

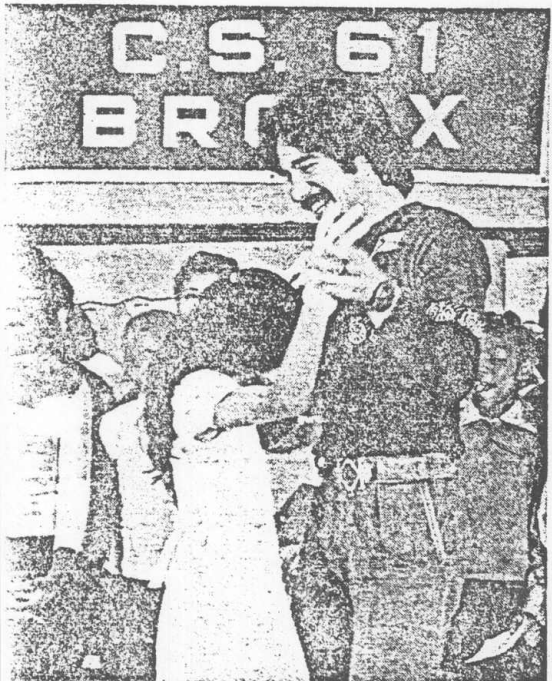
Rock Reporter Rivera

Geraldo Rivera thinks big. "I went into news knowing I wanted to be more than a local newsmen standing in front of a burning building talking about the number of firemen being treated for smoke inhalation," he says. Thirty-year-old Rivera has now been in the news business exactly three years and eight months as a reporter for New York City's WABC *Eyewitness News*. During

FRED CONRAD



WITH NURSING-HOME RESIDENT



RIVERA ON LOCATION AT A BRONX SCHOOL
More Kissinger than Cronkite.

that time, the former Brooklyn street-gang leader, merchant seaman, dry-goods salesman and poverty lawyer has won five Emmys, 74 other awards, and a \$100,000-a-year salary. He has just started his own network show, *Good-Night, America*, a 90-minute magazine-format mixture of filmed reportage and talk-show discussion that premiered last month as part of ABC's late-night *Wide World of Entertainment*.

Rivera has accomplished his celebrity with a combination of aggressive investigative reporting, cocky flamboyance, bulldozer ambition and the preemptive coverage of his own convictions. Like television news itself, the Rivera style is half journalism and half show business. Long-haired, casually hip in crew-neck sweaters and saddle oxfords, Geraldo (pronounced Herald) Rivera is sometimes identified as the first "rock-n'-roll newsmen."

Fury and Tears. Although he had no journalistic experience, his breezy enthusiasm impressed WABC executives looking for someone to fill a vacant ethnic slot (he is half Puerto Rican, half Jewish). Rivera wasted little time on one-alarm fire assignments before digging into his own niche as the station's "slum-dope reporter." He made his name with a three-part report on the *Drug Crisis in East Harlem*, which gave names and faces to drug-abuse statistics with portraits of three heroin addicts. In 1972 he sneaked a camera crew into the Willowbrook State School for the mentally retarded and produced a searing exposé of the squalor in which retarded children were left unclothed and unattended. With no attempt at "objectivity," Rivera laid the blame for Willowbrook directly on the administration of Governor Nelson Rockefeller in his commentary filled with fury and even tears: "This is what it looked like. This is what it sounded like. But how can I tell you about the way it smelled? It smelled of filth, it smelled of disease, and it smelled of death."

Reports like these have earned Rivera the reputation of a crusader. They have also brought him unusual freedom. He and cameraman Martin Berman have separate headquarters away from newsroom hustle in a cluttered basement office known as "Geraldo's Bodega." Rivera simply notifies the station when he has a report ready for broadcast. "Reporters are paid for each appearance on the air," says Rivera. "It is the greatest single cause of TV news mediocrity. It fosters quantity rather than quality."

Rivera's favored status and his independence have hardly made him popular among his colleagues. Some resent his leapfrogging past others with more experience. Others point to his aggressive tactics. Last fall, for instance, Rivera decided to cover the Israeli war. When the station's decision was to send

no one, Rivera dashed over the station director's head to the network and wangled an O.K. Says one WABC executive, "Geraldo lines people up behind him to fight for what he wants, and then plays them off against one another."

The most serious charge against Rivera is that his reporting is blindly one-sided. In reply, Rivera is fond of quoting Edward R. Murrow: "On some stories there is no other side." Few would blame him for his editorial outrage at Willowbrook—"We've got to close that damned place down." On his first three *Good-Night* shows, however, he has taken stands in favor of decriminalization of marijuana, granting amnesty for draft evaders, and setting up quasi-legal red-light districts as a solution to the prostitution problem.

Rivera's avowed "sacred cause" is "to use television as an instrument of social change." He is not humble: "I don't care about being Walter Cronkite. Kissinger is more my hero. I consider myself both a newsmen and a newsmaker in effecting change in society. It was frustrating to be limited to a local audience," he adds. "As a local newsmen, the most powerful man I could influence was the mayor."

He lives with his wife Edith, a fashion designer and the daughter of Novelist Kurt Vonnegut Jr., in Manhattan's Greenwich Village. He enjoys being recognized on the street. "TV creates celebrities," he says. "It is ego-satisfying work, I'll admit."

Good-Night, America gave some credence to the rumor that Rivera is being groomed to take over Dick Cavett's old nightly slot. Network executives deny it, contending that he is not ready to be on full time. Rivera thinks otherwise. "I think I could do a 90-minute show every night with the right kind of staff." His idea of the right kind of staff? "An army of young, committed investigative teams who would rove the world reporting subjects relevant to me, not necessarily to ABC News President Elmer Lower." That's big thinking, Geraldo.

Television Transplants

Like American pizza and French drugstores, the form and flavor of cultural phenomena often change in the translation from one country to another. So it would seem with television. Recently a pair of TV series have appeared, one in West Germany, the other in England, that present, in effect, foreign versions of two well-known American television families:

ONE HEART AND ONE SOUL. Herr Alfred Tetzlaff is the hero of West Germany's hottest new situation comedy. He is a first cousin to both *All in the Family's* Archie Bunker and his relative, Alf Garnett of the BBC comedy series *Till Death Us Do Part*. Herr Tetzlaff is a