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## Television in Review: Color Film

### Christmas Eve 'Dragnet' Show Is First Sponsored Dual Transmission

By JACK GOULD

JACK WEBB, the earnest entrepreneur of "Dragnet," over-extended himself in his observance of the Christmas season. His special holiday assignment for television's most popular fictional detectives, Joe Friday and Frank Smith, aspired to the status of a Yuletide classic on two different counts and fell short on both.

First, the program was the initial commercial film to be shown in full color as well as the usual black and white (9 P. M. Christmas Eve over N. B. C.). Sad to relate, it was by far the worst completely electronic color TV to be seen in many a day—roughly comparable, in fact, to the ragged experiments of several years ago.

Second, the "Dragnet" presentation tried to do a modern-day Christmas story about a little boy who prays for a new red wagon and, when he receives it, wants to give the Christ Child the first ride. The youngster's thought in itself was a touching climax, but the drama as a whole had little plausibility and was overly contrived in its emotionalism.

The color premiere of "Dragnet" was of special interest to the TV industry because of the wide use of films in video, but the quality of the tints wasn't

even in the running with the home norm for color TV in recent weeks. After a viewer had watched the beautiful colors shown last week in Barry Wood's "live" production of "Season's Greetings," he undoubtedly found the "Dragnet" color neither artistically nor commercially acceptable.

Mr. Webb's familiar technique of flashing from close-up to close-up during conversations between the detectives can be rather trying in monochrome; in color it was absolutely blinding to the eye, especially with extremely erratic lighting and poor matching of color values.

The flesh tones on the faces of Mr. Webb and Ben Alexander, who play Friday and Smith respectively, were very uneven. The grey of Mr. Webb's jacket was mostly blue and, in distant shots, the colors varied strongly with movement of the cameras.

The fault appeared to be with the film itself, because Technicolor in the past has shown up much better on color TV. Significantly, there was no invited audience to see "Dragnet" as it came over the air in color. N. B. C.'s reluctance to call attention to the showing was not hard to understand.

By his bit of pioneering, however, Mr. Webb performed a useful service for the West Coast film-makers. With color television they must put forth a maximum effort because the contrasts between "live" and filmed images apparently is going to prove much more marked in color than in mono-

### Tint Effects Disclose Lack of Experience—Religion Is Motif

chrome. Producers who rush into color films without first learning the tricks of the new electronic art could lose their shirts. The standards for home color TV are already much higher than perhaps Hollywood appreciates.

After the contents of the Christmas Eve installment of "Dragnet," Mr. Webb apparently succumbed to the temptation to push his luck. Amid glowing advertisements hinting that the program was something of a precinct house version of "Amahl and the Night Visitors," a phonograph recording of the sound track was put on sale in retail stores some weeks ago. Generally speaking, classics are born after their premiere, not before.

The chief drawback of the program was that it was self-conscious about its religious motif. In this story a figurine of the Christ Child disappeared from the altar of a mission. Commercially, the figure had no value, not even in a pawn shop, but none-the-less "Dragnet" operated on the assumption that its disappearance was larcenous. The contradiction was difficult to accept. In compensation, Mr. Webb gave more attention to the Christmas mood than to his Christmas story. A reversal of emphasis would have brought happier results.