

Film and Culture
A series of Columbia University Press
Edited by John Belton

What Made Pistachio Nuts? Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic

HENRY JENKINS

Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle

MARTIN RUBIN

Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II

THOMAS DOHERTY

Laughing Screaming: Modern Hollywood Horror and Comedy

WILLIAM PAUL

Laughing Hysterically: American Screen Comedy of the 1950s

Ed Sikov

Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema

REV CHOW

The Cinema of Max Ophüls: Magisterial Vision and the Figure of Woman

SUSAN M. WHITE

Black Women as Cultural Readers

Jacqueline Bobo

Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film

DARRELL WILLIAM DAVIS

Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema

RHONA J. BERENSTEIN

This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age

GAYLYN STUDLAR

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Hollywood and Beyond

ROBIN WOOD

The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music

JEFF SMITH

Orson Welles, Shakespeare, and Popular Culture

MICHAEL ANDEREGG

Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934

THOMAS DOHERTY

Sound Technology and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity

JAMES LASTRA

Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts

BEN SINGER

Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture

ALISON GRIFFITHS

Hearst Over Hollywood: Power, Passion, and Propaganda in the Movies

LOUIS PIZZITOLA

Masculine Interests: Homoerotics in Hollywood Film

ROBERT LANG

Special Effects: Still in Search of Wonder

MICHELE PIERSON

Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco, and the Female Form

LUCY FISCHER

THOMAS DOHERTY

COLD WAR, COOL MEDIUM

TELEVISION, McCARTHYISM, AND AMERICAN CULTURE

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS NEW YORK

network). The television triumvirate inspires Rex Harrison to remind viewers that the ancient Greeks believed that the size of a democratic state was limited by the range of a human voice. This "challenging definition" was answered in the twentieth century by the technology of television and radio, pioneered for American democracy by Gen. David Sarnoff of the Radio Corporation of America, Leonard Goldenson of the American Broadcasting Company, and William S. Paley of the Columbia Broadcasting System. Due to the ingenuity of these noble men and their colleagues, "a single voice can reach millions upon millions—a voice to entertain, a voice to communicate, a free voice speaking to free men." Yet the voices are not loud and angry but calm and reasoned. "We are not a mob to be led by demagogues," asserts Cronkite.

When Eisenhower is introduced to receive the ADL award "for a life devoted to the furtherance of freedom," he walks purposely to the podium. The president begins with a bit of self-deprecation and repeats to comedic effect a verb of recent coinage, "I have been briefed—and briefed—and briefed."

Earnest yet relaxed, Ike recalls his hometown of Abilene, a frontier outpost still bound by the Code of the West, where "a man can walk upright" and "you could meet anyone face to face with whom you disagree." "You could not sneak up on him from behind and do any damage to him without suffering the penalties of an outraged citizenry," says Ike. "If you met him face to face and took the same risks he did, you could get along with almost anything"—pausing a beat, repeating the line for emphasis—"you could get along with almost anything"—gesturing now, pointing to his chest—"as long as the bullet was in the front." Warming to the theme, he hammers home the point. "In this country, if someone dislikes you or accuses you, he must come up in front. He cannot hide behind the shadow. He cannot assassinate you or your character from behind without suffering the penalties of an outraged citizenry." Wild applause fills the room.

Eisenhower then segues into some light banter. "The only responsibility I have is to some individual in front of me who has [cue] cards—[to tell me] if I used up all my time. I just noticed—he says, 'Go ahead, it's all right.'" Appreciative chuckling cascades through the hall, at the notion of the chief executive deferring to the demands of a cue-card holder, when, as anyone could plainly see, he was the true master of the medium.

SIX

ROMAN CIRCUSES AND SPANISH INQUISITIONS

The quality of live—the electrifying sense of witnessing events as they happened, of sharing experience in time across space—was the decisive and unique attraction of early television. Describing the radical switch from the grammar of motion pictures to the grammar of television, the media historian Erik Barnouw observed that the "real time" codes of live television recovered "an element that had almost vanished from film—one which few viewers noticed consciously but one which undoubtedly exercised an hypnotic influence." Before television, spectators were conversant in only one moving image language, a dialect that found its most eloquent expression in the "invisible style" of classical Hollywood cinema. Not only was the designing hand of the filmmaker concealed, but a syntax of smooth dissolves, eyeline matches, and seamless editing worked to suspend the passage of time. Yet no matter how fluid the flow of celluloid, "movie time" is time filmed, always a moment from out of the past projected into the present. Live television happens in the same temporal frame: for beheld and beholder, the same existential moment, the same imaginative space.

The best-remembered exemplar of the thrill of the live is the anthology series, the flagship product of the Golden Age of Television. Typified by the earnest melodramas staged on *Studio One*, *The U.S. Steel Hour*, and *Playhouse 90*, and dating roughly from 1948 (when *Studio One* premiered under producer-auteur Worthington Miner) until 1958 (when the same show rang down the curtain on live performance for videotape recording), the genre lent a high-brow luster, or at least middlebrow respectability, to prime-time programming. "The advantages of live TV are subtle and complex: you have to deal largely in intangibles," admitted John Crosby in 1953. "Film possesses no sustained acting or mood, little of the tremendous feeling of urgency and immediacy of live TV." Hollywood filmmakers who took "a patronizing attitude toward a new medium" were fooling no one, boasted Worthington Miner in 1955, taking a patronizing attitude toward the old one. "Television is young—scarcely eight

Barnouw

years old—yet in that time it has encouraged more original, more creative, and more courageous thought than pictures have in half a century.”

Like all golden ages, the short-lived but storied epoch of live television shined more brightly as time rolled on. By the early 1960s, television pioneers were already waxing nostalgic about the halcyon days of high-quality, high-intensity televisual theater. Max Liebman, producer of the live comedy-variety hour *Your Show of Shows* (1950–1954), tried to put things in perspective. “There was no ‘golden age,’ of television,” he explained. “Some shows were better and some were worse.” Mainly, though, the recollected enchantments of the raptures of live television were immune to revisionism. “TV was invented as a live animal,” Fred Coe, the esteemed producer of *Goodyear TV Playhouse*, reflected in 1965. “It produced an eyewitness account of happenings in the arts, in sports, in theater, in current events.”

In fact, when telecast live, news events and political hearings exerted the same hypnotic influence as the anthology series—and, occasionally, the same improvisational delights of the variety shows. Though the production facilities were more primitive and the shows more specialized, Washington, D.C., like New York and Los Angeles, originated some of the most compelling programming on early television. “What do you get out of the McCarthy investigations on TV that you can’t get in the papers?” asked television critic Marya Mannes. “The answer is: Plenty. The telephoto lens, bringing each human element close to the eye, makes it an experience probably more intense and disturbing than actual presence in the committee room.” Television critic Jack Gould agreed. “The absorbing attraction is to follow the testimony as it goes first one way and then the other,” he explained. “On TV it is the drama of unrehearsed actuality unfolding for everyone to see at home.”

The first televised hearings from the Senate and the House of Representatives were symbolic Cold War harbingers. On November 11, 1947, WMAL-TV, the ABC affiliate in Washington, D.C., telecast testimony from Secretary of State George C. Marshall before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a plea for the historic plan that would bear his name. On August 25, 1948, the first telecast from the House of Representatives offered another preview of coming attractions: the inquiry by the House Committee on Un-American Activities into accusations by ex-communist Whittaker Chambers that Alger Hiss, a former State Department official and current president of the Carnegie Endowment, had operated as a Soviet agent in the 1930s.

Telecast to a mere 10,000 sets in the capital, the primal “hearingcasts” of the late 1940s were treated more as novel experiments than media landmarks. In 1948 *Variety* snickered at the prospect of “continuous coverage of the Congressional follies.” But as television’s penetration soared upward—from roughly a tenth of the population in 1949 to around two-thirds by the end of



Premier screening: as Alger Hiss (far left, second row) listens, Whittaker Chambers testifies at a televised hearing of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (August 25, 1948). (Courtesy United Press International)

1954—the live legislative programs launched two backbenchers into the ranks of political stardom. The first is a man largely forgotten to American history because his performance is not readily retrievable on kinescope; the second is a man remembered all too well because his appearances are carefully preserved and incessantly rewound. Between them, Sen. Estes T. Kefauver (D-Tenn.) and Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy (R-Wis.) showed that heretofore obscure legislators might rise to national prominence not through the traditional means of ascent—party service or public accomplishment—but exclusively through deeds performed on television.

“Kefauver Fever”: The Kefauver Crime Committee Hearings of 1951

From January to March 1951, the Senate Committee to Investigate Crime and Interstate Commerce, chaired by the lanky and slow-talking Estes T. Kefauver (he preferred the adjective “Lincolnesque”) barnstormed across America

conducting a series of public investigations into organized crime. When telecast live from New York through the facilities of independent station WPIX, the Kefauver committee's crime hearings proved that political events might rival serial entertainment, variety shows, or sports events as magnetic attractions. In a nation just getting hooked into television, the congressional drama made for dynamic programming.

Formed on May 10, 1950, the Kefauver committee sought to investigate the rising tide of organized crime in America, or at least its heightened visibility and perceived resurgence. In retrospect, the crime wave that washed over the nation seems but a ripple, the alarm another random outbreak of Cold War jitters. Yet postwar prosperity had given law-abiding citizens a surfeit of discretionary income and, while most of the paycheck paid mortgages and purchased the sleek new appliances cluttering the suburban castle, more than the skimmings sustained the biblical vices of prostitution and gambling and the baksheesh that greased the palms of the police. By centralizing operations and running affairs on a solid business footing, criminal enterprises thrived. In this sense, the rise of organized crime paralleled the nationalization of all American experience in the 1950s. No less than the interstate highway system and television itself, the business of crime had become a matter of networks, with national syndicates annexing the fiefdoms of provincial racketeers.

Unlike the proliferation of television under the watchful eyes of the FCC, however, criminal networks were largely unencumbered by federal interference. For decades, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover had stubbornly refused to acknowledge the existence of organized crime, the Mafia, or any other national crime syndicate. It was left to Senator Kefauver to introduce a permanent contribution to the American vocabulary: "the Mafia." Helpfully correcting mispronunciations by a panel of reporters on *Meet the Press* in 1951, Kefauver defined the Mafia as "the most cohesive national [crime] organization" though "it is more a way of life than a particular formal organization."

Hoover's obtuseness notwithstanding, the Kefauver committee beheld an America suffused with organized crime, where "gangsters, mobsters, and gamblers are literally getting away with murder." Deploying the rhetoric of another threat to the domestic tranquility, the committee warned that "the secret government of crimesters is a serious menace, which could, if not curbed, become the basis for a subversive movement which could wreck the very foundations of this country." The Soviet analogy also occurred to Spruille Braden of the Citizen Crime Commission, who testified before the Kefauver committee in geopolitical terms. "Of one thing we can be sure," railed Braden, reeling off the names of some of the most notorious mobsters, "the Costellos, the Adonises, and the rest of this scum, and still more, the miserably corrupted law enforcement officers, are among the Kremlin's best friends."

However, compared to those other menaces to the body politic, a societal threat as venerable as crime was almost reassuring. Rather than the stark polarities of loyalty and treason, of democracy and communism locked in a twilight struggle careening headlong into nuclear oblivion, the Kefauver face-offs pitted virtue against vice, cops against robbers, crusading prosecutors against kingpins of crime. The dialectical materialism uncovered by the Kefauver hearings concerned only the good old deadly sins (lust, avarice, envy) engaged in for the most American of motives (money). If many of the culprits had names that ended in vowels and residency status that facilitated swift deportation, at least they held firm to a cracked-mirror version of the American success ethic. As long as the executive actions of Murder Inc., were intramural, the civilians didn't get too upset about the crossfire.

Besides, the criminals called to testify before the Kefauver committee might have stepped from a Warner Bros. gangster film or Damon Runyon short story. If the reality was the consolidation of nationwide crime networks overseen by devious thugs, the appearance was of colorful "deese-and-dem" hoods speaking in fractured English, criminals as character actors. Never an inhospitable home for outlaws and gangsters, America saw not the corporate criminality of the Mafia but the rugged individualism of feisty palookas hustling for the main chance. In fact, just down the street from the Kefauver hearings in New York, Damon Runyon was undergoing pop cultural revival in *Guys and Dolls*, Broadway's hottest ticket and a lighthearted musical about the very kinds of activities the Kefauver committee was crusading against.

Rolling the dice himself, Kefauver gambled on television by inviting cameras to cover the action of his permanent floating committee. Almost alone among his colleagues in 1951, he understood that television was the emerging proscenium for politicians on the make. Lauded as "one of the most TV-minded of Washington legislators," Kefauver nearly rode his video celebrity to the nomination for president on the Democratic ticket the next year (in 1956 he settled for the vice presidential spot under Adlai Stevenson). "By no means do I want to minimize the great role played by newspapers and radio in dissemination of information," Kefauver declared, "but television provides the public with a third dimension which helps in interpreting what actually goes on."

However, no one—not the senator who beckoned the cameras, not the station managers who telecast the show, and not the viewers who welcomed whatever programming was aired during daytime—anticipated the magnitude of the public response. It was spontaneous, not premeditated, and, like all the best drama, it snuck up slowly and struck suddenly.

Beginning in January 1951, the Kefauver committee lit out from Capitol Hill for the hinterlands, almost as if trying out the show on the road before hitting Broadway for the major reviews. In a tour that criss-crossed the country, the

J. Edgar Hoover refused to acknowledge organized crime

is demo
crazy
infedz
or
grand
study?

senator presided over open hearings in New Orleans, Detroit, St. Louis, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, and Washington, D.C. Typically, special investigators for the committee preceded Kefauver into town and held closed sessions to winnow out the small-time punks from the big-time crooks. Besides putting fear into the hearts of corrupt local officials, news reports of the closed sessions served as a warm-up for the arrival of Kefauver and the open hearings. Usually the senator performed solo as a "subcommittee of one," taking over a downtown courthouse, rousing the forces of local law enforcement, and subpoenaing suspicious characters.

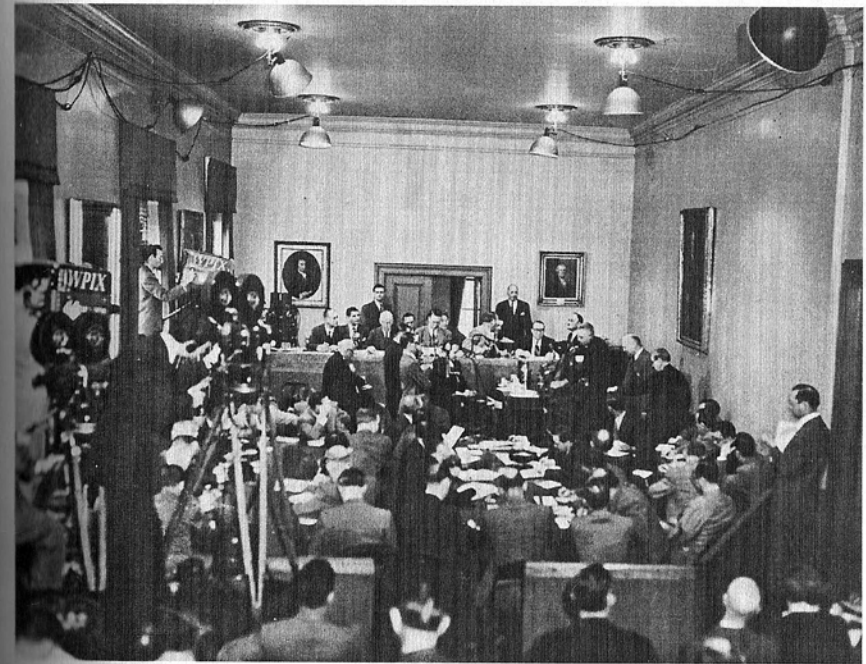
Although the Kefauver committee had inaugurated its road show the previous summer (including a stopover in Chicago, the spiritual epicenter of American crime), it was in New Orleans on January 25–26, 1951, that the hearings were first simulcast on radio and television. The Crescent City boasted an exceptionally colorful and lunkheaded crew of corrupt law enforcement officials. Around the parishes adjacent to the city, bayou sheriffs were not shocked that gambling was going on under their noses—they were shocked that anyone else would be shocked. One local lawman denied knowing that slot machines were really illegal. "I know it's against the law, but they have them all over the state," he explained. Nor did prostitution strike him as forbidden by tradition and statute, though he assured Kefauver that all the brothels in his jurisdiction were segregated.

Only an hour of the hearings was telecast over WSDU-TV, the sole television station, but New Orleans set a pattern for each successive stop on the tour: the local station canceled regularly scheduled programming and the community was gripped with a video-induced spell of "Kefauver fever."

In Detroit, where the two days of hearings were telecast in their entirety without commercial interruption by both WWJ-TV and WJBK-TV, an estimated 90 percent of the television sets throughout the region tuned in. In St. Louis, KSD-TV was forced to extend its limited plans for coverage "after the station's switchboard was swamped with calls from viewers wanting to see more," reported the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. "Never have so many amateur television actors held the interest of so many listeners."

In Los Angeles, ABC affiliate KECA-TV, the only station to anticipate the intensity of public interest, telecast all sixteen hours of the hearings over two days. Kefauver then went north for two days in San Francisco, where live coverage was provided by two of the city's three stations, KGO-TV and KPIX.

As in the South and Midwest, the West Coast succumbed to Kefauver fever. Each set of hearings drew the largest daytime audiences yet recorded and inspired "wild bursts of public enthusiasm." Motion picture producer Stanley Kramer wired KECA-TV to praise the Kefauver telecasts as "the most intelligent coverage in public service ever rendered this community" and 2,000



"Kefauver Fever": WPIX television cameras and the newsreels capture the opening session of the Kefauver Crime Committee hearings, at the Federal Courthouse in New York City (March 12, 1951). Kefauver sits at the center table wearing a gray suit. (Courtesy AP/Worldwide Photos)

other viewers "put the KECA-TV switchboard completely out of kilter by phoning in their congratulations." The *San Francisco Chronicle* marveled at the "startling camera eavesdropping" into the sessions and predicted: "It will become the high spot in public services performed by local television."

But it was in New York that the Kefauver committee's investigations metamorphosed from a series of local news stories into a historic, near-national spectacle. From March 12 until March 21, 1951, the Kefauver committee held hearings in the United States Courthouse in Foley Square—first in a tiny room on the 28th floor, three days later in more spacious accommodations on the third floor—to investigate numbers rackets, protection payments, and graft. New York was the penultimate city on Kefauver's itinerary and thus benefited not only from the momentum built from the earlier stops but from the heightened media attention that the city claims as its birthright.

Telecast live during the day by five of New York's seven stations, and in its entirety by DuMont affiliate WABD, the hearings became a metropolitan

early
Ready TV?
Kefauver
Committee
hears
Crooked
offices

Kefauver Spectacle
 NY

obsession in New York and wherever viewers were hooked in to the WPIX feed. Linked via coaxial cable and microwave relay, the Kefauver show was carried in part or in full by twenty-five stations in twenty-one cities on the eastern seaboard and throughout the Midwest. Originating a total of forty-four hours of coverage, WPIX was responsible for all aspects of the production, though expenses were shared among participant stations in a pool arrangement. The bare-bones operation consisted of two cameras (four cameras after the hearings moved to the bigger room) and eight microphones, a limitation that became an advantage: the simple shot/reverse shot exchanges between interrogator and witness accentuated the mano-a-mano tension. Harry T. Brundige, formerly of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, served as on-camera commentator. The cast of soon-to-be household names included Senators Kefauver, Charles H. Tobey (R-N.H.), Herbert R. O'Connor (D-Md.), Lester C. Hunt (D-Wyo.), and Alexander Wiley (R-Wis.), and chief committee counsel Rudolph Halley.

The first day of the New York hearings featured Frank Erickson, a small-time gambler who played it smart and dummied up. To whatever question was asked, Erickson parroted the same reply, a legal phrase soon turned national catchphrase: "I refuse to answer on grounds that it might tend to 'criminate me.'"

The star witness, the outlaw set up for a showdown with marshal Kefauver, was the notorious mobster Frank Costello. A shadowy underworld kingpin, Costello had for decades wielded control over slot machines, narcotics, and politicians in and around the New York metropolitan area. Having always kept a low profile, the camera-shy capo was a reluctant witness who refused to testify on live television. Still eager for the spotlight himself, Senator O'Connor brokered a compromise whereby the cameras would refrain from showing Costello's face. The visual amputation ultimately proved futile because newsreel cameras were filming the mobster full figure for television newscasts that same evening. However, during the day, on live television, the lucky accident of video editing transfixed some 20,000,000 viewers.

At first viewers resented the loss of Frank Costello's talking head. Gradually, though, as the camera focused in on his hands—crumpling scraps of paper and nervously fiddling with his eyeglasses, all wet palms and hairy fingers—the image became strangely hypnotic. "Somehow the camera view of the headless Mr. Costello's exquisitely tailored chest, his spotless pocket handkerchief, his manicured hands nervously picking at his faultlessly-turned lapels or toying with his eyeglasses only accentuated the impression that he is indeed a sinister figure," commented *Broadcasting/Telecasting*. Only half joking, Jack Gould dubbed Costello's gesticulations the "ballet of the hands."

Though Costello was a hard act to follow, Virginia Hill Hauser, moll of the late Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel, topped him. Bringing sex and sizzle to the gray lineup of men in suits, she sashayed in to the committee room fashionably dressed for the black-and-white medium in a silver blue mink cape, gray suede gloves, and broad-rimmed chapeau. Arriving late, Hill snapped petulantly at the flash photographers. Kefauver excused her tardiness by remarking that "ladies from my part of the country are traditionally late."

Speaking in a whiny, magnolia accent, the auburn-haired 35-year-old told a fascinating tale: how she first came north from Alabama to "sling hash" at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933, how she met "some fellas" of remarkable generosity who showered her with money and racetrack tips, and how she knew nothing about drugs or other illegal activities. After so many dour refusals to testify on grounds of self-incrimination, Hill's colloquial backtalk was a crowd-pleasing change of pace. Asked to explain the reasons for a raucous fight between Bugsy Siegel and herself at his hotel in Las Vegas, she explained, "I hit a girl at the Flamingo and he told me I wasn't a lady." As she left the stand, she belted a female reporter, kicked a male reporter, and cursed at the flash photographers.

That weekend, Kefauver took Sunday night off to stretch his video range as the mystery guest on CBS's popular game show *What's My Line?* Even before the senator walked on stage, the panelists exhibited fluency in Kefauver-ese during opening introductions. "What do you do, Hal Block?" asked actress Arlene Francis, playing straight man for the *Variety* columnist on her left. "I refuse to answer on the grounds that it might tend to incriminate me," deadpanned Block.

The rituals of the "mystery guest" segment on *What's My Line?* required the panelists to don blindfolds, whereupon the mystery guest walked on stage and signed his name on a blackboard. Instantly recognized by the studio audience, Kefauver received sustained, fervent applause. During the role-reversal interrogation, the blurring of show business and the nation's business spawned comic confusion. "Are you in the entertainment business?" queried Miss Francis, as the audience chortled. It took less than two minutes for humorist Bennett Cerf to guess Kefauver's identity and not much longer for Hal Block to suggest that Kefauver's own television show be called *What's My Crime?* "As a matter of fact," Block quipped, "are you sure you want to be shown on television—or just your hands?" Gushed Arlene Francis: "We'd love to have your ratings!"

The second week of the Kefauver hearings began with the testimony of former New York mayor William O'Dwyer, whom the committee suspected of impeding investigations into racketeering. O'Dwyer struck back by accusing Senator Tobey of being involved with New York bookmakers. Sporting an archaic editorial eyeshade, Tobey, an eccentric 70-year-old given to bombastic



No longer the Mystery Guest: Sen. Estes Kefauver introduces himself to the *What's My Line?* panel (May 18, 1951). From left: Dorothy Kilgallen, Bennett Cerf, Arlene Francis, and Hal Block. (Courtesy AP/Worldwide Photos)

orations in a mellifluous baritone, launched into an emotional defense of his integrity. "That is not true! I will take the oath right here, if you will give it, Mr. Chairman. I hate a fourflusher!" Tobey stormed.

The next day O'Dwyer apologized and admitted "there is nothing to it." Tobey then delivered a mawkish soliloquy. "Hate is a terrible thing," he told the rapt gallery. "I take my inspiration from a higher source and try to forget it. . . . I have lived long years and God has been good to me. I am a poor man, and always will be. . . . But there is one thing I am. I am a free man. And I am willing that everything I ever did or said or wrote should stand in the light of day to anybody, friend or foe alike." He paused theatrically. "Let's get on with the hearing." A thunderous ovation filled the hearing room.

On March 21, the final day of testimony for Frank Costello, Senator Tobey bore into the close-mouthed mobster for a pithy exchange on the duties of American citizenship:

Tobey (feigning exasperation): Well, you're looking back over the years now to that time when you became a citizen, and we're now standing

twenty odd years after that. You must have in your mind some thing that you've done that you can speak to to your conduct as an American citizen. If so, what are they?

Costello (pause): Paid my tax.

At that, the gallery and the senators alike erupted in laughter.

When Costello left the stand, WPIX commentator Harry Brundige took over the hearings. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said to viewers. "Mr. Costello has been a rather mysterious figure to you of the television audience because he was not photographed, but at this time Mr. Costello is willing to face the camera and let you have a good look at him."

The cameras turned on Costello, and Brundige coaxed his prize catch. "Mr. Costello, as the photographer says to the little boy, will you smile a little bit?"

Costello turned to the camera and smiled.

The nonplused committee chairman, temporarily frozen by Brundige's gall, finally took back the reins. "All right," said Kefauver testily, "that is all."

The morning after the first television marathon in American history, viewers rubbed their eyes and walked into the daylight slightly stunned and spent. During the two-week run of the hearings in New York, the city seemed to come to a full stop to watch the riveting real-time, real-life television drama. The ratings for what was hailed as "the greatest TV show television has ever aired" were unprecedented, boosting viewership to nearly twenty times the normal ratings. DuMont's WABD, the only station to telecast the entire hearings live, far outpaced the ratings of the other stations.

Watching the "spellbinding drama" of the Kefauver hearings, critics struggled to find words to describe the deep immersion compulsions of prolonged and concentrated television viewing. This was not the weekly ritual of Uncle Miltie or the Friday Night fights, but an unrehearsed and unfolding drama beheld for hours over a period of days, an intense commitment to an intimate, unrehearsed, and extended moving image spectacle. The thrill of soaking in the full force of the medium for the first time, of fronting the essential facts of life with television, was an artistic experience of a new aesthetic order. Trying to describe the urgency of the video addiction, observers resorted readily to hyperbole. "No event TV has yet covered—the United Nations, the political conventions, the presidential inauguration—presented high drama on so continuous a scale," declared *Billboard*. "These hearings are dealing with insidious factors. Watching them became equally insidious, in the sense that they relegated other duties and daily routines to the background." Tellingly, in Los Angeles, where only edited kinescopes were telecast, the Kefauver hearings ignited little of the excitement of the live telecasts on the East Coast. Likewise, *The Kefauver Crime Committee* (1951), a

newsreel compilation from Fox Movietone News, languished in motion picture theaters. For congressional drama to make for gripping television, it had to be live and viewers had to know it was live.

By the time the Kefauver committee left New York for the final round of hearings in Washington, D.C., its characters and catchphrases had entered the national lexicon. Subpoenaed crime boss Jake "Greasy Thumb" Guzik, an alumnus of the Al Capone school of bootlegging, proved himself an apt pupil of the New York sessions. Escorted to the witness table in handcuffs, Guzik enunciated his version of a by-now-famous response: "I'm gonna refuse to answer any questions on grounds of incrimination. It may incriminate me or tend to incriminate me or lead to incriminating me in some devious way."

Eventually, Senator Wiley asked if Guzik was a lawyer or represented by a lawyer. Guzik said no.

"Then where did to get this phrase that you've been using?" asked Wiley.

Replied Guzik: "I heard it on television."

HUAC-TV

On March 21, 1951, concurrent with the Kefauver Crime Committee hearings, the House Committee on Un-American Activities launched a long-delayed follow-up investigation into alleged communist influence in the entertainment industry. Yet unlike the Kefauver committee, and despite its publicity-hungry reputation, HUAC tended to shun the brightest spotlight. Ironically, the congressmen investigating television were almost as camera shy as the mobsters investigated by Kefauver. Farsighted politicians who sought to exploit television for access to the electorate knew that their magnified images also invited closer scrutiny. The medium might bite back, inciting voter rebellion and exposing the hidden flaws of the closed shop and exclusive club that was the United States Congress.

During the notorious Hollywood Ten hearings of October 1947, HUAC had been widely derided for conducting a "three ring circus" (the recurrent metaphor for the unruly impact of klieg lights and cameras on congressional inquiries) when newsreels showed witnesses shouting and being shouted down, ejections from the hearing room, and intemperance on all sides. The antics surrounding the Hollywood Ten sessions had been such a public relations fiasco that future HUAC hearings tended to be conducted well away from the eyes and ears of the newsreels, radio, and television. "They object

to the Roman circus-Spanish inquisition incidents that have occasionally arisen in committee hearings," explained *Broadcasting/Telecasting*.¹

In 1949, HUAC voted unanimously to ban radio, newsreel, and television coverage of future hearings, asserting that the bright lights for the cameras contributed to a "circus atmosphere" in the usually sedate chambers of Congress. More likely, the members of the committee were afraid of coming off as befuddled foils for the media-savvy witnesses in the dock. Committeemen sat dumbstruck before the theatrical flourish of character actor Ed Max, who during HUAC hearings in Los Angeles in October 1952, flung his World War II medals onto the hearing room table and shouted, "Take these back to Truman. They used to be known as 'fruit salad,' now they're known as fraud salad. I was proud of them but not any longer. You've negated their importance." Against such bravura gestures, the committee members could only play straight men—or, worse, the villains of the piece.

Aside from being upstaged, the most serious argument against television coverage of congressional hearings was constitutional. Though a ratings hit and a media milestone, the Kefauver hearings raised troubling questions about the propriety of conducting courtroom-like proceedings on live television. Kefauver committee counsel Rudolph Halley argued that "the acid glare of TV" was actually the best safeguard of a fair hearing, but many legal experts felt that the acid was eating away at due process and constitutional protections.

Opponents of live coverage fretted about compelling citizens to testify under hot lights and suspicious eyes, a gauntlet deemed self-incriminating by definition. Plagued by second thoughts after serving on the Kefauver committee, Sen. Alexander Wiley proposed legislation to curb the broadcasting and filming "of proceedings of Congress and its respective committees." Besides the sorry spectacle of "an unjust inquisition of people under klieg lights, particularly people who might not be able to testify properly under such conditions because of health reasons," Wiley envisioned the solemn deliberations

1. HUAC members were not averse to motion picture publicity under controlled circumstances. In the anticommunist film *Big Jim McLain* (1952), chairman John S. Wood (D-Ga.) and his colleagues perform brief cameo appearances at the beginning of the film, shot in the actual hearing room. In close-up, committee counsel Frank S. Tavenner speaks a line of dialogue he already had memorized. "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" he asks an actor (playing a university economics professor not an actor) who takes the Fifth Amendment. Ready for his own close-up, Wood then recites the usual follow-up question. "Would you, if called upon, willingly bear arms on behalf of the government of the United States?"

Cams
in
Courtroom
Unconstitutional?