“If our hopes for democracy are to be realized, the media must supply full and accurate information on which the people can base their judgment on public affairs, and they must offer a forum for the discussion of those affairs.” With these words, outspoken public intellectual Robert Maynard Hutchins accepted the 1959 Sidney Tillman Foundation award for public service. The characteristically grandiloquent speech, widely covered in the press, lambasted the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and Congress for their failure “to develop any concept of the public interest, convenience, and necessity.” Hutchins counseled the audience not to fear “a federal agency…established to regulate us,” referring obliquely to the FCC. “We have the pressure,” he warned, “that will shortly make the agency the servant and mouthpiece of the interests it was intended to control.”

Reading Hutchins’ incendiary remarks today, one might be forgiven for assuming that he was the leader of a popular, even radical grassroots media activist movement. But although he was certainly a controversial figure in his time, Hutchins was a blue-blooded member of the Establishment, the former president of the University of Chicago. The we in his speech referred not to the people, nor even to a political movement but rather to The Fund for the Republic, a combined think tank and grantmaking institution that Hutchins headed throughout the 1950s. The Fund for the Republic counted among the most visible arms of establishment liberalism in this period. Created by the Ford Foundation in 1952 in response to McCarthyism’s incursions on constitutional freedoms,
the Fund aimed to investigate and resolve the problems of civil liberties and civil rights in postwar American society. Its orientation was decisively an activist one; as one officer described it in 1954, the Fund “has determined to change bad practices and to instigate good practices in as direct a manner as possible. While some of our projects are studies, we embark upon studies only when this appears to be necessary to action, or the only practicable means of action.”

This mission, particularly its relationship to direct action, would have changed quite dramatically by the end of the decade, when the Fund became the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions and moved to Santa Barbara. Still, the Fund and the Center were always closely identified with Hutchins, an opinionated liberal whose legendary arrogance and contempt for conservative values would no doubt mark him with the “Latte Libel” today.

This presentist comparison with the contemporary Right’s stereotype of the liberal Blue State elitist has its limits, however, as the Fund for the Republic embodied a strain of mid-century liberal activism that is difficult to translate into present day political categories. It was certainly more radical than the anticommunist Cold War liberalism that constituted Arthur Schlesinger Jr.’s “vital center,” yet it was alienated entirely from the Socialism of figures like Irving Howe and Dissent magazine and from the organized, if corporatist, labor movement of the period. And although its formation in response to political crisis, together with its interest in pedagogical uses of popular media, might suggest an ancestral affinity with contemporary mainstream liberal organizations like People for the American Way, even that more plausible resemblance only goes so far. The Fund’s officers and trustees were part of a bygone world of male elites, the bipartisan establishment of the decades before Watergate and the U.S. failures in Vietnam, a group
of men who “may have been partisan, but who tried to sound judicious and evenhanded. There was such a thing as consensus, and their job was to find it and speak on its behalf.”

The consensus that liberal members of the establishment sought at mid-century did not emerge from the people, nor indeed from the realm of popular movements. Diversity, for the Fund and for other civic associations in this period, meant the inclusion of prominent leaders of a cross section of so-called “Interest Groups” in round table discussions. Moreover, although the problems it sought to resolve were insistently shaping the political present of the nation at mid-century, the Fund located its touchstones for the democratic process, and for fully activated citizenship within democracy, in the Republican past. Hutchins and his colleagues saw their task primarily in terms of the democratization of the Constitution, that is, as the unleashing and protection of all the freedoms promised in that document. As its eventual transformation into the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions made evident, the Fund saw democratic change not in terms of the distributive logic underlying more radical social justice movements associated with the New Left, but rather as a function of categories created within liberal political theory, with its emphasis on rights, freedoms, and individual sovereignty. This aspect of the Fund’s strategy reflected American liberalism’s pressing need, in the context of Cold War politics, to affirm principles of freedom over the rhetorics of freedom associated with popular anticommunism.

The Fund’s extensive media sponsorship, especially in television, reflected this understanding of the course of democratic progress. I am only in the preliminary stage of research in this area, but I will offer in the following paper some preliminary
observations on the Fund’s work in media and public relations during this period. On a
very basic level, the narrative of the Fund’s television work is the story of mid-century
American liberalism’s search for a popular voice in which to transmit its core values.
Like its parent Foundation and other mid-century beacons of liberal intellectualism
(including Paul Lazarsfeld whose Citizens Television Commission was briefly sponsored
by the Ford Foundation) the Fund displayed an abiding interest in mass culture as a tool
for creating informed citizens. Television, in the liberal imagination, was possessed of a
unique capacity to show and tell that would guide viewers out of the fog of pre-war
cultural and political isolationism, creating eager participants in the emerging
internationalist economic and diplomatic world order. However, whereas the Ford
Foundation’s Television-Radio Workshop saw the mass distribution of arts and culture as
the linchpin in this pedagogical task, the Fund for the Republic sought to change political
attitudes and behaviors more directly. It saw its job unabashedly as the education of the
masses and manifested a distinctly “top down” understanding of media processes. The
particular urgency with which liberal internationalists expressed this pedagogical task in
this period was a reflection of the Cold War climate. Media education’s task, in Hutchins’
view, was nothing less than the task of rescuing the world from destruction. Reflecting on
the threat of “Hydrogen Warfare,” he wrote in a letter to noted film producer, rabbi, and
philanthropist Jack Skirball, that “The American people are the most powerful in the
world. If they are unenlightened, they will be the most dangerous people in the world.”

The Fund’s pedagogical vision of civic enlightenment through television was
difficult to put into practice. The problems that it faced in carrying out this task are amply
documented in its papers, housed in the Public Policy Collection at Princeton’s Seeley
Mudd library. Hutchins in particular was perennially dissatisfied with the networks as national outlets for the level of information transmission and unfettered debate he deemed necessary for mass enlightenment. At one point he explored the possibility of sponsoring a national lecture series, transmitted via Theater Television, in which international leaders, among them Charles De Gaulle, Arnold Toynbee, Winston Churchill and Albert Schweitzer. In typically impulsive fashion, he issued telegrams of invitation asking these and other distinguished figures to participate and “help the American people understand the world and their position in it” prior to checking on whether this patently unfeasible plan would actually be possible.⁸

Hutchins’ grandiose and impractical vision of transforming the nation’s movie theaters into televisual lyceums was only one of many possibilities for media work explored at the Fund over the course of the 1950s. What’s immediately striking about the various forms of sponsorship in which it entered is they fact that they are strikingly incoherent. The Fund tested every imaginable genre and mode of address as a potential venue for civic education, harnessing industry figures like Skirball and NBC producer Howard Chernoff to help develop scripts and arrange meetings with Network brass to discuss their ideas. Fund TV experiments on the network level, most of which never aired, included situation comedy programs, anthology dramas, soap opera, documentary films and news clips, historical biographies, and interview programs.⁹ In local and syndicated programming, the Fund concentrated on public affairs, sponsoring individual broadcasts and entire series’ of programs focusing on civil liberties and civil rights, most prominent among them the Los Angeles originating Confidential File, which covered
topics of race relations and to a lesser extent civil liberties, with a somewhat sensationalist slant.

Many explanations offer themselves up to account for this broad ranging and eclectic array of program forms. At this point in the research process, I am most inclined to see the strange and fractured history of the Fund’s search for a method of political education in popular media as a window onto the internal contradictions of the establishment liberal project in this period. The Fund’s various (mis)adventures in mainstream media signal its vexed relationships to popular commitments and grassroots ideals in the years prior to the rise of radicalism in the 1960s. Neither New Deal nor New Left, the Fund must be viewed as a liberal segment of a larger group of “institutional” sponsors of prestige, educational, or public service television in this period, among them the DuPont corporation, the AFL-CIO, and the Advertising Council. These organizations, like the, Fund saw television as a medium of national pedagogy, designing programs that would offer viewers an ideological template for understanding the nature and place of citizens—construed variously as individuals, unions, government and corporations--in the world’s largest capitalist democracy. Sponsorship, in the worldview of the institutional sponsor, was not simply a way of selling goods, it was also a form of civic speech. Labelling this speech educational, and presenting it as a public service, was an opportunity to speak politically while seeming to rise above mere “politics.” The process of putting this idea of sponsorship into practice was not easy, and the struggles these sponsors faced provide insight into the various ways that the mass media audience become equated with the unformed citizenry of the nation in the technocratic imagination.
The interest of the Fund’s television work for media history surely lies in the ways its vision liberal civic education articulated (and distarticulated) with these other uses of television as an instrument of pedagogy and democratic governance in this period, rather than its status as a “forgotten” activist moment that slides the origin point of certain strategies a few clicks back on the timeline. Liberal advocacy on television was distinct in fundamental ways from “company voice,” or “institutional” sponsorship. If the latter frequently appealed to liberal values of fairness and rights, it was mainly to provide business associations and private firms with a language in which to promote ideals of corporate citizenship and the broader social benefits of business interests to mass media audiences. These public relations pitches rarely referenced the Bill of Rights or the issue of Constitutional protections, although they frequently sought to position free enterprise in terms of the “rights” of the corporation. Anticipating the neoliberal revolution in government by several decades, they used the language of Constitutional freedoms to foster opposition to New Deal initiatives. Analyzing the assumptions about audienceship and media effects that guided the choices Fund officers made in their television work, my goal ultimately is to situate the work of the Fund within the broader context of public service uses of television in the 1950s, all of which add up to a struggle to annex the political center and the authority of network television as places from which to advance particular sociopolitical agendas. The television activities documented in the files of the Fund are marked by distinct blockages in the predictable flow of ideology imagined by elites in their attempts to reach the populace. For most of its career in television, the Fund could never quite decide who its audience was, and this indecision was reflected in the genres and modes of address with which it flirted over the years. Thus, alongside the call
for a more active public sphere in media, Hutchins and other officers at the Fund held as self-evident the need for sugar coated formulae and indirect modes for the transmission of liberal ideals, especially when it came to network TV. They saw the national TV audience as a foreign and uneducated “other,” doing little to disguise their distaste for the programs they devised to teach principles of civil liberties and civil rights to ordinary Americans. Remarking on a proposed Fund-sponsored TV series about the Stewarts, an American family facing in their daily life “all of those problems brought about by…anti-democratic forces,” media consultant Howard Chernoff wrote dismissively that the treatment was “corny enough to appeal to the people we are trying to reach.”¹⁰ In short, the Fund approached mass media via a familiar liberal dichotomy, as a social relationship promising both a means for public education and debate and a means for the destruction of civil society altogether through the promotion of triviality and entertainment. And they saw themselves as a group apart from the mass audience, refusing to own television sets or claiming not to watch them—as did Walter Lippman, who kept the TV in the kitchen, to be viewed by the maid.¹¹

The remainder of this paper unravels some of the historical and political pressures that seem to account for the deep structural, generic and formal differences among the various television activities of the Fund for the Republic. These differences say a great deal about the local, national, and syndicated television industries as venues for activist speech. On one level, they reflect the Fund’s precarious position, caught between the networks and the federal government, both of which sought to circumscribe—for different reasons—the kinds of civic media pedagogy in which the Fund could engage. On another level, these differences also reflect the organization’s fractured and
contradictory relationships with the liberal causes it espoused and the audiences it sought to reach. After outlining the ideas about the audience that emerge from the Fund’s relationship with media professionals both at the Networks and on their own staff, I conclude with a consideration of the shifting logics of political representation involved in the two final television projects of the Fund. The first of these was the 18 month Newsfilm project, which worked closely with newsreel cameramen, local station production staff, and amateur camerapersons gathering footage of civil rights and civil liberties news stories and distributing them via syndicated news services to local stations and network news directors. The second, inaugurated after the Fund changed its mission to address the “Basic Issues” of democracy, a change motivated in part by treasury department investigations, as I shall detail, was the Fund’s final television project, an interview program entitled Survival and Freedom, hosted by Mike Wallace on ABC in 1958. The story of the transition from one to the other is, I shall argue, the story of a shift in the way the Fund imagined its audiences and, along with it, the scale on which it might best effect social change.

The practical censorship imposed by the networks in their negotiations with the Fund is perhaps the most readily apparent factor shaping the Fund’s search for a liberal civic voice on television. Networks targeted the overt didacticism of Fund projects and the assumptions about audience on which they were built. Sylvester “Pat” Weaver, upon viewing the pilot for the Fund’s first TV project, reacted with utter distaste at the program’s format: a series of about civil liberties violations and incidents of prejudice interspersed with “humorous” commentary by cartoonist Al Capp (this was prior to Capp’s “right turn” in the early 1960s.). Summarizing the NBC programming chief’s
concerns, one staff member wrote that Weaver found the humor inappropriate, questioning whether such direct treatment was wise. He further noted that Weaver advocated NBC’s method of liberal representation instead: “in the case of discrimination, for example, to use Negro actors wherever they should be used without any emphasis on the actual fact of their use.” 12 Weaver’s concern with the advisability of adopting such a didactic voice reflected a sense of the audience and its receptivity that was more flexible and nuanced than that of the Fund officers. If the Fund saw viewers as open vessels for ideology, Weaver saw the audience as recalcitrant and ultimately resistant to lectures from above (an attitude which might seem in contradiction with Weaver’s famous educational programming strategy, Operation Frontal Lobes, although as Vance Kepley and others have shown, this strategy was as much a form of public relations for the network as it was a comprehensive program of education by television.) 13

Weaver’s response is instructive as it illustrates both the manifest differences and the underlying similarities between the liberal sensibilities of the media professionals setting representational policy at the networks and those of the Fund’s officers. Both groups believed in example setting, but their goals were different. In Weaver’s view, social change was best effected through the unremarkable representation of black people. The unstated, and pathologizing, assumption in his policy was that such treatment would normalize them in the white mind. Fund officers, on the other hand, sought to set examples in the realm of behavior, seeking to normalize liberal attitudes rather than particular populations in the minds of the average white viewer. This desired goal was a perpetual point of contention between the Fund officers and the media consultants from whom they sought advice. The latter were almost unanimous in their criticisms, focusing
like Weaver on the crudeness of the chosen mode of address and the transparency of the Fund’s preaching.

These criticisms rarely registered however. When the Fund commissioned **Westinghouse Studio One** veterans Rod Serling and Reginald Rose to script a pilot episode for an anthology drama about civil liberties, a program promoted as the first of several “’Open ended dramas’…primarily concerned with freedom in our time, and [which] will present more than one side of situations,” they sent the resulting script to several consultants for comment. The script was not favorable received.14 Writer Reggie Schuebel noted that the script was simplistic in its representation of the right wing characters, wrote “I’m afraid these disciples of liberalism underrate the brain power of the right wing so that intolerance bounces back upon itself.”15 The Fund was undeterred by Schuebel’s criticism. It shot the script, with Sidney Lumet producing and **Studio One** director Worthington Minor directing, then sent it to the networks in the hope that the all-star production team would attract a sponsor for the series. Although CBS was initially interested no sponsor was forthcoming. The film was eventually reedited as an educational short to be shown locally, to civic groups, in public meetings.16 Even when officers found fault with the final versions of programs they sponsored, they were not the same faults that their consultants found. This is clear in the material surrounding a nationally syndicated installment of **Confidential File** that focused on the plight of the Black professionals passing as white. When one staffmember noted that the program was clumsy and stilted, doing little to advance the cause of racial injustice, Hallock Hoffman, Paul Hoffman’s son and an officer of the Fund, was outraged. “Let’s…fire Miss Huling if her opinion is as bad as I think,” he wrote in jabbing strokes on the front of the interoffice
memorandum transmitting her critique. Such complete rejection of the opinions of media professionals reflected the arrogance with which Fund officers approached the work of media production, refusing to acknowledge that the process was intricate and time-consuming, involving significant skill and dedication.

But these conflicts of opinion between media professionals and Fund officers indicate more than just the Fund’s arrogance and naivete in the realm of mass media. Rather, the latter’s somewhat unrealistic understanding of the responsive capacities of its audience offers us insight into their image of the spectator, construed as the ideal liberal subject capable of all forms of knowledge, to whom political rationalities were transparent and, once identified, easily differentiated into more or less appropriate forms of action. This image of the individual subject never quite reconciled itself with the image of the mass audience Hutchins and others held, the latter a suggestible mass seeking entertainment alone. Indeed, when Fund officers saw problems in their projects, their judgments rested on how whether the program appeared to cultivate this liberal spectator. This was in strong contrast with the evaluative process of their media consultants, all of whom tried to identify with the position of the “average” television viewer when they read scripts and viewed films. On the Confidential File episode’s shortcomings, Hoffman wrote to Coates with the following gentle critique: “The feeling of the injustice practiced on the people before your camera was clear and compelling. The other feeling, that the society was denying itself able, creative work from able, creative people by discrimination, was not as clear.” The shortcoming, in other words, lay in the way the program failed to lay out a positive course of action for the viewer,
molding from the unformed clay of the television audience a rational liberal subject who was now aware of the social costs of his ignorance.

Further indications of the assumptions about audience active in Fund television project are evident in the proposals submitted by media workers the officers employed or funded to produce their programs. Although the officers held the pursuit of liberal pedagogy to be paramount, they never articulated what aesthetic techniques might best bring a viewer to that rational subject position. This was the task of the directors of those projects they chose to fund. In 1956, newly hired Newsfilm project director George Martin attempted to make the translation, pitching a (presumably network) show that would illustrate “what happens to people in conversations on civil liberties and bill of rights that take place by chance in club cars…barber shops…bars…in taxicabs, airplanes and elevators.” Every dayness was an important element of Martin’s idea. Suggesting the consummate everyman, he proposed that “some sympathetic personality as James Stewart would portray the man with the answers in conversations on specific aspects of the Bill of Rights.” Martin’s idea seemed to be intended as much as a subtle message to the Fund about how to conceive of their audience as it was a feasible proposal. Its cast, he figured, would include He stressed that the program should “avoid sterility and preaching and to permit viewers to identify themselves with the man asking the questions.” And he indicated that the aesthetic norms of conventional entertainment should predominate: “The films should be so paced that audience conviction will flow naturally from the argument as it develops on the film…[they] should each wind up with some kind of affirmation or agreement on the fact that room for differences is the nation’s greatest source of strength.”

Martin’s proposal did not interest Fund officers,
who after all had hired him to produce rough edits of news clips on civil liberties and civil rights topics, to be distributed primarily to local news editors. But this oddly pitched dramatic program is nevertheless an useful index of Fund assumptions about network audiences, especially when compared to the models of reception that guided their funding of local television programming. Presumably developed with a sense of Fund officers’ aesthetic norms in mind, Martin’s idea suggests that the network audience could only be reached through indirect means, the didacticism submerged in drama and concealed in the figure of the motion picture industry’s consummate liberal dramatic pedagogue, James Stewart.

This sense of the imagined taste of the national mass audience, contrasts sharply with the speculations about genre and reception offered by a Fund-supported civic sponsor in local television. Summarizing the approach of his news program Dateline: Freedom, the unsigned representative of the San Francisco Council for Civic Unity suggested that people would not listen to drama or documentary programming on issues like racism unless they are of “the highest quality.” Moreover, he contended, they avoided interview or discussion programs “because they are too dry.” But “almost everybody listens daily and weekly to some news program,” and indeed, this format was particularly effective for educating viewers on racial injustice: “important here, it seems, is the absence of preachment, of an underlying attitude of moral superiority, or of other emotionalized and opinionated approaches commonly associated with the field of intergroup relations.” Like Martin, this author cautioned the Fund against preaching. Taking this point further, he offered a model of the effects that the Fund might hope to
achieve in its sponsorship of local news programs more nuanced than those advanced by Hoffman and Hutchins:

    Our considered view is that gradual, almost imperceptible modification of the outlook of individuals (as distinguished from ‘conversion’) takes place under the impact of the news, fairly presented in context, of both good or bad happenings touching minority groups.” He proposes that “it is important to distinguish between merely verbal antagonisms in this field and what individuals actually do in specific problem situations; e.g. a person may continue to state his prejudices, but in many particular situations will refrain from behaving according to those statements.

    Dateline, we think, encourages growing recognition of, and behavior consistent with, the rights and opportunities to which all are entitled.”

This model of media activism through news and the proliferation of diverse forms of information must have appealed to the Fund officers, one of whom noted that Dateline: Freedom was “most promising…and might set a model for similar programs in other areas.”

If Fund officers felt at this point that their network television programs were required to entertain (despite the fact that they were unable to find a network that would pick such programs up), they saw their local programs very differently. All of their local programs were activist in their orientation, seeking to influence events and attitudes directly. The newsfilm project was the clearest instance of this. In addition to educating people about civil liberties violations and causes in various regions, it aimed at publicizing the efforts of desegregationists in the South to local television audiences across the country.
(although in many cases it did not even try to distribute its newsreels to Southern stations.) Following Hoffman’s idea of the constructive representation as the key to the creation of a rational liberal subject, the project sought out moments of successful integration that were not being covered in the news, as well as iconic moments in the history of the civil rights struggle, such as the Montgomery bus boycott. They recorded desegregation efforts in the Louisville public school system, in Dallas’s public transportation, and at the University of North Carolina. They also considered projects that might not seem particularly newsworthy but which affirmed the mainstream liberal creed of the Fund, such as a Yale dermatologist’s discovery of “substances which can, with comparative ease, change skin color from light to dark and in many cases from dark to light.”

This material was roughly edited into clips and distributed by United Press-Movietone, which recorded the number of stations that used the footage. The project managed to reach a fairly large audience. In October, 1956, after a year of operation, project director George Martin estimated that the total audience reached by the Fund’s news clips thus far was just over 2.5 million.

These projects skirted dangerously close to violating the laws governing tax-exempt organizations, specifically the prohibition against “propagandizing” and the exertion of political influence. The pressure on the project to produce footage that was “balanced,” showing both sides of an issue and refraining from advocacy, became particularly intense following a 1955 appearance by Hutchins on Meet the Press. During the broadcast Hutchins challenged blacklisting as a violation of the Bill of Rights and the principle of Equal Protection, issuing the provocative statement that he would not hesitate to hire a communist at the Fund if he were qualified for the job. This was a position far
more principled than the accommodationist concern with false accusation through which many other liberals voiced their opposition to McCarthyism. In response, HUAC instigated a treasury department review of the Fund’s tax-exempt status and an investigation into the Fund’s activities. Although Martin was careful to avoid stories that might appear to take sides in political campaigns, the Newsfilm project was drawn into the investigation in 1956. The Treasury department found that three pieces of film were possible examples of bias. The first was a report on postal censorship, which detailed the U.S. Postal Service’s decision to confiscate copies of *The Moscow Gazette* ordered by a retired schoolteacher trying to learn Russian. The second was footage covering attacks on pacifists protesting war on Armed Forces day. The third was a report covering a meeting of the Congress of Freedom, which the investigators claimed intentionally sought to make the participants look ridiculous.

Martin, a seasoned professional in broadcast news production, was vociferous in challenging these accusations, soliciting testimony from News Directors at network owned-and-operated stations that had used Newsfilm Project material in the past. However the Fund was not willing to take risks. Its lawyer, Bethuel M. Webster, called Martin to tell him to “play possum…and not get engaged in things which our enemies could cite against us as being outside of our charter powers and our tax exemption.” Although the investigation had not cited any of the civil rights stories in its investigation, Webster told Martin that the injunction to remain innocuous applied to a planned story he described as “the Fund chaperoning this trip of negroes and whites into Louisiana.” When Martin protested that the project would not be chaperoning, but “merely following them and reporting what happened” Webster replied that they could be interpreted as
chaperoning, appealing to the broader concern with the safety of the Fund: “it helps not to prejudice our entire program in order to get an exciting picture of race relations in Baton Rouge.”26

Following these controversies, the Fund reined in its direct involvement in the Newsfilm project and other activist causes, deciding instead to rewrite its mission statement entirely. The result was the Basic Issues program, which commissioned small working groups of elite opinion leaders to study the “Basic Issues” of constitutional democracy. From that point onward the Fund ceased making grants to small, grassroots activist organizations, such as the San Francisco Council for Civic Unity and its TV program Dateline Freedom. Redefined by this longitudinal project, the Fund became the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in 1959, relocating to Santa Barbara, Ca under the leadership of Hutchins.

The Fund’s trajectory in the 1950s thus followed a path that led from an eclectic, multi-variant approach engaged in sponsoring small-scale efforts to bring about concrete change on the local level to a more nationally identified and abstract set of discussions staged among elites. The Basic Issues program mainstreamed the Fund for the Republic into a more centrist advocacy dialogue in postwar culture. The group counted among its founding ideas for discussion “the role of the corporation” and “the role of the trade union” as well as cold war foreign policy. These foci, coupled with the increased involvement of corporate liberal business leaders and mainstream centrist liberals brought the Fund’s projects in line with centrist establishment organizations like the Twentieth Century Fund.
This trajectory was reflected in the Fund’s final television project, the videotaped interview program *Survival and Freedom*, which it sponsored on ABC to serve as publicity for the Basic Issues program. Prior to Fund sponsorship, ABC called the show *The Mike Wallace Interview*, drawing on Wallace’s previous success at the DuMont network, where he hosted a sensationalist and probing interview show called *Nightbeat*. *The Mike Wallace Interview* was known for covering controversial figures in the news. In sponsoring it, the Fund sought to capitalize on this notoriety while bringing in a roster of guests whose high profile might encourage “opinion leaders” to watch the show. It listed among its guests liberals such as theologian Rheinhold Niebuhr and justice William O. Douglas, public intellectuals such as psychologist Eric Fromm and author Aldous Huxley, liberal business leaders such as Cyrus Eaton of Republic Steel and NBC’s Sylvester “Pat” Weaver, and prominent foreign policy figures like Henry Cabot Lodge Jr and Henry Kissinger. It did not steer clear of civil rights issues, but it chose to focus on them by inviting Harry Ashmore, a white newspaper editor from Arkansas who was known for his anti-segregation stance to discuss the issues, rather than civil rights leaders themselves.

*Survival and Freedom* was the Fund’s most successful foray into network television, but it came at a price. Network personnel were suspicious of the Fund’s sponsorship, and they were wary that association with Hutchins would expose ABC to charges of bias. When Ted Yates, the show’s producer, did try to get the network to approve Martin Luther King as a guest, ABC refused, arguing that Ashmore had already appeared on the program. Yates protested, pointing out that “in the interests of balanced programming it would seem sensible to me to have an important negro on the series. In
the year-plus that we’ve been on the network we have not interviewed a negro. And in the presentation of the integration issue we have interviewed Governor Orval Faubus, the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, and Senator James Eastland, all segregationists.”

However, ABC stood firm and refused to sanction the interview. In one highly publicized case, the network refused at the last minute to air Wallace’s interview with U.N. ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge because the Fund had allowed Lodge to edit and reshoot his comments. John Daly, the ABC news director who cancelled the broadcast, noted that Hutchins’ letter of protest misquoted New York Times columnist Jack Gould’s assessment of the controversy. As he pointed out, Gould did not support the Fund’s position, although Hutchins had claimed he did. Gould, Daly noted, was highly critical of the Fund’s description of the programs: “I quote: ‘under Dr. Hutchins novel concept of the ‘educational interview,’ genuine reportorial independence becomes mere camouflage for a handout.’”

When the Fund filed a claim against the network with the ACLU, it found no support. Executive Director Patrick Malin and Radio-TV representative Tom Carskadon reviewed the case for Hutchins, but they agreed with Daly. In their words, “since the program is offered to the public as a news interview, the audience assumes it will see the give-and-take of a regular journalistic interview in which the subject presents his opinions in direct response to the questions. This is particularly true in view of the wide and deserved recognition that Mr. Wallace has won because of his penetrating television technique.”

This episode reveals the degree to which the Fund’s commitment to free speech was subservient to its broader understanding of television as a tool through which elites might educate the masses—a sensibility not so far removed from that of the business
organizations using television for purposes of “economic education” in this period. In focusing on “opinion leaders” as a target audience, rather than a broader notion of the American public, the program drew on the two-step flow model of propaganda and influence, a model developed in cold war communications sciences, to describe pathways of information and opinionmaking within a mass populace.\textsuperscript{30} The Fund’s decision to focus on what it perceived as an educated minority within the general population was, in a sense, not so much a switch from one audience to another as it was the recognition that ultimately, its audience was always elites like itself. Hutchins and Hoffman were never completely comfortable with the Newsfilm project, as they could never quite trust the opinions of its staff. Fund officers endlessly questioned the amount of time it took to complete the films that were in production, and refused to believe that the project’s editor worked 9 hours of overtime in one day.\textsuperscript{31} Reading through the Fund’s papers, it seems at times that showing other members of the liberal establishment that the Fund was an active grantfunding organization was more important, ultimately, than actually achieving results through local, grassroots work.\textsuperscript{32} Even though \textit{Survival and Freedom} was a poorly rated program, with significant restrictions imposed upon it by the cautious network, it was high profile enough to advance Hutchins’ Basic Issues agenda, generating public responses that could point to the advisability of establishing his longstanding goal: a center devoted to liberal discussion of controversial issues. With the establishment of the Center in 1959, the program’s work was done—it would be Hutchins’ last attempt to find a sympathetic venue for his ideas in the popular media.

This is a somewhat pessimistic conclusion, one that should indicate how much more work there is to be done. As I continue to work in the Fund’s archive, I am now
trying to understand how the organization’s mission—raising awareness of the
cstitutional mandate for both civil rights and civil liberties—registered the fact that
these were particular causes grounded in actual struggles. To what extent was the
representation of these issues refracted through the racial and class positions of the Fund
officers, shaping the treatment of each as topics for television activism? Some of the
answers lie in the Fund’s papers, but visual and formal analysis is crucial too. I have not
yet located any copies of the Fund’s media projects prior to Survival and Freedom (Mike
Wallace recently donated his copies of the show to the Ransom Center in Texas). If they
can be located, these films will further enrich the story of liberal media activism at mid-
century.

1 Fund for the Republic Archives, Box 143, Folder 1.
2 Hallock Hoffman to name Howden, 10/21/54, Box 110 Folder 1.
writes nostalgically about the Establishment’s demise, a move which might classify him
among the Boomer Liberals—a group Eric Lott incisively diagnoses as white members of
the old New Left for whom a politics organized around culture and identity damages the
cause of the left. Gitlin includes in this group Richard Rorty, Todd Gitlin, and name. If it
were not for the reactionary nature of Boomer Liberalism, it might serve as a close
analogy for the position of the Fund for the Republic in the present day.
4 The Fund’s positions on civil liberties and civil rights were far more radical than those
of the President, but its self-described role in mid-century political culture nevertheless
embraced Eisenhowerian principles of leadership, the latter drawing on corporate liberal
principles of balance and fairness to bring “diversities together in a common purpose.”
Eisenhower’s phrase aptly describes the work of the Fund at the end of the decade, at the
point when it transmogrified into the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions.
Quoted in Griffin, “The Corporate Commonwealth.”
5 For an early account of the rise of Interest Group Liberalism starting with Eisenhower
see Lowi, 1967.
6 See Miller
7 Robert Maynard Hutchins letter to Jack Skirball, October 4, 1955. box/folder
8 Telegrams, 5/5/55 box/folder
Like many public service television films, a number of these unsold Fund TV projects were eventually sent to the Armed Forces for screenings in bases overseas—the latter a veritable “orphanage” for unwanted and unsellable factual films in this period.

On Lippman’s TV see Saudek oral history at Ford Foundation, Wesleyan Omnibus papers.

Edward Reed Memo to Ping Ferry, January 9, 1954. Box 108 Folder 5.


The file for this project includes letters of inquiry from interested organizations. These consisted for the most part of labor groups and liberal churches (Unitarians and Quakers), the latter bulwarks of grassroots liberalism in the mid-century US and among the Fund’s core constituency.

Hoffman handwritten response on covering page of memo Edward Reed to Hoffman 1/26/56, Box 109 Folder 4.

Martin to Reed 3/20/56, Box 111 Folder 4. All ellipses save the last one in original.


David Freeman, September 29, 1955 memorandum to Hallock Hoffman, Box 110 Folder 1.

George Martin, Progress Memo to Frank Kelly, August 1, 1956, Box 111, Folder 4.

George Martin, Progress Report, October 29, 1956, Box 111 Folder 4.

I have not as yet determined what event this refers to. Presumably it is some kind of interracial freedom ride.

Transcript of telephone conversation between George Martin and Bethuel Webster, August 2, 1956, Box 111 Folder 4.

Ted Yates to Don Coe, June 23, 1958, Box 144 Folder 1.

This may reflect the fact that the inactivity of the Fund was the subject of a stinging critique of the Fund from New Yorker writer Dwight MacDonald.