



## The Box

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Historians are not certain of the first image broadcast by television. Perhaps it was the toy figure of the comic strip character Felix the Cat; perhaps a dollar sign. Either would be appropriate and equally true—or false. So much is unclear about this medium which is so relatively new—the first commercial broadcast began in July, 1941. For that reason alone, Jeff Kesseloff's *THE BOX: AN ORAL HISTORY OF TELEVISION, 1920-1961* is an invaluable resource.

Yet *THE BOX* is more than a series of archival information. It is a glorious unfolding of stories by brash, opinionated, and often brilliant men and women who created the medium which has helped to create modern American—and, by extension, world-wide—culture. They are here: Don Hewitt of the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), establishing the style of hard-nosed, hard-hitting journalism that resulted in the acclaimed *60 MINUTES* series and the excesses of tabloid journalism; Red Barber, bringing major league baseball into the living rooms of America with a sophistication far in advance of the technology at his disposal; Milton Berle and Bishop Fulton Sheen, two widely divergent superstars of the early days of television but linked, improbably yet inevitably, on the same, small black and white screen.

Television changed how Americans looked at—and thought about and acted on—entertainment, religion, politics and economics. More people watched the episode of *I LOVE LUCY* about the birth of Little Ricky than viewed the inauguration of President Dwight Eisenhower. Television helped the rise of Red-baiting Senator Joseph McCarthy, and television aided in his downfall and disgrace.

How did it begin? *THE BOX* gives the first forty years of the story, told by the men and women who were there and were making it happen, often by the seat of their pants and skin of their teeth. It was not always a pretty story, but it was always an entertaining one, and Jeff Kesseloff has done an outstanding job of helping those who were there make those times live again.

## Sources for Further Study

*Booklist*. XCII, November 1, 1995, p. 447.

*Boston Globe*. December 27, 1995, p. 73.

*Library Journal*. CXX, October 1, 1995, p. 84.

*The New York Times Book Review*. C, November 19, 1995, p. 40.

*Publishers Weekly*. CCXLII, October 23, 1995, p. 54.

*The Washington Post Book World*. XXV, December 3, 1995, p. 2.

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