

THE TV SCENE

Education Channel at Head of Class

BY CECIL SMITH

There's a note from a friend containing a clipping from Radio-TV Daily to the effect that a St. Louis educational TV station had reported that it was operating in the black but that it had virtually ceased local production and had lost "most of its audience." I'm assuming the point my correspondent wanted to make was that to hold a solid audience, an educational station could not



Cecil Brown

depend solely on NET network and foreign programs but must have a vigorous producing arm sounding a strong voice in the community it serves.

When KCET (Channel 28) began operating here last September, it very definitely planned to produce much of its own product—not only for Los Angeles, but for the nation. However, the thought was that it should crawl before it ran—that such a new concept in TV

saturated Los Angeles, which has more channels than any other city, should make itself known before it began doing any great amount of producing, that its first duty was to tell the public: "I am here!" Furthermore, it had a tremendous backlog of 10 years of NET programs to draw on to fill its limited schedule.

However, such has been the response to the station, despite the UHF handicap, KCET found that it was known from the moment it took the air. Educators and leaders of a dozen fields offered to participate. Notable among these was Cecil Brown whose work as a commercial newscaster spans three decades. Brown left KNBC to do a twice-nightly commentary on the station—at 8:30 and 10:10.

Touchiest Theme Thus Far

Perhaps the strongest effort KCET has made at home production has been the series Speculation, an effort to assemble brilliant men around a table to discuss and speculate on major issues of our time. Tonight's edition at 7:30 has the touchiest theme the program has handled thus far—"Who Killed President Kennedy?"

The moderator is UCLA history professor Keith Berwick and the speculators are Atty. Mark Lane, an outspoken critic of the Warren Report; Oxford historian Hugh Trevor-Roper; psychiatrist Robert Litman, and Attorney Ed Mosk. The program, produced by Elliot Schick, is as deeply concerned with the lack of public concern as it is with the assassination.

There are elements in educational TV who fear touchy and controversial issues on a community station—the elements that caused the cancellation of Mort Sahl's scheduled post-election comment. On the other hand, the station did an excellent study of the lunatic fringe in the far right movement in Southern California earlier this fall, a program narrated by Brown that was notable for its comprehensiveness and its fairness. It would seem in a station dedicated to intellectual stimulation rather than the perpetual nirvana of commercial TV that controversial material—handled by experts, not ex-announcers—would be its meat and drink.