Susskind, David (1923-1987) Encyclopedia Article

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David Susskind was one of the few successful television producers to also star in front of the camera. He began his career in the late forties as an agent, eventually representing such stars as Jerry Lewis and Dinah Shore. After forming Talent Associates with Alfred Levy, he started to package live dramas, before becoming a full-time producer in the mid 1950s. Over the course of more than thirty years, he produced hundreds of television dramas for such series as *The DuPont Show of the Week* and *Armstrong Circle Theater* ; over a dozen movies, including *Raisin in the Sun* (1961) and *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974); and numerous stage plays. Aspiring to be the Cecil B. DeMille of television, Susskind especially cherished prestige specials and among his award-winners were *The Ages of Man* (1966), with John Gielgud; *Death of a Salesman* (1967), starring Lee J. Cobb; and *Eleanor and Franklin* (1976), with Edward Hermann. In 1958 he became a celebrity as host of his own talk series, *Open End,* which had unlimited time to examine an issue. The brash Susskind liked to confront his guests, exemplified by his heated exchange with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. His often-controversial series, which was trimmed to two hours in the early sixties, covered a wide range of topics, from such weighty issues as racism and organized crime to tabloid fare, including astrology and sex change operations. Retitled *The David Susskind Show* in 1967, the program continued for nineteen years until the host's untimely death in February 1987.

Further Reading:

Asinof, Eliot. *Bleeding between the Lines.* New York, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1979.

Gehman, Richard. "David Susskind Wants to Be Goliath." *TV Guide.* November 23, 1963, 15-19.