

BRIEFING SESSION

Tuesday, June 2, 1959

NBC TELEVISION

PROGRAM #9 - "THE IMAGE OF AMERICA"

THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION AND RADIO CENTER

AND

THE NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY

PRESENT

"BRIEFING SESSION"

PROGRAM #9: "THE IMAGE OF AMERICA"

DATE: Tuesday, June 2, 1959

HOST: Dean Edward W. Barrett

FACTS COMMUNICATOR: Frank Blair

GUESTS: Mr. Norman Cousins  
Senator Hubert Humphrey

PRODUCER: Joel O'Brien  
DIRECTOR: Lynwood King  
WRITER: Harry McCarthy

[Music]

ANNOUNCER: From New York City, the National Educational Television and Radio Center, in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company, presents BRIEFING SESSION -- the facts behind the issues in the world today. Your Host, Dean of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, Edward W. Barrett.

DEAN BARRETT: Welcome to the 22nd Edition of Briefing Session.

About a year ago this book stirred up one of the liveliest controversies that we've had over our foreign service in some time. It's a novel called, as you can see, "The Ugly American" -- perhaps you've read it yourself. The authors, William Lederer and Eugene Burdick, say it's fiction, but based on actual facts about happenings in the Far East.

Factual or not, "The Ugly American" has served one purpose: That is, to help us focus attention on the efforts of our overseas services. And our topic tonight is, "The Image of America" -- what the word "American" means to people of other nations. Are U. S. Information programs and personnel presenting an effective image of America? And, in key areas of the world, how are we doing in competition with the ambassadors of Communism?

To help us with these questions we have two guests: Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, and a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; and Norman Cousins, Editor of the

Saturday Review, and a longtime student of our "overseas image."

One question before our briefing, Senator Humphrey. Do you think our foreign service and our overseas information programs present an effective picture of the United States?

SENATOR HUMPHREY: Well, it's that word effective, Dean Barrett, that bothers me in that question. It's true that our foreign service and our overseas information service present a rather broad picture of the United States, but after all, they are required to represent our policy, and every once in a while I feel that that policy is inadequate or does not fully describe the aspirations of the American people.

But by and large, the foreign service and the overseas information service does a fairly good job, I would say, for our nation.

DEAN BARRETT: And what would you say on that, Mr. Cousins?

MR. COUSINS: I agree with the Senator. It would be a mistake, I believe, to expect any single agency to do the complete job of projecting a favorable and effective American image. But so far as the information services are concerned it seems to me that the great surprise is that those services have been able to do as well as they have done considering limitations of budget, and in some cases of personnel.

DEAN BARRETT: We'll hear more from these two gentle-

men later. But first, for our facts briefing on the nature of our overseas image, and what it does, here is NBC Newscaster Frank Blair.

MR. BLAIR: Ever since World War II we have been bombarding the rest of the world with information and ideas about America, and about Americans themselves. For our purposes, let's break this down into two classifications -- official and unofficial.

In the unofficial category there are the tourists, and travelling businessmen, each one an unofficial ambassador to the people he meets overseas. And in the 12 months ending last March, the State Department issued 687,767 passports to these "unofficial ambassadors."

Then, the movies -- Hollywood's export product. Every year we turn out about 250 films, and eventually almost all of them get overseas with some story or other about America.

Then there is the military -- 651,763 soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines stationed in 260 bases abroad. And of course, in many cases, their wives and children.

Now we come to our official agencies -- the foreign service, and our information programs.

This year the State Department is operating 286 overseas posts in 89 countries. This is one, our embassy in Tokyo, headed by an ambassador, with a trained staff under him.

In all there are 8,025 State Department foreign service personnel overseas, 3,500 of them career foreign service

officers. These are the professional diplomats, selected by rigid examinations and graduates of special State Department training.

But despite their training, these men are not necessarily our ambassadors. Traditionally, many of the first-string ambassadorial appointments -- including the strategic area ones -- go to top-ranking members of the party in power when they are made. In other words, patronage.

Then there are the information agencies, the ones that go straight to the people, not just the governments. The Voice of America, broadcasting around the world 24 hours a day, in 41 languages, more than 75 programs daily from studios in Washington and Germany. Two-thirds of its output goes behind the Iron Curtain, into Russia, the satellite countries of Eastern Europe, and the Far East. The other third -- 24 hours of programming a day -- is beamed into free world countries. News broadcasts, cultural programs, a constant flow of information by radio.

The Voice is just one part of the program of the United States Information Agency, an independent agency, responsible for the government's overseas program. To carry out its program, the USIA maintains 200 overseas information posts in 80 nations.

Last year the USIS operated 155 libraries in American cultural centers overseas, selected books on democracy, and arguments against Communism. Among these textbooks, and the fiction, books about America five million copies in 32 languages,



books about every phase of American life and history brought to towns and villages.

USIS also held English classes -- like this one in Indochina -- in 165 cultural centers abroad.

USIS's program also includes plays, like this one in Thailand -- designed to hammer home the threat of Communism. This team toured the country by jeep, even by elephant, carrying the story of America into the furthest corners.

Last year we spent more than \$96 and one-half million on our information programs to convey the Image of America to the rest of the world.

But sometimes, it didn't work out. There were scenes like these -- USIS libraries bombed and burned, American diplomats and officials attacked, or insulted. In the last ten years the USIS has recorded about 50 anti-American "incidents" of this sort.

What happens? What goes wrong? Are we getting our money's worth out of these programs? Or are we not spending enough on them? Are they effective?

To help answer these questions we have asked four of our NBC Correspondents stationed overseas in Europe, the Middle East, in Russia, and in the Far East, to tell us what the Image of America is in their areas. Here are their reports. First, John Rich, in Germany.

MR. RICH: The Germans, I believe, are more kindly

disposed toward Americans than are most other European nations. I'm speaking now of the West Germans and not the Communist East Germans. The reasons the Germans are kindly disposed toward us are pretty practical, mainly because we are the nation that more than any other has sponsored their return to respectability.

Germany is one of the few places I have found in the world where you can identify yourself as an American and not have to get ready to duck when you say it.

The Germans are kindly disposed toward us, I think, not merely because of our monetary and our moral support, but because we more or less fascinate them. They are a materialistic people themselves and I think they are fascinated by our material accomplishments.

MR. BLAIR: Irving R. Levine, Moscow correspondent.

MR. LEVINE: When I was getting ready to leave Moscow recently after my four years there each of my Russian friends asked me to please leave any jazz records and American magazines I might have. This was one of many incidents showing how tremendously curious Russians are about life in the U. S. A.

Russians know about our industrial production, which Khrushchev is trying to equal, about our jazz, about our cars. But their image of other aspects of life in the U. S. A. is usually distorted. Soviet publications caricature the United States -- unemployment so widespread that there are breadlines; installment



buying, a device of capitalists to keep the working man in perpetual bondage; millionaires run the country. These things Russians believe. Even the most discerning Russians I have spoken with are convinced all the Negroes are mistreated and that all white Americans condone it. Russians are convinced, too, that America's leaders if not its people do want war.

MR. HANGAN: This is Welles Hangan in Cairo. To the people of the Middle East, America means a lot of things -- Cadillacs and cokes, hula-hoop and Hollywood. It also means the promise of limitless opportunities and the hope of immigration.

It means just about everything the Middle East can't make for itself. For most Middle Easterners America is almost as deep an enigma as Russia is for us, but for different reasons, and of course in a different way. The reason is that America presents so many faces, so many different faces in this area -- the brazen, tough, sunburned face of the oil-man just up from Arabia; the earnest friendly face of an American tourist; the youthful face of the 6th Fleet sailor.

Also for Middle Easterners America is a jumble of ideas, electric ideas of freedom and nationalism, generated by the American University in Beirut, and other American schools; stuffy anti-Communist ideas preached by American ambassadors; big get-rich-quick ideas from American businessmen.

For all his puzzlement the Middle Easterner has a

fairer image of America than we often think, or the Communists would like. America, he knows, is a colossus of power and wealth.

MR. ROBINSON: I'm James Robinson in Hong Kong. To the people of Southeast Asia America means wealth, perhaps too much wealth, considering this background of extreme poverty.

Most people out here have the opportunity to judge us only by our tourists or government officials. The increasing numbers of American travellers just now discovering Asia very often expect the green dollar gives them special privileges. Though dearly loving our money, Asians, like anyone else, demand being treated as equals.

The majority of the thousands of United States government employees out here disregard the old maxim, "When in Rome do as the Romans do." For these representatives live in splendid isolation. In a sense they have replaced the "great white Rajahs" who made Western colonialism the most hated system in Asia.

There is no really genuine fear of America here, at least no serious thoughts we want to physically take over these countries but there is a growing contempt. Too often Washington gives the impression American dollars can buy these people's allegiance. And at the same time we blatantly advertise our aid grants. It's like giving a birthday gift and leaving the price tag on it.

MR. BLAIR: One final note. Early this year, the Chamber of Commerce asked American businessmen working abroad whether they felt our information program overseas was effective. More than two out of three of them believed the USIS was presenting a balanced picture.

Now back to Dean Barrett and our guests.

DEAN BARRETT: And before we get into our questions, one other precinct has been heard from on that subject, and I quote from Variety, the leading entertainment weekly.

Herman Cohen, an independent movie producer, said recently American movies are doing a better job in selling democracy abroad indirectly than the State Department is directly.

Mr. Cohen, by the way, just produced two films in England. One of them is "Horrors of the Black Museum," and the other is "The Headless Ghost."

Seriously though, gentlemen, how great an impact do you think the "unofficial" image of America has had -- the movies and the tourists?

SENATOR HUMPHREY: Well, of course the unofficial image, or the unofficial aspect of America in foreign lands has had a big impact, some of it good, regrettably some of it not so good; and these particular horror movies to which you allude are anything but helpful. In fact, they portray a picture of America which is most unfortunate. And occasionally some of our tourists will act up

a little bit, get a little too heavyhanded with the money, a little bit too domineering, but by and large I think the American tourist does us fairly well, and I would say that there is within the American movie industry many wonderful movies which properly used can do us well. It is a matter again of good taste, and a matter of selection.

DEAN BARRETT: Mr. Cousins, what would you say about that, particularly movies?

MR. COUSINS: I have had a chance, Dean Barrett, to talk to people in many countries throughout the world, in Europe, in Asia, and in Africa, and it is true that the American movie represents the main point of contact between those peoples and the United States. And that main point of contact, I'm afraid is misleading. You certainly get a distorted idea of America. The next time you go into an American movie imagine yourself seated in a motion picture theater in Asia perhaps, or in Africa, or South America, and then ask whether this is the America that you know.

Now we can make allowances. Other people cannot. This is what they see. I would say the American motion picture is far more important, far more damaging to the United States than anything that is now being said or done against us by Communist propaganda.

DEAN BARRETT: And you would say there how many good movies to a bad one from the standpoint---

MR. COUSINS: I recognize, as Senator Humphrey does and as you do, Dean Barrett, that there are good movies, but I honestly wouldn't know just how vital that fraction was.

DEAN BARRETT: Now as the Editor of a leading magazine perhaps you can tell us, Mr. Cousins, whether you consider this book, "The Ugly American," really valid and useful?

MR. COUSINS: As I read that book, Dean Barrett, specific people came to mind whom I had met in Asia in particular, and I feel that this book is true for what it says. But like the movie "The Blackboard Jungle" which was true for what it said, it did not tell the whole story.

I think it would be possible, for example, to do a book equally important, equally dramatic, about other people in the foreign service who have served the United States well.

I think, for example, of a cultural affairs attache in Hiroshima, Japan who sent his children to Japanese public schools, who took part in Japanese cultural life, and became an important local figure.

I think, for example, of an American cultural affairs attache in Colombo, Ceylon who is I think, or was while he was there, one of the most important foreigners ever to come to Ceylon.

All over the world, in fact, I can think of wonderful Americans, and I hope that someone does a book about them too.

DEAN BARRETT: I can tell from your nods you



generally agree with that, Senator Humphrey.

SENATOR HUMPHREY: Yes, I certainly do. I believe the book "The Ugly American" has served a very useful purpose. It has caused every thoughtful American to re-examine our so-called image abroad, to re-examine the qualifications of the personnel representing this country.

But I want to emphasize while it is true that some of the government personnel have not done their job as well as we would like them to do, remember, they are representative of the United States and they represent, in fact, very accurately the United States in many instances.

DEAN BARRETT: The good and the bad.

SENATOR HUMPHREY: The good and the bad. They represent our inability to understand people from what we thought were once just exotic and strange lands.

MR. COUSINS: But it is a problem that we face.

SENATOR HUMPHREY: It surely is a problem.

DEAN BARRETT: Let's move on from there. Newsweek Magazine recently said the Communists are spending between five and seven times as much on propaganda around the world as we are. One, do you think that's roughly true; and if so, do you think we can compete effectively by spending as little as we are?

SENATOR HUMPHREY: Are you asking me, Dean Barrett?

DEAN BARRETT: Yes, Senator.



SENATOR HUMPHREY: I think it is true. There have been some very accurate studies made of this Communist propaganda program. I have reviewed them. There have been yearly studies for several years.

I don't believe we are spending enough. But what is more important is the question are we spending it well. And when I think of what we could be doing it sometimes makes me feel rather unhappy we are not doing even better with the money we have.

For example, if we are going to have a radio transmitter let it be the best. I remember in the Middle East for a while our radio transmitter in the Middle East for the Voice of America was a rather squawk box outfit located on a ship off the Island of Rhodes, inadequate for its needs.

Furthermore, these mobile library units, the libraries themselves, not in Europe so much, but in Africa and Asia, we need them better, need more of them, and don't need to always put in these libraries books about "Hail the United States; Three Cheers for the United States." What we need to do is put into these libraries books that relate to scientific subjects, for example, to attract attention; books that relate to the needs of the people in the area, their health problems, their problems of literacy or illiteracy. There are many things that could be done.

We need to spend more, spend it better, and may I

add further, to recruit from the broader base of our population. Let's use the ethnic groups, cultural groups, religious groups in our society. I don't happen to believe that the recruitment process in our government is all it should be. I think there ought to be some emphasis on the ethnic groups and their location in other lands.

DEAN BARRETT: Thank you. Well, we have a lot to cover in a short time.

Let me ask this, Mr. Cousins. In a recent poll 54% of those asked in Great Britain felt what the United States says differs from what it actually does too often, that our deeds contradict our words. What do you think?

MR. COUSINS: If this is what the people of Britain believe I am sure that the poll is correct, or rather I don't see that any of us--

DEAN BARRETT: Do you think it's a fair criticism?

MR. COUSINS: I don't think any of us can question, but the question is why do they believe that? It seems to me there is all too often a gap between what we say and what we do. And this is true not only of Britain, but it seems to me of the Far East.

I was going to say we talk a great deal, for example, about freedom. We say that the heart of American policy is freedom. Yet, so far as the people of Asia and Africa are concerned they want to know when we are going to take those state-

ments seriously. They want freedom, freedom from outside rule, and they feel the United States is holding back. Meanwhile Communist propaganda without spending very much money -- and money is not the key in this whole thing, it is the policy that is critical -- meanwhile Communist propaganda has only so far as Asia and Africa are concerned to point out the United States is dragging its heels on the question of independence for peoples of Asia and Africa. All too often it seems to me we are apt to think of winning or creating a favorable image with money. But I am concerned about the things we can do without money that we are not doing.

DEAN BARRETT: And, Senator, would you say we are inclined to use propaganda as a substitute for action and policies too often?

SENATOR HUMPHREY: I surely would. But I want to say too that there are some actions that you can take that are the most effective in propaganda. And I was trying to refer to that just a moment ago.

Take, for example, one idea, that if we were to launch in the North African-Middle Eastern areas, just to take one geographical area, a fleet of mobile health clinics -- we can put these at work. They can traverse the desert lands, any kinds of terrain. You don't even need to have roads. They can be put on halftracks. This would be the most powerful kind of propaganda on the one hand, but it would be propaganda based upon a deed.

The mobile library unit is another one. I have another little idea. Sometimes I have heard people say there is no use having the Voice of America be too powerful for certain parts of Africa because the people don't have radios. Is that right? Well, give them radios. I mean, after all, if you are going to put up a transmitter that costs you \$15 million it is not a bad idea to have somebody with radios to be able to listen; and when I say radios I don't mean necessarily in each village hut, but in each village, see that there is a modern, up-to-date receiving set, and this can be made available through a thousand and one agencies both private and public.

DEAN BARRETT: And regardless of what the Communists are doing, right?

SENATOR HUMPHREY: Very much so. And may I add that this is the great weakness, I think, in all of our propaganda. Namely, that we are constantly fighting against the Communists rather than being ourselves, projecting our real selves to them, and also identifying what we are attempting to do with their needs. Many of these people are not nearly as worried about the Communists as we are. They are worried about their sickness, their poverty, their lack of health, their frustrations, their basic needs, their desire for independence, and economic development. And here we are, the United States, just a nation filled with this dynamism of development, engineering, accomplishment, work, deeds. Why don't

we identify ourselves this way instead of this shadow boxing with Lenin, Marx, Stalin, and Khrushchev?

DEAN BARRETT: And Mr. Cousins, following that up, would you say we have been too inclined to base our economic aid and our other support on whether a given nation lines up on our side?

MR. COUSINS: I would, Mr. Barrett, but I would like to back up for a moment -- the Senator has presented some very imaginative and I think valuable suggestions for strengthening the Voice of America.

I would like also to suggest to the Senator that perhaps we give some thought in addition to having a good Voice of America, to developing a good ear of America. Sometimes I think it would be a good idea for us to be quiet for a while just to find out what the rest of the world is thinking, and saying. It seems to me we have been so busy proclaiming our own objectives, talking about the image of America abroad, we haven't recognized the most effective person in terms of a relationship is someone who understands someone else's problems; and in that connection, Dean Barrett, your question concerning the framework within which we gave aid is highly important.

I was in India several years ago at a time when the Indian people were very hungry. You had a very serious famine situation as the result of the fact you had a dry spell in the heart



of India and floods on the coast.

Well, at that particular time we had then, and we still have, a large surplus of wheat. Indeed, we were paying millions of dollars a day just to store the wheat we couldn't use. But at this time where the question was fairly clear, here you had a basic need and we had ability to give -- at that particular time the question we were asking was, well, does Nehru agree with us in the United Nations?

It seems to me that our policy makes sense only when we recognize that there are some things we have to do and are right to do whether or not someone agrees with us.

I would be all for sending wheat to China if the Chinese people were hungry.

DEAN BARRETT: You, Senator Humphrey?

SENATOR HUMPHREY: Well, I think you ought to take these great blessings we have of technology, food, health, education, and make them into positive assets.

Let me put it this way, Dean Barrett. I do not need to get my inspiration in terms of the things that we thought ought to be done in this world on the basis if we don't do it the Communists are going to get us. In other words, I don't need to be inspired by Marx, Lenin, Stalin, or Khrushchev. I can get enough out of the philosophers of my life that mean something to me, out of the teachings of Old and New Testament, the Declaration of



Independence, the Charter of the United Nations, and our own history.

So I say put ourselves to work on the positive aspects, and I think this is what Norman Cousins has been saying, that what we are doing here is limiting our effectiveness by a negative approach; and, by the way, the recipients constantly are being told by this negative approach that we are not doing it to help them, we are doing it only because we are afraid that the Communists are going to take a hold in that area and thereby hurt us. It becomes a kind of selfishness.

DEAN BARRETT: Senator Humphrey, we have just a little over a minute to go. Tell me quickly, do you think the allegation is correct that we are too often served by ambassadors abroad that are not adequately equipped for their jobs?

SENATOR HUMPHREY: Regrettably that is sometimes true. There needs to be much more done in recruitment and training.

DEAN BARRETT: Do you think our foreign service personnel on the whole, Mr. Cousins, is adequately trained in the languages of the countries in which they serve?

MR. COUSINS: I think the foreign service personnel could have a better background in languages than it now does, but to me the surprise is that we are getting people as good as are serving the United States, considering the limitations in budget and the general framework of the program.

DEAN BARRETT: Do you think we have enough stability, Senator Humphrey, in our overseas personnel?

SENATOR HUMPHREY: Not at all. We need to think of this in long term, long range purposes and objectives, giving a sense of security and stability.

DEAN BARRETT: Do you think perhaps some of your Congressional colleagues are too inclined to judge programs by how much, say, they hurt Communism?

SENATOR HUMPHREY: I regret to say that many times the appropriations for these programs run up and down like a child's fever, depending upon the latest insult from the Kremlin. If that Kremlin ever gets kind to us over a considerable period of time I'm afraid what would happen to these programs.

DEAN BARRETT: And what would you say on that, Mr. Cousins?

MR. COUSINS: I think that the heart of the matter is that you can't expect to have a good image of America abroad unless you have a good foreign policy. It doesn't make any difference how elaborate your information services will be. If our foreign policy does not make sense to other peoples nothing in terms of manipulation could possibly make them feel that this is worthwhile.

DEAN BARRETT: Thank you very very much, gentlemen. You have covered a great deal of ground. From this and from other

discussions we can sense agreement on certain points. One point is that we need not view Communists as supermen -- they are not.

Second, at the same time, we should not just assume that our foreign policies and information program are aimed just at fighting Soviet Communism. We will face many of the same problems if and when Communism no longer exists.

Third, we need much more permanence and stability in our economic aid and comparable programs so that we can plan ahead and enlist permanent personnel.

And fourth, that we need to base our economic aid and support not so much on the index of whether a nation lines up on our side as against the Communists, but more on helping the new uncommitted nations to be strong enough to be free and to make their own choices.

Well, thank you very much, gentlemen. And next week Briefing Session will investigate the subject of "Labor and the American Economy" -- the relationship between the labor movement and the American standard of living. We will go into the questions of the validity of the phrase "The Monopoly Power of Labor," and whether the wage push and factors in management and in labor cause inflation.

If you have any other questions on this issue that puzzle you don't hesitate to send them to Briefing Session, NBC, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, and we will try to see that they are answered on this program. We will see you then.

---



# Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



[www.mnhs.org](http://www.mnhs.org)