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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Douglass K. Daniel. *Lou Grant: The Making of TV's Top Newspaper Drama.* Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996. 380 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8156-0363-4.

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Lou Grant: Journalism, Activism, and Controversy

The Lou Grant Show holds a particularly important place in the history of television as popular culture, both because of its high quality and because of the controversy over star Ed Asner's political activities, which many thought led to the show's cancellation. This book on the award-winning newspaper drama series, which aired on CBS from 1977 to 1982, is a welcome addition to case studies of TV programming. Daniel, who spent eleven years as a journalist and now teaches at Kansas State University, aims to explore the show's unique place in the histories of TV and journalism.

After surveying the genre, along with its radio and film antecedents, Daniel outlines the creation of the show: its characters and casting; its production and censorship. A blow-by-blow account of each season is followed by a description of the growing controversy over Asner's political activism. The book ends with a brief consideration of the show's legacy. Daniel concludes that *Lou Grant* portrays the journalism profession with realism but not with accuracy. He suggests that the show's idealized depiction of journalists may have been unavoidable. Photographs of the cast and cartoons about the series are included, along with character sketches, synopses of each episode and *Mad Magazine*'s parody of the show.

Daniel marshals the facts like a good reporter. He presents them chronologically in clear prose, using a narrative structure for the most part. While this approach is useful as a means of collecting data on the show and considering its general accuracy in regard to journalism, it lacks interpretive insight. Daniel's survey of the newspaper drama on TV and in film and radio is sketchy at best. He makes no serious analysis of the genre and its evolution. Nor is there much consideration of gender roles, ethnic and racial stereotypes, or production techniques, let alone the role of celebrity in popular culture. Most important, Daniel seems to have overlooked relevant research in popular culture, such as the *Beyond the Stars* series from the Popular Press, edited by Loukides and Fuller, making much of his hard work appear superficial and incomplete.

At the heart of the book are the struggle that this well-written, well-acted, highly acclaimed series had with the ratings and the fire Asner drew for his liberal political activitism. Daniel describes these aspects well, but he never resolves whether, in fact, the controversy or weak ratings caused the cancellation. Readers must draw their own inferences. Unfortunately, journalistic caution seems to keep Daniel from forming an opinion, and he does not employ the analytic resources that would have led to a more cogent analysis of the controversy, along with other aspects of the show. One of the most valuable observations Daniel does make is that *Lou Grant* may have been one of the first victims in the trend of declining network audiences.

In sum, *Lou Grant: The Making of TV's Top Newspaper Drama* provides a helpful survey of an important series, but in this case, good journalistic research needed to be buttressed with expertise in popular culture and critical studies.

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