

# NBC

America's Network

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O'Donoghue, et al., performed by John Belushi, Chevy Chase, Jane Curtin, et al., NBC. Transcript from the author's private collection.

22. Global TV in Toronto provided a studio and crew; producer Len Stuart fronted \$35,000 to get the first seven episodes made. See Patinkin (2000, 119).

23. *SCTV Network 90*, July 10, 1981, produced by Andrew Alexander, Doug Holtby, and Len Stuart, directed by John Blanchard, written by Dick Blassucci, Paul Flaherty, Bob Dolman, et al., and performed by John Candy, Joe Flaherty, Eugene Levy, et al. *SCTV Disc 1: On the Town/Polynesiantown Episodes*, Shout! Factory, DVD 33469, released June 7, 2005.

24. Brandon Tartikoff told the cast that the network wanted to keep the show running—at 7:00 p.m. Sunday night, opposite ratings juggernaut *60 Minutes*, and with network approval of all material so that it wouldn't offend the children watching at that hour. It was an offer that *SCTV* could refuse. See Thomas (1996).

25. *The New Show* starred *Saturday Night Live*'s frequent guest Buck Henry, *SCTV*'s Dave Thomas, and Valri Bromfield, a Second City Toronto veteran who had made her network TV debut doing a stand-up routine on the first episode of *NBC's Saturday Night*.

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### The Little Program That Could

#### The Relationship between NBC and *Star Trek*

MÁIRE MESSENGER DAVIES AND ROBERTA PEARSON

*Star Trek* in its various incarnations is one of the most successful television franchises ever produced and one of the longest-running. It is also a cultural phenomenon that goes far beyond television. For this the world has NBC to thank. Yet, also thanks to NBC, it nearly did not become so. In an ironic twist of fate, the current (in 2005) franchise owners, Paramount Network Television and UPN, announced in February 2005 that the most recent *Trek* series—the fifth, *Star Trek: Enterprise*—would be canceled that May, after four seasons, because of falling ratings. This could be seen as history repeating itself. It recalls what happened to the very first *Star Trek* series in 1969, when after three struggling seasons it was finally canceled by NBC.

However, the cancellation of *Enterprise* is not quite history repeating itself. There are marked differences between the current cancellation and the way the original series of *Star Trek: The Original Series (TOS)* slipped out of the airwaves in 1969. These differences reflect historical changes in the television industry and its relationship with audiences that enabled the *Trek* franchise to reinvent itself and to turn failure into spectacular success in the 1980s and 1990s. The differences also reflect the more straightforward economic imperatives that governed network decisions in the 1960s. As Herb Solow, the executive who sold *TOS* to NBC, and co-author of *Star Trek: The Continuing Story*, put it in an interview with us: "In the final season, NBC gave 'a short order' of twenty-four episodes; NBC went out on a limb [with *Star Trek*] and it ended up losing money. . . . *Star Trek* was not a big deal to NBC."<sup>1</sup>

By contrast, in 2005 *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001) was a very big deal to Paramount. As a press release stated in February 2005: "All of us at Paramount warmly bid goodbye to *Enterprise* and we all look forward to a new chapter of this enduring franchise in the future."<sup>2</sup> In other words, in 2005, unlike in 1969, this massive, money-spinning, multimedia cultural phenomenon was not going to be allowed to stop producing profits for its owners, whether through television, through other media, or through spin-off merchandising. Rewards like these were evidently not antici-

pated by NBC when they canceled the original show in 1969, even though, as Gary Westfahl (1996) has pointed out, a busy unofficial trade in *Trek* souvenirs and memorabilia had already started among fans. We can be sure that, learning from its history, *Star Trek's* owners will go on exploring ways of reinventing and rebranding the product so that it continues "to boldly go" where no media products have gone before. *Star Trek* celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 2006, and, with four seasons—the minimum for profitable syndication—safely in the can, *Enterprise* joined the four earlier TV series that continue to be rerun on TV stations around the world and will continue to make profits for its owners.

It was NBC that brought *Star Trek* to its first mass audience, and the network surely deserves some reflected glory from the phenomenon that the series became. Yet the NBC/Universal Web site does not mention the 1966 launching of *Star Trek* as one of the significant events in its history; in contrast, "television's longest running program," *Meet the Press*, is featured for meeting its "half-century mark" in 1997. But, as an example of NBC programs and policies under the classic network system, *TOS*—canceled in 1969 after seventy-nine episodes—offers a useful case study. It illustrates the adventurousness of the NBC network, as Herb Solow has claimed, but it also offers a case study of how a program that failed under the traditional network system was able to do better under a different system, twenty years later.

We argue here that *Star Trek* was a program that could have thrived had it been aired after the shift to demographically differentiated ratings in the 1970s and 1980s, which was prompted by the relative fragmentation of the audience due to cable and satellite channels. *Star Trek: The Next Generation (TNG)*, 1987) did indeed thrive on that basis. Yet even in the 1960s, the original *Trek* presaged a new era, for those who cared to notice, because of its relationship with fans and its special demographic appeal to young viewers—an appeal that the network failed to exploit because of the industry's perceived need in the 1960s to appeal to large, general audiences rather than to smaller niche ones. *Star Trek* was a series ahead of its time. In 1987, *TNG* became the first episodic series drama to go straight to syndication, thus bypassing the networks altogether, as the new world of cable made possible. And more recently, when the network concept was reinvented in the 1990s under the control of Hollywood studios, the flagship show on Paramount's new network UPN was *Star Trek: Voyager*. Our case study of *Star Trek* in its various incarnations illustrates the major structural developments in American television across its forty-year history.

In describing the relationship of the original series with NBC, *Star Trek* scholars are fortunate that people like Solow and his co-author Robert Justman are still very much alive, articulate, and writing and speaking in the public domain. Such TV veterans' accounts of past events, though often contrasting, illuminate working practices and relationships within the industry that have now been superseded by new technological and industrial processes and that are too rarely documented in detail. *Star Trek* is an exception: even before we were able to conduct interviews, much of the inside story of NBC's dealings with the show had been reported in Solow

and Justman's *Inside Star Trek: The Real Story* (1996) and in Stephen Whitfield and Gene Roddenberry's *The Making of Star Trek* (1968). *Star Trek: The Next Generation—The Continuing Mission*, by Judith Reeves-Stevens and Garfield Reeves-Stevens (1997), is also a source of much valuable inside information about the resurrection of *Star Trek* as a television series, including the decision in 1987 not to sell it to a major network. These insider accounts—often (understandably) self-promoting—are all authorized by the production company. Thus we can assume that some information that scholars might find illuminating is not covered, including some of the more forthright personal remarks about individuals that some of our interviewees made to us. Nevertheless, to the extent that original production materials, such as memos and scripts, are reproduced, scholars and readers are free to draw their own conclusions.

In contrast, most other television programs of the past have not been so well documented in published form, whether authorized or not, or indeed documented at all. The original internal memos between producers and network, letters, pitches, diagrams, models, scripts, and plans that have survived thanks to *Star Trek's* status as a cultural phenomenon with a huge fan following can be accessed through their marketing in these "insider" books. The authorized published accounts are well known in the *Trek* community, whether of fans or of *Trek* scholars, but this essay may perhaps introduce them to media scholars interested more generally in network histories and in television. This essay also reflects on the relationship between documented history, mythmaking, direct primary information (such as our interviews), and secondary sources such as the authorized accounts in discussing the meaning and significance of television shows over time.

### **Star Trek as Television: The American Classic Network System**

But we must begin at the beginning: the original network environment within which *Star Trek* was launched. The person primarily responsible for selling *Trek* to NBC, a former head of daytime programming at the network, was our interviewee Herb Solow. In 1964 Solow was director of program development at the independent studio Desilu, run by Lucille Ball and her husband, Desi Arnaz. There had been a failed attempt by *Trek's* originator, Gene Roddenberry, to sell the series to CBS, but Solow's insider knowledge of NBC suggested to him that NBC would be a more desirable client: "I took *Star Trek* to NBC for various reasons, one being that no advertising agency would spend the development money needed, another being that the advertising agencies chose to stay put in New York and Chicago. NBC welcomed me; I had left on good terms with them." Solow was very defensive of NBC, claiming that the network had been unfairly denigrated within the *Star Trek* mythos. To him, the network was "the hero." As he put it, "NBC gave us its all": "NBC should be applauded. . . . I feel that NBC has been totally misjudged and maligned by *Star Trek* fans. Since I had worked twice for NBC prior to *Star Trek* [director of

network daytime programs and program director for the NBC film division], I was very close to all the key NBC executives, Grant Tinker, Herb Schlosser, Mort Werner, Jerry Stanley, Paul Klein [vice president of research and a very influential person], Bobby Sarnoff [David Sarnoff's son]. I was aware of the network's always-present station, sponsor, and government problems."

For Solow, Gene Roddenberry was not "the hero" of the *Star Trek* story, and certainly not "the Great Bird of the Galaxy," as producer Robert Justman dubbed him, to the network's annoyance. During our research for our book (Pearson and Davies, forthcoming) it has been illuminating to see how very differently our various interviewees spoke about him. Some appeared to idolize him; many respected his talents. But Solow, the astute company man, producer, negotiator, and deal maker, portrays the "visionary" as something of a nuisance in the deal-making process with NBC:

I only took him to a meeting with me once. Once was enough. . . . Gene set about making NBC the heavy, the villain with regard to everything: schedule, ratings, programs practices (censor), publicity, etc., thus playing to the fans. He felt that the fans were more important than the network. He cast himself as the god and NBC as some demonic force from the other side. . . . The networks (I use the plural as they all speak to each other) felt differently. . . . Gene went ahead and created a villain (NBC) with the help of fans—people with a financial interest in fandom.

In the 1950s and 1960s the networks were synonymous with television: anyone wanting to broadcast a commercial program to the American public had to do so via NBC, CBS, or ABC or not at all. Herb Solow approached his former colleagues at NBC directly on behalf of the Desilu studio, which had agreed to shoot a pilot episode for *Trek*. He described the "ordering pattern" at the time:

If the network likes the pilot . . . [it] orders the series; in the case of *Star Trek*, NBC ordered a total of sixteen new episodes (seventeen including the pilot). The early episodes did fairly well, so they exercised their option and extended the order to twenty-six new episodes for the first season. The two-parter (first pilot recut, etc.) and the second pilot film make up the total of twenty-nine episodes ordered for the first season. In season 1 the ratings were slowly falling. Remember, the networks must order additional episodes for the second season while the first season episodes are still being broadcast. NBC was not sure what it wanted to do. . . . Their choice was twenty-six new episodes or cancel the series. Much to their (and stations') financial regret, they went for a second year. Remember, stations get paid by the networks based on sponsorship of the series they carry. So with few sponsors, it's the local stations who suffer financially along with NBC.

Networks also exerted control over content through their broadcast standards departments, and they exerted almost universal control over audiences and distribution; 98 percent of all TV audiences in the 1960s watched the big three networks.

As well as interviewing Herb Solow in 2005, we were able to interview (in 2002) his co-author, Robert (Bob) Justman, a meticulous chronicler of his own career, who

has kept his letters and memos to and from Roddenberry, Desilu, NBC, and other parties. In contrast to Solow, he was less complimentary about some of the network's judgments: "NBC was considerably appalled by the pilot we made ['The Cage']. So much so that they called Herb [Solow] in and Gene and said, 'Look, we like what you did, but there's some things we want to change, especially in the areas of casting, and especially in the areas of *Don't be so smart*.' They didn't say the word *smart*. They just mentioned things like: our concepts were too intricate for the normal television human mind. . . . Well I thought it wasn't that way at all. I felt that we could barely keep up with people." Justman was referring to the multi-ethnic cast, including the alien "Vulcan," Mr. Spock, played by Leonard Nimoy, which was proposed for the first series and the then-daring idea of having a female first officer. (This was dropped—but the series was eventually to pioneer a woman captain in *Star Trek: Voyager* [1995–2001] and a black captain in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* [1993–99].) He was also referring to the kinds of political and ideological debates prompted by the series, which, according to him, were deemed "too smart" for the 1960s mass audience.

We were also able to interview William Shatner (Captain Kirk), the star of the original series—a man who came across as impatient with *Trek* mythology. Shatner commented on the original *TOS* pitch, praising Roddenberry's "genius" (even though he had not always seen eye to eye with him): "It takes a certain genius to do that, to sell a series, to come up with a commercial enough theme, and a kind of concept that speaks to these network executives, who are [either] very bright and are there because they're conducting a network, or very stupid because there's no place else for them to have gone."<sup>3</sup> It seemed that Roddenberry (and Shatner) were lucky enough to meet some bright executives—at NBC. One was Jerry Stanley; the other was Grant Tinker, who was described by Herb Solow as "an outstanding person" and by Todd Gitlin (1985) as the "most liked man in Hollywood" (125) and who would later become a legendarily successful president of the network. Solow and Justman (1996) described in their book their first meeting with Tinker and Stanley at NBC Burbank in May 1964: "It was like most network meetings: fifty percent small talk, twenty-five percent network gossip and twenty-five percent business" (19). Tinker and Stanley were not convinced the show would be commercial and did not believe there was "enough of an audience out there to support this mixture of science fiction and fantasy" (19). Solow and Roddenberry asked NBC for a commitment for a ninety-minute pilot script that could run as a TV special if the show did not sell as a series.

Tinker and Stanley agreed, and the first pilot episode, "The Cage," written by Roddenberry, went into production at Desilu. This episode featured James T. Kirk's predecessor, Captain Christopher Pike, played by Jeffrey Hunter, who leaves the *U.S.S. Enterprise* with a landing party in response to a distress signal from a planet, Talos IV. The Talosians, strange-looking monklike creatures with translucent heads, have lured Pike and his colleagues there in an attempt to use them as breeding stock to create a race of slaves that will repopulate their ravaged planet. They

encourage Pike to breed with a beautiful human female captive, Vina. He is attracted to her, but her beauty turns out to be an illusion—in fact, she is disfigured from an earlier crash landing. The humans refuse to be used in this way (a classic motif to be used again and again), and the Talosians give in and let them return to their ship.

“The Cage” was piloted to NBC in 1964, and according to the insider accounts (Solow and Justman 1996; Whitfield and Roddenberry 1968) Mort Werner, head of programming for NBC, “loved it.” Nevertheless the network decided not to commission it because, so Robert Justman told us, it was “too cerebral.” However, in their book, Solow and Justman (1996) drew attention to “[t]he unspoken reason, [which] dealt more with the manners and morals of mid 1960s America.” The network broadcast standards office was concerned about the perceived eroticism of the pilot and what it foreshadowed for the ensuing series. NBC’s Sales Department worried that the Mr. Spock character, with his pointed ears and slanting eyes, would be seen as “demonic” by “Bible Belt affiliate station owners and important advertisers.” It was at this point that *Star Trek* received its next stroke of luck from NBC; as Solow and Justman put it, “Mort Werner did not forsake us” and unusually allowed Desilu to produce another pilot, “Where No Man Has Gone Before” (60–61). According to Whitfield and Roddenberry (1968), for a network to commission a second pilot “shattered all television precedent” (126). This seems to have resulted from the good and mutually respectful relationship between Solow and Werner, with Roddenberry, the loose cannon, being diplomatically kept out of, or in, the picture as Solow thought fit.

There were many negotiations with NBC about the diversity of casting. Roddenberry had wanted a female first officer, which the network did not accept—according to Solow in our interview, partly because Majel Barrett (later to be Nurse Chappell in *TOS*, and Lwaxana Troi in *TNG*, as well as the second Mrs. Roddenberry) did not work in the part. Nevertheless, NBC had a policy of encouraging a degree of diversity from which *TOS* benefited. The series still looks exceptional in the multiculturalism of its cast. In May 1965, NBC’s Mort Werner had sent out a directive to all network series producers to hire more actors from diverse racial backgrounds; the regular *Star Trek* crew had African American Nichelle Nichols, Japanese American George Takei, Walter Koenig as the Russian Chekov, and of course, Leonard Nimoy as Mr. Spock, the Vulcan, providing a regular commentary on the nature of otherness that was to become a major theme in all the *Trek* series and movies and the subject of a still-proliferating flow of scholarly comment.

Daniel Bernardi (1998) points out the social and political context of *Star Trek*’s production in the 1960s, when “the civil rights and antiwar movements accelerated the fight against a separate and unequal reality in the hopes of achieving a more egalitarian ideal” (26).<sup>4</sup> He suggests that NBC was exceptional in allowing a series with such aspirations on the air: “While the majority of network programming remained white, *Star Trek* was among the few series that embraced and consistently spoke to the shifting meaning of race that contextualized its production and initial

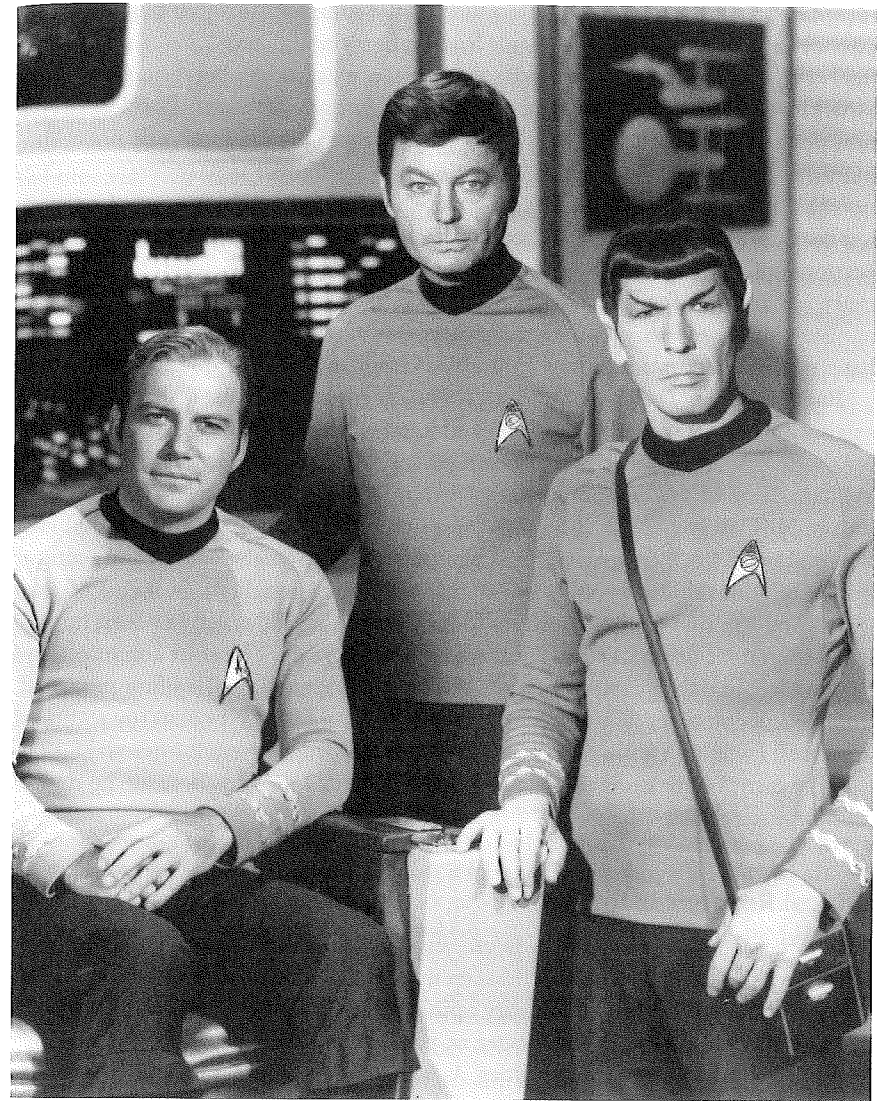


FIG. 13 Captain Kirk (William Shatner), Dr. McCoy (DeForest Kelley), and Mr. Spock (Leonard Nimoy) on the set of *Star Trek: The Original Series* in 1966. (Library of American Broadcasting)

reception" (34). Bernardi attributes much of the source of this "liberal humanist" discourse of racial equality to Gene Roddenberry and, like all *Star Trek* scholars, freely draws on the mass of secondary material about Roddenberry, such as a published interview with him in 1991 (see Alexander 1991). Although Roddenberry is now deceased, we found that "Gene's vision"—that is, the discourse of liberal humanism—was still pervasive among production staff in the very different production and historical circumstances of 2002 when we visited Paramount. Contrasting the durability of the Roddenberry "vision" with some of the negative firsthand accounts of the man has been one of the many illuminating insights of our primary research on *Star Trek*: however irritating Roddenberry may have been to the network in the 1960s, as Solow and others describe, both he and they appear to have gotten hold of something culturally important, almost despite themselves.

Back in January 1966, as Bernardi writes, negotiations with the network about casting and story resulted in the unprecedented second pilot. This pilot, extensively recast, dropped the female first officer, replaced Jeffrey Hunter as Captain Pike with William Shatner as Captain Kirk, and, just managing to preserve Mr. Spock, was sent to NBC in New York. The series was commissioned, due to air the following September. In his interview with us, Shatner—an extremely astute commentator on the relationship between the economic and institutional requirements of television and the role of the "creatives"—explained the difference between himself and Hunter: "The character [Kirk] was a leading man. The shirt comes off and this goes on, and the girl comes in, and the fight starts, and it's all leading-man stuff. So when people would ask me, Did you suffer from being typecast, my standard answer is: I wouldn't know whether someone in a boardroom somewhere said, Let's not hire him. I only know the people who said, Let's hire him. Because he dashes and jumps and kisses the girl."<sup>5</sup>

### Critical Responses to TOS

NBC accepted the series, but the beginnings of *Star Trek* did not augur well. *Variety* wrote that the series "needs to be shaken up and given more life than death."<sup>6</sup> Despite the *Hollywood Reporter's* contrary opinion that the show "should be a winner," within three months it was in danger of cancellation.<sup>7</sup> The insider accounts give an impression of constant difficulties, as well as what Justman told us was "enormous fun."

There were regular clashes with network overseers. As Solow and Justman (1996) point out, series with standard formats are "network damage proof," but sci fi/fantasy is an exception: "It needed an NBC program manager with experience, good taste, an appreciation for the written word, lack of ego and absence of involvement in private lives of personnel who could represent the interests of the sponsor and the network regarding series and story content and timely delivery of the product" (140). Stan Robertson became the program manager, and there were many disagreements between him and Gene Roddenberry. Network censors—the Broad-

cast Standards and Practices Department—also had the power of veto over content. According to Solow and Justman, the first broadcast standards official they had to deal with, Jean Messerschmidt, was "firm and reasonable." But, as Justman told us in our interview, there were many occasions when censors were not, and he and Solow frequently used the censors' focus on eroticism to slip more controversial material past them. Solow and Justman recount in their book how by drawing the Broadcast Standards Department's attention to a sexual issue they could incorporate ideological questions into the story line without being noticed. An example was the second-season episode "A Private Little War," in which the issue of whether Captain Kirk and his crew were right to intervene in maintaining the balance of power between warring factions on an alien planet was obviously a thinly veiled reference to the Vietnam War. In their book, Solow and Justman describe an exchange of memos about this episode with the network, which objected to a scene that included "an open mouth kiss" between a half-naked woman and Kirk. The network apparently did not notice that the story was about "the police action" in Vietnam. Solow and Justman observed: "But the audience did. We got letters. Lots of them" (356). In his later interview with us, Solow defended the network on this score: "You have to understand the time. NBC were not conservative; they were following the broadcasting codes set by the NAB [National Association of Broadcasters] (following the Hays Office). For instance, Lucy was not allowed to say *pregnant*."

In his interview, Justman, a production perfectionist who had learned his trade in Hollywood with Robert Aldrich and King Vidor, expressed unhappiness with the lack of technical control in his dealings with the network:

It was much better before it went on [the TV screen]. . . . What got lost is some of the richness of the color image and the shadows and the lighting. When you give your show, that you worked on so hard to bring it to as close to perfection as you can, and you give it to the network, and the network puts it on in their machine room, and they just blast a light through that print and wash it out. . . . I was kvetching on the phone to NBC, saying, Wait a second, what are you doing to our show? It doesn't need that much light.<sup>8</sup>

There is again a difference of emphasis between Solow and Justman, indicative of the way in which histories and mythologies are built up and revised, on the technical point about "the richness of the color image and the shadows and the lighting." Whereas Justman complained about the network "washing it out," Solow in his interview voiced a more pragmatic attitude and pointed out that broadcast color was in its early days and "TV color was different." His view was, "We needed to trust the people who worked for RCA and NBC—they were the experts." He also put a gloss on the account given in his and Justman's book: "Color projected in a screening room was not the color seen on the air. The conversion to electronic broadcasting played havoc with film color. NBC had a color specialist named Alex Quroga who worked with *Star Trek* and *Bonanza* to try to come close. Justman's only com-

plaint that is valid is that no one told the NBC broadcast color technician that Spock's skin was supposed to be yellow, so when the first episode was broadcast, the color technician overrode the film and removed some of the yellow color and replaced it with a pinkish skin-tone. That's early television."

While these tussles were going on, *Star Trek's* corporate status changed. In July 1967, Desilu was bought by Gulf+Western, which had just (in 1966) bought Paramount Pictures. Thus Paramount, the show's present owners and beneficiaries, became the (then not very enthusiastic) owners of the *Trek* franchise. Later, in 1989, Gulf+Western was renamed Paramount Communications Inc., and in 1994 Viacom, an independent company that spun off from the CBS broadcasting network when CBS sold its syndication divisions in 1971, merged with Paramount. So, in one of the ironic turns of corporate fate that can be so fascinating to historians of the industry, *Star Trek* finally ended up in a relationship with the network, CBS, that had refused it initially.<sup>9</sup> According to Solow in his interview, when Paramount bought Desilu they didn't want *Star Trek*: "Paramount didn't want *Star Trek* because it was losing too much money each week and didn't have enough episodes to syndicate successfully. That was a wise business decision at the time. They did not have the Kaiser Television figures available, as it hadn't happened yet [see below]. Recall that Roddenberry was also offered a chance to buy all of Paramount's equity in *Star Trek*. He passed at a price of \$150,000. Who knew the property would gross near \$3 billion?"

Despite its lukewarm reception by some critics and its unimpressive ratings, the original *Star Trek* began to attract the enthusiasts who would eventually be the saviors of it and who would help provide a foundation for its renaissance twenty years later, in the new, postnetwork, demographically targeted era, with *TNG*. *TOS* had its fans—and they were thoughtful, argumentative, and determined fans. According to an NBC booklet issued in August 1967, twenty-nine thousand pieces of fan mail were received in the first season—only *The Monkees* drew more fan response. This booklet described the *Trek* audience as "decision makers," people who would be attractive to potential sponsors. But despite this acknowledgment of the kind of audience the program was likely to attract, it was still scheduled in a slot on Friday night, 8:30 to 9:30, where it was likely to miss the young audience of high school and college students to whom it most appealed. By December 1967 the series was again in trouble; fans John and Bjo Trimble drew up an advice sheet, "How to Write Effective Letters to Save *Star Trek*," for fans to circulate. These were sent to the presidents of NBC, NBC affiliates, TV columnists, and *TV Guide*. In an updated version of its 1967 *Mailcall* pamphlet about fan mail, NBC reported that 115,893 letters had been received as a result of the fan campaign, 52,358 during the month of February. Roddenberry himself was involved in this letter campaign.<sup>10</sup>

The show was renewed—but was placed in an even worse scheduling slot, Fridays at 10:00. This would kill it. In our interview, Herb Solow commented on audience figures now, compared with the "death" of the original series:

The average audience for *TOS* networkwise was five million. Not spectacular. *Mission Impossible* [which was broadcast by CBS, not NBC] was getting twenty million viewers. . . . If *Enterprise* were on NBC today as a network show and it attracted five million viewers it would be considered viable. If *TOS* were on now and attracted five million, NBC would keep it on the air. There's so much competition—if you get five million now that would be doing darned good. . . . Another reason *TOS* would have been renewed is that the fan demographics indicated a quality buyer mentality, which is music to sponsor's ears.

Solow and Justman (1996) also attributed the demise of the original series to a fundamental clash of values: "Late summer 1967 . . . the creatives ran into corporate America" (367). This interpretation was to recur in the accounts of the *Star Trek* production personnel we interviewed ourselves. Solow and Justman were scornful of corporate America, with what they called its "disease of MBA-ism" and its jargon. They objected to being asked about the "product line" and the "return on investment." Justman said, "We don't manufacture widgets here, this is show business, the whole thing is fucking gobbledegook" (Solow and Justman 1996, 367). Nevertheless, their show *was* a commodity and was never going to be saved, or reproduced, unless some corporation could be convinced that there was money in it. At that point, nobody could see any money in it.

In his interview, Solow contrasted the new "MBA-ism" with how things had operated at Desilu:

Not like the old system at Desilu that I used to run. It was like a family. Anyone could come into the office if they had an idea and we'd listen to it. [There was] a group of Desilu studio people who loved their work and did more than expected of them. To this day crew people and executives alike will tell me it was the best years of their lives. TV is an interesting animal in that it put together the broadcasting industry and the movie industry. The death of the motion picture business was linked with the rise of the TV business. Their old way of doing business suddenly (within a few years) changed. They were no longer alone in supplying visual entertainment to the world. A new guy was on the block, and, at first, they tried to ignore him and failed. They finally joined up and television film production became a major industry. Today, of course, these very same unwilling players own networks, cable stations, publishing companies, media outlets around the world.<sup>11</sup>

On January 9, 1969, *TOS* in its NBC incarnation was over. The show's ratings had dropped by 50 percent. Production of the seventy-ninth episode, "Turnabout Intruder," had run one day over schedule and \$6,000 over budget. Properties of the show, which would be worth a small fortune today, were dispersed and disappeared. "Tribbles" (little furry creatures who featured in one of the most famous episodes of the whole five series, "The Trouble with Tribbles"), props, and costumes were stolen. There were also not enough episodes to make a standard syndication package, which usually requires four seasons, as in the case of *Enterprise*.

Nevertheless, another stroke of luck occurred. In 1967, while the original series was still on the air but struggling, Paramount Television struck a syndication deal with Kaiser Broadcasting. Kaiser owned a number of major-market UHF stations—Philadelphia, Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, and San Francisco. Knowing that the series was popular with young males, Kaiser had the bright idea of scheduling the show every night against the 6:00 p.m. newscasts of their competitors, “gambling that young males were not heavy viewers of television news programs,” as Solow and Justman (1996, 418) put it. Thus began *Star Trek*'s afterlife in syndicated sales, including international sales.

A year after the demise of the show, Gene Roddenberry asked Paramount for control of the rights so he could do something with it himself. They agreed to sell all rights, title, and equity position to Roddenberry for \$150,000, but, as Solow pointed out to us, he could not afford it. Under the terms of the original deal, Desilu and Norway Productions, Roddenberry's company, and the studio (Paramount) retained overall control of the property. However, net profits were to be shared among Desilu, Norway, William Shatner, and NBC. The original series had lasted only three seasons, and it would seem that, in devising such a formula, Roddenberry and his studio had not hit on a commercial winner but had in fact miscalculated quite badly.

### Audiences: From Mass Ratings to Demographics

What the network had failed to calculate, although Kaiser Broadcasting apparently had, was the effect that the series would have on key demographic groups of educated young men and women. These included the students at MIT who attributed their desire for space careers to *Star Trek* (see Tulloch and Jenkins 1995) and the young Whoopi Goldberg, who was inspired in her career by the presence of a black woman playing an officer, not a maid or a comic, as a regular star of an adult series drama on TV—Nichelle Nichols as Lieutenant Uhura. *TOS* appealed to young men with disposable income. In *TV Week*'s second Annual Poll of Favorites by Age Group, *Star Trek* was at the top in both the twenty-to-thirty and thirty-to-forty age groups (Solow and Justman 1996, 356). But in the 1960s, with its emphasis on the mass audience, this was not enough to rescue the series for the networks.

When *TOS* originally aired, the three commercial networks had a 98 percent share of the whole audience and the simple goal of each network was to get a bigger share, especially in prime-time evening programming, than the other two. Times changed; in 2002, as Mike Mellon, vice president for research at Paramount Pictures, Television, pointed out to us in an interview, the three big networks' combined share was only 33 percent. He described the May sweep of 2001, when, for the first time, non-network output got a larger share of the audience than network programs. (Non-network output includes cable and basic cable, plus VCRs.) *Star Trek* had to reinvent itself to take account of these larger changes taking place in the industry as a whole, including changes in audience measurement.

When *TNG* came on the air in 1987 within a rapidly developing multichannel television landscape, including cable, satellite and VCR use, audience impact was being assessed differently. As Michael Mellon told us: “Households are shrinking, and the demographics become that much more important. . . . Why is the Superbowl always the highest cost spot in prime time television every single year, and not necessarily an efficient one? Because you're looking at the most men of any spot that will ever run that year. . . . And they set up a spot for more money than any spot they have because it's a valuable spot.”<sup>12</sup>

In 1970 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) prohibited networks from receiving profit participation in series licensed for broadcast and also outlawed network participation in syndication rights, although existing agreements were allowed to stand. As Les Brown (1971) pointed out, these new rules (Financial Interest and Syndication Rule—“Fin-Syn”) “were a boon to Hollywood studios which came to realize enormous profits from their network hits, because they owned the shows entirely and because they were able to sell the re-runs in syndication while the new episodes on the networks were at the peak of their popularity. . . . [T]he syndication market flourished” (157).<sup>13</sup> Such an arrangement—the selling of “front-end” (original) material and “back-end” (repeat) material at the same time—by the Hollywood studios, turned out to be tailor-made for the deal leading to *Star Trek*'s eventual revival with *TNG*.

*Star Trek* as television was fully reborn in 1987.<sup>14</sup> The rebirth was announced in September 1986; the first twenty-two-page “bible” is dated November 16, 1986, and it resulted in what many people argue is the finest and most successful product of the whole franchise: *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Thanks to the relative box-office success of the *Star Trek* films, of which there were by now five, and also to the existence of a loyal audience for *TOS* in syndication, Paramount decided that it would be worth attempting to produce a completely new television series. This provoked considerable controversy among both fans and *Trek* insiders, who felt that Kirk and company could never be replaced. Nevertheless, it was thanks to Kirk and company that *TNG* was ever considered feasible at all. Another of our interviewees in 2002 was then the head of Paramount Television, Kerry McCluggage. As he put it, “The original *Star Trek* . . . became a hit and a phenomenon when it was sold into syndication. There were only seventy-nine episodes, but they were stripping it five days a week, and it became immensely popular. And it was the popularity of that show in off-network syndication that spawned *The Next Generation*.”<sup>15</sup> *TNG* would be produced and distributed under very different conditions than the earlier series. Paramount decided to avoid the networks and go straight to syndication—in other words, to sell the new series directly to local stations. This made economic sense to the studio because it cost more to produce an hour-long episode of a TV series (particularly an expensive one like *Star Trek*) than the network would be willing to pay for it. The shortfall had to come from syndication—repeat sales—and, as McCluggage pointed out, *TOS* already had a guaranteed market for these. The value of the back catalog—a value always recognized by fans but



only now belatedly by the legal owners of the product (the studio)—could be exploited. The deal for selling the untried *TNG*, with its bald “unknown Shakespearean actor”<sup>16</sup> as captain, to the local stations was cautious and extremely ingenious.

*TNG* took advantage of the strategy of barter syndication. In exchange for running the new show for free, local stations were required to allow Paramount seven minutes of commercial time in each episode to sell to national advertisers. The station could sell the remaining five minutes of commercial time for themselves. This income from advertising still would not cover the cost of production, but Paramount was already making \$1 million per episode through repeats of *TOS* in syndication. The clinching ingredient of the deal was that Paramount would sell the profitable *TOS* only to stations that took *TNG* too. Mel Harris, the Paramount executive who announced the deal to the press, explained this by saying, “We came to the conclusion that nobody was going to give it the same kind of attention and care that we could give it” (Alexander 1996, 501). In 1995 Paramount formed its own network—UPN—and on the strength of the existing franchise and a new series, *Star Trek: Voyager* was created in 1995. Ever since *TNG*, *Star Trek* as television has gone out either as a syndicated show or on Paramount’s own “netlet”: *Deep Space 9* (1993), *Voyager* (1995), and *Enterprise* (2001) have never been broadcast as first-run shows on the big three American broadcast networks.

In his interview with us, Bob Justman described how it felt producing a show not for network but for syndication in the new post-Fin-Syn studio-dominated television universe:

*TNG* was a totally different experience. It was totally different, and totally the same. But the big difference was, and this, this is heaven, this is heaven for a film producer. [whisper] *There was no network.* [then louder] *There was no network, folks, no network.* There was no Broadcast Standards Department. There were no censors. We censored ourselves, so to speak. We did not have to submit one of our stories to the network for approval by programming and that same script to broadcast standards for approval by the broadcast censors. Nothing. Nada. You know, once Paramount tried to step in and get involved in the cutting of an episode, and Gene Roddenberry blew them away and told them, “Don’t come back again,” you know, “*We’ll* take care of the creative end of everything.”

So the little program that could became the big program that did. And despite the current setback with the end of *Enterprise*, it is likely to continue to be the huge franchise that will. It seems a pity for NBC that they are unlikely to be able to claim credit for it. *Star Trek’s* fortieth birthday in 2006 will almost certainly involve individuals and organizations across the media industries, from publishing, to models, to computer games, to movies, to special DVDs, to Web sites, both authorized and unauthorized, in its celebrations. Let us hope that it will earn at least a mention on the Web site belonging to the organization—NBC—that originally gave it to the world and that, according to Herb Solow, the loyal ex-employee, was the original “hero” of the continuing story.

## Notes

1. Herb Solow, interview by Davies and Pearson and e-mail exchanges with both authors, April 2005.
2. Paramount/UPN press release, February 2, 2005.
3. William Shatner, interview by Davies and Pearson, January 16, 2002.
4. On race in *Star Trek*, see also Harrison et al. (1996) and Pounds (1999).
5. William Shatner, interview by Davies and Pearson, January 16, 2002.
6. *Variety*, September 8, 1966, 9.
7. Bill Ornstein, “Star Trek,” *Hollywood Reporter*, September 9, 1966, 4.
8. Robert Justman, interview by Davies and Pearson, 2002.
9. In another twist of fate, the rights to *Star Trek* television now reside with CBS Paramount, the new company created when Sumner Redstone split Paramount/Viacom into two separate entities. The splitting of Paramount/Viacom and the subsequent merger of the WB and UPN networks came as this chapter was in the final stages of revision.
10. See the account of Roddenberry’s enthusiastic and Machiavellian operations in Solow and Justman (1996).
11. Herb Solow, interview by Davies and Pearson, 2005. It is interesting that the word *family* was also used by the people we interviewed in 2002, working on *Enterprise*, such as line producer Merri Howard, postproduction producer Wendy Neuss, and actor/director Jonathan Frakes.
12. Michael Mellon, Paramount Studios, interview by Davies and Pearson, January 16, 2002.
13. The Fin-Syn rules were repealed in 1995, allowing much greater concentration of ownership between networks and production companies. The trend for networks and studios to become part of the same conglomerates, as in the case of Paramount/Viacom in 1994, is discussed in Holt (2004).
14. We refer to “television” for the purposes of this chapter as live action. In 1973 in the United States there was an unsuccessful animated series made by Filmation for NBC on Saturday mornings, which folded after twenty-two episodes.
15. Kerry McCluggage, interview with Davies and Pearson, 2002.
16. This was the notice on Patrick Stewart’s dressing room door during the first season of *TNG*.