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REVIEW: The Women Who Made Television Funny: Ten Stars of 1950s Sitcoms

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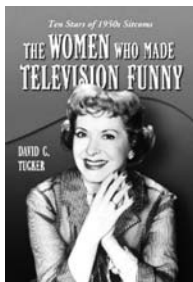
States of America during the U.S. Civil War, by following the wartime adventures of one raider, the CSS Shenandoah. *Sea of Gray* describes the mission of the Shenandoah, its role in the naval front of the war, and its eventual search for a safe port upon the end of hostilities. In a manner reminiscent of Blackbeard or Henry Morgan, the mercenary ship Shenandoah was charged by the CSA to seek out Union merchant ships and destroy/plunder them. Upon learning that the war had ended and that his crew would be considered pirates by the Union (a hangable offense), the captain of the Shenandoah circumnavigated the globe in search of a safe port where he might surrender. During its tenure as a privateer, the Shenandoah looted and sank 34 ships before surrendering to the British in November of 1865, over six months after the conclusion of the war. Meticulously researched and documented, and written in an easy-to-read style, *Sea of Gray* serves as an excellent resource that explores this interesting chapter in the Civil War. The book contains several pages of photographs, an extensive bibliography, and other useful supplemental material. Recommended for public libraries, high school media centers, and academic libraries. Suitable for advanced high school students, undergraduates, and graduate students. ►►

— Reviewed by **Elizabeth White**
University of Georgia Libraries

The Women Who Made Television Funny: Ten Stars of 1950s Sitcoms

by David C. Tucker (McFarland & Co., 2007; ISBN 978-0786429004, \$35.00).

"Duck and cover." "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" "I will go to Korea." Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas. The Kinsey Reports. If you lived during the decade when these topics were in the news and your family owned a TV, then you will probably have a Lucy and Ethel flashback when you hear the phrase "Speed it up a little!" (Remember the candy factory episode?) Impressively researched and written with obvious affection for its subject, David C. Tucker's book is filled with interesting details and anecdotes about some of the women who were instrumental in creating the TV sitcoms of the 50s. The 10 women featured in Tucker's book include Gracie Allen ("The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show"), Eve Arden ("Our Miss Brooks" and "The Eve Arden Show"), Lucille Ball ("I Love Lucy"), Spring Byington ("December Bride"), Joan Davis ("I Married Joan"), Anne Jeffreys ("Topper"



and "Love That Jill"), Donna Reed ("The Donna Reed Show"), Ann Sothern ("Private Secretary" and "The Ann Sothern Show"), Gale Storm ("My Little Margie" and "The Gale Storm Show: Oh! Susanna"), and Betty White ("Life with Elizabeth" and "Date with the Angels"). Each illustrated chapter traces the career of one star and places her in the context of the development of TV as an entertainment medium. This last point is significant, because as Tucker points out, TV was in its infancy and topics viewed as the least bit controversial were taboo. Imagine if, like the alien Thermians in "Galaxy Quest", all you knew about United States culture in the '50s came from the television sitcoms. You would know nothing of the Cold War jitters that had school children diving under their desks, the Korean War, the national fear of Communism, the national shame of racism. Most of all, you would wonder how in the world these earthlings procreate, since males and females don't even mention S-E-X, let alone sleep in the same beds. Yet despite the constraints of censorship and the social mores of the '50s, these women made sitcoms if not exactly an art form, at least an artful and humorous rendering of somewhat idyllic, white middle-class culture. "Unable to fall back on strong language, racial or sexual epithets, or shock value," as Tucker points out, "the shows of the 1950s entertained us because of the gifts of the actors, writers, and producers who created them..." And in all cases, the women who starred in these shows were much savvier than the ditsy female characters that some of them played. Lucy Ricardo longed for a role in show business whereas Lucille Ball was vice-president of the successful production company she founded with her husband. Author David C. Tucker is a freelance writer and public library administrator in DeKalb County, Georgia. His book is recommended for all public and academic libraries. ►►

— Reviewed by **William A. Richards**
Georgia College & State University

FICTION

Thirteen Moons by Charles Frazier
(Random House, 2006; ISBN 0-3755-0932-1, \$26.95).

Thirteen Moons is a fictional biography inspired by the life of William Holland Thomas of protagonist Will Cooper. As Charles Frazier states in the Author's Notes, Will Cooper "is not William Holland Thomas, though they

