaged areas in the state. KET’s founders knew that the technology of educational television offered certifiable benefits to education in society, and while they knew it was not fully capable of reversing the effects of a history of educational inequality, applying that technology equitably to all members of society was the only earnest choice they felt any true educator could make.

The other principle, expressed by Press in his memoir as he reflected on the years campaigning for an ETV network, was that the resistance of state legislatures and

bureaucracies to enacting ambitious proposals within an education system, whether it be outright opposition or simple inertia, can be overcome. Kentucky had been decried for decades for its substandard system of public education, and even in years like those after World War II, where faith in the ability of the state to overcome social inequalities was relatively high, the prevailing philosophy within Kentucky's government was to keep belts tight as possible. In an era when the very concept of a state sales tax stoked controversy and outrage, Press and his colleagues convinced the state to undertake a program that many viewed as an extravagance. They did so only by mounting a laborious public relations campaign, where they endeavored to convince everyone in the state of the need for a network. Press knew how recalcitrant Kentucky could be in embracing drastic changes, but looking back on the campaign he remarked, "when the state really wanted to move, I discovered to my great surprise, it really could."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 107.

## CHAPTER 5. “SIGNALS TO EVERY DIP AND HOLLOW:” THE RISE AND FALL OF THE APPALACHIAN EDUCATIONAL SATELLITE PROGRAM AND THE APPALACHIAN COMMUNITY SERVICE NETWORK

One technological apparatus emerging in public conversation roughly at the same time as KET’s long march toward full state coverage was satellite communications.

After network designs submitted by Edward Schten’s Legislative Research Report to the Kentucky Legislature were accepted in 1962, the state did not waver in its commitment to the essential design of that technological plan, in spite of rising awareness of satellite capability. Blanketing the state with an array of individual transmitters was indeed an expensive option, but in the face of many other less costly or less comprehensive options for transmitting signals and interconnecting studios, Leonard Press and his colleagues in the Kentucky Authority for Educational Television remained committed to their ambitious plan. Kentucky had elected to operate primarily with ground-based or “terrestrial” machinery, wherein each local transmitter was connected via a microwave link to adjacent transmitters, and by extension, all production facilities. Communications satellites orbiting the earth’s surface could, however, offer the same interconnection functionality and, as this chapter will show, many other opportunities for interaction and communication between different sites.

The capability of satellite transmitters and speculation as to their possible use had at that point been discussed for well over a decade, but by 1966 their application in mass communication was sufficiently manifest to merit serious consideration for use in educational television. That year saw one of the first major proposals for their use in noncommercial television—at the same time Congress was considering how to establish an interconnected system of educational broadcasters. Ultimately, on the

recommendation of the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, Congress would create the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Public Broadcasting Service, both of which operated mainly as a terrestrial network. The Ford Foundation had proposed in 1966 however that a satellite could be commissioned to carry signal for all major television producers, commercial and noncommercial, with profits from the former going directly to support the latter. Bill Ladd, columnist for the *Louisville Courier Journal* and member of the Kentucky Authority, acknowledged in his column the potential benefits to interconnection satellite would provide, but moreover implied that Ford's idea presented a host of side considerations that Congress was not likely to broach. A later oral history interview with Hartford Gunn, manager of Boston's educational station WGBH and first president of PBS, confirmed this suspicion, recalling that the Senate Subcommittee on Communications gravitated to the Carnegie Commission plan partly due to the simple fact that it appeared much less controversial by comparison.<sup>1</sup> Relay and interconnection systems based on satellite and cable technology would, of course, go on to fundamentally alter the landscape of broadcast television in a few years' time, but this was not something most viewers and lawmakers were willing to entertain in the mid-1960s.

This chapter will examine a major initiative to use satellite and cable television distribution systems to provide useful educational programming to schools and households in the Appalachian region. In spite of the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction's demise, communities of educational broadcasters maintained a

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Ladd, "Satellite Plan Could Create A Mess," *Louisville Courier Journal*, August 4, 1966; Hartford Gunn, quoted in Robertson, ed., *Televisionaries*, 246-247.

belief that noncommercial public media would be a useful tool in targeting and combatting systemic educational inequality on a regional basis within the United States. As the architects of MPATI had done a few years earlier, a new cohort of media experts took to the sky and embraced an unconventional technology as a means of building new educational institutions across their region and expanding opportunities for individuals and communities within that region. An earlier proposal of this magnitude had been issued in Appalachia, as seen in a previous chapter, but that proposed project and MPATI both foundered in the mid-1960s amid accusations that their systems simply did not cohere with accepted wisdom, both in public education and broadcasting. The rise of satellite technology in the 1970s, however, gave new life to these ambitions, and provided remarkable results to the system of education in Appalachia.

It is worth observing how prior to the launch of new attempts at a regional network, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the networks' main sponsor, had continued investment and development in ETV in the region, albeit on a smaller and more targeted scale. Research into the general state of education in Appalachia, regardless of the availability of ETV, revealed specific and urgent needs across the region. The ARC provided valuable grant support to organizations that met these needs, and a number of these organizations employed ETV as a useful tool. Their programs expanded the range of ETV well beyond the conventional schoolroom materials and mass interest documentary filmmaking that had defined noncommercial television to that point. Instead, the new cohort of Appalachian ETV programs targeted more specific issues, such as the GED program, early childhood education, and local government affairs. Each of these new programs coincided with research into existent educational opportunity

within the region, rather than an imposition of what educational broadcasters who were unfamiliar with the region might have suggested for it.

These minor grant programs provided the groundwork for the new attempts at a region-wide ETV network. Of the two major programs considered in this chapter, only the first, the Appalachian Educational Satellite Project (AESP) would be based solely in satellite technology. Appalachia was one of a few disadvantaged regions identified by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) as ideal candidates for new applications of the satellite technology developed by NASA scientists. Though the satellite program only lasted a few years, its functions were adopted and favored by educators in Appalachia. Local partnerships between school districts incorporated satellite technology as a means of sharing resources among schools that could not offer them individually, and higher education programs throughout the region developed interactive programs with the satellite that resembled present-day Internet platforms more than conventional television.

Technical considerations would cause the satellite program to be dismantled, but many of the programs and staff energies within AESP were redirected toward the creation of the Appalachian Community Service Network, a nonprofit, government-chartered network available as an educational alternative on the burgeoning cable television (CATV) industry. Cable television could not offer the same opportunities for interaction between a program's distributor and viewers at home or school, but it did entail much greater reach, both to homes within Appalachia and throughout the rest of the country. As with its predecessor, ACSN generated considerable media attention and popularity, but would quickly see its government support dry up. Despite many efforts to



preserve the network as a public and noncommercial resource for Appalachia, ACSN ultimately had to be sold to private investors. It would be rechristened as “The Learning Channel,” and it has operated privately ever since, though today it is commonly known by the abbreviation TLC.

These efforts were spaced across the 1970s and early 1980s, though each shared roughly the same institutional home in the Appalachian Regional Commission. Boyd Fellows had concluded in 1966 that plans for a regional communications system in Appalachia proposed by educational broadcasters were unfeasible, but the ARC’s hefty bureaucracy proceeded apace toward educational improvement in the years following Fellows’ report. Educational television reemerged in the ARC in such a way as to address many of the issues the National Association of Educational Broadcasters had raised in their original proposal, but it was also used in such a way as to allay concerns Fellows and others had raised about a singular ETV authority looming over the entire Appalachian region. To an outsider, AESP and ACSN might resemble this kind of authoritative service, but close examination of the ARC’s activities in television reveals a complex and muscular array of smaller projects and grants across the region. The cable and satellite services may have been the most prominent service in the eyes of the public, but they stood atop a diverse and collegial bounty of television offerings.

Noncommercial broadcast media in the present day is known almost exclusively as “public television,” defined by a reporter at the CPB’s inception as a nonprofit channel “directed in principle to all [television] set owners.”<sup>2</sup> The term gained credence throughout the 1970s, but the design of regional services like AESP and ACSN make it

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen White, “Carnegie, Ford, and Public Television,” *The Public Interest* 9 (Fall 1967), 12.

difficult and somewhat inaccurate to consider their programs as “public television.” Although the descriptor “educational television” would be used less and less after PBS took off, the programs offered through AESP and ACSN are more accurately considered ETV, since they were often targeted at very specific groups and settings, and as with the previous networks examined in this dissertation, their primary intended function was to serve as an aide to formal classroom instruction rather than general viewing. The case of ACSN strikes a particularly unusual balance in this regard, as it existed nominally to serve communities in Appalachia, but as a cable network it appeared alongside ESPN and CNN and was available nationally. Though ACSN did not profit from advertising revenue, most viewers would need to pay for cable subscriptions to view it. Yet while the network remained a government-sponsored corporation, its directors insisted on finding ways by which its resources could be available free of charge in Appalachia. AESP and ACSN were publicly owned enterprises, but their mission was explicitly educational, so in spite of their public appeal, it makes better sense to label them “ETV networks.”

### **The Potential Use of Satellites in Educational Television: Carnegie and Ford**

Like most of its investigations into television technology and how it could best be applied in an educational setting, Ford’s foray into satellite in 1966 was accompanied by assiduous and detailed reports for the FCC and interested television specialists to pore over. Their satellite plan, however, was directed more toward the political consideration of how the federal government should support the various noncommercial stations throughout the U.S., which were perennially short-staffed and underfunded. The Carnegie Corporation had by that time established its own research commission into the

issue, and the latter's findings and recommendations would ultimately form the ideological basis for the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. Stephen White, assistant to the commission's chairman James R. Killian, would admit in a piece for *The Public Interest*, published in Fall of 1967, that the Ford Foundation was consulted from the beginning of the commission for its expertise in ETV. "Ford, after all," in White's observation, "was the patron saint of noncommercial television." The understanding at the time was that Ford could not produce the study of a potential national network, as they could not be considered impartial and objective in the matter. In any case, White recalls, "it seemed to Carnegie that the goodwill of Ford was essential" in their proposed system.<sup>3</sup>

According to White however, the research period for the Carnegie Commission coincided with high-level personnel changes at the Ford Foundation that would briefly jeopardize that goodwill and shake the ideology of noncommercial broadcasting to its core. Henry T. Heald, who had presided over the Ford Foundation for 9 years, turned the organization over to President Johnson's outgoing National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy, who, on taking office felt Ford should exercise a more involved role in the process. Bundy was encouraged in this thinking by a new broadcast consultant at Ford, Fred Friendly, a recent expatriate of CBS News who had been acrimoniously ousted after a distinguished career of heavy-hitting and trenchant journalism with the network. Together the two Ford neophytes pressed for a more ambitious proposal than what Carnegie had been pursuing to that point. Ordinarily, this sort of institutional rivalry would not have gained much notice outside their respective circles of the federal bureaucracy, but Ford's proposal raised eyebrows across the nation (evident in Bill

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<sup>3</sup> White, "Carnegie, Ford, and Public Television," 10.

Ladd's column in the *Courier Journal*) because it rehashed the notion of a "fourth network," a public educational option for broadcast television equivalent in stature and power to NBC, CBS, and ABC. With satellites in play, Bundy and Friendly wanted nothing less than a revolution in television.<sup>4</sup>

The commercial networks had achieved nationwide presence via a patchwork series of terrestrial links, most of which were procured through partnerships with telephone companies. Satellite, Ford contended, would allow a tidier arrangement of interconnection, one shared by the three major networks with a simple excise tax that would fund a noncommercial "fourth" network also using the satellite. "To the commercial broadcast community," one technical report of the proposed Ford system noted, "the current land facilities and their cost have significantly influenced their distribution techniques and services." Those networks could reap the financial benefits of a streamlined system, while "the educational television community" could also look forward to use of this same system, which would in turn "make possible real-time nationwide viewing of programs and expedite the economies and technical benefits of pooled [educational] program generation facilities and revenues for the first time." Under the satellite arrangement, local educational stations and state networks would no longer be forced to operate in a perpetual state of isolation and poverty.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> White, "Carnegie, Ford, and Public Television," 16. White elicits Friendly's frustration with the established power structures in television, but it is worth noting that Bundy was also feeling aggrieved by his former employer. Though he did not oppose the war in Vietnam entirely, he had become openly critical of the strategy employed by Johnson and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara.

<sup>5</sup> "Broadcasters Nonprofit Satellite System Study: Prepared for the Ford Foundation," November 7, 1966, 2-1, Virtual Vault Report No.008314, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Ford's plan was rejected mainly due to an unreceptive audience in the FCC and Congress. In their search for a more stable and equitable system of noncommercial television in the U.S., lawmakers simply weren't interested in giving such a radical proposal a full hearing. Pursuit of Ford's proposal would have engendered a cataclysm within the national communications industry, and likely earned Ford very formidable and irate foes in A.T.&T. and COMSAT, the company first awarded a concession by Congress for commercial satellite television. Hartford Gunn recalled that the commercial networks and telecommunications companies were "absolutely scared out of their minds with Fred Friendly's scheme," and before their representatives had the chance to fume at the Senate Subcommittee, the latter essentially said to the Carnegie team, "Go...get this fellow Friendly off our backs."<sup>6</sup>

Ford's proposal also gave little attention to the state and needs of educational television at the time. Their ETV production studio, NET, did supply a tremendous amount of programming to stations that would otherwise have serious difficulty in filling an hourly schedule, but in preparing the satellite plan they overlooked the popularity of locally-produced programs. Ford assumed, though, that all schools using ETV could use roughly the same programming, with five to-be-determined schools serving as model (or, in their words, "fishbowl") schools for all others using the network. This was essentially a rehash of the logic behind MPATI, although the MPATI board had gone to great lengths to include local teachers and school administrators in the development of their curriculum.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Robertson, ed., *Televisionaries*, 247.

<sup>7</sup> "Broadcasters Nonprofit Satellite System Study," 2-3.

By contrast, the Carnegie report upheld the diverse offerings of local stations as a prominent virtue of the existing system. The document's first recommendation called for "concerted efforts at the federal, state, and local levels" toward "adequate support of the individual educational television stations and to increase their number." Though the eventual design in the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 did not allow for the level of interconnection between member stations that Ford had seen as necessary, it did recognize the bonds local stations had been forming with the communities around them. Calling to mind the appeal toward localism rather than uniformity in education, Stephen White praised the Carnegie design he had helped to establish. That model, "persistently erected on the base of the local station...anticipates complete local control of program scheduling, substantial local production, and a broad reliance on local talent." Describing the forthcoming Public Broadcasting Service, White insisted: "it enthusiastically supports electronic interconnection among the stations, but looks upon it as a distribution device," by which any station could access high-quality programs, but "without prescribing for any station the manner in which those programs are to be used."

Satellite technology would remain a promising tool in spite of its rejection under Bundy and Friendly's utopian vision: commercial broadcasters would continue to gravitate toward its benefits, and, as this chapter will show, so did noncommercial broadcasters. White acknowledged that Ford's satellite plan would have solved many of the burdens facing noncommercial broadcasters, but their mistake, in his view, was believing "that there is no room in television for programs intermediate between the purely local and the purely national."<sup>8</sup> Using satellite, AESP would create a model for

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<sup>8</sup> White, "Carnegie, Ford, and Public Television," 16.

regional broadcast, and strike a balance in the exact area that Ford had overlooked. In so doing, it would expand the ethos of a local station to a range of areas experiencing similar educational disparities, and in the mold of PBS and CPB, it would allow local communities to share program resources and collaborate where they felt pressing need for such attention.

### **Television and Education in The Early ARC**

The previous chapters illustrate the widespread acceptance of ETV as a viable educational tool among states and school districts in and around Appalachia by the mid-1960s. As mentioned earlier, the concept of a unifying, Appalachia-specific network foundered at this point, in spite of the available precedent of a Midwest-specific network in adjacent states. In rejecting the proposal on behalf of the Appalachian Regional Commission, Boyd Fellows affirmed ETV's potential uses in the struggling region, but the concept challenged Fellows' understanding of the bedrock principle of localism in educational policy in the U.S. He was especially wary that a federally-supported network (at least in its use as a classroom instructional aid) would pose a threat to the autonomy of local teachers and administrators. Federal aid to local schools had always been a thorny issue in American politics, even though its popularity had relatively risen during the Great Society era. In spite of educational broadcasters' preference to see the medium as ancillary or supplemental to existing curricula, doubt remained as to how accepting local teachers would be toward programming produced with little or no understanding of the schools or students where they would be used. Whether or not rural schools in Appalachia would accept and incorporate ETV broadcasts would, in Fellows' view,

“require a local judgment,” and he simply did not feel confident that such a program would have the necessary support.<sup>9</sup>

While the first chance for an Appalachia-specific regional network may not have aligned with the agency’s priorities for education, federally supported ETV took off spectacularly around the nation in the years following the Carnegie Commission’s report. President Lyndon B. Johnson’s aid for public education was a foundational component of his Great Society program, and the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, which created PBS and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, was linked to that greater initiative in the President’s remarks. In his message to Congress supporting the bill, Johnson reported that “practically all noncommercial stations have serious shortages of the facilities, equipment, money, and staff which they need to present programs of high quality,” and that a federal partnership in the production and distribution of “a vital and self-sufficient noncommercial television system will not only instruct, but inspire and uplift our people.” In that message, Johnson also announced that the executive Department of Health, Education, and Welfare would explore areas where public television could do the most service and support projects in those areas. HEW would later serve as a foundational supporter of the satellite and cable television experiments in Appalachia.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Fellows, “Educational Broadcasting as a Tool for Appalachian Development,” p. 2, ARC, UK Special Collections. Prior to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, heated debates over the issue of federal aid to local schools, and the perceived threat it posed to local districts’ autonomy, played out throughout the postwar era. Certainly the most heated element within this debate was the issue of desegregation. For the standard treatment of this history at the national level, see Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945–1980* (New York, 1983). For an excellent Appalachian case study, see Carol Mason, *Reading from Left to Right: Conservatives and the 1974 Kanawha County Textbook Controversy* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “President Johnson’s Message to Congress, H. R. Doc. 68, 90th Congress, 1st Session, February 28, 1967,” in *Documents of American Broadcasting*, ed. Frank J. Kahn, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1978), 358.



As public television proceeded into the 1970s, however, it is worth noting that Johnson's successor did not share in the enthusiasm for most Great Society initiatives. Richard Nixon's animus against public television fits very well with popular narratives of his administration's suspicion of popular media.<sup>11</sup> Nixon made several public gripes about the influence and content of public television, most notably in his protests over PBS's comprehensive coverage of the Watergate hearings. In spite of the administration's protests, PBS did survive in some fashion and ambitious endeavors like the Appalachian Educational Satellite Project were made during the Nixon administration. Historian Gareth Davies argued that while Nixon "believed that the Great Society had demonstrably failed, he considered that the wisest response would be a redirected activist reform agenda with a Nixonian stamp." Nixon's approach to restructuring the new programs he inherited, in Davies' estimation, "was less to reduce the size of the government than to make it work."<sup>12</sup> PBS may not have been dramatically altered in the early 1970s, but public and educational television projects would evolve under the Nixon administration.

The ARC chose not to pursue a region-wide ETV network, but its larger efforts toward improving education in the region proceeded to be one of the agency's integral

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<sup>11</sup> Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of A President and the Fracturing of America* (New York, 2008), 596. PBS aired the Watergate hearings in their entirety without commercial interruption, and the network hired news anchors Nixon had long viewed as dangerous liberals and unfairly biased against his policies. The anchor in question was Sander Vacour. When Nixon heard of his new role at PBS, the president immediately ordered that funds for public broadcasting be reduced.

<sup>12</sup> Gareth Davies, "The Great Society After Johnson: The Case of Bilingual Education," *Journal of American History* 88 (March 2002): 1408 (quotation). Support for bilingual education, one of Davies' first illustrations of this transition, was an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that Nixon endorsed, believing that it was an important local issue his predecessor had overlooked. See also Gareth Davies, *See Government Grow: Education Politics from Johnson to Reagan* (Lawrence, Kans., 2007).

goals. In 1967, the ARC's Educational Advisory Council was formed with the express purpose of "advis[ing] the Commission of the status of education in the Appalachian Region and to suggest ways whereby the ARC could most effectively invest its funds to correct any deficiencies found." The educational program initiated by the ARC that has since been widely recognized by historians—the need for more vocational training and learning opportunities—did appear as one of the Council's highest priorities, but there were a host of other issues called to attention by the report. That group's research found that, even taking into consideration the states in northern Appalachia that budgeted far more funds for education, the mean for state expenditures for education in Appalachia averaged \$100 less per pupil, per year, than the national figure. Amid other issues facing the region's schools, such as outdated and inadequate facilities, high dropout rates, and comparatively low teacher salaries, per-student funding from state government was, in the Advisory Council's view, the area most in need of improvement in Appalachian schools.<sup>13</sup>

The ARC did however support studies on the issues teachers in Appalachia faced, evidenced in their authorized survey—conducted by the Arthur D. Little Corporation—of over 32,000 teachers in the region. The Little report found that more basic issues beset students in Appalachian schools than per-student funding disparities. Teachers in the region, the study found, were for the most part well-qualified, and content in teaching in their communities. The mean annual salary for teachers nationally for the 1968-1969 school year was \$7,900. The average for teachers in the Appalachian region was lower

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<sup>13</sup> "The Education Program of the Appalachian Regional Commission," no author, 1970, folder 7, box 612, ARC, UK Special Collections. Viewing disparities among schools as the result of unequal spending on pupils was the orthodox view in postwar debates over educational policy.

than that figure (by approximately one thousand dollars), but not so much as to seriously affect overall job satisfaction among Appalachian teachers.

In keeping with general population trends, the region was seeing younger teachers with recent training steadily leave the region for better opportunities outside Appalachia. The report observed however that new generations of qualified teachers eager to teach in their hometowns—women especially—could reliably be counted upon to stay in the region. Teachers in the region commonly worked in older facilities with maintenance issues and inadequate space, but on the whole this did not appear to be a particularly pressing matter in the minds of most teachers in Appalachia. The study found rather that they were more concerned with the infrequency of their own in-service training, as well accounting for the unfamiliar and unexpected challenges younger teachers frequently experienced in working with students in disadvantaged rural areas.<sup>14</sup>

As schools were being asked to do more with steadily declining resources, ARC directors were attentive to the concerns of both teachers and administrators. Eugene Hoyt, director of the ARC's Education Activities Staff, voiced these concerns in a congressional hearing on the problems faced by educators in rural America. In addition to the obvious issue of rural districts' isolation, Hoyt noted that schools in Appalachia were also negatively affected by "low value of taxable property, tradition . . . inefficient administrative units and sparse population." In spite of these obstacles, however, Hoyt told the committee that his impression of rural teachers and administrators was that further federal oversight and reform were not the desired solution in Appalachian locales.

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<sup>14</sup> "Research Report No. 12: Teachers in Appalachia, Prepared for the Appalachian Regional Commission by Arthur D. Little, Inc.," August 1970, folder 3, box 556, ARC, UK Special Collections.

“When I talk to a person from that school system,” Hoyt remarked, “I find that he is very proud of his schools. I don’t believe any reform that tends to tamper with that pride and independence will be as successful as a reform which builds on it.”<sup>15</sup>

That impression reinforced Hoyt’s policy for schools in his tenure as director. Under his leadership, ARC coordinated the creation of cooperative initiatives between neighboring school districts in certain portions of Appalachia. He explained to the Senate committee that “promoting the voluntary establishment of school cooperatives” would allow interested areas to directly target more pressing issues and identify specific needs—“so that each local community can use its own strength and combine with other communities to provide the kinds of things that children need.”<sup>16</sup> This approach aligned more or less with Nixon’s domestic policy of “New Federalism,” which moved generally toward the downsizing of centralized reform efforts in favor of targeted support for local initiatives. This approach redounded in public hearings during the Nixon administration on both Appalachian education and public television.<sup>17</sup>

The effort to organize such cooperative organizations between school districts prefaced the development of the Appalachian ETV satellite program. The eventual

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<sup>15</sup> *Hearings before the Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity of the United States Senate, 92nd Congress, First Session on Equal Educational Opportunity, Part 15: Education in Rural America, September 1–3, 1971* (Washington, D.C., 1971), 6429–6433.

<sup>16</sup> *Hearings before the Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity* (1971), 6433.

<sup>17</sup> Clay T. Whitehead, Nixon’s appointed director of the Office of Telecommunications Policy (later known as the National Telecommunications and Information Administration), offered his interpretation of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 before the Senate Subcommittee on Communications. Federal funding of public broadcasting, in Whitehead’s view, created a dilemma. “One the one hand,” he argued “there is a need for the Government to support public broadcasting. On the other hand, it should be insulated from Government interference.” The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 attempted to deal with this dilemma by creating a system based upon the ‘bedrock localism’ and, by creating an institution—the Corporation for Public Broadcasting—to serve the needs of the local stations. *U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Communications of the Committee on Commerce, Overview of Office of Telecommunications Policy Hearing, 92nd Congress, First Session, March 28–30, 1973* (Washington, D.C., 1973), 86.

expectation of the satellite program was that it would specifically aid these cooperatives. In autumn of 1972, *Appalachia: The Journal of the Appalachian Regional Commission* reported on the new school cooperative programs, known as Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs). Under the program, school districts that were sorely lacking in tax base, or were especially isolated, could partner with nearby school districts and higher education institutions to coordinate teaching methods and share effective resources for teaching rural students. Educational policy decision making within the region, the *Appalachia* piece noted, demanded close attention to the different policies of specific states, and different arrangements existed among the RESAs owing to varying state laws. The report was not intended as an advertisement for school districts who might consider joining a RESA or some similar arrangement—rather, it served as a signal to state legislators who needed to pass laws permitting such cooperatives before RESAs could be implemented.<sup>18</sup>

The article on RESAs made it plain by the second paragraph: “A RESA is not a superstructure imposed on its constituent school districts; it is not a consolidation of school districts. It is a creation of the participating school districts.” These cooperatives would make it possible, *Appalachia* noted, for struggling districts to “provide the services and programs that are required to prepare students for meaningful careers in a rapidly changing society”—services and programs that “individually those same districts would find it too cumbersome and expensive to provide.” Also, rather than simply offering under-resourced schools the opportunity to catch up with their peers, the article

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<sup>18</sup> “The Rise of the RESA,” *Appalachia: The Journal of the Appalachian Regional Commission* (hereinafter *Appalachia*) 6 (October/November 1972): 2–3.

forecasted how the pooled resources of a RESA would make member schools more eligible for taking part in “programs which might be considered of an experimental, pilot or demonstration nature.” Taking advantage of such opportunities, or even simply remaining aware of their existence, required time and funds that individual school districts in Appalachia could not easily expend unless they found ways to share resources.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Medium and the Message in the Region**

And while solutions were being developed within the ARC for issues plaguing the region’s conventional classrooms, the agency also explored new applications for educational television. One year after the profile on RESAs, a special issue of *Appalachia* titled “The Medium and the Message in the Region” (1974) touted practical uses of ETV then being explored by the ARC. Borrowing for its title the famous maxim (“medium is the message”) of popular media theorist Marshall McLuhan, the issue opened with an emphatic affirmation of the good ETV could continue to offer in the region. “Cultural isolation, long a characteristic of many parts of Appalachia, is diminishing daily,” the issue’s introduction reported, “and the family TV set is one major reason why.” This overarching argument certainly rested on an outdated notion of Appalachia as an isolated cultural backwater, but it assured readers that the local ETV initiatives presented in the issue were more effective because they emerged as self-determined solutions by locals to meet specific needs.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “The Rise of the RESA,” 3.

<sup>20</sup> “The Medium and the Message in the Region,” *Appalachia* 7 (February–March, 1974): 30.

One such article highlighted a new home General Education Development (GED) program being offered by Alabama Public Television, from both the northern, Appalachia-adjacent local transmitter and throughout the state network. Residents could tune in to regularly scheduled course programs throughout the week to prepare them (along with a ten-dollar mail order study guide) for the GED exam. Students enrolled in the program also had the option of visiting offices designated as learning centers in their home county, or requesting home visits from tutors for additional help in preparing for the test. The program's director, Dr. Kyo Jhin, noted in the article that adult education programs often alienated enrollees due to their inability or unwillingness to provide communal learning environments to participants, and also because of a dull, clinical presentation of course material. "They were bored by what they were being taught," he told the report's author, "and they had no sense of getting individual attention to their problems. We've tried to remedy both of those defects." Other specialists involved in the project also indicated their desire to use television to expand opportunities to working adults, but not at the risk of sacrificing personal bonds between teacher and student.<sup>21</sup>

Another article in the issue reported on the Appalachian Field Services Office of the Children's Television Workshop in southwestern Virginia. Children's Television Workshop was responsible for such programs as "The Electric Company" and the most famous of all public television shows, "Sesame Street." Like the GED course, the

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<sup>21</sup> "Go-GEDers Use Video: Alabama Adults Work for High School Equivalency Diplomas," *Appalachia* 7 (February–March, 1974): 32-33. Program coordinators reported that, within a few weeks of the program's airing, over 300 adults had purchased study guides for the GED program, while another 250 or so had requested loan copies from their counties' learning centers. Dr. Jhin also noted gleefully that the program included an optional graduation ceremony in Huntsville. Kentucky would develop its own GED via television program in the mid-1970s to great acclaim, a project which will be considered in the next chapter.

Children's Television Workshop offered learning aids and secondary activities for parents whose children regularly watched Sesame Street and The Electric Company. These programs, the report found, had been a godsend to working class homes in central Appalachia, particularly those in districts that could not yet offer kindergarten or preschool facilities, which the ARC had determined to be quite common. The profile of the Sesame Street and Electric Company programs was buoyed by effusive praise from participants. Rosa Lee Hooper, a mother of nine in southwest Virginia, participated in the program and remarked to the magazine how her preschool-age daughter could now read mail and the newspaper. "Betty Sue, she's doin' real good," Hooper said. "We work together and she can print real clear and she hasn't even gone to Head Start yet."<sup>22</sup>

Other programs the ARC highlighted in the issue expanded beyond the reach of a single program or target demographic, and also beyond the conventional understanding of educational television as an aide to schooling. Additionally, the two other programs profiled in *Appalachia* also presented new technological components to ETV, with an eye for how the medium of broadcast television could retain a spirit of localism and visible ties to the region, even as the national public television service was proliferating all around the country at that point.

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<sup>22</sup> Jane Dwyre Garton, "Sesame Street at Home: Parents in Southwest Virginia Learn With Their Children," *Appalachia* 7 (February–March, 1974): 36, 40 (second quotation). The Appalachian field office of the Children's Television Workshop served all of Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia, and the southeastern portion of Ohio. For more on the application of Sesame Street and The Electric Company as home educational resources, see Victoria Cain, "From Sesame Street to Prime Time School Television: Educational Media in the Wake of the Coleman Report," *History of Education Quarterly* 57 (November 2017): 590–601.



One of these profiles, titled “Town Meeting on the Tube: People Planning in Southwestern Virginia,” offered a clear vision of what program directors were hoping to obtain through ETV

“For a nation awash in nostalgia, the New England town meeting has special appeal. It began in an earlier and simpler time, when adult citizens could gather once a year to hear about the local issues, express their opinions, pass laws, elect officials and generally be sure that everything was shipshape on the local scene. In the words of the World Book [Encyclopedia], the town meeting is ‘the purest form of democratic government known, because it is government by the people rather than by their elected representatives.’”<sup>23</sup>

Rather than simply use ETV as a medium for educational curricula, the Fifth Planning District Commission of southwestern Virginia endeavored to use television to facilitate a town hall meeting. The program would thus not only educate viewers about the inner workings of district politics and decision making, but it would also invite local people to participate in that process in ways that might not have been available to them previously. The journal noted that most televised news coverage that reached local areas like southwestern Virginia was predominantly national, and as a result “most of us know far more about the energy crisis and hostilities in the Middle East than we do about what’s going on in our own city hall.” Local issues and policy were no less important, the issue argued, but most households had become alienated from them. The televised town meeting would reintroduce information on local politics to those households, particularly among people who “just don’t have time to dig out the facts, or to do a lot of heavy thinking about what the facts mean.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Champion, “Town Meeting on the Tube: People Planning in Southwestern Virginia,” *Appalachia* 7 (April–May, 1974), 2.

<sup>24</sup> Champion, “Town Meeting on the Tube: People Planning in Southwestern Virginia,” 2.

More of a polling exercise than an actual town hall meeting, the “People Planning” program created by the Virginia planners adapted similar programs they had seen aired in Dallas and New York City, which were intended mainly for gathering policy opinions in advance of the 1976 election. In the Virginia program, a select group of community members from across the district met in a conference to determine which particular local issues were the most pressing to their respective communities. Each major topic area they suggested would then serve as the subject for a televised documentary, filmed in and around the district, on the various considerations and interested parties related to the issue. The documentaries were aired “on all of the commercial and educational TV stations in the district area—“an unprecedented display of cooperation,” the report’s author noted—at various times throughout the week, and were promoted by those stations and local newspapers and radio stations. Viewers were asked to reply to printed questionnaires that were distributed in advance and mail them to Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg, where they would be compiled by a consulting sociologist. Program directors saw only modest return percentages for their surveys, but overall they were confident, the article noted, that such public affairs programming would “become a model for improving the democratic process by giving citizens a voice...not just in Appalachia, but throughout the country.”<sup>25</sup>

The final piece in *Appalachia* dedicated to new ARC initiatives in ETV, titled “Homegrown is Fresher: Broadside TV Pioneers in Regional Video Programming,” delivered the most explicit statement on the virtues of local and regional specialization in

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<sup>25</sup> Champion, “Town Meeting on the Tube: People Planning in Southwestern Virginia,” 6-10. Issues selected for documentary production included “Healthcare, Aging, Education, Land Use, Consolidation of local governments, Recreation, Criminal Justice, Housing, Day Care, Water, [and] Transportation.”

ETV production. In 1973, a wholly new public television operation was started in Johnson City, Tennessee, called “Broadside TV,” dedicated specifically to documenting the Appalachian region and showcasing it to a local television audience. A Canadian documentarian named Ted Carpenter conceived the idea for Broadside after a stint in the VISTA program and his studies in “new regionalism” at the Highlander Center in east Tennessee. Broadside TV was, in Carpenter’s words, created to address the “tremendous lack of authentic information on living in the Appalachian Mountains,” which resulted in “widespread misunderstanding of life there.” Interviewed by the *Kingsport News* (Tenn.) at the station’s rollout, Carpenter said Broadside would program “topics such as strip mining and how it affects the farmer, the tradition of real mountain music, local public hearings and constituency reports from area congressmen”—anything that might, as he put it “instill self-consciousness and pride in the residents of the Appalachian region.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> “Broadside Television,” subject header available through webpage for Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, [https://archives.etsu.edu/agents/corporate\\_entities/98](https://archives.etsu.edu/agents/corporate_entities/98) (accessed July 28, 2018); Mary Richmond, “Local Programming Seeks To Raise Consciousness, Pride In Mountains,” *Kingsport News*, October 25, 1973. Broadside was one of a number of small-scale, do-it-yourself style television operations across the United States at that point. For more on this phenomenon, see Deidre Boyle, *Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited* (Oxford University Press, 1998). “Homegrown is Fresher: Broadside TV Pioneers in Regional Video Programming,” and 1 (quotation), 2, 12.

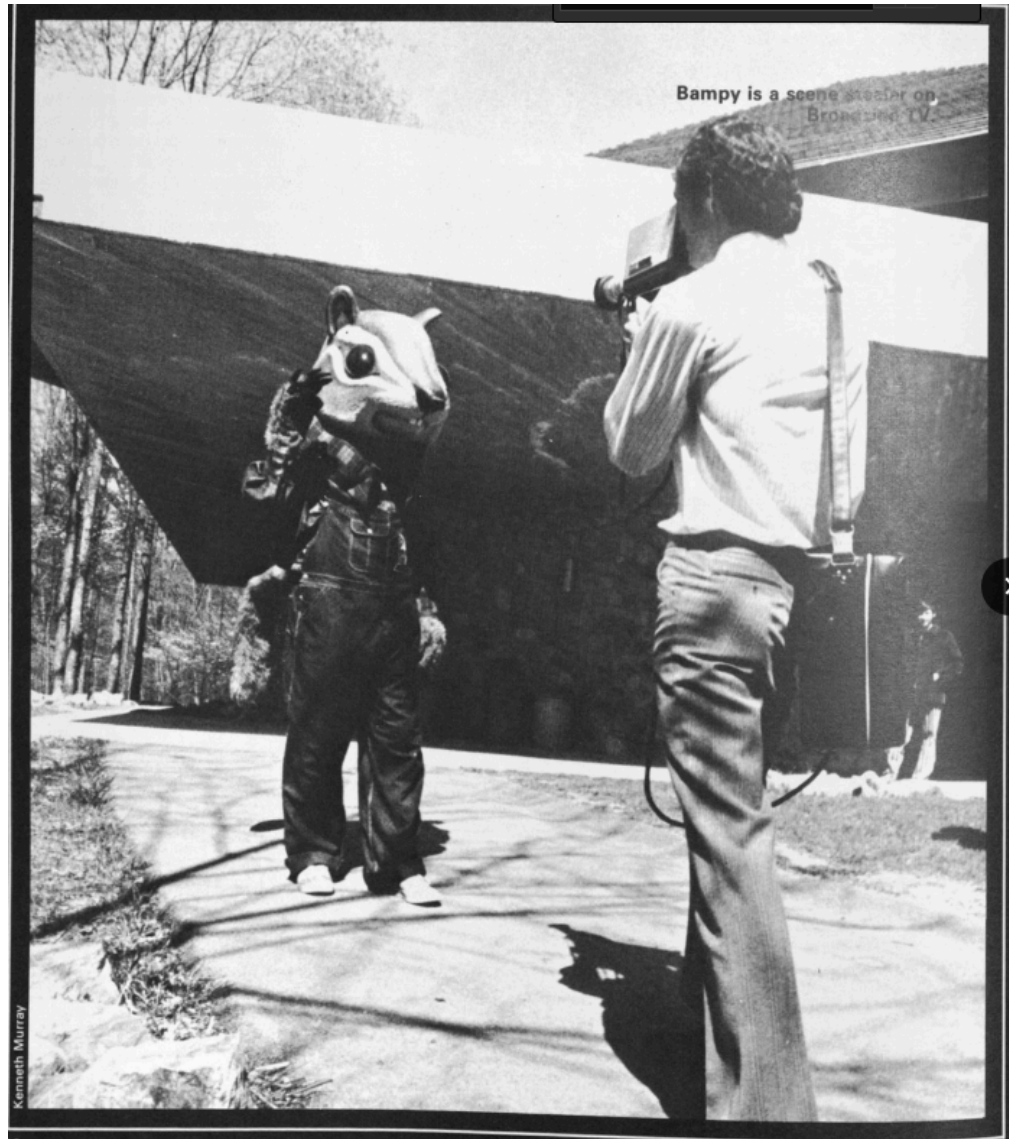


Figure 5: "Bampy:" An On-Screen Character on East Tennessee's Broadside TV Network

The profile of Broadside TV in *Appalachia* emphasized how the small scale of the organization—fewer than a dozen staff—allowed the operation to remain more collegial and connected to the local community. The piece also devoted significant space to the means by which Broadside was aired, the relatively unfamiliar domain of cable television. A recent policy issued by the FCC, the article noted, required cable companies serving over 3,500 subscribers to include locally-produced “access” channels

to subscribers in those respective areas. This requirement to provide “public access television” (the name by which it is more commonly remembered) would be overturned in the coming years as a result of challenges by major cable providers, yet the 1974 article in *Appalachia* gave the impression that cable companies operating in eastern Tennessee and southwestern Virginia were favorable to the stipulation, at least at first. Broadside partnered with area school districts to provide instructional programs, and its early general audience programs included a live music festival in Bristol, a profile of a community school in nearby Blackey, Kentucky, and “TV Foxfire.” By the end of the decade though, the cable companies had won their case against the FCC, and support they were formerly required to pay Broadside dried up, leaving the local access network to an eventual bankruptcy.<sup>27</sup>

In light of Broadside TV’s short lifespan, the hopeful tone in its profile in *Appalachia* is seen today with a certain irony. The important point to consider, however, is the breadth of programs presented by the journal in 1974. Taken together, the different programs profiled in the “Medium and the Message” issue demonstrate the ARC’s earnest faith in the potential for new communications technology to connect and edify people in Appalachian society, as well as a desire to innovate within the television medium and expand its potential use. Though the specifics of the “cultural isolation” that necessitated these programs—as the series’ introduction stated—was never addressed in

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<sup>27</sup> “Homegrown is Fresher: Broadside TV Pioneers in Regional Video Programming,” *Appalachia* 7 (April–May, 1974), 13-16; “Broadside Television,” subject header available through webpage for Archives of Appalachia. In spite of the loss of mandated payments and support from cable companies, Broadside TV continued through the end of the decade with support from the ARC and other grant sources.

any of the articles, it was clear from the issue that the ARC was investing wholeheartedly in television's ability to educate people within the region.

### **The Satellite**

Records kept by the Appalachian Regional Commission show that the agency had been apprised of the potential uses of satellite television in the region as early as 1967. A data and research-based consulting firm called Communications & Systems, Inc. delivered a presentation to the ARC in December of that year on their computer facilities and subsequent ability to process educational data. Were the ARC to consider launching an ETV network through the use of satellite technology, as the Ford Foundation had recently proposed for the entire country, Communications & Systems would be able to aid the ARC through "operations research, systems analysis and design...advanced mathematical and physical analysis, and management sciences." They could not offer satellites to the ARC, but merely suggested their helpful services if Appalachia should ever acquire one for educational purposes.<sup>28</sup> This may have sounded well and nice for such an arrangement, but in 1967, employees of the Appalachian Regional Commission were not rocket scientists and had no means of constructing or otherwise acquiring their own system.

By the early 1970s, however, the agency's education division would be in partnership with some of the most famous rocket scientists in the world. As recounted in "The Reshaping of an Innovation," a summary memorandum of both the AESP and

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<sup>28</sup> "Presentation to the Appalachian Regional Commission on Potential Applications of Educational Television," December, 1967, folder 2, box 612, ARC, UK Special Collections.

ACSN projects issued in 1982, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was, by the late 1960s, under pressure to shift the benefits of some of its scientific discoveries to the public. “This was a departure,” the report noted, from NASA’s “former policy of developing space technology but leaving its applications to the private sector.” Rather than prepare the latest satellite models to deliver to the hands of commercial industry experts or reserve them for use by scientists within the federal government, NASA chose to pursue “user experiments” with their new craft: “to test the feasibility of utilizing the satellites to help communities in need of assistance in education, health, economic, social, and cultural improvements.” To solicit partners in this new undertaking, NASA sought out the help of other federal agencies in identifying participants.<sup>29</sup>

NASA partnered with the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, which tasked the Office of Education and later the National Institute of Education (est. 1972) with finding ideal applicants for the program. Naming the project the “Educational Satellite Communication Demonstration,” NIE’s official goals included, among other objectives, evaluating “the feasibility of a satellite based distribution system for providing needed educational services to several isolated rural areas” with the use of “a variety of instructional materials, processes, and techniques.” More critically though, they would remain attentive to the costs a potential satellite program might impose on recipients, how the educational programs could best be arranged within existing local systems, and most

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<sup>29</sup> “Final Report of the ACSN to the National Institute of Education: The Reshaping of an Innovation, 1970–1982,” 22, June 30, 1982, folder 5, box 163, ARC, UK Special Collections. The ATS series reflects on what historian Neil M. Maher has described as NASA’s campaign to “reorient some of its technology away from outer space toward our bright blue planet” in light of charges that the agency was out of touch with contemporary social and environmental issues. See Neil M. Maher, *Apollo in the Age of Aquarius* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2017).

importantly “the degree to which the service is accepted,” by recipients.<sup>30</sup> At this point, the application of satellite technology was a provisional experiment—the benefits it might offer to interested regions were merely the hypothesis at this stage.

Appalachia was chosen as an area that could likely benefit from the introduction of satellite technology, and in 1972 the ARC commissioned a report through Washington University in St. Louis to identify where and how such technology could be implemented most effectively. The new technological possibilities inherent in satellite transmissions certainly erased many of the barriers that had worried previous ETV network designers. In creating Kentucky’s network for instance, technical director Ronald Stewart had spent months calculating interference and signal range in the hills of eastern Kentucky to determine the best possible locations for transmitters. In the apt description of “Reshaping of an Innovation,” satellite allowed the ARC “to carry television signals to every dip and hollow of the earth’s surface and open a way to provide channels even beyond the number contained on a dial of a TV set.”<sup>31</sup> The 1972 study also revealed new dimensions of broadcasting for ARC administrators to consider, such as the capacity to coordinate different programs simultaneously to all participating receivers, and also the ability for receiver sites to respond to the program originator in real time.<sup>32</sup>

The Washington University study recognized that, with the amount of funding and equipment Appalachia could expect to receive for an experiment in satellite, the ARC

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<sup>30</sup> Final Report of the ACSN to the National Institute of Education: The Reshaping of an Innovation, 1970–1982,” 23.

<sup>31</sup> “Final Report of the ACSN to the National Institute of Education: The Reshaping of an Innovation, 1970–1982” 41.

<sup>32</sup> Jai P. Singh and Robert P. Morgan, “Identification of Fixed/Broadcast Satellite-Based Educational and Health Telecommunications Services for the Appalachian Region,” June 1, 1972, p. 40, folder 3, box 560, ARC, UK Special Collections.



could not provide this signal to every home in the region. They would be prepared however to supply receiver equipment to a large number of schools, public meeting spaces, and health-care centers. Descriptions of how satellite could help the latter resemble present-day calls for telehealth capabilities. “In spite of the substantial development of roads and highways in the Appalachian region,” the report’s authors observed, “access to health-care centers is still a problem for quite a substantial portion of the Appalachian population.” Satellite communication, they intimated, could potentially provide “broad geographical use of the services of a limited number of specialists,” including “remote interpretation of vital signs such as EEG, EKG, X-rays...and specialized consultation, as well as access to specialized medical data banks.”<sup>33</sup> Given the possibility of two-way communication, the new ETV technology could now expand beyond schooling and into public health.

Harold E. Morse, director for the satellite project, came to the research team from the education branch of the ARC, and thus tended to think primarily of how the region’s education system specifically could benefit from the satellite. He often cited the Arthur D. Little survey of Appalachian teachers as the main impetus for the operation. At first, his main goal was to provide teachers in participating school districts the latest in-service training and pedagogical tools for teaching in an underserved region, both of which, the Little study concluded, were sorely lacking in the region’s schools. The initial program could not incorporate every school district in the region, and so Morse and his colleagues turned to the RESAs as ideal early test subjects. 16 such cooperatives had been

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<sup>33</sup> Singh and Morgan, “Identification of Fixed/Broadcast Satellite-Based Educational and Health Telecommunications Services for the Appalachian Region,” 43.

established by the time the satellite project was underway, but ultimately 5 were chosen as initial recipients of the satellite programs—one each from New York, Maryland, Virginia, Tennessee, and Alabama. All of the RESAs to that point had significantly demonstrated, in the words of program administrators, “participation by all the schools, colleges, and allied organizations in the area being served.” After the satellite’s first year of operation, each of the original RESAs would expand to two ancillary locations, meaning that 15 sites would eventually be served by AESP.<sup>34</sup>

Once accepted, the ARC dubbed the experiment the Appalachian Education Satellite Project. As an organization, AESP took pains to avoid the appearance of a centralized, government media service. The ARC’s headquarters in Washington, D.C. administered the project, but it placed the onus of curricular development and program production on participating RESAs and area higher-ed. institutions, as well as the “Resource Coordinating Center,” (RCC) the general production studio for all programs distributed through AESP. Located on the campus of the University of Kentucky, the RCC was housed in a converted gymnasium in the College of Education in Dickey Hall, the same space designated previously as a regional production center for Kentucky Educational Television. Outside of participation in productions for KET, UK’s television department had demonstrated effectiveness in creating high-quality educational programming, and its application to serve as the RCC was chosen over several other institutions.

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<sup>34</sup> “Final Report of the ACSN to the National Institute of Education: The Reshaping of an Innovation, 1970–1982” 27, 31.

Beginning in May of 1973, RESAs would initiate the process by outlining the types of professional development programs or course material they wanted the RCC to produce. NASA had provided two units from the “Applications Technology Satellite” series, the ATS-3 and the ATS-6 (designed to transmit video and audio), and also the use of their satellite uplink facility in Rosman, North Carolina. After a year of development at the RCC, the finished programs would in 1974 be sent via cable to the NASA satellite uplink in Rosman and, ATS-6 would transmit them to the RESAs and participating colleges. During the hours in which courses were transmitted, personnel were on site at the RCC in Lexington to troubleshoot and respond to questions phoned in by any of the participants.<sup>35</sup>

Teachers working with AESP experienced pressure to produce lively, informative, and engaging content, much like the creators of the Alabama GED program and distance educators of the present day. The main objectives laid out by the Chautauqua-based RESA in New York, for example, were to better equip teachers in improving children’s reading skills, and to encourage more high school graduates in the region to pursue post-secondary study. The programs produced at the RCC were by no means conventional and dull training videos—rather, they were components of interactive training seminars and exercises that different schools could engage in simultaneously. Live video feeds of course instructors were transmitted to participating sites and text and audio responses given by teachers in one location were circulated mid-session with other sites. The data from responses were collected by staff at the Lexington

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<sup>35</sup> “AESP Policies and Procedures Manual,” 7, (March 1978), folder 1, box 162, ARC, UK Special Collections.

facility and by site coordinators stationed at each location to assist with the technical process.<sup>36</sup>

A follow-up study of one interactive seminar course on elementary school reading instruction observed some confusion and unease among participants as to the role of these site coordinators, who were not teachers and had no expertise in the course material. In spite of the remoteness and the unconventional format, course participants, in the follow-up study's conclusion, "reported overwhelmingly that they were using the strategies and materials presented in the [satellite] DPRI course in their own classrooms." Furthermore, the report observed that participants "did not view the course format as impersonal," and that "when participants were asked to rate the learning activities included in the DPRI course in comparison to their typical campus counterparts, the DPRI activities were all rated as superior to campus versions."<sup>37</sup>

Profiles of AESP in *Appalachia: The Journal of the Appalachian Regional Commission* lauded the ingenuity of the project and its potential for effecting dramatic changes in the region's education system. Well aware of the persistent fear that televised instruction programs had lost their sheen from previous decades, *Appalachia's* survey of participating students found that "student satisfaction with the courses is certainly evident," and that the interactive components of the RCC-produced courses actually made the satellite courses more attractive than the conventional lecture hall or seminar.

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<sup>36</sup> Stephanie B. Bennett, "Appalachian Education Satellite Project, Phase I Final Report, Chautauqua (N.Y.) RESA Triangle," August, 1973, folder 1, box 704, ARC, UK Special Collections; "AESP Overview, Technical Report No. 2/RCC Evaluation Component at the University of Kentucky," March, 1974, folder 2, box 613, ARC, UK Special Collections, 4, 9–10.

<sup>37</sup> "AESP Overview, Technical Report No. 8/Student Achievement: Diagnostic and Prescriptive Reading Instruction, Summer 1974" August, 1975, folder 12, box 791, ARC, UK Special Collections, 51–52.

Teachers taking graduate-level courses through one of the partnering colleges were expressly favorable to the relative cost of the satellite courses. *Appalachia* reported that course enrollment at each site was restricted to twenty students, with some institutions offering the course for \$350, a far better deal than the \$1,694 price of comparable three-hour graduate courses at the University of Kentucky.<sup>38</sup> As the experiment progressed, project administrators also found that satellite delivery of courses could be applied in a number of other areas—over time the AESP expanded its offerings to include regular courses at the region’s colleges and universities and also training for healthcare staff in rural hospitals and clinics.<sup>39</sup>

Like any modern technology AESP had its share of “bugs” and malfunctions. The ARC’s report on “Equipment Reliability” during the first few months noted that problems with the audio component for instruction and responses had not been resolved until the second semester of courses. During interactive seminar sessions, “approximately 8 percent of the seminar question relays were hindered by malfunctions that rendered one or both delivery modes inoperative,” and that “on two out of 31 transmission days, malfunctions in the delivery system caused system-wide failures.” Still, the evaluation of the satellite equipment maintained that technical failures were an expected part of exploring the new medium and they should not deter any further development of ATS-6 or the AESP network.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> William J. Bramble, Claudine Ausness, and Dennis F. Goldstein, “On the Beam: The Appalachian Education Satellite Project,” *Appalachia* 9 (April–May 1976), 14, 16.

<sup>39</sup> “AESP Policies and Procedures Manual,” 6.

<sup>40</sup> “AESP Overview, Technical Report No. 5/Equipment Reliability,” July, 1975, Folder 11, Box 791, ARC, UK Special Collections, 52–53.

AESP was not the only experimental use of NASA's applied technology satellite. The ATS-6 had the capacity to route dozens of similar programs, with a general focus on exploring the use of telecommunications in rural areas. Historians Tess Lanzarotta and Jeremy Greene profiled a contemporary experimental program which used ATS-6 to promote "telehealth" in rural Alaska. As Appalachian teachers and students had difficulty accessing adequate postsecondary and graduate education in their communities, Native American populations in Alaska also struggled with sorely lacking (or nonexistent) public health infrastructure.<sup>41</sup> The initial rollout of AESP and other programs from 1974 to 1976 was the experimental phase, and in September of 1975 the ATS-6 was repositioned for another experiment in transmitting health, education, and cultural programs, this time in India. Following this, the project administrators evaluated the trial run and concluded that AESP merited a renewal. Courses resumed in late 1976, with an additional provision for UK from NASA of a satellite uplink facility to prevent issues with course transmission. By 1977 the experiment had seemingly gained institutional status, as the "P" in AESP was changed from "Project" to "Program."<sup>42</sup>

Harold Morse had faith in AESP's potential benefits to education in the region from the start, but it was also apparent he considered AESP's progress merely as a first step in further possible experimental uses of television in the region. In the first report on AESP in *Appalachia*, Morse noted that while satellite could do a great deal to improve

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<sup>41</sup> Tess Lanzarotta and Jeremy Greene, "Communications Technologies as Community Technologies: Alaska Native Villages and the NASA Satellite Health Trials of the 1970s," *Technology's Stories*, May 2, 2017, available online via, [http://www.technologystories.org/communications-technologies-as-community-technologies-alaska-native-villages-and-the-nasa-satellite-health-trials-of-the-1970s/#\\_ftn2](http://www.technologystories.org/communications-technologies-as-community-technologies-alaska-native-villages-and-the-nasa-satellite-health-trials-of-the-1970s/#_ftn2) (accessed June 8, 2019).

<sup>42</sup> "AESP Overview, Technical Report No. 5/Equipment Reliability," July, 1975, folder 11, box 791, ARC, UK Special Collections, 52–53 (quotation); "Final Report of the ACSN to the National Institute of Education: The Reshaping of an Innovation," 22, 31.

communications within the region, the preliminary studies of that medium's benefits to the region revealed that "communications facilities (land lines, telephone connections, and television signals) were not operating at the level of efficiency which they were presumed to have." In a remark that foreshadowed part of the eventual plans for ACSN, Morse expressed his desire to extend the benefits of AESP to the average television household and he envisioned that AESP could pave the way for use of the satellite as an "Open Appalachian University, which would provide higher education to Appalachian people scattered over large geographical areas."<sup>43</sup>

Though Morse may have held a special fondness for the work done by AESP, he also bore no illusions of the satellite—or educational media in general—as a panacea for the region's educational issues. In an article he coauthored in 1977 with Patrick W. Carlton, a professor of education at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University-Reston, Morse and his co-author lavished praise on the technological achievements of AESP. Still, they recognized that deeper educational inequalities lingered in the region. Property tax revenues still ensured inequitable funding for school districts and Morse and Carlton cited research that reported "drop-out rates in Appalachia are 20 to 25 percent higher than those of the rest of the nation," and the percentage of adults in Appalachia who completed high school in 1970 was still significantly lower than the national average. AESP was a sterling example in their article of the region's educational institutions' "long-standing tradition of providing technical assistance to local groups and communities" through research, organizing seminars, and "consultative assistance."<sup>44</sup> But

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<sup>43</sup> "Appalachian Teachers Study via ATS-6," *Appalachia* 7 (June–July 1974): 9.

<sup>44</sup> Patrick W. Carlton and Harold E. Morse, "The Challenge to Education in Appalachia," *Appalachia* 10 (February–March 1977): 31.

in spite of this tradition and its evident benefits, such as AESP, Morse and Carlton still argued that there was much collective work yet needed to help the region's educators.

### **The Cable Network**

Morse's wish for a publicly-broadcast network would be granted much sooner than he expected—or may have wanted, for that matter. In October of 1978, NASA announced that the ATS-6 had too many maintenance issues to justify its continued use, and thus the satellite would be decommissioned in June of the next year. With its primary instrument soon to be withdrawn, 1978 became the year for the ARC to look for alternatives. The “Reshaping” report recounts a search by AESP staff for similar satellite options, only to find that “no public satellite capable of carrying the AESP program was available,” and that “NASA had announced no plans for a replacement for ATS-6.” It appeared that the era of NASA returning the benefits of its research and redevelopment so directly to the general public had dwindled.<sup>45</sup>

For the immediate issue of interrupted satellite transmission, the Commission leased eighty-four hours of weekly airtime for one year on the private network satellite, RCA's Satcom 1, the primary carrier for the rapidly developing commercial cable television industry. By the time the ARC was ready to make use of that service, AESP had ceased to exist. In the ARC's proposal to the NIE for continued funding in 1979, Morse announced that the satellite project had “renamed and reshaped itself into the Appalachian Community Service Network, a non-profit corporation established under the

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<sup>45</sup> “Final Report of the ACSN to the National Institute of Education: The Reshaping of an Innovation, 1970–1982” 50.



corporate laws of the District of Columbia,” and that the decision to do so had been approved by the full ARC at a meeting on September 10, 1979.<sup>46</sup> Archive documents do not give a clear motive for switching to the nonprofit model—perhaps the leasing fee for a commercial satellite proved greater than what the ARC was prepared to give on a sustained basis, or perhaps Morse and the other AESP directors desired more flexibility in deciding what courses and programs to distribute.

At any rate, the process of becoming the Appalachian Community Service Network necessitated some dramatic changes in the organization. For one, as a 501(c)3, the network would no longer be governed directly by the ARC and would instead elect a board of directors. However, as the primary benefactor of the new non-profit network, the by-laws stipulated that the ARC (with consultation from the National Institute of Education) would decide who should serve on the board. Terry Sanford, former governor of North Carolina and president of Duke University, became chairman. Morse served as the Network’s president.<sup>47</sup> The partnership with the University of Kentucky also ended as a result of the new structure. The Network concluded that, while UK faculty, staff, and students performed admirably in producing content for the AESP network, ACSN’s leadership structure dictated that they have greater control in what programs would be either be produced or syndicated for broadcast. ACSN still maintained a presence in Lexington, though they initiated a process by which they would own and maintain their own production facilities. From January 1, 1981 through March 31, 1982, ACSN leased

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<sup>46</sup> Harold E. Morse, “ACSN Proposal to NIE for Funding, 1979–1980,” September, 1979, folder 5, box 794, ARC, UK Special Collections, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Morse, “ACSN Proposal to NIE for Funding, 7.

production facilities from Kentucky Educational Television while the Network constructed its own facilities at Coldstream Farm on the north side of Lexington.<sup>48</sup>

With the use of a publicly-owned satellite, AESP had the capability of transmitting clearly to any particular point within the Appalachian region, but the constraints of the program limited those transmissions mainly to the educational institutions that had signed on to the program. The “Reshaping of an Institution” report observed that, by contrast, “the addition of cable TV systems to the ACSN,” would not only defer the issue of equipment maintenance to RCA and the cable network operators (a factor which had unexpectedly sunk the AESP), it would also present “opportunities to participate in expanding markets.”<sup>49</sup> The array of channels then available under cable television was very small compared to the leviathan the industry would accrue over the next three decades, but ACSN would enter the market alongside many of the formative cable networks (e.g. CNN, TBS, ESPN) that carried cable television from its infancy. On cable, they could not reasonably be thought of as a “fourth network,” but ACSN had the potential of staking a claim as the premier noncommercial alternative in the nascent medium.

Another important trade-off surrounding the transition to a cable network was the issue of scheduling. Filling the hours of a weekly schedule would prove to be a challenge alongside other networks that boasted of their capacity to broadcast 24 hours a day. Even

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<sup>48</sup> “Final Report of the ACSN to the National Institute of Education: The Reshaping of an Innovation,” 177–79. In the facility transition, ACSN offered positions in the new network to all UK employees who had previously served as production staff. The report on the transition also noted that, professionally, “the KET agreement was a vast improvement over previous arrangements.”

<sup>49</sup> “Final Report of the ACSN to the National Institute of Education: The Reshaping of an Innovation,” 174.

if the network had retained its production studio at the University in Lexington, the program output of that one facility could never have hoped to meet the demand of a cable schedule. As a result, staff within ACSN shifted their stance from that of course design and data evaluation, to that of a conduit for any organization producing ETV programming that fit the network's general mission. The bulk of programs produced under AESP, in spite of their original design as training courses for teachers and other public professionals, would be repurposed as general programming. Some of the latter AESP courses, such as "Small Farm Marketing," and "Developing Rape Crisis Centers in Rural Communities," had started to gravitate toward a more general audience. At any rate, the industry standard for most cable and regular broadcast networks at that point was to draw most of their programs from various production companies, so ACSN was not unprecedented in this new task.<sup>50</sup>

Beyond the question of who would produce programming and how it would be linked to the RCA satellite, there remained the issue of how the "Open Appalachian University" network would be distributed equitably to viewers. Though the network entered into a new, semi-autonomous organizational structure, Morse and his colleagues were evidently still very much bound to the public service commitment they began with AESP. As a result, they considered a number of options for how the region could best be served. AESP enjoyed the arrangement whereby community satellite antennas were provided by the various participating government agencies. As the satellite program progressed, new receiver sites opened across the region, and these were still available to

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<sup>50</sup> "Final Report of the ACSN to the National Institute of Education: The Reshaping of an Innovation," 188.

ACSN, but there were still many communities in Appalachia that had neither a receiver site nor connection to cable television service.

If Morse had his way, rural communities interested in receiving ACSN could obtain satellite equipment as other communities had during AESP, but that option, as with many of the loftiest goals in distance education, proved to be too costly under the new corporate organization. Alternatively, ACSN considered partnering with PBS, which recently arranged its own system of coast-to-coast satellite transmission. That option was also untenable, given that ACSN was still committed to producing programs specifically tailored for educational needs in Appalachia. ACSN would have to essentially contest with other PBS programs for airtime. Eventually, ACSN decided to remain in the mix of commercial cable networks as an educational alternative to ESPN, HBO, and other entertainment networks. Viewers outside the cable service network could travel to the remaining receiver sites if they were interested in ACSN, but they were otherwise without access.<sup>51</sup>

Programming for the ACSN still resembled the early initiative behind AESP. Though the specific need for teacher in-service training through television no longer drew the most attention from the network, the network still offered continuing education “telecourses,” accredited by participating higher education institutions. Programs not affiliated with any specific institution (known as “community service” programs) could potentially be adopted as telecourses by interested institutions, but were otherwise designated for promoting “personal enrichment” of viewers. ACSN also broadcast

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<sup>51</sup> Morse, “ACSN Proposal to NIE for Funding, 1979–1980,” 4–5, 7.

meetings of government committees and proceedings known as “teleconferences,” much like Virginia’s Fifth Planning District had experimented with in the previous decade.<sup>52</sup>

At the outset, the list of institutions partnering with ACSN in telecourses was not as extensive as what AESP had overseen, but there were still dozens of participating higher education institutions and educational cooperatives throughout the region, and additional institutions signed on as the new cable station took root. These included Floyd Junior College in Rome, Georgia, Morehead State University in Kentucky, and the University of Tennessee Continuing Education Center in Chattanooga.<sup>53</sup> Telecourses usually combined the purchase of course materials and viewing of recorded instructional segments at home. Aside from a few programs that incorporated viewers’ telephone call-ins, the new network did not have the real-time interactive component that had been the cornerstone of AESP. Viewers and students could count on a regular, weekly airtime for programs that interested them. Telecourses also required a few scheduled meetings at a central location, usually the institution granting credit for the course. ARC did its part to promote telecourses in *Appalachia*, highlighting available courses including “Teaching the Young Handicapped Child,” “Contemporary Health Issues,” and a continuing education course for viewers in the legal profession titled “Legal Issues in the Eastern Coal Industry.”<sup>54</sup> Examples of “community service” programs included “Keep It Running: Auto Repair for Dummies,” a 20-week course on basic repairs and

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<sup>52</sup> “ACSN Site Locations,” *Appalachian Community Service Network* 1 (1979), 3.

<sup>53</sup> “ACSN Site Locations,” *Appalachian Community Service Network* 1 (1979), 4.

<sup>54</sup> “ACSN Telecourse Utilization Guide, Summer Semester, 1981,” folder 1, “ACSN Programming,” box 163, ARC, UK Special Collections; Judith K. Ballangee, “ACSN Takes Off,” *Appalachia* 14 (January–February, 1981), 6.

maintenance, and “Bluegrass Banjo Level One,” a beginner’s music course the ACSN acquired for distribution from a production company in Knoxville.<sup>55</sup>

One might expect effusive praise for ACSN from *Appalachia*, the journal of the federal agency that held the key interest in the network, but in “ACSN Takes Off,” author Judith K. Ballangee framed ACSN as exactly the type of program the Appalachian Regional Commission ought to have been carrying out since its inception. Amid the “open marketplace” of cable television that was “spawning new program services almost daily,” as Ballangee describes, ACSN had developed a unique and visionary use of the medium that was gaining national attention. “A far cry from the first attempts at ‘instructional’ TV,” in Ballangee’s description, the article at one point described ACSN with a quote from *Newsweek* art critic Douglas Davis. In his general observation of the satellite and cable landscape, Davis had heralded ACSN as a hopeful sign for what cable could offer the average viewer, as it was committed “directly to the worlds of education, labor, medicine and science, as well as the arts,” and could “reach small specific audiences as well as large.”<sup>56</sup> Though Ballangee noted that ACSN was not acting in competition to PBS or its member stations, she found that its regional focus yielded clear advantages over the established channels in public media. ACSN had “a clearly defined primary audience that shares a common cultural and socioeconomic identity, an established method for exchanging ideas with its audience on a regular basis, and a

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<sup>55</sup> “ACSN Continuing Education and Community Service Programming, Fall 1981,” folder 1, “ACSN Programming,” box 163, ARC, UK Special Collections.

<sup>56</sup> Douglas Davis, cited in Ballangee, “ACSN Takes Off,” 5.

singular commitment to meeting the broad educational needs expressed by that audience.”<sup>57</sup>

A most unfortunate parallel between the ACSN and the current distance education environment is that, in both cases, educators find themselves having to do more and more with diminishing state support. ACSN, as a non-profit corporation, began its operations in the red, as the ARC agreed to essentially advance the network \$2.1 million dollars for the shortfall the company expected as a result of losing much of its operational structure in the wake of AESP’s implosion. The hope for Harold Morse and the Board of Directors was that promotion of the telecourses and the revenue gained from course fees and material costs would eventually balance the network’s ledger. Though the network touted the fact in successive reports to the NIE and the ARC that revenues were increasing, they never reached the amount of money ARC initially advanced.<sup>58</sup>

Telecourse enrollment was the main source of revenue for the network, but ACSN actively sought new partnerships and ways of generating support for their channel. Hoping to entice their commercial broadcaster colleagues in the cable industry, ACSN proposed a tuition share plan, whereby \$3 of every course enrollment fee would go to cable provider companies that agreed to carry ACSN. Effectively, this would create a collective effort between ACSN and the local provider toward promoting ACSN courses to viewers, but also to colleges and universities that might sign on to the network as ACSN expanded to new markets. In pitching the plan to cable providers, the ACSN

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<sup>57</sup> Ballangee, “ACSN Takes Off,” 8.

<sup>58</sup> “Final Report of the ACSN to the National Institute of Education: The Reshaping of an Innovation,” 189; “A Report to the Appalachian Regional Commission from the Appalachian Community Service Network,” June 29, 1982, folder 8, box 794, ARC, UK Special Collections, 15–18.

announcement for tuition said the plan would offer “a double opportunity to impact your bottom line,” but also “the long-term benefits of the quality programming ACSN provides” in the communities served by prospective cable providers.<sup>59</sup> In admitting in the plan that ACSN programming could potentially be altered according to the new regions and communities it reached, the network seemed to slowly be shedding its “Appalachian” identity.

Beginning in 1982, ACSN added the moniker “The Learning Channel”—taking the full name “ACSN: The Learning Channel”—as a gesture to the national cable audience that the benefits of their educational alternative were not limited to Appalachia.<sup>60</sup> Fundamental changes like these reflected the deficit flood waters that were rising around the network, but it is worth noting that, in a number of ways, ACSN maintained its commitment to offering a public, noncommercial experiment within the corporate landscape of cable television. In the 1982 reorganization, the network did not accept any of the advertisement revenue generated by the for-profit networks, though it was offered to them. Even as it was clear the relatively slim subscriber fee ACSN received for its services from cable providers would not sustain them, Harold Morse still

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<sup>59</sup> “ACSN: Tuition Share Plan,” 1981, included as appendix to “Final Report of the ACSN to the National Institute of Education: The Reshaping of an Innovation,” 315.

<sup>60</sup> “The Reshaping of an Innovation—ACSN: The Learning Channel, 1974–1982,” October, 1982, Folder 2, Box 163, ARC, UK Special Collections, 9. The brochure, “Reshaping of an Innovation” included a letter from Morse giving further (though not entirely satisfying) explanation for the name change. There is an evident disconnect in the records of the ACSN between Morse’s newer role as a cable television executive and his earlier role with the strictly governmental agency, AESP. Aside from the “A” in the acronym, the letter gives no mention of Appalachia. Rather, the new network’s “programming philosophy” was to “help *adults* enjoy the rewards and pleasures of lifelong learning.” (emphasis added)



put forth proposals that the subscriber fee be waived in the counties within the Appalachian region identified by the ARC as economically “distressed.”<sup>61</sup>

Aside from the tenuous ground beneath the feet of Morse and his colleagues as they attempted to expand ACSN services while also securing the lifeblood of future growth in course enrollment revenue, larger external factors threatened their entire operation. The election of Ronald Reagan, a staunch disciple of the conservative movement, had placed the future of the Appalachian Regional Commission in jeopardy, as the ARC fit the administration’s definition of an expendable government agency that needed to be dissolved.<sup>62</sup> While ACSN was steadily cropping up in cable offerings across the United States, the governors of the states that comprised the federally-defined Appalachian region were entreating Reagan and Congress to reconsider this drastic cut. By the time Reagan took office, the supposed extravagance of spending under Great Society programs such as the ARC had made them a political liability, and the resolution submitted by the governors (many of whom were Democrats) “support[ed] the President’s determination to limit federal spending and agree[d] that the Appalachian Regional Commission should take its fair share of the cuts.” Each governor defended the renewal of the ARC vociferously, arguing that genuine strides had been made by the agency toward alleviating poverty in their states.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Harold E. Morse, “Proposal for Providing ACSN–The Learning Channel Free to Cable Systems in Distressed Appalachian Counties,” 1981, folder 7, box 794, ARC, UK Special Collections. Morse expressed dissatisfaction that while ACSN performed well in national markets outside Appalachia, subscribership in the region was below what he really hoped for.

<sup>62</sup> See Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 200-205.

<sup>63</sup> “Governors Urge No Cuts for ARC in 1981, Fair Share in 1982,” *Appalachia* 14 (March-April, 1981), 2-5.

Al Smith, a journalist from Kentucky (and host of Kentucky Educational Television's news and public affairs program, "Comment on Kentucky") was then serving as federal co-chair for the ARC. His vocal defense for the vital necessity of the ARC likely led to his ouster after the first year of Reagan's presidency concluded. For most of the 1980s, Smith notes in his memoir, the agency was "on life support:" repeatedly left off Reagan's budget, but kept alive by remonstrances from both the states' governors and congressional delegates. Before his dismissal, Smith and the ARC's executive director, Henry Krevor, pared down the agency's budget to a bare, uncontroversial minimum that could easily pass through Congress and over Reagan's objections. This included money for continuation of highway projects and, as Smith summarizes, direct aid to "sixty particularly distressed ARC counties that needed additional monies for health and education." Smith's successor, Winifred Pizzano, a health services administrator by training, maintained this level of funding throughout the Reagan presidency, until President George H.W. Bush broke with Reagan's approach and included the ARC in his budget requests.<sup>64</sup>

ACSN's status as an experimental self-sustaining educational nonprofit was dire enough, but following the cuts to the ARC made under the Reagan administration, it was clear that the network could no longer survive as a government enterprise. Though the network offered an educational service, it was not one of the most urgently needed services the ARC was allowed to retain. A feasibility study by the Network's legal representatives on the possibility of reorganizing as a for-profit network concluded that doing so would jeopardize all the grants and partnerships ACSN relied upon, but

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<sup>64</sup> Al Smith, *Wordsmith: My Life in Journalism* (Louisville, Ky.: Plied Type Press, 2011), 380-382.

continuing to exist “as a publicly-supported organization or a private foundation would depend on the extent of any other funding received from the general public and the government.” Under the new administration, that support simply would not exist.<sup>65</sup>

ACSN was sold to private investors and by 1985 the network dropped Appalachia from its name and became known only as The Learning Channel. As a privately owned cable network, TLC did not generate the same voluminous public records as a non-profit network supported by a variety of government bureaucracies. Still, evidence suggests that for a time TLC retained the appearance of a noncommercial, education and public service network within its programming, producing, for instance, programs that taught adults basic computer skills, high school students useful tips for the SAT and ACT exams, and junior high level applied mathematics.<sup>66</sup> Morse stayed on with the network, and for his part he seemed unfazed by the transition, giving the impression to a reporter for the *Lexington Herald-Leader* that private ownership had always been a part of the plan (“It gives us the working capital we need to expand,” he remarked). Employees of The Learning Channel, the *Herald Leader* found, owned 5 percent of the network’s stock, so Morse certainly benefitted from the sale.<sup>67</sup>

The Learning Channel would continue to offer formal instructional and informal educational programming through the remainder of the 1980s, and sparingly throughout

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<sup>65</sup> Anthony S. Harrington, “Memorandum for the Appalachian Community Service Network, RE: Reorganization into a For-Profit Corporation,” September 7, 1982, folder 9, “Feasibility Study: ACSN Reorganizing,” box 793, ARC, UK Special Collections; Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 205–07.

<sup>66</sup> Kathy Fridge, “New Fall Series Slated for The Learning Channel,” *Del Rio News Herald*. September 21, 1986.

<sup>67</sup> Paul Prather, “Network to Expand Local Operations,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*. June 9, 1986. The “local” in the title here refers to ACSN’s satellite uplink facilities in Lexington, which were still operational and would, the article reported, begin serving as a relay station for PBS and other commercial networks.

the following decade. It was resold to a telecommunications conglomerate in 1991 when its first purchaser declared bankruptcy, and the new buyer had at that point already offered an educational channel called “Discovery.” Sources told reporters for the *Los Angeles Times* that The Learning Channel had then been sold for \$31.5 million dollars. Certainly the network had appreciated in value since it had first subsisted on a 2 million-dollar loan from the ARC, but this was still small compared to the approximately \$13 billion budget the ARC commanded around the same time. In 1992, the *New York Times* praised the network for continuing to offer educational programming for children, even when the network had yet to turn a profit for its parent company, but by the 2000s the network had begun to, as education writer Audrey Watters notes in her blog piece on the commercial transition, “steadily...distance itself from ‘learning,’ promoting itself instead as ‘TLC.’”<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

What then, can we learn from the story of this failed network? Was it merely another slick, technological promise to “modernize” the Appalachian region, akin to railroads in the late-nineteenth century, or automobiles and highways in the mid-twentieth? David Whisnant, historian of Appalachia and preeminent critic of such efforts, reached this conclusion regarding AESP in *Modernizing the Mountaineer: People, Power, and Planning in Appalachia* (1980). In the book he associates the satellite project

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<sup>68</sup> John Lippman, “Discovery Will Buy Learning Channel Unit,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 1991; Geraldine Fabrikant, “Learning Channel’s Ad-Free Strategy,” *New York Times*, October 12, 1992; Audrey Watters, “What Happened to Educational Television: The Story of ‘The Learning Channel,’” *Hack Education*, May 30, 2015.

with a long historical list of “relics or curiosities,” which “leaving little behind . . . are soon forgotten.” Whisnant rightfully identifies the more dubious aspects of the satellite program’s genesis, such as the obvious condescension in Morse’s assertion that AESP would be “the forerunner of more ambitious satellite projects to help crack the cultural isolation of Appalachia,” or the suspicious fact that stock for Fairchild Industries, the private firm that built the ATS-6 for NASA, quadrupled after the satellite was launched.<sup>69</sup> In light of Whisnant’s criticisms, it is difficult to see AESP as anything other than “out of touch” with the region’s needs.

Yet the educational television projects undertaken by the ARC in the 1970s and 1980s are worth remembering, even in light of the fact that these projects’ most faithful proponents would scoff at the idea public broadcasting alone could “fix” the region as a whole. AESP, though not a particularly large project in terms of what the ARC funded at the time, directed its energies to address a specific need identified by teachers and students living in the region. As AESP was dismantled, that effort was transformed into a cable network with a less specialized program, but a far broader reach. At the height of its brief period as a government-supported enterprise, ACSN reached an estimated 145,916 homes in the Appalachian region, and publicized the needs of the region to many more homes outside it.<sup>70</sup>

With a collective lifespan of roughly 10 years, neither the AESP nor ACSN operated long enough to radically transform and uplift the region’s education system, as

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<sup>69</sup> David Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer: People, Power, and Planning in Appalachia* (Knoxville, Tenn, 1994), 164.

<sup>70</sup> “A Report to the Appalachian Regional Commission from the Appalachian Community Service Network,” 10.

Whisnant may have expected of them, but even so their creators had never staked such high hopes to either project. In the article Morse co-authored with Patrick Carlton, “The Challenge to Education in Appalachia,” the scale of the many challenges facing anyone dedicated to the task of improving education in Appalachia were neither minimized nor underestimated. Furthermore, Morse and Carlton suffered no illusions about their positions as ARC staff and consultants. “These are disturbing shortcomings, to say the least, and it would be easy,” they noted, “to capitalize upon them through the use of facile explanations designed with the flick of a bureaucratic Bic to cure all Appalachian problems.” They knew that such an approach—whereby programs like AESP and ACSN would be pitched as a cure-all—would “contribute to a cruel and totally unjustifiable deception.”<sup>71</sup> An ETV network would certainly be useful, but in the final goal of improving education in Appalachia, it could only be one out of many genuinely needed responses Morse, Carlton, and their colleagues could provide.

Within the realm of distance education technology, it can also seem especially daunting to take a stab at developing new ideas and solutions for students in Appalachia, as the Internet economy shows with its constant (and often disorienting) production of new tools, solutions, and subsequent challenges for the user. However the history of AESP and ACSN—two bygone projects provided within earlier technological media—sheds light on essential elements for further innovation in distance education: attention to specific needs identified by local educators within the region rather than sweeping, nationwide educational trends; partnership between a wide variety of agencies and specialties; and an unwavering enthusiasm and imagination for making education

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<sup>71</sup> Carlton and Morse, “The Challenge to Education in Appalachia,” 31.

accessible to as many students as possible. The issue of adequate funding, which the ACSN lost, will also remain an issue, but as educators and institutions are endowed with financial opportunities for new experiments in distance education, hope remains that new generations of innovators will not lose sight of this earlier experiment and its guiding principles.

Students who benefitted from AESP and ACSN, either through formal courseware or general interest programming, would still have the option of doing so through The Learning Channel, at least for a few years. That the underlying private, commercial interests of that channel eventually revealed themselves through the complete makeover of TLC's programming, shows the value of keeping educational media under public control. The ARC would not attempt to provide a unified, region-specific source of educational technology again, but public media sources throughout the region would continue their services in the decades after ACSN's dissolution. The next chapter will return to the two state-level cases examined previously—Kentucky Educational Television and North Carolina's WUNC-TV—to provide a brief sampling of some of the programs those sources have offered since their activation. Readers like Whisnant, who might be looking to these programs for signs of radical transformation in Kentucky and North Carolina's education system will likely be just as disappointed. As with AESP and ACSN, they appear modest in scope, but they provide important seeds for that transformation, as well as helpful models for how others can best implement public and educational media in regions that need it.

## CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

In June of 1977, the Carnegie Corporation announced the forthcoming release of a new report the philanthropy giant had commissioned on public broadcasting, the first it had conducted since the release of the landmark *Public Television: A Program for Action* a decade prior. New developments in media technology, Carnegie found, had called into question whether the structures of noncommercial television and radio as envisioned and codified in 1967 were still applicable and worthwhile as these new media environments came into being. Together, cable and satellite television formed one such technological development, and as seen in the previous chapter, their distribution capabilities had cast doubt on the reach and relevance of the conventional broadcast stations Carnegie had considered previously. The other emerging device was video reproduction of educational programs, either onto cassette tapes or video disks. Copying programs and distributing them directly to schools and other stations had been possible in the late 1960s, but in the following decade the mass production of these new formats had reduced the cost of reproductions considerably. This had called into question whether or not schools even needed an over-the-air source of programs when copies were so readily available, or if home viewers would still support their local public media when they could pick and choose their favorite programs as they would books for their own personal library.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover the new commission sought to evaluate the progress of public broadcasting as a federal institution, which it had become following the Public

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<sup>1</sup> Les Brown, "New Panel to Study Future of Public TV," *New York Times*, June 14, 1977, p. 1. Another new development Carnegie meant to analyze was the growth of National Public Radio. Radio had not garnered the attention of the earlier Commission as much as television, but NPR had grown to be a valued and respectable sister agency alongside PBS following its creation in 1970.



Broadcasting Act of 1967. The establishment of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Public Broadcasting Service had been accompanied by hopeful speeches and ambitious promises for how public television could affect society in general. The Carnegie Corporation was interested to know how well the medium had acquitted itself. How well had it performed as the massive social “laboratory for creative experimentation” its creators purportedly meant to offer? Furthermore, while the earlier Commission and the resulting legislation intended to stitch together the various isolated and incongruous noncommercial broadcast operations into a sinuous whole, the 1977 Commission recognized that the national system still resembled “a patchwork of institutions...organizations, consortia and affinity groups, some of which are cooperative and some competitive.” As with the earlier Carnegie report, the new Commission members had the ear of the current White House occupant, and they recognized how their report could drastically alter the course of public media policy.<sup>2</sup>

In *The Public Trust* the Commission wholeheartedly reaffirmed two conclusions from the previous Commission. First, the report’s closing chapter, “The Social Dividend of the Electronic Media,” stressed that, regardless of its expansions into new domains and means of consumption, broadcast media, properly programmed, still possessed a remarkable capacity to “teach, heal, and inspire.” Second, the Commission rejected the idea, as had many other educational broadcasters in previous decades, that the educational properties of television and radio could be entrusted to commercial interests. Though commercial broadcasters had at various times insisted that their offerings were produced and distributed with the public’s interests in mind, the “social tools of

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<sup>2</sup> Brown, “New Panel to Study Future of Public TV.”

revolutionary importance”—as the Commission considered them—could not be “permitted to assume a wholly commercial character.” If public programs were withdrawn from the broadcast media diet which had become preeminent in so many Americans’ lives, the result would be, as the Commission described it, a “ruthless pursuit of the lowest common denominator,” and an unrestrained “merchandising of consciousness.”<sup>3</sup>

The authors of *Public Trust* understood that public media in the United States would continue to be evaluated largely as an educational and thoughtful alternative to commercial stations within the domain of entertainment, but they maintained that noncommercial stations across the country were still vitally important resources in learning and teaching. In a section titled “Telecommunications and Learning,” their findings provided an earnest appraisal of the successes and missteps of instructional broadcast media over the previous two decades. Naturally, they attested to the continued popularity and acclaim for *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company*, noting that these offerings by the Children’s Television Workshop had struck the ideal balance between formal instruction and entertainment within any given program. Many educators, the report noted, remained skeptical of the true compatibility of broadcast programs and formal learning, but the popularity of *Sesame Street* and the launch of new programs attempting to emulate their approach showed that general support for broadcast media, at least for children, had visibly grown in the last decade.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *A Public Trust: The Landmark Report of The Carnegie Commission on The Future of Public Broadcasting* (Bantam, 1976), 296.

<sup>4</sup> *A Public Trust*, 257-258, 261.

To those who looked askance at telecommunication's role in learning, whether they were teachers unconvinced of improved learning outcomes among students who supplemented their education with broadcast media, or the "adolescents and adults" at home "still waiting for a *Sesame Street*-type breakthrough" in program development, *Public Trust* had an answer. The main issue had been the capacity for interaction: students or other viewers could receive generous offerings from the educators who designed the programs and the stations that delivered them, but there had to be some meaningful way for viewers to communicate feedback, directly or indirectly, to the programs' producers. Certainly the media's technical aspects could make for an alluring and often exciting transmission of visual and auditory information, especially as educators were mastering "close-ups, magnification, time sequencing, juxtaposition of sight and sound, and other sophisticated forms of editing." But to provide such technical masterworks without any space for interaction and dialogue between student and teacher, the Commission found, was altogether unproductive.<sup>5</sup>

These "passive forms of learning" from earlier applications of educational media had, the Commission noted, been overcome in the previous decade in a number of ways. For one, technical developments in telecommunications had allowed for digital communication between program recipients in remote locations. The introduction of satellite and cable systems, they acknowledged, was embraced primarily for the ways those media could spread programs across a wider range and offer more channels than conventional radio frequencies. Less recognized though, was the development inherent in the new media "of new technologies such as two-way cable television," which

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<sup>5</sup> *A Public Trust*, 267.

provided “the feedback essential to all forms of learning.”<sup>6</sup> Echoes of the Appalachian Educational Satellite Program, as well as the other experimental ETV programs supported by the ARC in the 1970s, can be heard in this point. Regardless of how well funded or skillfully produced an ETV program may be, the Carnegie Commission knew that the education offered by those programs required some means by which the learner could respond to the teacher.

Two-way communication technology in ETV, the Commission argued, would strengthen learning among viewers if it remained a focal point in public media. But in response to the fundamental question “how can radio and television teach best,” *Public Trust* stressed that the most important point educational broadcasters had learned was that their programs could only be supplemental resources and aides to teachers, produced in consultation with those teachers. As MPATI and KET had learned in preparing their networks, teachers were predominantly concerned that ETV programs might be used to replace their positions or preclude the hiring of new teachers going forward. In response to such fears, those networks had designed systems under which teachers within the network’s reach could voice their concerns and influence the content of educational programming. MPATI and KET’s recommendations for using programs stressed that teachers could build curriculum with those resources, but that they should not be relied on exclusively when planning lessons.

The Carnegie Commission reiterated these points in *Public Trust*. “[N]either a radio or televised program,” they argued, echoing the MPATI and KET conclusions, “could be fully effective in isolation.” Instead, “each program must be carefully

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<sup>6</sup> *A Public Trust*, 266.

researched and produced as part of an integrated learning system.” In such a system, teachers would “use the program to stimulate, provoke, and motivate the student, and to illuminate ancillary reading materials,” much as KET and MPATI had recommended. “Television and radio,” the *Public Trust* authors concluded, “can never be more than invited guests in the classroom.”<sup>7</sup>

In considering how educators could make the best use of public media, the Commission also reaffirmed the philosophy of localism that had been shared so commonly in designs for educational television networks. The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 had created a national structure for public, educational television and radio, but it stopped short of instituting a uniform national network like the major commercial networks. Local stations could access and implement programs produced at costs that most local stations individually could not otherwise afford, but under the provisions of the Act those stations had the final say in what programs they would or would not use. “We harbor, in this country,” the 1977 Carnegie Commission observed, “an acute sensitivity about local control of education. Educational and instructional needs vary greatly and are often unique from community to community and state to state.”<sup>8</sup> As seen in previous chapters, this predominant sensitivity pervaded the work of educators attempting to establish networks that reached beyond the range of one single television transmitter. MPATI and KET had to attest regularly to skeptics that their networks would not upset this established order, and concerns over an upended localism had

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<sup>7</sup> *A Public Trust*, 268.

<sup>8</sup> *A Public Trust*, 263.

prevented educators from using ARC resources to create a region-wide telecommunications network in the 1960s.

A crucial point related to this failed Appalachian network, however, separated *A Public Trust* from earlier discussions of educational broadcasting and localism. While the Commission insisted that decisions for the use of media should remain with local teachers and administrators, they now recognized an important new corollary. Where individual local communities were either unable historically to procure the same high quality educational resources for their students, schools, or households, or where more well-endowed local communities partook in high quality educational resources and neglected neighboring communities that lacked those resources, regional networks could ameliorate those disparities. Such networks should be established where necessary. Essentially, the Commission held, it was the duty of regional networks to provide the distance learning service these outlier communities needed.

Though the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and other federal programs had alleviated many of the financial burdens associated with starting and operating ETV stations, these did not fully account for the poverty in communities in regions across the nation that could benefit from additional educational resources. Individual stations should have “prime responsibility” for their own local programs and services, the Commission argued, but by “pooling funds for regional and national activities,” a regional cooperation “between stations and educators at the local and regional levels” could ensure “responsiveness to local educational needs and local control over curricula.”<sup>9</sup> As satellites and other new technology in telecommunications were

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<sup>9</sup> *A Public Trust*, 256.

developed and implemented, the Commission suggested, “consortiums of stations” could “join together to form ad hoc networks for specialized programming needs.” Though they did not mention Appalachia as a site for such a network, many knew that disadvantaged regions like Appalachia, and the people living there who had been subjected to inequitable educational circumstances, could benefit the most from such regional partnerships.

The state of North Carolina, as seen in an earlier chapter, was slower to appreciate this regional need. Their first ETV station was, like so many of the U.S.’s early ETV operations, prescribed by the FCC in such a way as to reserve the benefits of the new medium for major urban areas and “educational centers” like Chapel Hill, where the state’s network originated. Though the station was under the auspices of the relatively new Consolidated University of North Carolina, its benefits were still available only in a more prosperous area that had much less difficulty in serving equitable education to its population than did the peripheral regions of eastern and western North Carolina. In time, and after the objections of citizens in these regions who protested the minimal reach of the “state” network, WUNC-TV would be extended to the peripheral communities. After ETV’s first decade the need to provide truly inclusive networks would become a common understanding among educational broadcasters, and the medium subsequently started calling itself “public television” as a way of reflecting that change.

Yet in spite of the fact that no national “fourth network” was ever instituted, and no region-specific network lasted more than a few years, it was state networks like those in North Carolina, Kentucky, and many other states that carried the torch of public, educational television through to the present day. *Public Trust* recognized this fact.

Though the Commission’s main goal was to reconsider the national policy effected by the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 and whether or not Congress or the President should consider additional funds or endowments, they praised state networks for identifying local educational needs and banding support together to provide an appropriate response. “Telecommunications configurations such as those developed in South Carolina, Nebraska, and others,” they found, had built the strongest foundations for public media by providing “not only hardware but also resources for programming.” In establishing such systems, state-level operations had provided “vehicles through which important educational and instructional services—in-school instruction, continuing education, at-home learning—can be delivered.”<sup>10</sup> Though the Commission did recommend continued financial support of public media by the federal government, they held up states as appropriately-situated mechanisms for designing coordinated responses to educational needs while remaining attentive to local needs and customs within their diverse populations.

Hundreds of examples from the voluminous number of programs produced by state-level public television stations could be called upon to illustrate the positive effects these organizations have had on their communities, but the two states explored in this dissertation have some particularly noteworthy accomplishments to mention. Recall that in 1974, the journal of the Appalachian Regional Commission, *Appalachia*, reported on Alabama’s two-way use of its state ETV network to provide expanded access to the GED testing program. KET would at roughly the same time, however, develop its own televised GED prep series, and their version of the program would emerge as the first

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<sup>10</sup> *A Public Trust*, 265.



choice among public television stations nationwide seeking to offer free prep materials for the test. *Public Trust* singled out KET's program as significant evidence for public television's capacity to aid adult education, finding that after less than five years, the KET equivalency test services were used by ETV stations in 40 states.<sup>11</sup>

In writing about the success of KET's equivalency programs for his memoir, Leonard Press cites the high production value invested into the Kentucky network's attempt at a series. Though the directors of the Alabama program found that their televised GED courses made prepping for the test far more engaging than studying correspondence materials in private and alone, they still relied to a great extent on GED television programs produced by outside agencies before the Alabama initiative started. These programs, one produced by Manpower Development Institute (primarily for active labor union members) and another by a community college in Seattle, still left much to be desired in the way of visual appeal, Press felt. KET started brainstorming adult education services in 1969, which as Press notes was also the year *Sesame Street* debuted and "changed the way we all thought about how educational television should, or at least could, look." Along with state funding, KET secured a grant from the ARC to produce the GED prep program, which together gave them a little over \$500,000 to put toward actors, writers, and color-TV ready set design. "We wanted this instruction to be a pleasure, not a pill," Press recalled, "especially given that we were appealing to adults who had already dropped out of school once. This had to be good."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *A Public Trust*, 260.

<sup>12</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 162-164; "GED: ARC Final Report," (July 25, 1973), pp 3, 5. Box 395, Folder 1, Papers of the Appalachian Regional Commission, University of Kentucky Special Collections. Kentucky's GED programs were regularly updated and reimagined over the following decades, and Press notes that it was one of the more high profile aspects of KET's overall programming. Most notably, Kentucky First Lady Martha Wilkinson made it a personal project of her own to enroll as many

Reaching Kentuckians who lacked a high school degree—an estimated 1.5 million adults out of a total state population of 3.3 million—was certainly one of the more widely publicized examples of a significant state ETV network service. Most of the activities of KET and WUNC-TV (now known as PBS North Carolina) have emerged with less public acclaim, though they are by no means less important. One especially important category in this sense is the offering of public affairs programming and coverage of state legislatures. Local affiliates of the major commercial networks became increasingly attentive to either news at the national level or more sensationalized local news stories. Television generally overlooked the inner workings of state government, and the Carnegie Commission and public broadcasters realized that noncommercial stations could step in to fill that gap. Leonard Press was grateful for PBS’s public affairs program *Washington Week in Review* when KET was first starting out, but he lamented that the show was “hosted and paneled by hired guns from the ranks of professional journalists whose regular jobs were with the commercial news media—mainly the major newspapers—in the D.C. area.”<sup>13</sup> State and local politics have a significant bearing on local communities, one more serious than most realize.

Both Kentucky and North Carolina’s networks have remedied this oversight with a number of programs. The legislative and capitol reporting programs of PBS North Carolina have gone by many names over the years, including *Stateline*, which featured coverage of the legislature and public comment on issues facing North Carolinians, from

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Kentuckians into the program as possible. She would appear in an Uncle Sam-style promotional campaign known as “Martha’s GED Army,” which had in its ranks the multi-platinum selling country music artist Waylon Jennings, who used the KET program to obtain an equivalency degree.

<sup>13</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 176.

1981-1991. In a given week viewers could see general summaries of legislative action, reporting on issues such as “Waterfront Restoration in N.C. Coastal Towns,” “Downtown Revitalization in Asheville,” and “Public Opinion: Should the Government Do More for Vietnam Veterans?”<sup>14</sup> Other North Carolina public affairs programs offered interview programs similar to *Washington Week in Review* or *Firing Line*, though with local journalists and political figures. Likewise, Leonard Press and his colleague Al Smith launched the state public affairs program *Comment on Kentucky* in 1974, and it has run ever since.

In reporting on state public affairs, Kentucky and North Carolina’s stations have managed to stay clear, for the most part, of any political controversies or entanglements. While it has become an occasional sport among conservative Congressmen and Senators to decry biased reporting and editorializing from PBS’s nationally distributed programs, local and state level stations have generally been able to avoid such charges. Furthermore, while the FCC policy laid out in *In the Matter of Editorializing by Broadcast Licensees* (also known as the “Fairness Doctrine”) was repealed in 1987, KET and PBS North Carolina make it a point to give equal, unbiased attention to multiple viewpoints on any given public issue. Press noted that some lawmakers over the years have objected to say, the studio anchor’s summaries of their speeches or certain parts of speeches being left on the cutting room floor, but KET has been vindicated numerous times over the years by the entire legislature for its nonpartisan approach.<sup>15</sup> Both

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<sup>14</sup> Programming Schedule, 8/7/81-9/30/84, box 12, folder 317, University of North Carolina Television Network Records #40258, University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>15</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 194.

Kentucky and North Carolina observed the “Statement of Principles of Editorial Integrity” drafting at a conference of public broadcasters in 1985, stating clearly that the aim of their organizations was to offer educational resources, not prod viewers one way or the other on a political spectrum.<sup>16</sup>

Yet it would be misleading to say that these networks have remained completely neutral on the most serious matters facing residents of their states. As Allison Perlman notes in *Public Interests*, media advocates have long observed how “seemingly neutral decisions” within broadcast policy making “are imbricated within existing forms of inequality and injustice.” Conversely, Kentucky and North Carolina’s networks have made use of their own “veneer of neutrality” to make open and important statements about the inequalities and injustices facing local residents, usually in the form of their documentary programs. Any number of these documentaries could be used to demonstrate this fact, but the best example may be KET’s Fund for Independent Productions, a state grant program passed in 1990 and administered by KET to aspiring documentary filmmakers.<sup>17</sup>

KET has bolstered the careers of countless documentarians through this program, but many of them have gone to young students at Appalshop, the documentary and arts collective center in the eastern Kentucky mountain town of Whitesburg, and a place that no one could call neutral with regard to serious issues facing Kentuckians. Press might

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<sup>16</sup> “The Editorial Integrity Project,” Editorial Integrity for Public Media: Principles, Policies, and Practices Website, “About” page, <https://publicmediaintegrity.org/about/>, accessed 4 January, 2021; Press, *The KET Story*, 239. Press discusses this multi-network compact in the context of state networks that had run afoul of governors or legislators that did not approve of a certain program or programs. The agreement not only stated the will of station directors to avoid political controversy, it also formulated legal recourse means for state networks if any unsympathetic lawmakers decided to target a network’s budget or charter on the basis of programming.

<sup>17</sup> Perlman, *Public Interests*, 7; Press, *The KET Story*, 209.

have earned the ire of Appalshop filmmakers when he accepted donations from coal companies to help pay for activation of the state network, but his steadfast fondness and support for the young minds his network supported there truly gave him the last laugh over the coal barons, as he describes here:

“I had reason to be grateful for [Kentucky River Coal owner] Catesby [Clay]’s steadfast support again some years later when KET angered the coal owners by scheduling an Appalshop program in support of a referendum to overturn the broad form deed. Worse, it aired just before Election Day. Catesby called, very unhappy with us...”<sup>18</sup>

And angry as Clay might have been over such a tremendous threat to the coal companies’ ability to destroy eastern Kentucky’s mountains and the people that lived on them, the veneer of neutrality held by KET was something that he could not violate. “[H]e did not withdraw his support of KET,” Press remembers, “even when the referendum passed.”

Close attention to state and regional ETV networks, their formation, and the decisions made by their founders, reveals a much more textured broadcast landscape than national-level studies can produce. These smaller operations did a great deal to educate citizens, both formally and informally. Those who search today for solutions and guidance in how to best offer distance education resources would do well to observe ETV networks as part of the story of distance education. Their experiments, in different forms and expressions, sought ways to actively attend to and provide for the have-nots in an education system, and studying these experiments will yield a broader, more thoughtful, and just endeavor toward equitable distance education in the present day.

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<sup>18</sup> Press, *The KET Story*, 111.

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