

**Class #3: Setting the Stage for**  
*Good Night and Good Luck*

## Reading Questions: *Good Night & Good Luck*

### ❖ *Reading #1: "Edward R. Murrow: The Reporter"*

1. Who was Edward R. Murrow? How did he become a "star" in the United States? (Also, who was Fred Friendly, the man George Clooney plays in the film?)
2. Who was Milu Radulovich? How did this case "change the face of American journalism" and establish "a new age in American politics"?
3. Why did Murrow resign from CBS? What did he do after this?

❖ Reading #2: "See it Now"

1. What was the background of "See it Now"?
2. "See it Now" was considered pathbreaking at the time. What made it so novel?
3. How did "See it Now" change after the famous show on McCarthy?

February 2nd, 2007

## Edward R. Murrow This Reporter

"This . . . is London." With those trademark words, crackling over the airwaves from a city in the midst of blitzkrieg, Edward R. Murrow began a journalistic career that has had no equal. From the opening days of World War II through his death in 1965, Murrow had an unparalleled influence on broadcast journalism. His voice was universally recognized, and a generation of radio and television newsmen emulated his style. Murrow's pioneering television documentaries have more than once been credited with changing history, and to this day his name is synonymous with courage and perseverance in the search for truth.



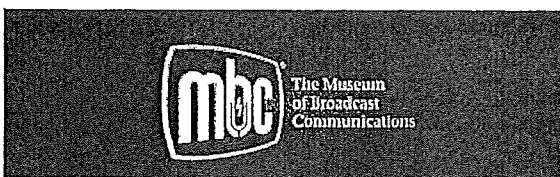
In 1937, Edward R. Murrow was sent by CBS to set up a network of correspondents to report on the gathering storm in Europe. He assembled a group of young reporters whose names soon became household words in wartime America, among whom were William Shirer, Charles Collingwood, Bill Shael, and Howard K. Smith. The group, which came to be known collectively as "Murrow's Boys," reported the whole of World War II from the front lines with a courage and loyalty inspired by Murrow's own fearlessness. During the war Murrow flew in more than twenty bombing missions over Berlin, and along with Bill Shadel was the first Allied correspondent to report the horrors from the Nazi death camps.

Returning to America after the war, Murrow was surprised to find that his overseas reports had made him a star at home. With the advent of television, Murrow was approached to host a weekly program. Along with his associate, Fred Friendly, Murrow had been producing a popular radio show, *Hear It Now*. The television show was to be called *See It Now*. Joe Wershba, a reporter who worked closely with Murrow, remembers, "Neither of them knew anything about film making or television. All they knew was they wanted to do stories. Important stories." Television was in its infancy and Murrow and Friendly had to learn the process of filmmaking and the primitive television equipment on the job.

Murrow's love of common America led him to seek out stories of ordinary people. He presented their stories in such a way that they often became powerful commentaries on political or social issues. *See It Now* consistently broke new ground in the burgeoning field of television journalism. In 1953, Murrow made the decision to investigate the case of Milo Radulovich. Radulovich had been discharged from the Air Force on the grounds that his mother and sister were communist sympathizers. The program outlined the elements of the case, casting doubt on the Air Force's decision, and within a short while, Milo Radulovich had been reinstated. This one edition of *See It Now* marked a change in the face of American journalism and a new age in American politics.

Soon after the Milo Radulovich program aired, it was learned that Senator Joseph McCarthy was preparing an attack on Murrow. As it happened, Murrow himself had been collecting material about McCarthy and his Senate Investigating Committee for several years, and he began assembling the program. Broadcast on March 9, 1954, the program, composed almost entirely of McCarthy's own words and pictures, was a damning portrait of a fanatic. McCarthy demanded a chance to respond, but his rebuttal, in which he referred to Murrow as "the leader of the jackal pack," only sealed his fate. The combination of the program's timing and its persuasive power broke the Senator's hold over the nation. The entire fiasco, however, caused a rift with CBS, and they decided to discontinue *See It Now*.

By 1961 tensions had become irreparable between Murrow and CBS and he accepted an appointment from President Kennedy as the head of the United States Information Agency. He was only to have the job for three years before being diagnosed with lung cancer. In 1964 Murrow was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and in 1965 died on his farm in New York. Perhaps more than any reporter before or since, Murrow captured the trust and belief of a nation and returned that trust with honesty and courage. His belief in journalism as an active part of the political process and a necessary tool within democracy has forever altered the politics and everyday life of the American people.



SEE IT NOW

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#### U.S. Documentary Series

*See It Now* (1951-57), one of television's earliest documentary series, remains the standard by which broadcast journalism is judged for its courage and commitment. The series brought radio's premier reporter, Edward R. Murrow, to television, and his worldly expertise and media savvy helped to define television's role in covering and, more importantly, analyzing the news.

The genesis of *See It Now* was a series of record albums that Murrow created during the late 1940s with Fred W. Friendly, a former radio producer at a Rhode Island station. The *I Can Hear It Now* records, which interwove historical events and speeches with Murrow narration, became such a commercial success that the partnership developed a radio series for CBS that also creatively used taped actualities. The weekly *Hear It Now* was modeled on a magazine format, with a variety of "sounds" of current events, such as artillery fire from Korea and an atom smasher at work, illuminated by Murrow and other expert columnists.

After his World War II experience, Murrow had assiduously avoided television, having been overheard stating "I wish goddamned television had never been invented." Friendly was eager to test the new technology and in 1951 the team agreed to transfer the *Now* concept yet again, this time emphasizing the visual essence of the medium, calling their effort *See It Now*. Murrow never desired to anchor the evening newscast, and he did not want *See It Now* to be a passive recitation of current events, but a active engagement with the issues of the day. To implement this vision, Murrow and Friendly radically transformed the fundamental nature of news gathering on television.

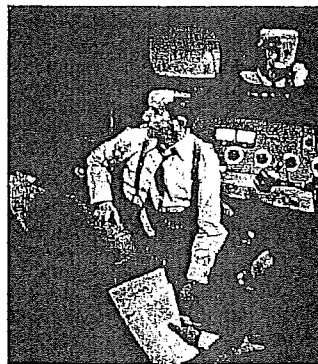
Unlike other news programs that used newsreel companies to record events, *See It Now* maintained its own camera crews to coordinate filming on location, using 35mm- cameras to record the most striking images. Murrow and Friendly also deviated from standard practice by mandating that all interviews would not be rehearsed and there would be no background music to accompany the visuals. Although *See It Now* relied on CBS correspondents around the world, Murrow, serving as editor-in-chief, and Friendly, as managing editor, organized the first autonomous news unit, whose ranks included reporter/producers Joe Wershba and Ed Scott; director Don Hewitt; production manager Palmer Williams; and former newsreel cameramen Charlie Mack and Leo Rossi.

"This is an old team trying to learn a new trade," intoned Murrow to inaugurate *See It Now* on 18 November 1951. Murrow, as in all the programs that followed, was ensconced in Studio 41, exposing all the tricks of the electronic trade—the monitors, the microphones, the technicians all in view. To underscore this new technological undertaking, Murrow summoned up a split screen of the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City and the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, the first live coast-to-coast transmission.

*See It Now* was the first news magazine series on television, alternating live studio commentary with reports from such seasoned correspondents as Howard K. Smith and Eric Sevareid. The series was initially scheduled in the intellectual ghetto of Sunday afternoon. By its third outing, *See It Now* gained a commercial sponsor, Alcoa (the Aluminum Company of America), which sought prestige among opinion makers to offset anti-trust troubles. As the half-hour series became the most influential news program on television, it moved into prime time, first on Sunday evenings, and then for three years on Tuesday evenings at 10:30 P.M.

*See It Now* established its voice by covering the campaign rituals throughout the 1952 Presidential year. Two early pieces were also emblematic of what Murrow/Friendly wanted to accomplish for the new venture: simulated coverage of a mock bomb attack on New York City, a segment that addressed the tensions of the nuclear age, and a one-hour report on the realities from the ground of the Korean War during the 1952 Christmas season. The later special evoked the frustrations and confusions of everyday soldiers and was described by one critic as "the most graphic and yet sensitive picture of war we have ever seen."

Despite the laudatory reviews and the respectability that *See It Now* brought to television news, a question plagued the partnership: how to cover the anti-Communist hysteria that was enveloping the nation. The team first searched for what Friendly called "the little picture," an individual story that symbolized a national issue. In October 1953 Murrow and reporter Wershba produced "The Case of Milo Radulovich," a study of an Air Force lieutenant who was deemed a security risk because his father, an elderly Serbian immigrant, and sister supposedly read subversive newspapers. Because of the report, for which Murrow and Friendly used their own money to advertise, the Secretary of the Air Force reviewed the case and retained Radulovich in the service. In "Argument in Indianapolis," broadcast one month later, *See It Now* investigated an American Legion chapter that refused to book its meeting hall to the American Civil Liberties Union. Again, Murrow and staff succeeded in



See It Now

Photo courtesy of Washington State University Libraries

**HOST** Edward R. Murrow

**PRODUCERS** Fred W. Friendly, Edward R. Murrow

#### PROGRAMMING HISTORY

CBS

November 1951-June 1953

September 1953-July 1955

September 1955-July 1958

Sunday 6:30-7:00

Tuesday 10:30-11:00

Irregular Schedule

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documenting how the McCarthyism, so-called because of the demagogic tactics of Senator Joseph McCarthy, penetrated the heartland.

Having reported discrete episodes in the Cold War, Murrow and Friendly decided to expose the architect of the paranoia, McCarthy himself. On 9 March 1954 *See It Now* employed audiotapes and newsreels, to refute the outrageous half-truths and misstatements of the junior senator of Wisconsin. In his tailpiece before the signature "Good Night and Good Luck," Murrow explicitly challenged his viewers to confront the nation's palpable fears. A month later, McCarthy accepted an invitation to respond and his bombastic rhetoric, calling Murrow "the leader and cleverest of the jackal pack," coupled with the later failure of his televised investigation into Army, left his career in a shambles. The McCarthy program also produced fissures in the relationship between Murrow and the network. Again, CBS did not assist in promoting the broadcast; but this time CBS executives suggested that Murrow had overstep the boundaries of editorial objectivity. In the process, Murrow had become controversial and, therefore, a possible liability to the company's business opportunities.

Provocative programs, targeting the most pressing problems of the day, continued during the 1954-55 season. Murrow conducted an interview with J. Robert Oppenheimer, the physicist who was removed as advisor to the Atomic Energy Commission because he was accused of being a soviet agent. *See It Now* documented the effects of the *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation decision on two southern towns. Murrow, a heavy smoker, examined the link between cigarettes and lung cancer. By the end of the season, Alcoa, stung by *See It Now*'s investigation into a Texas land scandal where it was expanding operations, ended its sponsorship. Because of the profitability of other entertainment shows, most notably the bonanza in game shows, CBS also decided that *See It Now* should yield its regular timeslot and become a series of specials. Many insiders thought the series should be retitled *See It Now and Then*.

During the final three seasons of specials, the tone of *See It Now* became softer. Despite exclusive interviews with Chinese Premier Chou En-lai and Yugoslavian strongman Marshal Tito, the most memorable programs were almost hagiographic profiles of American artists, including Louis Armstrong, Marian Anderson, and Danny Kaye. Controversy for Murrow was now reserved for outside the studio; his 1958 speech to radio and news directors was an indictment of the degrading commercialism pervading network television. The final broadcast, "Watch on the Ruhr" on 7 July 1958, surveyed the mood of postwar Germany. After *See It Now*'s demise, CBS News made sure to split the Murrow/Friendly team; Murrow hosted specials, the most significant *Harvest of Shame*, and left the network in 1961 and Friendly was named executive producer of *Now's* public affair's successor, *CBS Reports*.

Murrow and Friendly invented the magazine news format, which became the dominant documentary form on network television. The most esteemed inheritor of its legacy, *60 Minutes*, was conceived by integral *See It Now* alumni: Don Hewitt (as *60 Minutes*'s executive producer), Palmer Williams (as managing editor), and Joe Wershba (as producer). *See It Now* was also a seminal force in how most television documentaries conveyed a national issue: to illuminate the individual story, immediate and direct, that resonates with deeper implications. If Murrow and Friendly established the model for the documentary for both form and content, they also tested the limits of editorial advocacy. Although the series of McCarthy programs have been lionized as one of television's defining moments, Murrow and Friendly exposed as well the inherent tension between the news and the network/sponsor. How to deal with controversy in a commercial medium has remained controversial ever since.

-Ron Simon

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See also [Censorship](#); [Columbia Broadcasting System](#); [Documentary](#); [Friendly, Fred W.](#); [Hewitt, Don](#); [Murrow, Edward R.](#); [Paley, William S.](#); [Slanton, Frank](#)

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