

FRANK STANTON



THE NEW FRANK STANTON STUDIOS honor a man revered as one of the greatest defenders of First Amendment rights for broadcast journalism.

Frank Stanton served as president of CBS for more than 25 years (1946–1973), guiding the “Tiffany Network” through the era of its greatest growth. Along with William S. Paley, CBS chairman, Stanton was the master builder of CBS, beginning at age 37.

Stanton became one of the industry’s most respected leaders, an icon for his First Amendment battles. He was broadcasting’s staunchest advocate for public service, making it CBS’s responsibility to provide high quality broadcast journalism in the public interest. Single-handedly, he succeeded in persuading Congress to suspend the Equal Time Law to permit the first broadcast of Presidential debates between Nixon and Kennedy in 1960.

The late Dick Salant, president of CBS News, called Stanton his mentor and “the best non-practicing journalist who ever lived.” Salant said Stanton understood how important broadcast news was to American democracy and society, including the “imperative need that it be responsible and honest, free from personal bias ... accurate and fair.” Stanton also demanded a sharp line between news and entertainment programs—a firewall.

Stanton backed strong, issue-oriented documentaries. He stood behind Edward R. Murrow’s “See It Now” in 1954 when it exposed the tactics of Senator Joseph McCarthy. He initiated “CBS Reports.” After the assassination of President Kennedy, Stanton kept CBS News on the air to cover the story for four days straight, all without commercial interruption. That coverage was important in keeping the country together at a critical time.

One celebrated CBS documentary in 1971, “The Selling of the Pentagon,”

reported on the U.S. military’s massive public relations activities. The broadcast infuriated some members of Congress. But it was Stanton who held his ground before a House committee and risked going to jail for contempt of Congress in order to protect broadcast journalism’s First Amendment right to withhold its notes and “outtakes” from congressional scrutiny.

During the congressional hearings, Stanton maintained,

“Clearly, the compulsory production of evidence for a congressional investigation of this nature abridges the freedom of the press ... The chilling effect of both the subpoena and the inquiry itself is plain beyond all question. If newsmen are told that their notes, films, and tapes will be subject to compulsory process so that the government can determine whether the news has been satisfactorily edited, the scope, nature, and vigor of their news-gathering and reporting activities will inevitably be curtailed ... a fundamental principle of a free society is at stake ...”

In refusing to turn over the CBS “outtakes,” Stanton held that,

“We take this position as a matter of conscience, because of our obligation to uphold the rights guaranteed by the First Amendment ... It protects the rights of journalists, not to make them into a privileged class but to safeguard the liberties of us all by preserving one of the most indispensable elements of responsible democratic government—to report freely on the conduct of those in authority. In Judge Learned Hand’s famous phrase: ‘To many this is, and always will be folly; but we have staked upon it our all.’”

Although three committees voted to hold Stanton in contempt, the full House voted against sending him to jail, by a vote of 226 to 181.

FRANK STANTON WAS BORN IN Muskegon, Michigan in 1908 and grew up in Dayton, Ohio. He graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University and holds a Ph.D. in psychology from Ohio State University. While in school, Stanton built and tested a recording device that he put inside radio cabinets to find out what the radio audience was listening to and for how long. CBS was interested in his work and in 1935, for \$55 a week, Stanton went to work for CBS, starting in audience research. Often called “The Boy Wonder of Broadcasting,” he was named CBS president 10 years later.

Frank Stanton has received innumerable awards, including five Peabody Awards for distinguished achievement and public service. In 1999, the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences awarded him its Lifetime Achievement Award as “the conscience of broadcasting.” Also in 1999, an editorial in *Broadcasting and Cable Magazine* called Stanton “the greatest broadcast executive of all time.”

In 1974, the late CBS newsman Eric Sevareid said of Stanton:

“No man in broadcasting more readily accepted the public responsibilities of this technically private enterprise. He made uncounted decisions that cost the business in order to profit the people. This learned man knew that liberties can be defended only as long as we still have them; that they are our own, and sole, defense ... In this business it is extremely rare that any man sitting far up there in the executive suites becomes a hero to those sweating down in the bear pit. Not by grandiloquent acts of heroism. But by sheer endurance, steadiness, unalterable support. He was there in season and out.”