



Wednesday, 2 January 2013

## The Quintessence of Nothing

Was there a radio star more quoted than Fred Allen?

It's hard to pin down Allen as a cynic, pessimist or a realist. Perhaps he was a bit of all three, judging by what he had to say about the entertainment industry of his day and California, a particular topic of dislike. Many of his observations have been preserved and requoted, but some are buried in old newspaper columns that we have endeavoured to pull from dusty archives and bring to you.

Buried amongst Fred's disappointments and annoyances are some cute one-liners that he would have used on his radio show—if he had a radio show. At the time of this column, December 19, 1951, he barely had a TV show. He, Jerry Lester and Bob Hope were appearing on a rotational basis as the hosts of "Sound Off Time," a live Sunday night variety show that petered out in early 1952. At least one TV failure awaited him before he found a modest level of comfort (and he decidedly looks uncomfortable on certain broadcasts) as a panelist on "What's My Line."



## Fred Allen Raps Favorite Targets

BY BOB THOMAS

HOLLYWOOD, Dec. 19.—(AP)—Sour-faced comedian Fred Allen, here for a movie stint, paused long enough to level a blast at his favorite target—vice presidents. Allen has long been a critic of the executive mind, particularly in the air networks and advertising agencies. He blames such bigwigs for television's failings, including his own.

"My shows have been pretty bad," he admitted openly, "except the last one. The reason is that until now I had been doing what everybody else said I was supposed to do. But on the last one, I disregarded their advice and did the kind of show I wanted. The sponsor was dropping the series anyway, so what, did I have to lose?"

### Many Screwed Notions.

"These executives have a lot of screwy, notions about TV. They say everything has to have movement. Even if you're standing still and doing a monologue, there has to be two guys running around behind you.

"After all, entertainment is entertainment, whether you're running a race or standing still. But you can't convince executives of that. I've always thought that the meeting of executive minds produced the quintessence of nothing."

The Boston comic has had many a run-in with executives. It started back with his first air show. The wife of one of the sponsors liked organ music.

"We were trying to put on a snappy show," recalled Allen, "but we had to stop in the middle of it to switch to the New York Paramount for two minutes of organ music."

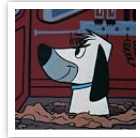
### Influence Rapped.

He believes that the advertiser's influence in TV produced a bad effect, "just as it did in radio."

"The TV performer has the same importance as the label on a can," he argued. "The show itself is not important; it's whether the show can sell the product. "I think it's bad in any medium when the entertainment quality is not the important thing. A discriminating audience has certainly helped the movie business. Pictures had to get better, because people found out they could eat popcorn right out in the open; they didn't have to go in darkened theaters to do it."

Allen is here to play a TV performer in a sequence of "We're Not Married." I asked him if he planned any more

## About Me



[View my complete profile](#)

## My Blog List

### Old TV History

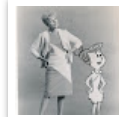


May 1940 - You couldn't blame David Sarnoff if he

mumbled some uncomplimentary comments at the F.C.C. in May of 1940. The Commission made two rulings, basically tell...

23 hours ago

### Yowp



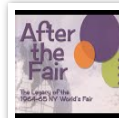
Wilma - Jean Vander Pyl didn't have a big name on

television when she was cast to play Wilma Flintstone in 1960. The others were a bit different. Bea Benaderet ap...

3 weeks ago

## Blogs to See

### Termite Terrace headlines



Today's Post: The 1964 World's Fair Documentary and other

64 World's Fair stuff - This documentary is quite good. Most of you have probably already seen it, but I'm sharing it here anyways. While I'm add it, why not share some ...

17 minutes ago

pictures.

"No," he replied. "I was never any good in pictures, and I never really had pictures written for me. I did my first one because they couldn't get Ned Sparks. I did another because they liked the first one. Then, I did one with Jack Benny because we were supposed to be fighting on the radio.

"Besides, I'm tied down to an exclusive deal with NBC. They won't let me work for any other network. Even when I'm not working, I'm not working for NBC."

I remarked that he was looking amazingly well for Allen. Even the bags under his eyes were small valises.

"I've been on a diet for two years because of my high blood pressure," he explained. "I can't eat anything with salt. In fact, I can't even return to New York by way of Salt Lake City when I go back; that's how strict it is.

"I had to give up drinking and smoking, too. At my age (57), I'm not allowed any pleasures. Why do I work? Just for the convenience of the treasury department."

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [12:07](#)



Labels: [Bob Thomas](#), [Fred Allen](#)

## 3 comments:



**J Lee** 2 January 2013 at 20:25

Allen's comments about network competence, advertising interference and the demanding nature of the Internal Revenue Service folks would feel right at home coming out of the mouths of any of today's TV comedians, which may or may not be ironic, given Fred's distaste for television.

[Reply](#)



**Yowp** 3 January 2013 at 02:39

I don't think things really change all that much, J.L.

[Reply](#)

▼ [Replies](#)



**J Lee** 3 January 2013 at 07:34

True, Yowp. But Allen's cynical/pessimistic/realistic takes on things -- especially the pop culture of the time -- were more up front than most other comedians of the time period. Fred obviously wasn't as coarse as some of today's comedians (and pretty much disdained TV in large part for its coarseness, while others today embrace it for the same reason), but the overall tone is in the same ballpark.

[Reply](#)



[Enter comment](#)

[Newer Post](#)

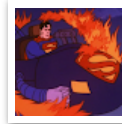
[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)

Subscribe to: [Post Comments \(Atom\)](#)



**Movies with Michael**



[The World's Greatest Super Friends: Lex Luthor Strikes](#)

[Back \(1979\)](#) - A wonderful episode. In this episode, Lex Luthor escapes from prison by switching places with Lois Lane. After escaping he captures each of the Supe...

1 hour ago



**Fernando Llera Cartoons**



[CONAGUA's cybersecurity payments found unverified](#)

by ASF's 2002 audit. -

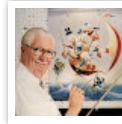
©2023

[fernandollera.com](#)

3 hours ago



**Pete Hale**



[My First Carl Barks](#) - I decided to become a cartoonist last year, so

I started reading some old "animal" comic strips and books for study and enjoyment. I've already tried out...

7 hours ago



**News From ME**

[Today's Video Link](#) - We haven't had any Tom Lehrer on this site in many years so let's rectify that. Here he is on one of David Frost's eighty zillion TV shows in Great Britain...

12 hours ago



**Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog**



[Tomorrow Afternoon at Niles: Silent Era Animation and Jerry](#)

[Beck](#) -

1 day ago



**AFRTS Archive**




[Your audience awaits!](#) - Many of us saved a tape or

acetate or two. There are a lot of people that would like to hear them again. The airchecks from AFN/AFKN/SCN etc usually t...

1 day ago

---

**The Exposure Sheet**



**A Taste of What's to Come** - Hey guys! I'll be out of town this weekend, and due to this trip, I decided to push back my next planned post to Monday, so I have some more time to iron ...  
*2 days ago*

---

**Cartoon Research**

**New York State of Mind: The 35th Anniversary of "Oliver & Company"** - An excellent "warm-up lap" for the artistic leaps and box-office blowouts on the horizon for Disney.  
*2 days ago*

---

**Mark Kausler's CatBlog**

**Felix Vs. A Spy From Brigandia** - In these Felix strips from 4-24 to 5-7-32, Felix returns from the Moon, only to encounter a spy from the kingdom of Brigandia, who wants to steal all the p...  
*6 days ago*

[Show All](#)

## Why Not Read...

- [Cartoonerific](#)
- 
- [Dr Grob's Animation Review](#)
- 
- [Tex Avery at Warner Bros](#)
- 
- [Format Films Roadrunners](#)
- 

## Blog Archive

- ▶ [2023](#) (320)
- ▶ [2022](#) (382)
- ▶ [2021](#) (380)
- ▶ [2020](#) (389)
- ▶ [2019](#) (376)
- ▶ [2018](#) (379)
- ▶ [2017](#) (380)
- ▶ [2016](#) (396)
- ▶ [2015](#) (389)
- ▶ [2014](#) (390)
- ▼ [2013](#) (388)
  - ▶ [December](#) (31)
  - ▶ [November](#) (31)
  - ▶ [October](#) (34)
  - ▶ [September](#) (31)
  - ▶ [August](#) (33)
  - ▶ [July](#) (33)
  - ▶ [June](#) (34)

- [May \(33\)](#)
- [April \(30\)](#)
- [March \(36\)](#)
- [February \(29\)](#)
- ▼ [January \(33\)](#)
  - [The Thrifty Tex](#)
  - [I'm Flabbergasketed](#)
  - [Real Gone Brushwork](#)
  - [Cat-Tails Background](#)
  - [No Shock Comedy](#)
  - [The Cameraman Who Wrote a Cartoon](#)
  - [Popeye Killed Harpo](#)
  - [Retrieving Larrimore](#)
  - [Alice Pearce](#)
  - [Cat and Mouse Flip Out](#)
  - [What a Hole](#)
  - [1930 Cartoons on Parade](#)
  - [Benny and the Brits](#)
  - [Tat](#)
  - [Not Just Spooks](#)
  - [Wartime Bull](#)
  - [Radio's Battle of the Books](#)
  - [A Colour Goes to War](#)
  - [Popeye's Blacksmith Blur](#)
  - [Eli's Not Coming, Bosko Is](#)
  - [He's Baloo, All Right](#)
  - [Bill Scott and Jay Ward on Cartoon TV Ads](#)
  - [Familiar Funny Sign Gag, Isn't it!](#)
  - [Flip's Fetish](#)
  - [Sound Off Against Bob Hope](#)
  - [Outlines of a Circus Cop](#)
  - [Give Him Some Tongue](#)
  - [40 Isn't Funny](#)
  - [Disney Hates TV](#)
  - [If You're Ever Down in Texas](#)
  - [Outlining Woody](#)
  - [The Quintessence of Nothing](#)
  - [Happy Nude Year from Elmer Fudd](#)
- [2012 \(397\)](#)
- [2011 \(106\)](#)

## Labels

[Aline Mosby](#) (20)  
-----  
[Art Davis](#) (46)  
-----  
[Bad Luck Blackie](#) (12)  
-----  
[Bob and Ray](#) (17)  
-----  
[Bob Clampett](#) (116)  
-----  
[Bob McKimson](#) (82)  
-----  
[Bob Thomas](#) (66)  
-----  
[Chuck Jones](#) (186)  
-----  
[Columbia](#) (68)  
-----  
[Counterfeit Cat](#) (10)  
-----  
[Cynthia Lowry](#) (36)  
-----  
[Dick Thomas](#) (18)  
-----  
[Don Patterson](#) (24)  
-----  
[Drag-a-Long Droopy](#) (14)  
-----  
[Earl Wilson](#) (19)  
-----  
[Erskine Johnson](#) (44)  
-----  
[Felix the Cat](#) (38)  
-----  
[Film Daily](#) (50)  
-----  
[Fleischer](#) (211)  
-----  
[Frank Tashlin](#) (43)  
-----  
[Fred Allen](#) (57)  
-----  
[Fred Brunish](#) (13)  
-----  
[Friz Freleng](#) (193)  
-----  
[Gene Deitch](#) (24)  
-----  
[George Pal](#) (12)  
-----  
[Grant Simmons](#) (10)  
-----  
[Hanna and Barbera unit](#) (131)  
-----  
[Hanna-Barbera](#) (10)  
-----  
[Hans Conried](#) (5)  
-----  
[Hardaway-Dalton unit](#) (7)  
-----  
[Harman-Ising](#) (101)  
-----  
[Henry Morgan](#) (14)  
-----  
[Irv Spence](#) (12)  
-----  
[Jack Benny](#) (622)  
-----  
[Jay Ward](#) (35)  
-----  
[Jimmy Durante](#) (22)  
-----  
[John Crosby](#) (108)  
-----  
[John Sutherland](#) (41)  
-----  
[Johnny Johnsen](#) (42)  
-----  
[Johnny Olson](#) (5)  
-----  
[Kenny Baker](#) (6)  
-----  
[King-Size Canary](#) (9)  
-----  
[Laugh-In](#) (18)  
-----  
[Legend of Rockabye Point](#) (7)  
-----  
[Little Rural Riding Hood](#) (7)  
-----  
[Magical Maestro](#) (10)  
-----  
[Maurice Noble](#) (12)  
-----  
[Mel-O-Toons](#) (5)  
-----  
[MGM](#) (745)  
-----  
[Norm McCabe](#) (10)  
-----  
[Pat Matthews](#) (13)

- [Paul Julian](#) (16)
- [Sara Berner](#) (6)
- [Screwy Squirrel](#) (42)
- [Spider-Man](#) (3)
- [Terrytoons](#) (117)
- [Tex Avery](#) (651)
- [The Cat That Hated People](#) (10)
- [Toby the Pup](#) (4)
- [Tom and Jerry Human](#) (46)
- [Tralfaz Sunday Theatre](#) (21)
- [Ub Iwerks](#) (126)
- [UPA](#) (78)
- [Van Beuren](#) (141)
- [Vernon Scott](#) (52)
- [Virginia MacPherson](#) (14)
- [Walt Disney](#) (209)
- [Walter Lantz](#) (325)
- [Warner Bros.](#) (879)
- [Who Killed Who](#) (13)