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TV Ought to Look at Its Own Picture

TELEVISION coverage of the Republican convention generated a new round of criticism of this loved-and-hated medium of communication.

Too much of the plot was revealed beforehand for the convention to make "a good show." Commentators didn't help with numerous insipid interviews with people who had little to say, repetition of rumors and their own idle chit-chat.

The Democratic convention may be just as dull. Its races have been run and challenges by would-be heroes are apt to fall flat. This criticism of the convention is not entirely the fault of TV programming, but it is a continuation of perpetual gripes.

The Federal Communications Commission, which supervises the broadcast media, has been called "Washington's worst agency." Public broadcasting has been praised for its documentaries and condemned for political and social slanting of programs.

Newscasters have been accused of "manipulating" listeners and

many think sports are overdone, even though this is one thing that TV does well. Television may have been at its best when it showed Earth men walking on the moon and at its worst when it is showing indecent, profane and violent movies to the kiddies.

It may be impossible to satisfy everybody or sometimes to satisfy anybody. No doubt the public knows precisely what is wanted for viewing, even though nobody knows exactly what it is. The news is that television programming is not likely to improve.

A recent article in *Saturday Review*, the literary magazine that has been having a hard time with its own programming in recent years, presents some provocative comments on why TV won't get better.

A former NBC vice president was quoted as saying "commercial television is primarily a marketing medium and secondarily an entertainment medium." Viewers might think of it the other way around.

Ratings are vital, because every point taken from competing net-

works is worth \$2.8 million for every hour that point holds up.

So "Least Objectionable Programming" was developed, based upon the theory that most viewers "just want their eyeballs massaged for a while and will watch whatever bothers them the least." The emphasis is on avoiding anything that will cause viewers to tune out.

"The majority of network programming is vapid not because the people in the business don't know how to develop interesting shows," the *SR* writer declares, "but because the industry deploys squads of well-paid, highly skilled craftsmen whose specific task it is to keep the programs dull."

If that is the goal, it must be admitted that TV frequently is a smashing success. But it does hit some lively programming now and then, especially with old movies and reruns from the early creative days of television.

Perhaps TV ratings studies ought to ask people what they would like to see. The answers might be both marketable and entertaining.