

ON THE AIR

Carson Makes News And a Bit of History

By **BERNIE HARRISON**

Star TV Critic

NEW YORK — When it comes to serious subjects or interviews; "Tonight's" Johnny Carson has been, by choice, a reluctant tiger. His aim, as he has said himself frequently, is to present a light diverting entertainment. But he made TV news twice this week and on one of his shows, a bit of TV history.

The two programs were one in which he interviewed Desmond Morris, author of "The Naked Ape," the other, his interview, show-long conversation with District Attorney James Garrison of New Orleans last Wednesday night.

Does this represent a change of policy on Carson's part? Not really, his "Tonight" staffers stoutly maintain.

The fact that the Morris interview was up front in the "Tonight" show instead of toward the end, where the authors, anthropologists and psychologists are usually presented, was sheer accident. Johnny had a comedian and a comedy writer named Pat McCormick, who usually gets way out, and it's been the Carson policy to present such performers whose material might be risqué or blue at the end of the program.

The theory is simple: The people who might be aggravated by such comedy antics are generally in bed by then. The other factor that made the interview unusual was that Carson himself had read the book, was fascinated by it and had called attention to the planned interview several weeks before. What happened on the show, however, was that Carson immediately launched the interview by pointing out that Morris' book was probably the first book in history whose reviews were banned.

He was referring to the deletion of certain words from the reviews in some newspapers, and the cancellation of the entire review in one Midwest paper, the latter because the reviewer included a certain word not used in family journals. Ridiculous, Carson said; Morris is a professional man, a scientist of standing, and the book is as scholarly as it is fascinating. Whereupon he proceeded to use the word.

The RCA peacock, I believe, added a half a dozen new hues. I couldn't help but think back a few years to that memorable night when the NBC censor blipped the word "watercloset" from a Jack Paar show, causing Jack to pack his bags for Hong Kong.

It really wasn't a good interview except that Morris projected vivaciously and his book could hardly be hurt by the national publicity.

The Garrison interview was almost accidental. Carson had comedian Mort Sahl on the program a week ago and Sahl revealed he was working as an accredited investigator for Garrison in New Orleans, whereupon they forgot about comedy and started to discuss the case. Carson therefore felt obligated to have Garrison on the program, and in a candid preface, said he hoped it would be illuminating.

It wasn't.

It would take a TV reporter who has specialized in the case to begin to dissect intelligently the arguments presented by the plausible Garrison, and Carson isn't a reporter. He struggled manfully, however, and the experience should do him good. It should prompt him never to make that mistake again.

The mail at NBC yesterday was scanty, only about 15 telegrams, which is par for the course. Most of them were "con."

Carson heads happily for a vacation before resuming the "Tonight" program from Hollywood soon. Harry Belafonte takes over on Monday with Senator and Mrs. Robert Kennedy scheduled as guests.

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- The Washington Post _____
- Times Herald _____
- The Washington Daily News _____
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- The Sunday Star (Washington) _____
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- New York Post _____
- The New York Times _____
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- The Worker _____
- The New Leader _____
- The Wall Street Journal _____
- The National Observer _____
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