

The Institution of U.S. Public Broadcasting

Willard D. Rowland, Jr.

Contents

Summary of main points	12
Introduction	14
1. A brief history of public broadcasting	15
2. International comparisons: different expectations and capacities	26
3. The major constraints in the U.S.	29
3.1 Internal structural limitations	29
3.2 Programming mandate: the matter of the public and the problem of popularity	34
3.3 Issues of oversight and accountability	36
3.4 The constraints of funding	40
3.4.1 Tax-based funding	46
3.4.2 Private funding	55
4. Summary: a proposal for structural and process changes . . .	59
4.1 Consolidation of national organizations	60
4.2 Consolidation of local organizations	62
4.3 Dramatically increased funding	64
Conclusion	66
Bibliography	67

Summary of main points

- U.S. public policy for communications has always been dominated by the First Amendment and a highly individualistic, libertarian social and economic ideology of the marketplace.
- That world view led to a well-ingrained pattern of private ownership and commercial purpose for the U.S. press, media and telecommunications, long before broadcasting emerged.
- Those entrenched structures of belief and motivation militated against strong forms of governmental regulation and public service in U.S. broadcasting.
- As a hedge against certain limitations of the private enterprise approach, a neo-libertarian, fiduciary policy of regulation in the “public interest, convenience and necessity” was adopted early in U.S. broadcasting, in the belief it would temper the commercial imperatives and foster a wider range of services within the private system.
- That policy failed, providing regulation largely in the interest of the regulated industries and encouraging competition only in a relatively narrow range of largely mass entertainment programming forms; it also worked against the maintenance of the initial nonprofit and noncommercial interests in broadcasting and subsequently the establishment of any significantly large, well-funded public service enterprise.
- The only aspect of public service broadcasting that had even modest support in the U.S. for the first four decades of radio and television was for educational uses.
- From the outset, the structure and operating procedures of U.S. educational broadcasting were highly decentralized and localized, setting a pattern of diffuse programming authority and complexity that, along with little or no significant funding support, discouraged development of strong national public broadcasting services.
- Those patterns and history were notably different from the experiences in other industrialized, “first-world” societies, where broadcasting was perceived initially less as an institution of

commerce and more as an important element of culture, leading to the establishment of the public service approach at the core of national broadcasting policies, usually at the beginning.

- Dissatisfaction with the performance of private, commercial broadcasting in the U.S. led to the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 and an emphasis on public (as opposed to educational) broadcasting, the establishment of new national funding and program service agencies and the appropriation of federal funding for public broadcasting.
- However, such measures remained small by comparison with national policies for public broadcasting abroad; to this day U.S. public radio and television remain weak appendages to the dominant private system of commercial broadcasting, cable and telecommunications.
- U.S. public broadcasting is constrained by relatively small amounts of funding, a restrictive program mandate (i. e., a mission for educational, high-culture, alternative service, but not for entertainment and popularity), weak notions of public service, strong habits of congressional oversight, relatively small amounts of program production, a highly complex set of organizational structures and program procedures, and increasing commercialization.
- Possible remedies for the current weaknesses in U.S. public broadcasting include articulation of a broader mission, consolidation of organizations at local and national levels, the provision of a wider array of distinctly differentiated program services, and dramatically increased funding.
- The increased funding plan would be part of a “public dividend” policy, in which Congress would create a public service telecommunications trust fund, to be built from substantially increased amounts of spectrum auction and license transfer fees in exchange for further deregulation of the private, commercial aspects of U.S. broadcasting and telecommunications.

Introduction

Public broadcasting in the United States is widely seen as an important component of the nation's media culture (Carnegie, 1987, 1979, Twentieth Century Fund Task Force, 1993). Its programming, and the terms of public support for it, are not without criticism; it has its detractors from both the right and the left (Horowitz, 1995; Jarvik, 1997; Ledbetter, 1997). On the whole, however, public broadcasting tends to be endorsed as a social good; American society is seen as being better off for having it, for its role in broadening the base of information, education, cultural experience and political discourse.

Frequently, however, and often without regard to political perspective, public broadcasting is also criticized for being difficult to understand and analyze. Few observers, even among its most ardent supporters, can readily describe and explain it. Its institutional structure and procedures are usually seen as overly complex, Byzantine, inefficient and, at best, highly cumbersome.

Whether merited or not, such criticism is often made without a full understanding of the extent of the history of public broadcasting and the way in which that legacy has dictated certain persistent patterns in the institution's organization and operating processes. It is the purpose of this article to relate some of that history, so as to better describe the key elements in public broadcasting's structure and the range of constraints upon it. The article will cover matters of public broadcasting's legal and policy heritage, its social and cultural mandates, and its funding and structural limitations. The article concludes with a series of modest recommendations for changing public broadcasting's funding, structure and programming goals.

1. A brief history of public broadcasting

The institutional structure and workings of U.S. public broadcasting, and the constraints on it, are a direct result of public policy decisions taken for U.S. broadcasting beginning in the 1920s. Those decisions in turn are related to a deeper history of American communications media and public policy for their relationship to government and the private sector.

Ownership and control of most U.S. communications were vested early and firmly in private hands and commercial purpose. Under the formal dictates of the First Amendment and by virtue of Enlightenment-era understandings of the role of the individual and of the relationship between private interests and government, the press, telegraphy, telephony and film each became the province of private ownership, to be financed by commercial, profit-oriented mechanisms. Technological and capital cost considerations (“natural monopoly”) led to a system of public regulatory oversight of telegraphy and telephony, but those industries were never publicly owned, and in exchange for rate and service commitments they were guaranteed certain levels of return and economic stability.

Matters of concentration and monopoly across a wide range of U.S. industrial enterprise (e. g., railroads, finance and oil), led to antitrust legislation and the development of federal regulatory structures by the late nineteenth century (Schwartz, 1973; Horwitz, 1989). From time to time there had been proposals for more direct forms of public ownership or involvement in communications (U.S. Post Office Department, 1914), but they never had much currency in American policy thinking, and they were not seriously proposed at the time of the development of the legislation dealing with radio.

The initial radio legislation (Radio Act of 1912) proved inadequate in several respects, not the least of which were a) that the original model of radio use was one of point-to-point radio telegraphy and telephony, not mass audience broadcasting, b) the known, usable spectrum of the day was insufficient to provide all the frequency demand emerging in the 1920s, and c) there was no satisfactory discretionary standard for making licensing assignments among the

growing number of competing applicants. There also were concerns about broadcasting's putative social power and influence that abetted the interest in providing regulatory oversight.

Major features of the Radio Act of 1927 therefore were to create a new authority to make licensing decisions, the Federal Radio Commission (FRC), and to provide it with a licensing standard, "the public interest, convenience and necessity," adopted from existing forms of administrative oversight in such areas as transportation, finance and commerce. As adapted for radio that pattern imposed a fiduciary responsibility upon broadcasters, licensing them to use the airwaves in return for public interest service. The law also, however, explicitly forbade the FRC from content regulation, except for matters of obscenity.

In general, then, the law reflected much of the central tendencies in early twentieth-century understandings of the relationship between private and public interests and approaches at the time to regulating commerce. It also reflected the overall belief in the appropriate dominance of private enterprise in most industrial and social sectors. The 1927 radio law was developed in the wake of a generation of antitrust reform and federal regulatory activity in which the ideology of a progressive, socially responsible private-enterprise economy had been successfully resuscitated. That belief system in the mid-1920s also had become closely associated with equally optimistic expectations about the positive values of commercial forms of modern, popular communication. As a result, throughout the decade before the Great Depression there was little support for fashioning radio under any other template. The assumption remained that there was such considerable identity between private and public interests in broadcasting that, as in the simple models of eighteenth-century libertarianism, the best public services would emerge in a largely unfettered private enterprise.

Therefore, although it was never explicitly stated in the new Radio Act, a strong underlying assumption among many of its proponents and a strong article of faith in its fiduciary standard, was that the public's interest in broadcasting would best be served by retaining ownership in private hands and permitting a relatively unfettered form of commercial use. In that respect the policy followed

the general tendencies for private ownership already dominant in all forms of U.S. communication, whether regulated or not.

Occasionally doubts were expressed about such prospects, and there were even explicit attempts to develop alternative, noncommercial radio services, typically under the auspices of educational, religious, labor, civic or municipal government institutions (Blakely, 1979, pp. 53–54; Frost, 1937; McChesney, 1993, p. 14). But those concerns and institutional alternatives were at such odds with the predominant world view that they remained relatively weak and ineffectual during the crucial “ballyhoo” years of the 1920s, when the basic structure of American broadcasting was being erected. As a result, the 1927 law made no provision for supporting or developing noncommercial broadcasting, and much of the work of the new FRC also militated against the few existing public service efforts (Blakely, 1979, pp. 54–55; McChesney, 1993, pp. 18–37), reinforcing tendencies that even before 1927 had been discouraging educational and other noncommercial efforts (Barnouw, 1966, pp. 172–174).

During the early 1920s the emerging broadcasting industry had become dominated by large national interests in electrical manufacturing and telecommunications (e.g., General Electric, Westinghouse, AT&T, and their creation, the Radio Corporation of America). During the two years immediately preceding passage of the 1927 act, those interests, in conjunction with a proliferating number of local stations and the rapidly growing national advertising industry, had begun to create a system of national commercial networks and centralized program production. Following the syndication and chain logic of many other national industries including the press and film, RCA created the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), and negotiations among a shifting group of phonograph (Columbia), film (Paramount), and tobacco interests led to formation of the Columbia Broadcasting Company (CBS), both in 1926–1927. The new law barely took cognizance of those structures (Barnouw, 1966, pp. 198–200). In direct contrast to the emerging pattern abroad it provided for licensing only of the local stations, not of the national networks. Its overall approach was to imagine and to try to assure that control of the system would be vested in local hands, and it did not address either the power of the network imperative or the implicit tension

between the increasingly central role of advertising support and the fiduciary standard.

During the early 1930s, as the Depression deepened and a broader debate raged about appropriate economic and social reforms, there emerged a certain degree of dissatisfaction with the limited extent of public service in commercial radio (Blakely, 1979, pp. 55–64). Many educational institutions, particularly land-grant colleges and universities, continued to try to develop a separate system of educational stations, and to support that effort, they sought legislation attempting to reserve AM frequency space for noncommercial or non-profit licensees.

But by the mid-1930s, such statutory efforts, most notably the proposed Wagner-Hatfield amendment to the 1934 Communications Act, had failed (Blakely, 1979, pp. 64–66; McChesney, 1993, pp. 196–210). As a result of the Depression and the discriminatory spectrum reallocation and other licensing policies of the FRC, many public agencies and private nonprofit institutions had withdrawn from radio operations (frequently selling out to commercial interests). With the number of active stations drastically reduced, the opportunity for much noncommercial production and for audiences to experience it were concomitantly lessened. In the absence of any major alternatives the public was increasingly cultivated with the light-entertainment forms of commercial radio. Meanwhile, the industry was making considerable claims about its intentions of working with noncommercial interests to offer alternative educational and high-cultural programming, and indeed for a period it actually seemed to be doing so. The educational leaders were themselves divided over how thoroughly separate a system of broadcasting was necessary. Simultaneously, whatever else the Roosevelt administration was accomplishing through its New Deal programs, it was not contemplating any significant restructuring of the U.S. broadcasting system.

Throughout this period a small group of noncommercial stations, largely at state colleges and universities, did survive, and eventually, by the late 1930s, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) had set aside reserved frequencies for exclusive use by such entities. But those reservations had come late, they were only in the new, as

yet unavailable FM band, and they were never extended back into the then predominant AM band. Further, they were preserved for a limited class of stations – “noncommercial educational.” The name evoked something far less popular, much more local and considerably less universal than the concept of national public-service broadcasting being developed abroad. This form of radio in the U.S. was seen to be necessary only in a relatively restricted domain of instructional, formally pedagogic service. Its models were principally those of the classroom – the lecture, the textbook and the training film. Only fitfully did it dwell in the realms of drama, public affairs or the popular. It was merely an alternative, at best a minor, secondary service with tiny resources and few public expectations that it should be anything more. It also was not seen as a national, integrated enterprise.

As a result during the heyday of American AM radio (1927–1955) noncommercial licensees had almost no presence in the medium, particularly in large population centers. There was no national, interconnected public service network, no national production capacity, no federal funding and a set of other revenues that remained minuscule by any standard abroad. With this poor heritage the noncommercial radio service was so narrowly defined, so locally based, and so technologically limited that well into the 1970s it was barely audible in U.S. media culture.

By the time of World War II, as the economy was beginning to recover and international political crises stimulated wider debate about the meaning and health of American democracy, certain contradictions in U.S. mass media structures and practices had become somewhat more apparent. The inconsistencies between the promises of libertarian expectations for the several mass media and their actual performances were discussed in the report of the Hutchins Commission, 1943–1946 (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947). More specific critiques of the radio industry were rendered in a special Hutchins Commission study, the White report (1947), and in a parallel, though unconnected, FCC staff report, the Blue Book (FCC, 1946). All three documents were couched in terms of what was becoming known as the social-responsibility theory of the press and media behavior (Peterson, 1956) in which the failures of private,

commercially sponsored, profit-driven media institutions were decried and recommendations for improved public service were issued. The Blue Book seemed to be laying the groundwork for stricter FCC regulation of public service performance by commercial licensees, and the Hutchins recommendations, supported by the critical White analysis, actually included provisions for a stronger noncommercial broadcasting effort and the introduction of federal government support.

However, neither the Blue Book nor the Hutchins report was ever adopted as official policy. They were too controversial, too explicitly threatening to the existing private enterprise interests and free-expression mythologies. They therefore had no immediate effect on basic terms of communication ownership, purpose, and control. The social-responsibility theory was capable of sharp criticism, but as an essentially neo-libertarian construct it had little capacity for significantly affecting public and political attitudes about major, necessary structural changes. It was a creature of the progressive, liberal reform ideology that had been fostering precisely the failures and contradictions that it was criticizing, and it never could transcend that dilemma (Nerone, 1995). Despite mounting evidence to the contrary, the public interest was still thought to reside in an overwhelmingly private, commercial system tempered by the existing form of federal regulation. Public-service communication values and institutions were never widely understood in the broader British, European, and Canadian terms. Indeed the public service organizations abroad tended to be seen, and dismissed, as “state” broadcasting. It remained an article of faith that whatever weaknesses there were in the United States, they could be overcome in time through the workings of enlightened, public-spirited, private broadcasting leadership, moderate FCC oversight, and the introduction of yet another, newer electronic technology.

In this light it is clearer why U.S. television also developed in a way that, patterned after radio, provided only a small space for formal institutionalization of a public-service effort, and never along the lines of anything approaching the models abroad. The core structure of commercial network radio was almost immediately replicated in the new television industry with many of the same local and

large national private interests taking charge of the new medium. Congress provided for no new statutory framework for television, and the FCC's approach was one of essentially endorsing that mapping of the radio structure and commercial logic onto television. By 1952 the NBC and CBS television networks were well in place and a burgeoning system of local network affiliates was emerging. ABC, the product of a regulatively imposed divestiture of one of NBC's previous two radio networks, was struggling, and one or two other networks failed in the mid-1950s. But the basic pattern was well-established early on and the general policy that had been formed nearly thirty years earlier during the origins of radio remained intact as television emerged.

For the next twenty years the structure of U.S. commercial television remained largely the same. The system was dominated by the three networks, which, with a loose array of independent stations across the country provided four to six channels in most major cities. The networks were made up of a combination of stations which they owned and operated, five to seven each, usually in large cities, plus dozens of affiliate stations owned by others, but contractually linked to one of the networks for the provision of an exclusive program service. Those services were a mixture of program types – news, sports, film and a large amount of popular entertainment. The entire structure was supported by advertising, national and local, and as a result the three major networks tended to resemble one another with similar mixtures of program types. Unlike the national channels in other countries they were not programmed to be different from another or complementary. But due to their exclusive advertising source of revenue they were designed to be competitive with one another in each of the program content areas.

There always were some reservations about the true diversity of content and service reflected in such a system, and that is why there was some support in the early 1950s for at least a modest educational alternative. But the notion of a major, well-funded public service alternative was not part of the policy debates in the early years. Therefore the ETV service that was developing through the 1950s and mid-1960s was a weak appendage of the major national, commercial structure.

By the mid-1970s cable television had begun to be an increasingly important part of the U.S. system of broadcasting. Originally cable had been an unconnected collection of local community antenna television systems (CATV), retransmitting local and nearby television stations for communities which, due to geographic location, had difficulty receiving the signals off-air. Such systems were typically isolated from one another, offering 6–12 channels each, and independently owned. With the advent of broader-band coaxial cable and a permanent, reliable, geostationary satellite delivery mechanism, cable was able to provide considerably more channels (20–36), including a set of national program services (film, sports, and even local independent stations), and they were becoming aggregated in multiply owned systems (MSOs) that in turn were assimilating themselves into the national entertainment and cultural industry system, with cross ownership interests in film, video production, news and sports franchises.

Geared to the regulation of broadcasting and the common carrier telecommunications industries, the FCC had been highly protectionist of the existing commercial television system as cable began to develop. A series of government and private studies and court actions helped change the Commission's posture, and by the mid-1970s cable was no longer being discriminated against. In fact, over time, cable was successful in achieving a highly privileged regulatory status independent both of common carriers and broadcasting. It avoided the rate and service regulation policies for telecommunications, while also being exempted from the public-interest licensing obligations of broadcasters. Deregulation was the hallmark of federal regulation for communications by the late-1970s; by the time of the Cable Communications Act of 1984 it had become the dominant theme of federal policy for cable. Meanwhile, deregulation continued in broadcasting, with the elimination of such central tenets as the Fairness Doctrine (FCC, 1987) and aspects of the cross ownership rules.

However all this change in federal policy for commercial broadcasting and cable had few implications for public-service television in the U.S. Educational television earned a certain degree of official support in the early 1950s, when for instance, the FCC provided fre-

quency reservations for noncommercial stations. This reservation policy was adopted earlier in the history of television than it had been in radio, preserving a somewhat broader initial niche. But, again, the concept of television in this realm was strictly limited, and the practical resources to realize anything more were not there. To its academic, philanthropic, state educational, and private, high-cultural constituencies, noncommercial television was more exciting than educational radio and therefore, from the outset, it did attract more substantial support locally and nationally than had educational radio. Yet, that support still tended to view this form of television in restricted terms. Its very name, ETV, evoked the old problem of “noncommercial educational” broadcasting. It was to be a service that was only a secondary alternative to the dominant private-commercial enterprise, with little or none of the expectations of popularity, universal service and wide-ranging subject matter associated with public television elsewhere. There remained a strong belief that private-enterprise, commercially-supported television would provide enough to satisfy the public so that no other option need be addressed. As before, the belief was that any failures that might emerge in the commercial realm could be corrected by appeals to private broadcasters’ consciences, gentle regulatory coercion, and an ETV service supported at minimal levels, largely by local interests, universities, and state authorities.

Furthermore, any tendency to question such assumptions or to invoke other public service models from abroad could be little advanced during the early Cold War/McCarthy era. That environment fostered jingoistic appeals to the most simplistic images of what was right and just in American values and institutions, and it trafficked in fear of anything alien or foreign, especially in such sensitive areas as communication, with all its overtones of concern about propaganda and freedom. Altogether then, almost no one, including the noncommercial interests themselves, were articulating a vision of a large, wide-ranging public service television institution that would be more central to U.S. broadcasting culture than educational radio had been.

The weaknesses of the commercial-adequacy assumption were sufficiently apparent by the late 1960s that federal policy for broad-

casting began to institutionalize certain adjustments. Federal support had moved beyond providing reserved frequencies to funding a few forms of instructional programming (1958) and the construction of noncommercial facilities (1962).¹ Now, particularly in the wake of the Carnegie Commission report of 1967 (Carnegie-I), the government was bringing itself to the point of beginning to provide funds for more general programming, national systems of public radio and television interconnection, and other grants for local licensees to use at their discretion. That apparently changing federal policy reflected the interest among various national centers of private and public power and among many state governments and associated local private interests in increasing the number of public television and radio facilities. Simultaneously, the more substantial federal initiative stimulated the state and local tendencies, with the result that the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 helped lead to the creation of a larger, more powerful national-level superstructure, including the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), and National Public Radio (NPR); a proliferation of public stations; stronger regional activities; more hours of national programming; and a more widely available and attended range of services.

The change in name and status signaled a certain broadening of purpose and potential service; it seemed to be stating the case for a substantially refurbished and upgraded public-service enterprise. There were wider expectations that public broadcasting should reach more people, address more interests, and generally elevate the quality of electronic media discourse. This was a trend that had begun in the mid-1950s, with the widening institutional basis of ETV licensee organizations in response to the expanding range of interests in non-commercial television's use. Various philanthropies, industrial interests, and other cultural organizations at the local level, most typi-

1 The initial reservations (12 percent of all television allocations) were included in the FCC's Sixth Report and Order (1952); the instructional television support, for \$3 million to \$5 million a year for research and experimentation in broadcasting and film, was in Title VII of the National Defense Education Act; and the construction funds, for up to 50 percent of the total cost of projects – initially only in television, not radio – were authorized by the Educational Television Facilities Act of 1962. See Blakely, (1979), pp. 89–93, 135, 143–144.

fied nationally by the Ford Foundation, had organized “community licensees” and had influenced other more traditional educational interests to encourage all forms of ETV stations to produce and carry a range of programming that was less formally instructional in nature. Efforts in drama, music, children’s programming, and even public affairs began to be introduced with a broader, more general audience in mind. Such trends were particularly encouraged through the Ford-supported national production and distribution center, National Education Television (NET), from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s (Jones and Rowland, 1990).

Meanwhile, during the 1960s and 1970s, licensee governance broadened to include a wider range of citizenry – leaders and representatives of an expanding realm of professional and social interests. Community group and state telecommunications authority licensees became increasingly prominent in local and national public broadcasting affairs, while local school district licensees actually declined. Although the number of university and state educational authority licensees increased, their boards, advisory committees, and managements tended to reflect a broader, less strictly educational orientation. These changes accelerated after the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act, which introduced additional federal funding and attracted attention to and support for noncommercial radio and television as a national enterprise, a public broadcasting “system.” But as important as all these developments were, they were slow in coming, and they either papered over old tensions and problems or introduced new ones.

The remainder of this article will review the principal issues involving public broadcasting’s programming mandate, its structure, its relationship to government and the overall question of its independence. It will introduce that discussion by reviewing certain differences between the characteristics of public broadcasting in the U.S. and the predominant patterns elsewhere.

2. International comparisons: different expectations and capacities

In addition to the deep policy history outlined above, another way of understanding the structural and operating conditions of U.S. public broadcasting is to compare its mandate and status to its counterpart entities abroad. There is now sufficient research on public broadcasting in the U.S. and other societies to make it possible to outline and evaluate the contrasts among national communication policies, public service media structures and funding patterns around the world, e.g., Avery (1993), Blumler (1989), Browne (1989), Day (1995), Engleman (1996), Fox (1997), Hoffman-Riem (1996), Lewis and Booth (1990), Rowland and Tracey (1990), Somerset-Ward (1993).

The details of national policy for public broadcasting vary considerably from country to country. But among most industrialized, "first world" democracies there are certain characteristics or tendencies in the arrangements for public broadcasting that are telling departures from the situation in the U.S.

Public broadcasting abroad has historically been far more central to broadcasting and telecommunications cultures.

In most instances the public-service institutions were built first; the commercial and private elements came later. As a result, the broadcast programming cultures in those nations tend to be defined by and revolve around the public-service ethic, rather than the other way around.

Broadcasting in other advanced societies is seen primarily as a cultural institution and only secondarily as an economic enterprise.

The primacy of the public-service ethos elsewhere derives from the tendency to understand broadcasting first as a matter of language, symbols, meaning, social identity and cultural expression. In the U.S. broadcasting historically has been seen primarily as a business, as an engine of and actor in commerce.

Public broadcasting abroad tends to continue to be supported much more richly by public funds on a per capita basis.

This condition has remained true in virtually all other countries, even in an era of increasing privatization and commercialization. The public broadcasting funding disparities between those countries and the U.S. continue to be of large magnitude and to lead to dramatically different programming possibilities.

Nationally chartered public-service broadcasting corporations (PSBCs) tend to produce much larger amounts of programming.

Most PSBCs have the budgets, facilities, staffs and mandates to produce large volumes of programs on a regular basis, day in and day out. As a result they tend to be able to provide a steady stream of high-quality material with considerably more regularity than in the U.S.

PSBCs abroad also tend to provide multiple strands of complementary national program services.

Most PSBC service mandates are quite broad, such that they are expected to provide a rich array of programming for both general and specialized audiences. The structural consequence of that expectation is that the PSBCs organize their programming in several coherent streams of separately identifiable services. Such services are universally available and delivered as distinct channels or networks.

The PSBC missions are so comprehensive that they are expected to be both popular and entertaining for the entire public in at least some aspects of their services.

Most national public broadcasters derive their current missions and roles – “to inform, educate and entertain” – from the original BBC charter (Briggs, 1961, pp. 348–360). By contrast in the U.S., the issue of entertainment is severely circumscribed by the dominant commercial system. There are concerns abroad about pandering to simple tastes, but in most such countries public broadcasting’s right, indeed its responsibility, to be entertaining is usually quite clear. The special contribution of public-service broadcasting insofar as popularity is concerned is to attend to matters of quality, to explore

the extent to which it is possible to have widespread popular appeal while yet striving to provide information, education and general enlightenment.

Where public radio and television are managed together in one organization they tend to have synergies that improve both.

Radio and television are different media. But public radio and public television share a common public service ethic that binds them more tightly than to their respective private counterparts. Under that joint banner the two media have the potential of working together more effectively. In those instances abroad where they share the same corporate charter they tend to be able to pool objectives and resources with far better results in public appreciation, policy development, programming and administrative efficiencies.

The number of public-service institutions in other countries tend to be far fewer, making it possible for them to be more coherent, focused and effective in their policy representations.

Most frequently there is only one principal public broadcasting organization in each society abroad. There seldom are more than two or three. As a result the public relations and national lobby energies are much more focused and less subject to multiple interpretations by the public and other parties. Such unity makes public service broadcasting much less subject to the divisiveness encouraged by hostile political and private forces.

This is not to suggest that public broadcasting abroad is without problems. In various systems there are difficulties associated with politicization, over-commercialization, and inefficient use of resources. In some countries there also have been serious episodes of self doubt and loss of vision and commitment (Rowland and Tracey, 1990). But on the whole there has been much more effective attention abroad to how public broadcasting can work positively in the development and maintenance of national and regional cultures, public voices and civic identity.

The difficulty for public broadcasting in the U.S. is that it has all the problems of its counterparts abroad with few of the advantages.

It has little consensus on just what is its mission, it is subject to considerable political pressure due to the particular mechanisms of its federal funding arrangement, it remains profoundly underfunded and therefore underproductive, and it is becoming increasingly commercial.

3. The major constraints in the U.S.

3.1 Internal structural limitations

The policy history outlined in Section I above depicts how at the outset, with the emphasis on supporting a private, commercial system and investing in the faith that such a system would provide a diverse body of public services, there was virtually no support for federal funding or building a major national public service programming and distribution enterprise, in either radio or television. As a result, U.S. public broadcasting grew up around a weak collection of independent local educational licensee organizations (universities, community groups, school boards and state educational authorities). Over the decades U.S. public broadcasting has been fashioned in a crazy-quilt structure that cannot be readily explained. Its structural origins are first Jeffersonian and then Madisonian. In theory the results seem to have all the benefits of the Federalist compromises, of both vertical and horizontal checks and balances. In practice the structure is severely restrictive.

The Jeffersonian aspects of the structure, the “state’s rights” elements, came into being in the 1930s and were firmly entrenched by the mid-1960s with the emergence of the first Carnegie report (1967) and the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. Those characteristics had been rationalized around the principle of local control of programming and concerns about the putatively overweening power of national centers of programming production and distribution. The use of the word “network,” for instance, early became anathema in public broadcasting. The local licensees had formed a national or-

ganization, the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB), that among other things had programming divisions, National Educational Radio (NER) and Educational Television Stations (ETS) (Blakely, 1979). But as membership controlled entities with no major federal or private funding, neither of those agencies had significant programming development resources or authority.

National Educational Television (NET) was the only other major national program service before 1967. Its acronym suggested the ambition of becoming a full-fledged broadcasting network, and to a certain extent by comparison with the NAEB divisions, it was. But even NET, with a steady funding stream from the Ford Foundation, was a modest program service; at its height in the late-1960s it provided only about ten hours of programming each week, and it never had a permanent interconnection capacity.

With the social turmoil of the late 1960s, it became politically difficult to argue for a centralized model such as the British, Canadian or Japanese Broadcasting Corporations. Many local communities and the stations serving them felt that NET was part of an "Eastern, liberal political establishment" that they perceived already to be well-represented in the commercial television networks. That NET was centered in New York and benefited from the nearly exclusive support of the Ford Foundation only reinforced the impression of many around the country and in Congress that a more decentralized program model was necessary when federal support became available after 1967 (Day, 1995).

As a result, in public television the new Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), in league with the existing public television stations, agreed to a model for the new interconnection service (PBS) that denied it the right either to produce programs itself or to operate independently (Avery and Pepper, 1980). From the outset PBS was to be a membership organization, subject to the broad-ranging and often conflicting interests of its members. It also was designed to rely almost exclusively on its members for programming. This was at some variance with the situation in radio, where NPR, the new counterpart to PBS, was invested with a good deal of centralized program authority and was permitted to produce programs itself. The television situation also stood in stark contrast to

that of public broadcasting abroad, where centralized national public service networks, complete with large staffs of production talent, were the norm.

The differences in this regard between radio and television were the result of different strengths among their stations. One of public radio's weaknesses became a strong argument for giving program production authority to NPR. Prior to 1967 there were few educational radio stations with the production expertise necessary to mount a daily schedule of consistently high quality public service radio programs for national audiences. The new NPR would therefore have little competition for national production rights and resources, at least initially. By contrast in educational television, several stations, in addition to NET, had developed national production capacity. Loosely known as the "six pack" (Avery and Pepper, 1980) they had already been struggling with NET for rights to produce for the national service. In league with the broader base of local ETV stations, they successfully argued against allowing the new PBS, which they largely controlled as an owners' cooperative, from having production authority, forcing it to carry their programs instead.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the national public broadcasting arrangement in the U.S. was that unlike the nationally chartered public service corporations elsewhere, CPB itself was thoroughly constrained in its role. The 1967 act prevented CPB from becoming either a program producer or program distributor. It could establish national intercommunication systems and it could fund public service programming, but it could not make such programs itself, nor own or operate national services fashioned around them.

From the outset of the post-Carnegie period, then, the normal functions of national public broadcasting were divided among CPB, PBS, NPR, the stations and other entities. The situation was particularly cumbersome in television, where PBS was limited to a role of providing technical interconnection among the PTV stations and coordinating the program schedule for them. That initial anti-federal model for public television was reinforced during the mid-1970s, in the wake of presidential interference in the media, including public television (Day, 1995). The PBS governance structure was adjusted

to reinforce its fundamental characteristic of station membership ownership and control. That tendency in turn led to the design and implementation in 1974 of the Station Program Cooperative (SPC), a mechanism whereby federal funds for programming were passed through to the stations and pooled for particular program projects as proposed from among the many different producing entities. That system proved to be highly cumbersome and lacking in creativity, as it assigned no real editorial accountability and generally favored those proposals that provided more hours for less cost.

In 1990 public television abandoned the SPC mechanism, in an attempt to concentrate more funding and central program commissioning authority in PBS. But to this day the funds available for that process remain paltry by comparison with other national public television organizations. PBS, unlike NPR, still has no production authority itself. The producers for national public television continue to be associated with a handful of large stations or state networks that compete with one another for the few funding crumbs that are available. It is a highly erratic, disjointed system that is in a constant state of flux and that provides no stability for the vast majority of producers and related production talent. As a result national public television programming continues to be small in quantity and limited in quality. While major productions across a wide range of topics are produced daily and weekly in other national public television systems, they are few and far between in the U.S. To be sure, certain national programs in both public radio and television are produced regularly, and a few even daily. But they constitute only a fraction of the regular, daily programming provided by the public-service corporations in most other democracies.

A myriad of organizations at national, regional and local levels all compete for scarce program funding, and yet few of them are strong enough to sustain such efforts on a regular basis. Even among those that do, the resulting amount of program production is relatively small. The typical pattern of U.S. public television production is one in which individual efforts are mounted for a particular program or series, only to be disbanded at the conclusion of the project. Each new program effort then requires a wholly new, separate funding and production cycle, wherein talent has to be reaggregated, often

with considerable loss of time and creative energy. At the end of the project the team typically dissipates once again. Very few public television programs and production entities have had a consistent, steady source of adequate revenue. As a result U.S. television is forced to approach much of its production responsibility as an ad hoc, intermittent process.

By comparison abroad, public-service broadcasting in virtually every other industrialized democracy has strong, deeply resourced, national program production capacities. While the exact details vary considerably from nation to nation, the principle remains the same. In virtually every case there are large concentrations of program production funds, facilities and people permanently organized around the public service program mission. With the arguable exception of public radio and a few continuing public television programs, public broadcasting in the U.S. has little of that characteristic.

Most of the separate public broadcasting organizations also compete with one another for the right to speak on behalf of the institution, and as a result, policy planning for public television and radio is almost nonexistent. With all its diverse power bases public broadcasting tends to be reactive to external political agendas. It has almost no capacity for setting its sights on long-term objectives that provide for its growth and development and an ever increasing centrality in American cultural life. Public broadcasting's recent failure to establish any position for itself in the Telecommunications Act of 1996 is a telling case in point. In no other country could so sweeping and important a piece of communications legislation be debated, let alone pass, without a full-fledged hearing of the case for the public service media. That such a debate did not occur in the recent legislative process is a mark of the marginality with which public broadcasting is perceived in the U.S. and of its own internal incapacity to work effectively to articulate a vision for the public-service concept.

3.2 Programming mandate: the matter of the public and the problem of popularity²

When Carnegie-I (1967) invoked the term *public*, it was clearly trying to create a new image for the enterprise. It could not dismiss entirely the educational label, for too much policy support at the local, state, and federal levels had been built on the assumption of the inherent worth of the association with education. However, Carnegie did try to transcend the issue by incorporating broad notions of general audience service and high production quality that would earn much wider funding support from private and public sources, while yet retaining enough of the traditional educational values to qualify legitimately as something other than conventional, commercial television.

Widely though not universally supported within public broadcasting, this approach did much to improve the attractiveness of the service to the broad moderate center of U.S. political and cultural tastes. But that very condition led to an increasing dilemma: the contradictions of popularity and publicness. For as noncommercial broadcasting had begun to call itself “public” and to use that title to justify calls for increased federal and state funds, it also had begun to be asked whether it ought not to be able to demonstrate a considerably wider audience reach on a more frequent basis. Yet at the same time, it was vulnerable to charges of trying to be too popular (“commercial”) and also being too unaccountable to the public now providing it more support.

The popularity matter was, and remains, awkward. If more tax-based resources were to be dedicated to public broadcasting, should not it be both more universally available and more attractive to larger, even majority audiences, as with public broadcasting elsewhere? The technical problem of inadequate and unavailable signals could be overcome with more federal and state construction money. But what then? Should public broadcasting be expected to attract more of that newly available audience, and if so, how? Could public attention be increased through programming or services targeted to vari-

² Portions of sections III B-D are drawn from Rowland (1993).

ous special social, ethnic, and economic groups or through material of more general audience appeal? But then, by whatever means it might be becoming more popular, how would it avoid charges of engaging in ratings' competition? If successful in building popular new program services, how would it adjust to charges of depressing the revenues of private broadcasters? How would it respond to losing some of its programs to the commercial marketplace, and would it generally manage to maintain a separate, supportable identity?

On the one hand, there was concern about whether public broadcasting was not going to be popular enough, whether it would remain the province of educational and cultural elites and therefore unworthy of public funds whatsoever, let alone substantial increases. On the other hand, there was concern that it would become too popular, becoming indistinct from the conventional commercial services, and in the process drawing so much audience and profitability from them that it would threaten the as yet fragile national policy consensus supporting its relatively recent elevation to a somewhat higher order of activity, presence, and status.

The problem has been exacerbated in the U.S. by virtue of the restrictions on public broadcasting's mandate for entertainment. Commercial broadcasting makes a strong claim for its primacy in that regard, and because the entertainment function was ingrained in the commercial realms well before public broadcasting began to achieve a post-Carnegie national mandate, the notion of public television's role as only a secondary, largely educational "alternative" was little questioned. With a few arguable exceptions (Carnegie II, 1979; Rowland and Tracey, 1991) the debate in the U.S. has never been able to address the linkages among entertainment, popularity and quality so well developed abroad. The notion that there could be a public-service mandate to bring quality into the popular and thereby improve the tenor of a wide range of television, and that to do so would require the establishment of large-scale, exceedingly well-funded noncommercial programming institution, has never been widely understood in the U.S.

3.3 Issues of oversight and accountability

The idea of publicness also had introduced difficult questions about governance, access, and accountability. Such questions would have arisen in general form with the introduction of any significant amount of federal funding for programming. They are endemic issues for all democratic societies that provide public support for broadcasting, the arts, theater or any activity involving communication and speech. Insofar as U.S. public broadcasting is concerned, these issues emerged amid the 1960s and 1970s debates about the redistribution of power throughout U.S. society and its institutions – the basic concerns about democratization in the struggles over civil rights, Vietnam, consumerism, and the environment, as well as all the issues involving the role of the government in many social institutions as reflected in such matters as education, welfare, affirmative action and the “culture wars.”

In that context, noncommercial broadcasting found that it could not claim to be public and yet avoid scrutiny about its responsibilities to that public. To accept more tax-generated funding, especially at the federal level, was to invite inquiry into its criteria and mechanisms for choosing governing boards and managements, for determining necessary services, and for supporting particular programming. Educational broadcasting had long been exempt from concerns about accountability. Its public funding had been minuscule (and nonexistent at the federal level), and it had, after all, been fostered primarily in the halls of higher education, where considerations of academic freedom and protection from intense, direct, public scrutiny usually prevailed. As an educationally high-minded or “uplift” activity, noncommercial broadcasting had also been accustomed to the benefit of the doubt about its social responsibilities – to a presumption of inherent goodwill, progressivism, and general improvement over what existed in the commercial realm. Consequently, public broadcasting was not initially well prepared for charges of discrimination, elitism and fiscal irresponsibility.

Few public broadcasters or their principal policy supporters seemed to be able to put these concerns into any historical perspective. In all the commentary and research on public broadcasting pub-

lished in the period between Carnegies I and II (1967–1979) there was virtually no recognition of the depth of the problem of publicness, no apparent awareness of the rich arguments about it stretching back through American history, with particularly acute expressions in the early twentieth-century debates about pragmatism and progressivism (Lippmann, 1922; Dewey, 1927). Broadcasters and public policymakers seemed to have little or no knowledge of these arguments and about how they might bear on contemporary struggles over the new media. Demonstrating a relatively shallow social and political consciousness about this institution they were building, public broadcasters had few tools for understanding how serious, and not merely partisan and special-interest-based, were many of the questions being raised about its publicness.

As a result, when such questions became a more regular part of the policy debates in the mid- and late 1970s, many public broadcasting responses, as expressed in board meetings, national conferences, and political lobbying, were fearful and defensive, appearing to be insensitive and even reactionary. There was such resistance to inquiries about governance, accountability, and access that many of the generally friendly forces in the policymaking arena were discomfited. Many public broadcasters took it for granted that it would be understood that they were providing participation for diverse interests, particularly for those that had historically been underrepresented in U.S. broadcasting, and they assumed that appropriate credit would accrue to the institution for such efforts. Yet they found, often to their consternation, that public interest groups, minority and feminist spokespersons, independent producers, and others were beginning to suggest that public broadcasting was too inbred, too reflective of a white, male, upper-middle class outlook that was much more closely associated with established, unprogressive forces in the social and economic order than it realized and hence, that substantial alterations in policy for funding and oversight were necessary.

That particular criticism became institutionalized in the form of increasingly organized efforts by local citizen activist groups and, particularly, independent producers. The national program development policies worked out by CPB, PBS, and the stations during the 1970s heavily favored submissions from the existing stations, par-

ticularly larger "community" licensees in the major cities that had built substantial production plants. Writers and producers unaffiliated with such stations, and therefore independent of their managements, boards, and funding structures, had almost no access to the federally provided production funds channeled through CPB or to the national schedule controlled by PBS and its member stations.

In response to this situation, many of the independent producers and associated nonstation interests began to call for changes in the structure of national program funding. By at least the time of the 1978 Public Telecommunications Financing Act, the influence of these groups was being felt and reflected in Congress. Some accommodations were made during the early and mid-1980s, but the independent producer community continued to feel that the program funding process was still stacked too systematically against it. Accordingly, through a steady process of representations before CPB and PBS, as well as a few major stations, the independents continued to organize themselves and achieve even more sympathetic hearings in Congress. Their efforts were parallel to, if not strictly modeled on, a similar set of activities abroad. Most other public broadcasting establishments had also come under fire for allegedly restricting production and programming practices, and those disputes had led to significant changes in national broadcast policies. Perhaps the most notable of these was the debate in Britain over the concept of the proposed Open Broadcast Authority and the eventual creation instead of Channel 4 (Blanchard and Morley, 1982).

In the United States the independent efforts achieved a somewhat less dramatic but nonetheless unprecedented success when in 1988, as part of a new federal reauthorization bill, CPB was forced to set aside portions of its funds for the support of independent program efforts (Public Telecommunications Act of 1988). The new law also directed CPB to create and fund a new independent production service. The result was the formation in 1989 of a formal organization, the Independent Television Service (ITVS), that would coordinate program grants to nonstation producers to expand program diversity and innovativeness and thereby, presumably, to foster a wider range of program voices within the public-television community (*Broadcasting*, 1989; Drickey, 1989).

A similar set of tensions has prevailed between much of public broadcasting and the public-access movement in cable television. Public television stations have tended to view community-access producers with suspicion and disdain, as highly self-interested, partisan spokespersons for special causes with little production and program sophistication. To this day there are few production alliances between community-access interests and public television.³ For their part the former tend to perceive the latter as being too little committed to fundamental issues of democracy and community action and still too beholden to liberal-centrist ideologies of pluralism, high culture and accommodation with economic and social power.

Meanwhile, from quite opposite, more conservative directions public broadcasting has continued to be accused of being, in fact, too immoderate, too “liberal,” if not leftist, and too much a part of that coalition of old New Deal and recent Great Society forces that had been characterized as undermining traditional U.S. economic and spiritual values. It also has been seen to be contributing to an overly large, stifling, and inflationary public sector and, like the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, to be serving the interests of too few in American society – in effect representing a public subsidy of private tastes and interests that should be forced to sustain themselves in the commercial marketplace (Samuelson, 1989; Jarvik, 1997). From these various neo-conservative perspectives, the post-Carnegie-I support for expanded federal aid had been a mistake, and a retrenchment to more traditional instructional purposes, if not outright elimination, was in order. It is this line of thinking that has buttressed the periodic major attempts to eliminate federal funding for public broadcasting since the passage of the public broadcasting act in 1967. There have been several such efforts, in the early 1970s, early 1980s, and mid-1990s (see Section III, D below). That critique has continued to the present day and is a regular staple of political and cultural commentary supported by the Heritage Foundation and other conservative funding agencies.

3 One notable exception in Denver, Colorado is at the Five Points Media Center where the co-tenants include a public television station (KBDI-TV), a community-based public radio station (KUVU-FM), and the city public access television organization (DCTV).

Finding public broadcasting under concerted attack from the left and the right, the liberal center, which during the late 1970s and early 1980s was otherwise under assault on a wide range of more general social and economic issues, felt much of its ground shifting, and the then recent consensus over the unquestioned value of steadily and substantially increasing federal support for public broadcasting began to unravel. That pattern of uncertainty has continued well into the late 1990s, and public broadcasting itself continues to be unable to articulate a clear vision of what is meant by its claim to being a public enterprise and how that unexpressed philosophy should translate into a larger and more effective role in American social experience. With a few arguable exceptions (e.g., Duggan, 1992) there remains little evidence of public broadcasting leaders (including board members, chief executives, senior managers, and producers in the various national, regional, and local station organizations) being able to write or speak at length and in depth about the philosophy, history, and social expectations of their institution, let alone the broader realm of related questions about its role in American culture, politics and social order. In short, one of the major constraints on public television is its own inarticulateness and its lack of convincing discourse about its centrality to its own society.

3.4 The constraints of funding

Several difficulties have always been associated with the funding of public broadcasting, most of them involving particular structural weaknesses among the various sources of revenue. However, by far the most serious problem about funding has been its utter inadequacy. Whatever other problems it might reflect, U.S. public broadcasting simply has not had anywhere near the amount of resources necessary for it to provide the extensive range of services that are consistent with the institution's central cultural role abroad and even with the more modest U.S. models of public telecommunications.

Public broadcasting's total revenues of \$1.9 billion (see Table 1) are about 4 percent of those of American commercial broadcasting, its numbers of stations are 19 percent of those in the commercial in-

dustry, and its national program production funds were one-fifth or less of what the commercial cable television industry has been spending on programs.⁴ Its per capita rate of support – the annual amount of public broadcasting revenue per citizen of the country – remains well below that of all other advanced industrial first-world nations, and its program production rate, particularly in television, is far smaller than all other public service broadcasting institutions around the world.⁵

Clearly, public broadcasting's financial situation has improved considerably over the past thirty years. That growth has led to the establishment of roughly 1,000 radio and television stations, a sophisticated satellite distribution system, two full-time national networks, and various other national and regional services, thousands of hours of original programming every year, much of it of exceptionally high quality, and a professional cadre of over 10,000 employees.

The infusion of federal funds helped strengthen the other public and private sources of support (see Table 2). However, although its total funding base in the late-1990s was some ten times that of what it was in the early 1970s (see Table 1), it must be kept in mind that such growth is measured against a tiny, almost invisible baseline and is therefore deceptively large.

The specific funding problems are all serious and can perhaps best be understood by analyzing each of the key categories of support in turn.

4 Total commercial broadcasting revenues for the years 1986–1988 grew from \$29.0 to \$32.7 billion (Source: Morgan Stanley & Co., Inc., *Communications Industry Datebook*, August 1988) and could be estimated at about \$46.0 billion in 1997 (Source: Thom Watson, APTS). In 1996 operating commercial radio and television stations in the U.S. numbered nearly 11,500 (*Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook*, 1997); total operating noncommercial stations numbered over 2,200, but of those, roughly 800 were religious, student-run or otherwise small radio stations not supported by CPB.

5 As just one simple example, the federal government of Canada provided the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation with \$918.2 million (U.S. \$685.2 million) in 1995–1996. The Canadian population of 30 million was about 11 percent of that in the U.S., meaning that the Canadian federal government commitment to public broadcasting was about \$24 per capita versus about \$1 in the U.S. See Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Annual Report (1995–1996). Note, too, that these figures do not include the additional millions of Canadian federal dollars in other national and provincial public service telecommunications programs.

Table 1: Total Funding of U.S. Public Broadcasting (Millions of Dollars)

Fiscal Year	Federal			Non-Federal			Total		
	Total	Percent ^a	State & Local Tax Based Percent ^a	Private	Total	Non-Federal Percent ^a	All Sources	Percent ^a	Percent ^a
1972 ^b	59.8	(25.5)	107.7 (46.0)	66.8	(28.5)	174.5 (74.5)	234.3	(100.0)	(100.0)
1973	55.6	(21.8)	127.3 (50.0)	71.9	(28.2)	199.2 (78.2)	254.8	(100.0)	(100.0)
1974	67.1	(23.1)	139.1 (47.9)	84.3	(29.0)	223.4 (76.9)	290.4	(100.0)	(100.0)
1975	92.3	(25.3)	156.6 (42.9)	115.9	(31.8)	272.4 (74.7)	364.8	(100.0)	(100.0)
1976	130.1	(30.0)	175.9 (40.6)	127.3	(29.4)	303.2 (70.0)	433.3	(100.0)	(100.0)
1977	135.3	(28.1)	191.3 (39.7)	155.6	(32.3)	346.8 (71.9)	482.1	(100.0)	(100.0)
1978	160.8	(29.1)	218.2 (39.5)	173.4	(31.4)	391.6 (70.9)	552.3	(100.0)	(100.0)
1979	163.2	(27.0)	245.5 (40.7)	194.7	(32.3)	440.2 (73.0)	603.5	(100.0)	(100.0)
1980	192.5	(27.3)	271.6 (38.5)	240.7	(34.2)	512.3 (72.7)	704.9	(100.0)	(100.0)
1981	193.7	(25.2)	277.5 (36.1)	297.7	(38.7)	575.2 (74.8)	768.9	(100.0)	(100.0)
1982	197.6	(23.4)	301.0 (35.6)	346.6	(41.0)	647.6 (76.6)	845.2	(100.0)	(100.0)
1983	163.7	(18.2)	318.3 (35.4)	417.1	(46.4)	735.5 (81.8)	899.2	(100.0)	(100.0)
1984	167.0	(17.1)	334.5 (34.3)	472.8	(48.5)	807.3 (82.9)	974.2	(100.0)	(100.0)
1985	179.2	(16.3)	358.4 (32.7)	558.7	(51.0)	917.1 (83.7)	1,096.3	(100.0)	(100.0)

Fiscal Year	Federal			Non-Federal			Total	
	Total	Percent ^a	State & Local Tax Based Percent ^a	Private	Total	Non-Federal Percent ^a	All Sources	Percent ^a
1986	185.7	(16.4)	378.8 (33.4)	569.5	(50.2)	948.3 (83.6)	1,134.0	(100.0)
1987	243.0	(18.8)	389.2 (30.1)	662.3	(51.2)	1,051.5 (81.2)	1,294.5	(100.0)
1988	247.5	(18.1)	415.9 (30.4)	704.4	(51.5)	1,120.3 (81.9)	1,367.8	(100.0)
1989	263.9	(17.0)	454.0 (29.3)	830.7	(53.6)	1,284.7 (83.0)	1,548.7	(100.0)
1990	267.4	(17.0)	473.8 (30.0)	840.2	(53.0)	1,314.1 (83.0)	1,581.5	(100.0)
1991	333.4	(19.4)	503.4 (29.3)	884.0	(51.4)	1,387.5 (80.6)	1,720.9	(100.0)
1992	373.8	(20.9)	484.5 (27.1)	931.8	(52.1)	1,416.3 (79.1)	1,790.1	(100.0)
1993	369.5	(20.6)	475.1 (26.5)	945.4	(52.8)	1,420.6 (79.4)	1,790.2	(100.0)
1994	329.9	(18.4)	509.5 (28.4)	955.1	(53.2)	1,464.7 (81.6)	1,794.6	(100.0)
1995	338.4	(17.7)	560.5 (29.2)	1,018.4	(53.1)	1,578.8 (82.4)	1,917.2	(100.0)
1996 ^c	338.9	(17.3)	517.6 (26.5)	1,099.1	(56.2)	1,616.8 (82.7)	1,955.7	(100.0)

a All percentages are of total federal and non-federal income.

b First year for which detailed non-federal data is available.

c New accounting systems adopted, discouraging direct comparison of data to previous years. See Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 1997.

Source: America's Public Television Stations Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Table 2: Federal Funding of U.S. Public Broadcasting (Millions of Dollars)

Authorizing Legislation for CPB Funding	Corporation for Public Broadcasting				Facilities		Other Grants and Federal Contracts	Total Funds
	Fiscal Year	Authorization	Appropriation	Authorization	Appropriation	Appropriation		
	1963-67					32.0		32.0
Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 (PL 90-129)	1968	9.0	-	-	-			
Public Broadcasting Financing Act of 1970 (PL 91-411)	1969	9.0	5.0	12.5	3.2		8.2	
	1970	20.0	15.0	15.0	5.4		20.4	
	1971	35.0	23.0	15.0	11.0		34.0	
	1972	35.0	35.0	15.0	13.0		11.8	59.8
CPB Appropriation Authorization (PL 92-411)	1973	45.0	35.0	15.0	13.0		7.6	55.6
CPB Appropriation Authorization (PL 93-84)	1974	55.0	47.8 ^a	25.0	15.7		3.6	67.1
	1975	65.0	62.0	30.0	12.0		18.3	92.3
Public Broadcasting Financing Act of 1975 (PL 94-192)	1976 ^b	110.0	96.0	30.0	12.9		21.2	130.1
	1977	103.0	103.0	30.0	14.0		18.3	135.3
	1978	121.0	119.2	30.0	18.0		23.6	160.8
	1979	140.0	120.2	40.0	18.0		25.0	163.2
	1980	160.0	152.0	40.0	23.7		16.8	192.5
	1981	180.0	162.0	40.0	19.7 ^a		10.0	193.7
Public Telecommunications Financing Act of 1978 (PL 98-214)	1982	200.0	172.0	20.0	18.0		7.6	197.6
	1983	220.0	137.0 ^a	15.0	15.0		11.7	163.7

Authorizing Legislation for CPB Funding	Corporation for Public Broadcasting				Facilities		Other Grants and Contracts	Total Federal Funds
	Fiscal Year	Authorization	Appropriation	Authorization	Appropriation	Authorization		
Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1981 (PL 97-35) and FCC Authorization Act of 1983 (PL 99-272)	1984	145.0	137.5	12.0	11.9	17.6	167.0	
	1985	153.0	150.5	-	24.0	4.7	179.2	
	1986	162.0	159.5	24.0	22.9 ^a	3.3	185.7	
Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (PL 99-272)	1987	200.0	200.0	28.0	20.5	22.5	243.0	
	1988	214.0	214.0	32.0	21.3	12.2	247.5	
	1989	238.0	228.0	36.0	20.0	15.9	263.9	
	1990	254.0	229.4 ^a	39.0	20.0	17.9	267.3	
Public Telecommunications Act of 1988 (PL 100-626)	1991	245.0	242.0 ^c	42.0	21.8	12.8	333.4	
	1992	265.0	251.0	42.0	22.9	23.6	373.8	
	1993	285.0	253.3	42.0	21.3	29.6	369.5	
Public Telecommunications Act of 1991 (for 94-96)	1994	310.0	275.0	42.0	24.0	30.9	329.9	
	1995	375.0	285.6 ^{a,d}	29.0	23.8	338.4		
	1996	425.0	206.3 ^{a,d}	15.5	42.1	263.9		
	1997	^d	260.0 ^{a,d}	15.25 ^d	21.0			
1998	^d	250.0	^d					
1999	^d	250.0	^d					
2000	^d	300.0						

^a Less than final appropriation due to impounding, rescission, or sequestration.

^b CPB data for 1976 includes transition quarter (appropriations, \$17.5 million).

^c Added figures are for the Satellite Replacement Fund (originally authorized at \$200.0 million).

^d Legislation not finished as of December 1997

Sources: America's Public Television Stations; Corporation for Public Broadcasting National Telecommunications and Information Admin.

3.4.1 Tax-based funding

Tax revenues for public television are provided at federal, state and local levels, though the latter is small and insignificant. In virtually all instances federal and state funding is appropriated from general treasury revenues. Unlike the situation abroad, and contrary to repeated recommendations of national task forces and study commissions, there are no special taxes dedicated to public broadcasting, such as license fees.

a) Federal funding

Other than the relatively small amounts of ETV facilities and ITV production support prior to the late 1960s, federal revenues were unavailable for noncommercial broadcasting. After the 1967 legislation and the creation of CPB the total amount of federal support (for CPB, facilities, and ITV) grew from some \$7 million in 1966 to nearly \$300 million in 1997. But by any expectation that public broadcasting should become a major influence in American life, such figures remained tiny.

Additionally, the efforts to generate the federal funds have proven constantly to be difficult and to provoke controversy. They have required the expenditure of considerable amounts of political capital and energy by public broadcasting leaders, and they have regularly been subject to serious reconsideration and even cuts. Those realities have had substantial costs that many people would consider to be too high. For such a relative pittance, public broadcasters have had to engage in constant, intensive lobbying and begging, thereby exposing themselves to regular political oversight and its vicissitudes and requiring them to divert considerable energy and resources from other presumably more essential tasks, such as program service development and production. Those efforts have likewise systematically undercut public broadcasting's independence and narrowed its own vision for itself.

When Carnegie-I first proposed a system of federal funding, it envisioned a taxing mechanism that would generate substantial and increasing revenues placed in a trust fund so that regular government influence over their disbursement and use would be prevented. It

was felt that nothing like the receiving-set licensee fee so common in most other countries would be feasible. Nor was it thought appropriate that advertising revenue should be permitted. Instead, funding proposals focused on various tax options, particularly on the sales of receiving sets, on commercial broadcasting revenues or profits, and on commercial uses of the spectrum. Yet none of these had sufficient political support, and when the 1967 act was passed it left the matter of federal funding up to Congress and the president as part of the annual authorizations and appropriations process typical for the vast majority of government programs. Furthermore, the amounts generated by that process were initially quite low, well below even the modest levels that Carnegie had contemplated as necessary for a minimally effective public-service enterprise.

Within a few years the weaknesses of the annual authorization and appropriation process became widely apparent, particularly in the wake of the Nixon administration's veto of the 1973 authorization measure and associated charges of political interference with the CPB board and public affairs programming (Carnegie II, 1978, p. 205; Rowland, 1976). Many public broadcasters still held out hope for a dedicated, more permanent source of federal funds, but because the political will for establishing such a mechanism did not seem to be strong enough and because it was unclear that even a trust fund would be free of regular appropriations review by Congress, a compromise arrangement was reached. The new scheme had three essential principles: funds for CPB would come from general treasury revenues with authorizations guaranteed five years in advance and appropriations for three of those; the amount of federal funds would be generated by a "system match" formula that constituted a fixed ratio between federal funds and the total amount of nonfederal financial support (NFFS) raised by all the licensees up to the ceiling provided by the authorizations; and the amounts to be distributed to the different media (radio and television) and to the licensees would be stipulated statutorily. These provisions went into effect in 1975 and were extended and adjusted in 1978.

For a period the new provisions seemed to be having positive effects (see Tables 1 and 2). The guaranteed authorizations were progressively high enough (from \$65 million in 1975 to \$220 in 1983)

to encourage significant NFFS growth under the system match formula, and the terms of that ratio, initially 1:22 (federal to nonfederal), were improved to 1:2. Total nonfederal income more than doubled between 1975 and 1981 (\$272.4 million to \$575.2 million).

However, at the very moment of its initial success the new federal funding mechanism began to break down in significant ways. The main difficulties were that the 1975 law's multi-year authorizations, which had been in effect barely two years, were reduced from five to three years in the 1978 act; the three-year advanced appropriations were actually only being made in the first of the three years, thereby making them, in effect, only two-year advances; and the authorization and appropriation steps remained separate, as with all government programs. The result was that the federal funding process was not at all long range, nor was it particularly well insulated, in that it was requiring public broadcasting to return to the administration and Congress at least every two years to seek renewed appropriations. Then, during the Reagan administration's major federal budget reassessments of 1981–1983 the actual appropriations for public broadcasting, which had reached a peak of \$172 million in 1982 were rescinded and cut. Federal support for CPB fell back to \$137 million in 1983, and the facilities funds, which had peaked at \$23.7 million in 1980, dipped to \$11.9 million in 1984.

During the mid- and late 1980s the situation improved somewhat, as the CPB appropriation rose to \$229.4 million and the facilities program to \$20 million by 1990. But in spite of these improvements the situation remained tenuous, the stable federal funding recommended by Carnegie-I was still out of reach. Even the more modest, but carefully crafted compromise principles for federal revenue generation in the 1975 and 1978 financing acts were in shambles. For two years (1984–1986) public broadcasting had actually been without federal authorizations, and for all intents and purposes the system match mechanism had been abandoned, as the actual federal appropriations fell well short of the amounts that would have been generated by the existing NFFS ratio. Public broadcasters struggled long and hard during the 1983–1986 period to secure renewed multi-year authorization measures. However in 1984 two such bills, seemingly well supported by Congress, were vetoed by the president, and

those vetoes were sustained. It was not until 1986 that an authorization measure was finally signed. Yet even then the advance authorizations were only for three years, until 1990, and the appropriations only for two, until 1989. In 1988 a new authorization bill was passed, but again for only another three years, and the eventual appropriations through 1992 continued to fall short of the authorized amounts.

Similar conditions dogged the facilities program. Although the Reagan administration had failed to eliminate facilities support, it succeeded in greatly reducing the authorizations for several years and forcing the appropriations to level out at about \$20 million a year. By 1997 that figure had fallen to \$15 million.

Much of the overt Reagan-era hostility to public broadcasting funding began to ebb during the first two years of the Bush administration. Public broadcasters were also blessed during that period with the passage of an important three-year satellite replacement program (1991–1993). However, there was reason not to overinterpret those improvements. The authorizations were well below the levels the old system match formula would generate, and the actual appropriations continued to be less than even those authorizations (Robertiello, 1990).⁶ The facilities funds were also far below what was necessary to build a truly substantial multichannel system of public radio and television. Meanwhile, under the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit reduction program, those already reduced CPB and facilities appropriations came to be subject to “sequestration” (further fixed-percentage reductions). Likewise, although the satellite program has been treated as an additional benefit, it almost certainly had the effect of helping to restrict the growth in both CPB and facilities funds (Robertiello, 1990). Furthermore, the three- and two-year authorization-appropriation process, particularly with the annual sequestration battles, kept public broadcasting on a short tether. Its leadership and supporters appeared to have given up hope of any major funding increases and of anything like the long-prom-

6 Had the match system been working in the late 1980s, it would have generated \$630-650 million in federal funds for 1991 or 1992, or over twice what had been appropriated in the 1988 law. Similarly in 1996 the match system would have generated roughly \$800 million, or about four times what was appropriated (\$206 million).

ised middle- or long-range guarantees of even the modest amounts it was receiving.

During the 1980s, public broadcasting continued to enjoy sufficient bipartisan congressional support to prevent a hostile administration from realizing its goal of eliminating federal funding. That support even permitted certain recoveries by the late 1980s. But that help proved to be too weak to prevent such assaults from regularly reappearing, particularly under the guise of the seemingly more objective criteria of budget deficit reduction targets.

Evidence of the continuing problem reappeared in the mid-1990s, when after the Republican victories in the 1994 congressional elections, new House Speaker Newt Gingrich and other leaders vowed to “zero out” federal funding for public broadcasting. As in previous such attacks, the public outcry and public broadcasting’s organized opposition led Congress to retreat from the most draconian measures (Molotsky, 1997). Nonetheless CPB’s previously approved higher forward funding for the late 1990s (appropriated at \$312 million for 1996) was partially rescinded, dropping from \$285 million in 1995 to \$260 million in 1996 and to \$250 million for 1998 and 1999.

In the fall of 1997 Congress agreed to a new set of increases, appropriating \$300 million for CPB for fiscal year 2000, and \$21 million for Public TV/Funding Program Financing (PTFP) for 1998. There even appeared to be progress toward federal funding of a public broadcasting digital transition plan, with Congress and the White House seriously considering a three-year \$771 million grant (1999–2001) to help meet the total projected cost of \$1.7 billion. The latter would be in the spirit of prior moments of special federal help for periodic major public broadcasting initiatives such as the original satellite implementation and subsequent replacement projects.

Even with the renewed upward trend of federal authorizations and appropriations, plus the prospects for special major technological upgrade projects, the fact remains that the recurrent experience for public broadcasting has been one of regularly being forced back into the defensive posture of having to appeal annually for every funding measure, while also frequently having to struggle against recisions in appropriations taking place during the years for which they have been granted. Signs of the continuing tenuousness of federal funding

for public broadcasting have been the several instances where annual appropriations for CPB and PTFP have had to be made without benefit of prior authorizations.

The effects of this process continue to focus public broadcasting leadership energies on short-term problems and to bind it tightly to the political agenda of the moment. As revealed during the 1990–1991 efforts to prepare for the next reauthorization bill (to extend to 1996 the legislation that would expire in 1993), and then the mid-1990s struggles against total elimination, public broadcasting has had neither the time nor the energy to stand back from these essentially annual funding struggles to look ahead and plan for any significant rearticulations of its purpose and needs. This condition also has made public broadcasting vulnerable to the temptations of undue caution and self-censorship as occasioned by expression of concerns by key congressional figures about programming topics and bias.

Altogether, then, the very mechanisms of the federal funding process, as much as the inadequate amounts, almost guarantee that public broadcasting will remain capable of only the most modest reassessment of its goals and capacities, and of being able to be as vigorously independent as desirable. It can reorganize a particular national program service office, align itself with a renewed national interest in education or prepare for a new digital transmission system, but it still cannot plan for, let alone implement, significant, far-reaching changes in the entire range of services and national and local delivery means.⁷

7 During 1990–1991, with the quality of U.S. education becoming a salient political issue, CPB and others began to re-emphasize the educational nature of public broadcasting both to justify the new authorization bill and to seek special smaller allocations in various education funding bills. Although useful in the short term, this tactic was a political expedient that was at odds with much of the general audience programming trends in public broadcasting since Carnegie-I and that in any event did not constitute a major reassessment of overall goals and services. By the late-1990s, with the federal appropriations re-improving somewhat, the educational emphasis had ebbed and elements of it were having considerable difficulty sustaining federal support (Bedford, 1997a).

b) State and local funding

As suggested in Section I, the origins of U.S. public broadcasting lie in a close association with the formal structures of education, particularly with the public school system and public universities. Those institutions are the primary province of state and local governments, not federal or national authorities, as is typically the case abroad. That tradition of decentralized educational responsibility explains much about why state and local government support for educational or public broadcasting has always been a larger source of capital and recurring revenue than federal income (see Figure 1). That support has been channeled primarily through university licensees and state educational and telecommunications authority station boards. Increased numbers of stations licensed to such institutions as well as support for various state and local instructional programs, accounted for a considerable portion of the system growth in the 1960s and 1970s. Steady increases in that form of support during the late 1970s and early 1980s, when state government budgets were otherwise widely leveling off or dropping, did much to offset the reductions in federal support. That growth has remained remarkably solid (with only a modest fall-off in 1992 and 1993) even through the breakdown of the system match principle in the federal funding process and the continuing fluctuations in congressional support through the 1990s.

However, while state and local support was significant and even increasing, the fact remained that its growth was slow and modest enough to guarantee only minor continued increases in public broadcasting facilities and program services. Proportionately it also declined from about 50 percent of overall public broadcasting revenues in the early 1970s to about 30 percent in the late 1980s and since.

State government funding also varied widely in type and amount across the country; many states did not make public broadcasting a high priority. Even where such support was substantial, it was typically annual and at the most biennial in character, its overall levels showed no dramatic increases, and its actual proportion of overall public broadcasting funding was still shrinking. Thus, while state support remained a substantial pillar of U.S. public broadcasting, it was unclear whether it could become the basis for anything more

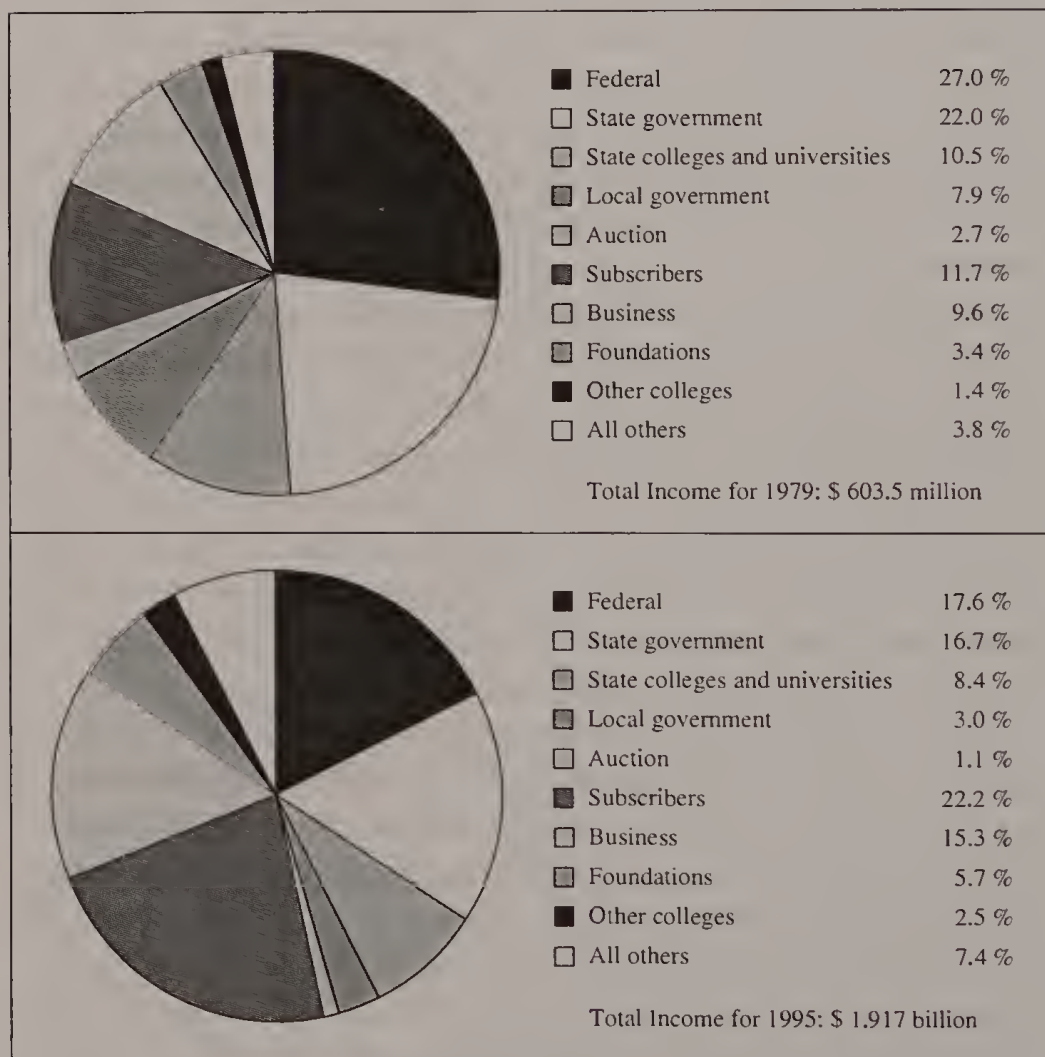
significant (that is, for a major increase in the numbers of noncommercial public-service channels and program efforts).

State funding had always been predicated on the educational and instructional potential of public broadcasting. The strength of its persistence and even growth over the years suggested the possibility of a continuing willingness of states to invest in the enterprise. It also was clear throughout the late 1980s that many state governments were intrigued by the possibilities of more sophisticated educational telecommunications, particularly under the rubric of “distance learning.” As improved quality of education became a popular political response to questions about economic recovery, state governments were widely offering incentives to all levels of education (elementary and secondary schools, junior colleges and universities) to become much more involved in the use of advanced technologies to deliver instructional programs. As always before in debates about the uses of new technologies in education, the premises of such initiatives were hotly argued, but the renewed state interest in the matter suggested possibilities for continuing to develop the state commitment to the educational public broadcasting enterprise. A few people within public broadcasting had always seen the potential of expanding the linkages in this realm, particularly through the “public telecommunications center” or “public TelePlex” concepts (Central Educational Network, 1989; Hall and Fellows, 1990), but public broadcasting seemed never able to develop national programs that would explore the full service and funding potential of such models. As a result, few public broadcasters were directly and forcefully testing the states’ willingness to work with them in this area and thereby leverage more state funding.

This ambiguity about the future of the relationship to formal education has remained throughout the 1990s. The rapid expansion of the Internet and World Wide Web has stimulated the search for new technology applications in all the major educational purposes – K-12, vocational training, higher education, continuing education and professional certification. There always have been competitive forces at work in the efforts to determine how best to use newer technologies to deliver formal instruction. The on-line, interactive world invites further competition for public broadcasting, from pri-

vate and public interests alike. As the on-line culture grows, it is likely that such competition will increase and all the traditional institutions of educational delivery, including public broadcasting, may find that their claim on state and local funding, however limited before, will continue to be limited without a clearer redefinition around such methods and opportunities. Meanwhile in keeping with the longstanding pattern, the continuing reliance on state funding reinforces the diffuse institutional structure and national program weakness of U.S. public broadcasting.

Figure 1: Sources of funding for U.S. public broadcasting 1979 and 1995



Source: Corporation for Public Broadcasting

3.4.2 Private funding

As a matter of law and regulation, U.S. public broadcasting is officially “noncommercial.” As such, although having no dedicated source of federal national funding as in the license fee mechanism abroad, it also has been restricted in its forms of nontax-based funding. Its response has been to develop several streams of revenue available to it within the U.S. world of nonprofit institutions, as for instance in the arts, culture and education. Such sources have included membership subscriptions, commercial underwriting, and foundation grants. Altogether these various forms of private funding grew at substantial rates after the early 1970s. Accounting for only about one-fifth of all public broadcasting funds in 1970, they amounted to more than a third by 1980, and then during the 1980s they more than trebled, accounting for well over half throughout the 1990s. The success of private funding was such that it came to replace state and local tax-based funds as the dominant form of public broadcasting support. Among its elements have been two principal forms that merit brief discussion.

a) Memberships and subscriptions

Up through the late 1950s, memberships and subscriptions were little used outside of a few listener-supported radio stations and the new community corporation ETV licensees. In time, particularly with the emergence of the Carnegie notion of public broadcasting, stations of all sorts began soliciting membership subscriptions, even eventually school and university licensees. Such patronage practices were already common in the arts and other cultural and social activities, as in the support of symphony orchestras, opera companies, museums, and hospitals. Their adoption in noncommercial broadcasting reflected a certain expectation that public radio and television might play comparable roles in communities around the country. By the late 1980s membership solicitation came to provide over 20 percent of public broadcasting’s total income, standing at 23 percent in 1996.

The initial rapid growth and sustained availability of such support had been highly encouraging for public broadcasting throughout the

1970s. It signaled a sort of audience loyalty and commitment that offset the discouraging news of regularly low ratings. It also provided a significant margin of increased income for public stations, permitting the necessary extra element in various important program service and capital projects. Further it helped build the NFFS base and was therefore part of the original system-match federal funding logic.

But there always have been certain reservations about the role and costs of such support. For instance, it raises a fairness issue, about whether viewers and listeners should have additional responsibilities for public broadcasting above and beyond the funds they provide through taxes. Simultaneously, it raises the publicness question – that is, for whom does public broadcasting exist and by whom should it be controlled? Only about 10 percent of the regular public broadcasting audience subscribes. Consequently there has emerged the implication of a special set of rights for that group in determining program service content. Such rights often seem to be acknowledged by fundraising campaigns that impress on the audience the extent to which their contributions are necessary to confirm station decisions about purchasing or producing particular programs. Those appeals have led to questions about how much disenfranchisement of the rest of the taxpaying audience might be occurring.

Meanwhile, the considerable efforts necessary to secure subscriptions have had other substantial costs. Station managements have to invest considerable amounts of time and energy in their fundraising efforts. They have had to build up large development staffs, and in many cases, particularly in public television, they have had to make trade-offs for such activities against local program planning and production efforts. In many U.S. public television stations the local program production staffs have been eliminated or folded into the development office, so that their sole or major local production activities have become the periodic fundraising appeals. As a result much of the community program service effort has been absorbed by the local cable access groups who quite often have little or no relationship with the public broadcasting licensee. This drift has exacerbated the estrangement between public broadcasters and the independent production communities; most significantly, it has helped

take public broadcasting out of the realm of local political and social affairs. Particularly in television, public broadcasting's identity has been increasingly that of an outlet for a national service, not as a forum for local voices and issues.

Finally, there has been the continuing question about the long-term prospects for membership revenue. With federal deregulation permitting increases in cable subscription fees, with the persistence of various special pay services on cable, and with the changes in the federal income tax law governing deductions of charitable contributions, it was unclear whether individual membership could be expected to grow much more.

The FCC's reluctance to maintain firm cable must-carry provisions for public television stations also seemed to undermine the subscription base. As a result public television had to expend considerable energy, and political capital, just to restore the minimum terms of traditional local reception guarantees. Those efforts diverted attention from the broader questions about the desirability and costs of this entire system of revenue generation; perhaps more important, they also diverted public broadcasters and interested political parties from working on the even larger task of framing a wider vision for the service. This situation remains a concern even after the Supreme Court, in 1997, albeit by a slim 5–6 majority, determined that the must-carry rules were constitutional (*Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. v. FCC*, 1997).

b) Underwriting and advertising

Industrial and corporate support for programming and even transmission operations became perhaps the most sensitive area of public broadcast funding. Never explicitly defined and authorized in legislation, the practice of soliciting underwriting developed early in the history of community ETV licensees, where appeals to foundations and various other private interests had become, like individual membership subscriptions, a symbol of its legitimacy as a particular kind of cultural institution and as a material necessity. In time, as public broadcasting's popularity grew and its evening audiences took on a particular demographic character – somewhat disproportionately upscale, professional and politically significant – many

national and local corporate interests began to perceive important public relations and political value in reaching such audiences with news of their support for certain kinds of programs. At first, such identification was possible only in brief, strictly regulated underwriting credits. But these practices became increasingly liberalized as program costs rose, federal funding proved more problematic and corporate interests in reaching public broadcasting audiences grew. Over time federal policy actually began to encourage expansion of private, commercial support and even outright advertising.

All of these tendencies were reflected in the experience of the Temporary Commission on Alternative Financing (FCC, 1983) which, as part of its 1982–1983 study of the nonfederal income potential for public broadcasting, actually conducted experiments in public broadcasting advertising. Though not willing to recommend advertising's permanent emplacement, the TCAF actually helped legitimize the serious discussion of advertising's merits and at the very least fostered an environment more congenial to liberalized sponsorship. The TCAF report recommended practices that the FCC soon authorized as "enhanced underwriting," thereby taking public broadcasting a significant step further into the realm of direct commercial advertising. During the 1980s and 1990s such support grew by 65 percent, from less than 10 percent to about 16 percent of all public broadcasting revenues.

Public broadcasters and their critics have remained sharply divided over this issue. There were strong concerns that any increasing commercialization of public broadcasting was unhealthy, that it drove the institution ever closer to the programming and audience considerations that guide commercial broadcasting and against which public broadcasting must stand. At the very least, questions were asked about what programming efforts and voices went unheard when underwriting resources were unavailable. Another practical concern was that increased commercialization would seem to threaten all the other significant forms of revenue generation without any guarantee that it would offer sufficient replacement funds. Other observers, however, felt that none of the other forms of financial support would ever provide the extent of revenue necessary for pub-

lic broadcasting to survive, let alone to grow and substantially increase its range of services and appeal. From this perspective the argument was that there were no realistic alternatives to increased commercial revenues and that although there were dangers associated with them, they could be managed well enough to ensure that the better, unique characteristics of public-service programming would persist and even prosper. The latter position was strongly reiterated in 1997 with the publication of a new proposal for partial, weekend commercialization of public television (Grossman, 1997).

Whatever the relative merits of these arguments, they tended to occur outside any sustained debate about the purposes and needs of public broadcasting. Even by the late 1990s there remains little recognition that the measure of increased commercialization's merits or demerits should be taken only in light of a clearer sense of public broadcasting's objectives.

4. Summary: a proposal for structural and process changes

All this evidence of the way public broadcasting works in the U.S., and careful comparisons with its counterparts abroad, suggests that what now exists is dysfunctional and actually counter to the best prospects for public service programming. In no major respect is U.S. public broadcasting working as effectively as it should. By virtue of decades of no or relatively low levels of national policy support and through a long process of resigned accommodations to that condition, public broadcasting has developed a thoroughly ingrained pattern of trained incapacity. It does some things very well, but by comparison with its counterparts abroad it is unable either to imagine or to work toward a broader role for itself in U.S. culture. Therefore, it is necessary to consider certain major structural changes.

Among those are:

- the consolidation of national-level public broadcasting organizations for programming and policy development purposes;

- a complementary consolidation of local and regional licensees;
- more centralized national programming production capacity in public television;
- a dramatic increase in the volume of programming produced by and for public television and radio at all levels;
- the reorganization of such production in full-fledged, complementary national and local multiple-program services; and
- the generation of far more resources to support those efforts.

4.1 Consolidation of national organizations

As suggested in Section II above, in other countries there tend to be only one or two national public service broadcasting organizations, e. g., the BBC and Channel Four in the UK, the ARD and ZDF systems in Germany, the ABC and SBS in Australia, the NHK in Japan or the CBC in Canada. In those instances where there are more than one organization, they typically are organized around distinctly articulated program services, and in most cases there is no division of public radio organizations.

In that light the variety of corporate structures in the U.S. tend to be wasteful and ineffective in providing the best, focused administrative structure for national public broadcasting. CPB only appears to be similar to its national counterparts abroad (BBC, CBC, NHK). Its name belies its essential lack of authority. Under current law it continues to have limited program commissioning authority and for the most part can only pass through funds to the stations and other entities. Unlike its counterparts it produces no programming, operates no networks, and owns no stations. Even its role in policy leadership is suspect, because of ambiguities in the law and the existence of a large array of other interests, many of them at the national level.

PBS has some program commissioning authority, and it does schedule the national service. But its program funding is so limited (\$291.6 million in 1996) and its station governance structure so powerful, that it still tends to provide only a single national service that is much more restricted than its counterparts abroad. Even its

several instructional services are merely supplementary. They do not constitute full-fledged universally available public television program streams. To this day PBS, and by extension all of public television, cannot take full advantage of its satellite and local transmission capabilities.

At the same time, PBS does not have the authority to represent public television politically. That task is assumed by a separate lobby group, America's Public Television Stations (APTS). Like PBS, APTS is a membership group that also is hamstrung by the multiplicity of its members' interests and jealousies. It has no authority or incentive to provide much long-term planning. And yet for many in the press and in the public at large, PBS is still invested with the presumption of speaking for all of public television, and, regardless of how erroneously, for all of public broadcasting.

NPR combines its operational roles in production and programming with representation. But, as with PBS, NPR finds itself competing with other formal or informal associations of licensees and program services that also lobby separately in response to competing agendas.

Meanwhile a consistent major theme of the several task forces studying U.S. public broadcasting since the mid-1960s has been a recommendation for the creation of a national program trust fund to concentrate available national program resources and planning. Such a step would eliminate much of the current overlap and redundancy among program planning and commissioning authorities. It might not, however, go quite far enough, leaving considerable program authority in the separate national and regional producing and distribution agencies.

Accordingly it might well be worth considering whether U.S. audiences would be more effectively served if, as abroad, all the various functions of major national public service broadcasters were consolidated in one federally chartered and funded organization. Such an organization could retain the CPB name, and it would likewise be possible to retain the PBS and NPR identities, perhaps as national programming divisions, as in the old NAEB model. It also would be possible to guarantee elements of licensee involvement in the new entity's governance, but the control would be limited. It

would not constitute the complete ownership reflected in the current system.

The new structure also would be much more aggressive in its program production and programming roles. It would be expected to own and exploit significant production facilities, as well as commissioning authority. It also would be expected to develop a series of different, multiple-program streams in each medium, e.g., three or four in radio, two or three in television, and many others on-line. Those services would be managed separately from one another, as in the national models abroad, but they would share facilities, technical resources and representation functions (for an unfulfilled but still compelling initial model of this concept see Gunn, et al., 1980). A recent, though much belated attempt to implement part of that model is reflected in the discussions about forming PBS-2 (Brockinton, 1997).

4.2 Consolidation of local organizations

There are now over 350 local public television stations and nearly 1,800 public radio stations. Some of these are part of state networks, but overall they tend to operate independently of one another. Most notably, while they may have available to them various program sources, they tend to use those services as supplements to a single national PBS or NPR service. That is, they do not group themselves around separate national program streams as in the BBC TV 1, 2, and Radio 1, 2, 3, 4 or CBC English 1, 2 and French 1, 2 models.

This strong pattern of local presence would be highly prized if it were accompanied by significant amounts of local programming production. But in far too many cases, particularly in public television, there are only a few, i.e., less than a dozen, hours of local program production a week. In radio local production is statistically much more prevalent, but it is all too frequently limited only to large amounts of music programming. The music formats mask the dearth of local news, public affairs and information services. With few exceptions, the significant NPR news and information services are not

supplemented by equally long-form and in-depth content at the local, state or regional levels.

To overcome such a lack of programming presence, it would be advantageous to consolidate stations and services in the various localities and regions. In one respect such concentration might be treated as a cost savings measure (fewer staff members and facilities), and it could readily result in elimination of many entities, leading to the survival of perhaps less than 100. But overall its justification would lie in what it would allow the licensees to do that they cannot now accomplish, as, for instance, in more clearly differentiated program services. Indeed, although the per hour or other units of cost should be lower due to administrative efficiencies, the total costs for this sort of wide ranging program effort would almost certainly be higher, as a result of the vastly increased amount of program material.

It should be emphasized that such consolidation should not occur solely for the sake of eliminating competition among local or regional entities. The purpose of this change, and the measure of its success, would be in the broadened range of complementary services occasioned by the sharing of resources and the associated synergies of creative and fiscal cross-subsidy. Duplication should be discouraged, but consolidation without significant diversity of program results would be a failure. In fact, some of the larger entities entering into such arrangements would have to approach the challenge as one of thoroughly rethinking their missions and transforming themselves into broader-ranging program service organizations, not simply as exercises in taking over and absorbing others.⁸

⁸ Tentative tendencies with regard to both national and local consolidation efforts are evidenced in recent discussions about the merger of the two major public radio program networks, National Public Radio (NPR) and Public Radio International (PRI) (Adelson, 1997), and efforts by CPB to encourage cooperative ventures and even consolidation among public television licensees in so-called "overlap markets," but as a matter of national policy or simply as a general understanding among the parties involved, it does not appear that there is an appreciation of how such initiatives will permit public broadcasting services to grow and expand.

4.3 Dramatically increased funding

The total revenues of U.S. public broadcasting are around \$1.9 billion. Of that only about \$300–350 million comes from the federal government. Such a figure is embarrassingly small by comparison with other major industrial nations.

The small amount of federal revenue has at least three unfortunate consequences. One, it is not large enough to sustain the volume of program production and acquisition necessary to build even a single national service of the range, volume and quality typical abroad. Two, it also makes it difficult to contemplate building a truly strong set of complementary national program services. Three, it forces public broadcasters to spend far too much time seeking other funding, principally in the form of commercial “underwriting” and individual memberships (subscribers).

Over time the underwriting system has evolved first into “enhanced underwriting,” then into direct sponsorship, and now outright advertising. In the process it has seriously compromised the noncommercial nature of the public service enterprise. The effects are clear in many cities where many U.S. public television stations may be said to have already been transformed into only a slightly higher quality of independent commercial television.

But equally as insidious is the time and energy the advertising and membership activities sap from program planning and production. As a result, public broadcasting management is increasingly less about programming and more about selling and marketing.

In recent years the assault on federal funding has become so heavy that many in public broadcasting have assumed that it will be eliminated entirely, or remain at some level even more modest than that of the present. The public broadcasting response has been to despair of federal support and to all but cease working for it.

This is an unfortunate tendency at just the moment when the real prospects for generating tax-based federal dollars that could be dedicated to public broadcasting are becoming far larger than at any time in its history. The source of those revenues would be the proceeds from the auctions of new or newly freed spectrum and from taxes on the transfer (sales) of licenses. Estimates of the total value of these

proceeds vary considerably. Auctions alone have accounted for about \$10 billion in recent years. Together auctions and taxed sales licenses might amount to \$100 billion in the next five years. If that figure was to be the target for the trust fund endowment for public broadcasting, it would yield roughly \$5 billion a year, fully 15 times the current amount of federal funding. With funding at that level, public broadcasting could eliminate all of its advertising and yet still have the sums necessary to support vastly increased amounts of production and multiple-program services to be developed by the dramatically restructured and consolidated national and local public broadcasting enterprise.

Currently the spectrum auction proceeds are being used solely in federal budget deficit reduction. They have not been linked in any way to the provisions of public service to which they are technologically related. Likewise, the spectrum auction notions in recent legislative proposals are weak, inadequate versions of what is being proposed here. The bills in the 104th Congress contemplated selling only the spectrum assets of public broadcasting itself. They made no provision for the dedication to public television of the proceeds of the auction of any other portion of the spectrum. Nor did they provide for tapping the profits earned by selling assets whose value rests in their license to use publicly owned spectrum space. Some in public broadcasting did propose raising revenues for a trust fund from a mixture of auction, transfer fees and noncommercial spectrum leases (U.S. House, 1995, pp. 20–21), but the total value of the endowment sought in that proposal was only \$4.0 billion, far short of the amount necessary to propel public broadcasting into a more significant role.

In this light, public broadcasting itself and those who claim to support it should be making the case for a major “public dividend” program to support the institution. That plan would articulate the details of the trust fund and the reformation of the structural elements. The public dividend plan would, however, be premised on the linkages among all three elements of reform – organizational consolidation, increased programming production and increased funding. Again, it is crucial that public broadcasting’s leadership clearly and strongly articulate the extent of the vision, and fiscal ex-

pectations, outlined here. Tepid responses to the current trust fund proposals and failure to press for substantial support for it would reflect a serious shortcoming and continue the low-vision tendencies of the past two decades (for an example of this problem see Bedford, 1997b).

Conclusion

This model is only preliminary, but it suggests much about how one would be able to help U.S. public broadcasting become far more central in the nation's broadcasting and telecommunications culture. If it is not adopted, the U.S. public service institution will continue to be a political football kept under serious constraints, as merely a weak derivative of the far larger, more powerful commercial system.

Without such a bold, new vision and reorganization plan, and a significantly stepped-up investment of public support, public broadcasting also will be driven ever more thoroughly into the arms of commerce itself, losing whatever modest protections it still retains from the pressures of the marketplace. Absent a renewed social contract and a clearer set of public culture values, public broadcasting will continue to harbor a limited vision for itself. It will likely, therefore, continue to slide into a posture of reducing its audiences to consumers and abandoning its traditional commitments to them as citizens in civil discourse. As such it will never measure up to its counterparts abroad and it will continue to betray the dreams of its best supporters and thinkers at home.

Bibliography

- Adelson, Andrea (1997). "Talking Stage: Public Radio's Top Voices Discuss Harmony of Merging," *The New York Times*, November 24, p. C 11.
- Avery, Robert K., ed., (1993). *Public-Service Broadcasting in a Multichannel Environment*. New York: Longman/Annenberg Program in Communication Policy.
- Avery, Robert K. and Robert Pepper (1980). "An Institutional History of Public Broadcasting," *Journal of Communication* 30:3 pp. 126–138. Barbieri, Richard and Jack Robertiello, (1990). "TV, Radio Face Different Revenue Picture," *Current*, July 23, 1990, p.1.
- Barnouw, Erik (1966). *A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Vol. 1, A Tower in Babel*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bedford, Karen Everhart (1997a). "CPB Hangover: Ready to Learn Double Funding," *Current*, December 1, p. 1.
- Bedford, Karen Everhard (1997b). "Coonrod, Brugger: Wait and See What Happens with Spectrum Fee," *Current*, December 1, p. 7.
- Blakely, Robert J. (1979). *To Serve the Public Interest: Educational Broadcasting in the United States*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Blanchard, Simon and David Morley, eds., (1982). *What's This Channel Fo(u)r? An Alternative Report*. London: Comedia Publishing Group.
- Blumler, Jay G. and T. J. Nossiter, eds. (1989). *Broadcasting Finance in Transition: A Comparative Handbook*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Briggs, Asa (1961). *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. v. 1. The Birth of Broadcasting, 1896–1927*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Brockinton, Langdon (1997). "A double vision at PBS (Public Broadcasting System may create second network)," *Mediaweek* 7:42, November 10, 1997, p. 5.

- Broadcasting*. (1989). "New public TV service names board," 18 September, p. 65.
- Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook* (1997). "Year in Review: Broadcasting and Cable 1996," p. xxi.
- Browne, Donald R. (1989). *Comparing Broadcast Systems: The Experiences of Six Industrialized Nations*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press.
- Carnegie Commission on Educational Television (1967). *Public Television: A Program for Action* [Carnegie I]. New York: Bantam.
- Carnegie Commission on the Future of Public Broadcasting (1979). *A Public Trust* [Carnegie II]. New York: Bantam.
- Central Educational Network (1989). *The Public Telecommunications Complex*, (March 1989).
- Commission on Freedom of the Press (1947). *A Free and Responsible Press*. [Report of the Hutchins Commission]. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Communications Act of 1934, PL 73-415, ch. 652, 48 Stat. 1064.
- Corporation for Public Broadcasting (1997). *Public Broadcasting Revenue Fiscal Year 1996*. Washington, DC: CPB.
- Day, James (1995). *The Vanishing Vision: The Inside Story of Public Television*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Dewey, John (1927). *The Public and Its Problems*. Fort Worth, TX: Holt.
- Drickey, Janice (1989). "Larry to the Third Power," *Current*, December 11, 1989, p. 23.
- Duggan, Ervin S. (1992). "The Future and Public Broadcasting," *Aspen Institute Quarterly* 4:3, pp. 14–37.
- Educational Television Facilities Act of 1962. PL 87-447, 87th Congress, 2d Sess., May 1, 1962.
- Engleman, Ralph (1996). *Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Federal Communications Commission (1946). "Public Service Responsibility of Broadcast Licensees," 7 March 1946 [Blue Book], in Frank J. Kahn, ed., *Documents of American Broadcasting*, 4th ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1984, pp. 148–163.
- Federal Communications Commission (1952). "Sixth Report and

- Order.” 17 Reg. 3905, 3908 (41 FCC 148, 158), April 14, 1952, in Kahn, pp. 182–190.
- Federal Communications Commission (1983). “Final Report,” Temporary Commission on Alternative Financing for Public Telecommunications.
- Federal Communications Commission (1987). Report No. MM-263 Mass Media Action on Fairness Doctrine, August 4, 1987.
- Fox, William John (1997). “Junk News: Can Public Broadcasters Break the Tabloid Tendencies of Market Driven Journalism? A Canadian Experience,” Discussion Paper D-26, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.
- Frost, S. E., Jr. (1937). *Education’s Own Stations: The History of Broadcast Licenses Issued to Educational Institutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Grossman, Lawrence K. (1997). “Introducing PTV Weekend” Available from *Current Online* at <http://www.current.org/weekend/wklg597.html>.
- Gunn, Hartford N., Jr., et al. (1980). “In Search of the Formula: The System Planning Project Papers,” *Public Telecommunications Review*, 8:3 (May/June) pp. 7–102.
- Hall, George and James Fellows (1990). “TelePlex: A Brave New World, a Bold New Concept,” *Current*, June 4, p. 39; see also the regular columns in *Current* by George Hall on behalf of the PBS Office of New Technology Initiatives (ONTI), 1988–1989.
- Hoffman-Riem, Wolfgang (1996). *Regulating Media: The Licensing and Supervision of Broadcasting in Six Countries*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Horowitz, David (1995). *Public Broadcasting and the Public Trust*. Los Angeles, CA: Center for the Study of Popular Culture.
- Horwitz, Robert Britt (1989). *The Irony of Regulatory Reform: The Deregulation of American Telecommunications*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jarvik, Laurence A. (1997). *PBS, Behind the Screen*. Rocklin, CA: Forum.
- Jones, Stephen B. and Willard D. Rowland, Jr. (1990). *NET Programming: A History and Appreciation of the Programming Serv-*

- ice of National Educational Television, 1952–1970*. Contract No. A86-31, Library of Congress, February 1990.
- Ledbetter, James (1997). *Made Possible By ... The Death of Public Broadcasting in the United States*. New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall.
- Lewis, Peter M. and Jerry Booth (1990). *The Invisible Medium: Public, Commercial and Community Radio*. Washington, DC: Howard University Press.
- Lippmann, Walter (1922). *Public Opinion*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- McChesney, Robert W. (1993). *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928–1935*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Molotsky, Irvin (1997). "How One Tough Bird Survived the Attack on Public Broadcasting," *The New York Times*, November 11, p. B1.
- Nerone, John C., ed. (1995). *Last Rights: Revisiting Four Theories of the Press*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Peterson, Theodore (1956). "The Social Responsibility Theory," pp. 73–103 in Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm, eds., *Four Theories of the Press*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, PL 90-129, 81 Stat. 365 (7 November 1967).
- Public Telecommunications Financing Act (1978), PL 95-567, 92 Stat. 2405 (2 November, 1978).
- Public Telecommunications Act of 1988, PL 100-626, 102 Stat. 3207, 7 November 1988.
- Radio Act of 1912, PL 62-264, ch. 287, 37 Stat. 302.
- Radio Act of 1927, PL 69-632, ch. 169, 44 Stat. 1162.
- Robertiello, Jack (1990). "CPB Spending Set for 1993," *Current*, (6 November 1990), p. 1.
- Rowland, Willard D., Jr. (1976). "Public Involvement: The Anatomy of a Myth" pp. 120–126 in Douglass Cater and Michael J. Nyhan, eds., *The Future of Public Broadcasting*. New York: Praeger.
- Rowland, Willard D., Jr. (1993). "Public-Service Broadcasting in

- the United States: Its Mandate, Institutions and Conflicts,” in Robert K. Avery, ed., *Public-Service Broadcasting in a Multi-channel Environment*. New York: Longman/Annenberg Program in Communication Policy.
- Rowland, Willard D., Jr. and Michael Tracey (1990). “Worldwide Challenges to Public Service Broadcasting,” *Journal of Communication* 40:2 , pp. 8–27.
- Rowland, Willard D., Jr. and Michael Tracey (1991). “The Case for Public Television: Its Principles, Purposes and Promise,” A Report Commissioned by America’s Public Television Stations, Washington, D.C., February, 1991.
- Samuelson, Robert J. (1989). “Highbrow Pork Barrel,” *Newsweek*, 21 August 1989, p. 44.
- Schwartz, Bernard (1973). *Economic Regulation of Business and Industry*, Vol. I. New York: Chelsea House.
- Somerset-Ward, Richard (1993). “Public Television: The Ballpark’s Changing.” Background Paper in *Quality Time?: The Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Public Television*. New York: Twentieth Century Fund Press.
- Telecommunications Act of 1996. PL 104-104, S. 652, February 8, 1996.
- Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. v. FCC (1997), U.S., No. 95-992, March 31, 1997.
- Twentieth Century Fund (1993). *Quality Time?: The Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Public Television*. New York: Twentieth Century Fund Press.
- U.S. House (1995). “The Future of Public Broadcasting: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance of the Committee on Commerce, House of Representatives,” 104–37, September 12, 1995.
- U.S. Post Office Department (1914). “Government ownership of electrical means of communication” Letter from the postmaster general, in response to a Senate resolution of January 12, 1914. 63d Congress., 2d Sess. Senate. Doc. 399, U.S. G. P. O.
- White, Llewellyn (1947). *The American Radio*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.