

The Forgotten Network: DuMont and the Birth of American Television
By David Weinstein
Temple University Press
Study Guide

Preface

- Weinstein notes that many of the early live programs have not been preserved. How does he write the history of early television, despite the paucity of primary materials?

Chapter 1. My Father Was an Engineer

- How did Allen Du Mont's personal strengths and weaknesses influence the fate of DuMont Laboratories and the DuMont network?
- As you read the book, consider whether Allen Du Mont was an asset or a liability to the corporation and the network.

Chapter 2. From Basement to Broadway

- How did CBS's and NBC's experience in the radio industry help them succeed as network television broadcasters?
- How did the FCC's 1952 station allocation plan hinder the network operations of DuMont and other companies that might have started networks?
- Evaluate how well the public was ultimately served by the FCC's 1952 allocation plan?
- What similarities do you see between the arguments regarding FCC station allocation in the early 1950s and debates today about media ownership, public service, and public access to broadcast media?

Chapter 3. Who Is In Charge Here?

- Why was there tension between Paramount executives and Allen Du Mont?
- How did television represent a threat to the motion picture industry?
- What role did Paramount play in the demise of DuMont Laboratories?
- How did the business climate and management style at DuMont foster innovative scheduling and programming?

Chapter 4. The DuMont Daytime Experiment

- Why did DuMont and station WABD become pioneers in daytime television programming?
- Compare and contrast DuMont's early daytime programming with daytime television today.
- WABD's Dennis James was one of television's first daytime television stars. Judging from the clips of *Okay Mother* and the evidence presented in the book, what kind of image did James craft in order to appeal to daytime viewers?

Chapter 5. Captain Video: Protector of the Free World and the DuMont Network

- How did *Captain Video* promote beliefs, values, and political ideology related to the Cold War?
- How did the program subvert some of these beliefs and values?
- How did *Captain Video* epitomize DuMont's low budget but innovative production style?
- Do you see a similar low-budget aesthetic anywhere in popular culture today?
- Review Rory Coker's *Captain Video* Web site: <http://www.slick-net.com/space/index.phtml>. What seems to account for the continuing appeal of space operas to Coker and other fans?

Chapter 6. What'd He Say? . . . Morey Amsterdam Meets Norman Rockwell

- How did TV manufacturers such as DuMont attempt to promote television receivers?
- Explain the gap between the promise of television, as described by DuMont's Receiver Division, and the programming delivered on *Window on the World* and *The Morey Amsterdam Show*.
- Amsterdam epitomized a particular genre of programming, the comedy-variety show, that was very popular in television's early days. Why was this genre popular through the early 1950s? Why did it decline in popularity so dramatically? What elements of the genre are still evident in television today?

Chapter 7. And Away He Went. . . Jackie Gleason and the Cavalcade of Stars

- How did Jackie Gleason develop as a comedian during his two years at DuMont?
- How did Gleason contribute to the development of the television variety genre through his work on *Cavalcade of Stars*?

Chapter 8. Law and Order, DuMont Style

- How did DuMont's detective programs present reassuring images of police and police work?
- What techniques did *Rocky King* and *The Plainclothes Man* use to establish their authority and "realism"?
- How has the police procedural genre evolved over time?
- What are the similarities and differences between *Rocky King* or *The Plainclothes Man* and more recent police shows such as *CSI* and *Law and Order*?

Chapter 9. A Bishop for Berle Fans

- Why did DuMont decide to put Bishop Fulton Sheen on the air?
- What accounted for Sheen's popular appeal?

Chapter 10. Ernie Kovacs and the DuMont Legacy

- What were Ernie Kovacs' aesthetic contributions to the evolution of television?
- How was Kovacs different from other television comedians, such as Milton Berle and Jackie Gleason?

- Explain Allen DuMont's ambivalence regarding his legacy as a network television pioneer.
- Evaluate the DuMont network legacy according to your ideas and values regarding television's political, cultural, educational, and aesthetic potential. How was the DuMont network a success? How was the network a failure?