

ABC'S of bad journalism

If one were given the choice of either viewing a major political event or a fictional movie based on a non-fiction book, what would one watch? Through the years, television news has decided to cover the events rather than show a movie so the public did not really have a choice. Networks have always considered the major political events (such as debates) more important than "entertainment".

Well, now it seems one of the three major networks is making a major editorial change to cover major movies before significant political events. In case the reader is not aware of the events covered in this editorial, one need only to look as far back as last week to the Presidential debates involving Independent John Anderson and Republican Ronald Reagan. Incumbent James Carter chose not to debate the two candidates.

Whether or not the President made the ethical decision not to debate was right or not is not the subject of this editorial. The subject is ABC's refusal to cover the event as it happens and instead show the 1978 theatrical film "The Midnight Express." The President's decision not to appear, however, is the major reason the network did not consider it "A Presidential Debate."

The Network said "In our view, a forum that includes the challengers but not the incumbent is not a presidential debate." Yet, how often do major candidates for the highest and most important job in the land get together in front of the American public to discuss the issues that are pertinent to the future of this country? If the American public is lucky enough, maybe once in four years. Ignoring live coverage of an event such as this is bad journalism and is why many people do not take television news seriously. The argument that television skims over important news can now be backed by the argument that television ignores important news to show a more important event such as "The Midnight Express."

To add insult to injury, ABC had a special on the

debate after the local news at 11:40 p.m. When most Americans are asleep and have to get up that Monday morning to go to work. The Midnight show went until after 12:30 p.m.

Just where are ABC's priorities? What do they consider more important, a major news event that almost demands live coverage or a "based on true story" movie (and not a very good one at that)?

Had either of the candidates made a major slip during the debate, ABC would not have been able to broadcast it until 11:40 p.m. Not that the press is looking for gaffs, but the future of this country is at stake.

Some consider ABC's move to not broadcast the debate a precedent. I think not. It displays a continual growth of apathy (there's that word again) in this nation. The growing "None of the above" attitude that plagues our country is due more to the ignorance of the candidates and their vast differences than to a like or dislike of the candidates.

Viewing choice is terrific as long as the choice is between "Shogun", "MASH," and "20/20." However, debates between the presidential candidates are more than significant enough to demand live coverage. ABC's decision not to cover the debate is bad journalism because it ignores a significant event. I wonder if ABC's President is voting for "None of the Above," too.

News coverage of events such as this are imperative. The idea of networks saying, "Let's let NBC cover the second debate (if there is one) and we show a movie," is a terrible idea. There may not even be a second debate between candidates. What also must be included in this argument is the known fact that the networks compete with each other for ratings. Ratings means money. If ABC were covering the first debate, NBC might decide to draw as many people away from the debate as possible by showing "Gone With The Wind" as an alternative to it. That is not productive programming.

Ballot measure 6 devastating

"Ballot Measure 6 would devastate public education in Oregon," State School Superintendent Verne A. Duncan said today. "The figure released today by the Legislature Revenue Office shows that the measure would reduce the local participation in school finance by more than 50 percent. The ballot measure would force massive state aid and would reduce local control of education."

The Legislative Revenue Of-

fice, using average statewide property tax figures, showed that local income for schools would be reduced by 45 percent and for community colleges by 55.6 percent. Because schools and community colleges receive revenue from state and federal sources, that would mean available operating revenues would be reduced by 29.4 percent for schools and by 24.2 percent for community colleges statewide.

County education districts,

which provide much of the education to the handicapped, would see their available operating revenue reduced by 28.4 percent and their property tax revenue reduced by 58.6 percent.

"Since the Oregon Constitution requires that the state provide a system of common schools, the operation of our elementary and secondary schools and community colleges would essentially become a state government function," Duncan said. "Local control of education as we enjoy it today would be lost."

Duncan said in his annual State of the Schools address, delivered Thursday in Portland, he joined with Governor Atiyeh's call for the defeat of ballot measure 6.

"I believe Oregon voters will oppose the measure and keep local control—and local financing—of public education and other local government services in their hands," he said.

FRANKLY SPEAKING ...by phil frank



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