

# Robert Kotlowitz

June 13, 1985

WNET-TV, New York City

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Robert Kotlowitz came to his position as Vice-President and Director of Programming at WNET-TV, New York's Channel 13, from a background in print magazines. Kotlowitz was drafted into the Army in World War II while he was a student at Johns Hopkins University. He served in the infantry, and then in intelligence, in Europe. After the war he returned to Johns Hopkins to finish his undergraduate degree and then studied at the Peabody Conservatory of Music. He then became a book and magazine editor. Before taking on the job at WNET, Kotlowitz had been managing editor of *Harper's* magazine.

Robert Kotlowitz was the author of four novels, and a memoir of his World War II experience, *Before Their Time* (1997). His novels—*Somewhere Else* (1972), *The Boardwalk* (1977), *Sea Changes* (1986), and *His Master's Voice* (1992)—chronicle Jewish life and assimilation from Poland to America. Kotlowitz retired from WNET in 1990.

After his death from prostate cancer in 2012, a *New York Times* obituary noted his role in building key programming for public television, such as *Live at the Met*, *Dance in America*, and *The MacNeil/Lehrer Report*, now the *PBS NewsHour*, which began during Watergate and then developed into a nightly news broadcast.<sup>1</sup> The *Times* obituary does not mention Kotlowitz's work with Frederick Wiseman, which began in the early 1970s and lasted beyond 1990, when Kotlowitz continued to serve as a PBS editorial advisor.

Robert Kotlowitz's close association with Frederick Wiseman has been almost invisible outside PBS circles. Kotlowitz was a strong advocate for Wiseman within public television, contributing to the extraordinary freedom and access that Wiseman has enjoyed there for fifty years. We interviewed Kotlowitz in his office at WNET/13 in New York on June 13, 1985.



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QUESTION: We'd like you to fill in some of the process through which Wiseman has had to go to secure funding and approval of his projects.

KOTLOWITZ: Right, right. I have to extract all this material out of my head because it's part of so much other material that's accumulated in here over the years, all of which tends to be different because the nature of every venture is different and the way we have to raise funds for them is always different. I have a very special relationship with Fred, both personally and professionally, and the personal relationship emerged from the professional relationship. When I became program and broadcasting director of WNET there was already a contract in effect with Fred which I inherited.

QUESTION: When was that?

KOTLOWITZ: Well, I joined the station in the summer of 1971, and I think I took over all those jobs within a year, just about over a twelve-month period. I think Wiseman had already made one film against a five-film contract. I admired Fred's work a lot, mainly because I found that it always took me by surprise, that it was never what I expected to see. I didn't know him, and we must have had a few lunches. We discovered mutual friends and mutual concerns and established a mode of operation which was really very much like that of an editor and a writer. My history was all print. I was managing editor of *Harper's* magazine before I came here and that was a very comfortable way for me to operate, and it's not the way I operated with most producers. Fred seemed to me so unique in his approach, and so unique in what he had already achieved, that anything that I might have to say conceptually would be absolutely gratuitous. What do you say to a man like Fred Wiseman when he decides he's going to do *High School* [1968], *Hospital* [1970], or *Sinai Field Mission* [1978], or whatever? Every idea seemed to me absolutely valid in the context of his over-all hope, which was to do a study of American institutions of one kind or another. And what is not an American institution when we start thinking that way?

So the agreement was that we would provide him with a certain amount of production money every year which came out of our discretionary funds, of which we had greater sums then than now, because we had Ford Foundation money, and we were able to dip into that in a way that we no longer can do. I mean, every penny now must be raised in some way or another. So, the funding was assured, and Fred would call. The pattern generally was that Fred would call from Cambridge and say, "I want to do a juvenile court," or "I want to do a study of welfare" and I would say, "Terrific." And there was no clearance. I mean, I didn't have to go to anybody, and I did not have Fred report in to any of our executive producers here, because it just seemed to me that he was just too special and, besides, it interested me professionally and personally, so I sort of retained it for myself. And then Fred would go out and shoot for six weeks or seven or whatever it was, and he would come back and say, "I've got all this footage." It was more or less the same experience each time, except substantively when we got to the film itself and he said, "I'm going to start working and I'll call you when there's something you can really—you can come up for a day." So, the pattern was that I would wait

for his call. He would then pick up the phone and say, “Come to Cambridge,” and we would go up and I would spend a day looking at footage, which he would have in some kind of order.

QUESTION: And about how long would the cut be at that point? Did it vary a great deal?

KOTLOWITZ: Hours and hours.

QUESTION: Six, eight, ten hours?

KOTLOWITZ: I would look at five or six hours. I’d take the early morning shuttle and leave late in the afternoon and in between we’d have a yogurt and sit overlooking Boston Harbor and look at this stuff. There would be no chronology to it, but I was sympathetic enough to what Fred was doing to be able to get some idea of what he was up to. I was always wrong. I mean I always assumed there would be much more, a much more strong judgment placed upon the material by Fred, because I was used to working with writers who were very passionate that way and believed that that’s what really counted.

It was always interesting for me to come back then from Cambridge and then Fred would either come to New York with a, not final cut, but a rough cut, more or less what the film was to be, and I would see an absolutely detached piece of work. Of course, infused by his choices of what to shoot and what to retain and what to cut, but a work that did not really fit my stereotypes. I mean, I thought *Hospital* was an absolute stunner. I had made the assumption that he would go into a mid-town hospital and find a chamber of horrors, bedlam, and that’s not what he found at all. And that’s what made me even more interested in Fred’s work, year by year. I was always eager to see what he was going to do with some of these subjects. Some he did much more with and some he did much less with, and I don’t know whether it’s because of the footage he shot or what he missed when he was there or what. But it has certainly been one of the more interesting relationships and rewarding relationships I have had in my time here. And then just filling out the last of what became a second five-year contract—a *Racetrack* [1985] on Belmont which will be broadcast next season. And I have seen that pretty much in rough cut and I have seen a lot of the footage from the Alabama institute.

QUESTION: Is this the institute for the blind and deaf children?

KOTLOWITZ: Yeah, which is going to be, I think, one of the most powerful of Fred’s works.

QUESTION: And he’s editing these simultaneously then?

KOTLOWITZ: *Racetrack* is finished, and the Alabama work is being edited now. In fact, I thought it would be great for Fred to go out and do the Belmont Stakes. I thought it would be just great for Fred to go out there for one day and do the Belmont Stakes and I had not had time to get up to the phone and call him when he called. He said, “You know, I want to do a racetrack.” So I said, “That’s funny, I was just going to call.” And I rarely did that. I almost

never picked up the phone and said, “Why don’t you do—, why don’t you think about that,” because he had enough ideas.

And that is pretty much the story of our relationship. I’m not sure that we are really a natural couple, but somehow, we work very, very well together and are very close friends now. I mean, on a whole other level. I did almost no interfering when I saw a rough cut, in terms of length.

QUESTION: Was it more like a progress report, rather than any sort of editorial judgment?

KOTLOWITZ: It was a progress report; it was a check point. If there was anything to me really seriously amiss, I would speak up and say something, but if Fred said this was going to be two-and-one-half hours and I really felt it would be better at two hours, I didn’t have enough faith that the two-hour thing was going to mean a damn thing more than the two-and-a-half-hour thing. I just never battled those things through, because I had no grounds to argue it on, except scheduling problems. That was the only way it could be talked about in any serious terms. Two-and-a-half-hours is difficult for many stations, obviously. But I really fought for that in the system all the way through. That was fairly tough; it was a tough road.

QUESTION: Did you then become his advocate in the system?

KOTLOWITZ: Well, you know, Fred was a pretty strong advocate for himself. He loves to speak up and he did speak up. But I was his advocate with PBS, yes. And there was a certain amount of falling away of support of Fred. You know, how long can you retain hold in this country when you find a form that works and then just—and that was a minor disappointment. But this is a system that you have to understand—we did the *Ring of the Nibelung* in collaboration with the BBC and German broadcasting and when I went out to our program fair—we have a program fair every year—to present it, I discovered that half the program managers had never heard of *The Ring*. This was in public television, and I was stunned. And this was fairly recently, I mean, this was only three years ago, and I realized that I was just going to have to spell my name for everybody every year for the rest of my life, unless I change my life in public television. So, I decided to do that and stick to it. I just don’t go out there and do those presentations. It’s too disheartening.

But, in any case, Fred had a lot of powerful initial support. I mean, nobody had done work like that. He’s *sui generis*. And then it didn’t suit everybody after a while. Some people began to turn on him and Fred has had to fight very hard to maintain his rights. It doesn’t matter, anybody who’s a MacArthur Fellow and all that stuff. He’s been honored and he’s somehow knitted this thing together himself. And it has to have been very, very hard. In any case, that’s the story in general. Some projects were tougher than others, but not in any serious degree.

QUESTION: When he would call you with a project, were there times when he would say, “I’ve got three ideas; let’s talk them over,” or did he present an idea and say—

KOTLOWITZ: No. Generally, by the time he got to the phone, he would have thought them through himself.

QUESTION: And it would be a topic and a place, or—

KOTLOWITZ: It would be either the Sinai—he knew he wanted to do the Sinai Peninsula or the American forces in Germany, American forces abroad, and he would pick West Germany. He wanted to do a juvenile court and by the time he called me, he had the court; but not always. But he knew what he wanted; he knew the subject he wanted to do.

QUESTION: Did you ever act as an intermediary in order to—

KOTLOWITZ: Yes, sometimes I would have to write a letter saying, you know, “Fred Wiseman makes films. He’s reputable, clean,” all the rest. And that had to be done occasionally, but not very often. And I never, I don’t remember an instance when I said to Fred, “I don’t think that’s such a great idea.” Because that, too, is arbitrary to argue. I mean, I know that Fred knows what his mind is. It just seemed to be pointless for me to get on the phone and say, “Why do you want to do Sinai?” I mean, I sort of knew why he wanted to do Sinai. And there didn’t have to be a lot of discussion or rationalizing.

And now that may have been a disservice for all I know to Fred, but it was the way it was and it’s the way I chose to act and it’s really my style anyway and unless I am so sure that I am right, and the producer isn’t. The producer has to go out and make the film, and to start whittling away at the original impulse seems to me not a very productive way of operating.

QUESTION: Were there ever aborted films?

KOTLOWITZ: Yes, let me think. Not in my memory, but my memory is not 100% intact. I don’t think so. I don’t remember an aborted effort. I mean, he may have spent months dealing with an idea, and maybe even filming himself—I don’t know—and then decided it won’t do and I never had heard about it, that’s possible. But I don’t think that ever happened either, though.

QUESTION: Has he come to you with requests for funds for *Celestial Navigation*? Are you involved with that project?

KOTLOWITZ: Well, I’m a novelist, too, so Fred and I’ve always been talking if he’s interested in doing a fictional film and I had just read *Celestial Navigation* [a 1974 novel by Anne Tyler] when Fred got interested in it and I felt a lot of the book was lovely, but I thought the ending was a cop-out, so we had this argument. And Fred loved the book and still does. But he didn’t come to us for money. I mean, it was a commercial venture and he’s been going elsewhere on his own to try and raise those monies.

QUESTION: One has the sense that very often he himself doesn't know what the point of the film is going to be until it's very close to being done.

KOTLOWITZ: I think that's true in every instance. I think that's the main value of his works, that he goes out like an absolute, a clean blackboard, I mean, with the usual baggage that everybody who is cultivated carries and makes his discoveries while he's filming. The fun of working with Fred was I was always being surprised that way. It was never, ever, quite the way I thought it was going to be.

Somehow, I assumed *Racetrack* was going to be a very fast-paced film, horses racing and all that. Well, it isn't like that at all. I mean the style of it is not—I wasn't even able to predict that to myself. So that keeps it very fresh for me. And I think the body of work is absolutely amazing, and permanent, and whatever the vicissitudes of one season to the next in the scheduling and all that struggle goes on. I mean, I just think he's made an absolutely major contribution to a form that can hardly be defined.

QUESTION: When you mention the falling away of support, have fewer of your PBS stations picked up the option of showing his films, as opposed to—

KOTLOWITZ: No, as you know, everybody needs good programming.

QUESTION: So that has not changed.

KOTLOWITZ: That hasn't changed. The fact is, Fred's programs get considerable ratings, you know, relatively speaking, on the air. They go on and there's an audience. The audience turns on and it's still there two-and-a-half-hours later. There is nothing else like it on television. It looks very different on the screen than it does on a Steenbeck [editing system] and it looks very different at home from what it looks like here in my office. You know you are looking at something authentic. And my own secret belief has always been that everybody is dying for authenticity on the television screen, something real to latch on to, to hold on to, and look at.

QUESTION: Fred has mentioned in public once or twice, in interviews, that with *The Store* [1983] someone—and he says this with real anger—said to him, “Don't do Neiman-Marcus; do Macy's or Gimbel's. They're more typical.” And there's a sense that he's growing impatient, in general, with some of the apparatus—

KOTLOWITZ: It was said by somebody, I think, at PBS. “Why do Neiman-Marcus? Do the thing that attracts the big audience.” Well, it's such a stupid remark and suggestion to make. If Fred wants to do Neiman-Marcus, you just have to know there's a good reason for it, and for him to be interested in Neiman-Marcus seemed to me itself sufficient. And he made a very amusing, witty program, I think, which was also surprising. It is not in any way a—you know, it wasn't full of all kinds of obvious revelations about conspicuous consumption. It was just terrifically amusing. But suggestions like that are made to him all the time.

QUESTION: Is he in a situation where, increasingly, he needs to make a pitch to people who then have had an opportunity to get back—

KOTLOWITZ: Well, we don't—those monies have to be raised film by film now and we don't have the resources and as people grow familiar with your work, they feel they can say anything. Everybody feels they can tell you what you should be doing. And they do. "You should be making them shorter; you should not be doing Neiman-Marcus; you should do Macy's."

QUESTION: And *Racetrack* [filmed before, but released after, *The Store*] is in black and white again?

KOTLOWITZ: Yeah.

QUESTION: And is the institute in Alabama also black-and-white?

KOTLOWITZ: That's an interesting question. I don't remember. [The four films shot at the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind are in color.]

QUESTION: I would think there'd be pressure for him to move to color.

KOTLOWITZ: And it's not so long ago that I saw it, too. There is pressure from the system to go to color, but that's another thing that seems to be silly. I mean everything on the screen is in color.

QUESTION: I get the impression from you that there really aren't offices full of people here, that really you're the connection and that there isn't a huge file of data—

KOTLOWITZ: There's no correspondence, to my knowledge. It's all pick-up-the-telephone and get-on-the-plane and when Fred comes to New York, we always spend an hour, two hours, whatever. But we do it now on another basis. It took me a while to learn how to feel confident in myself with Fred, because he's full of temperament, full of anger, and wants his fair share. So, when it comes time for broadcasts, there was always a lot of confrontation with publicity people, promotion people, and advertising, and all those questions. But that seems to be standard with all this kind of stuff and we would go through that and after about three years, I began to feel very comfortable.

QUESTION: There is a story that a few years ago, WNET [Channel 13, NYC], instead of offering Wiseman films to other stations, began charging.

KOTLOWITZ: Well, we made the attempt. What was called the Station Program Co-operative was established, if that's the word, and it's an attempt really to have stations pay for programs that other stations made, to some degree at least. And we thought since we were putting \$150,000 a year—I think this is the figure—in our discretionary funds into the program and not getting one penny back, that the stations should help us share the burden. Well, there are limited funds out there, as you know, and a lot of programs being offered that were more

urgent to those stations in terms of the time that they filled on the air, like *Sesame Street*, *MacNeil-Lehrer*, *Great Performances*, all that stuff, and public affairs material does not bring much money to the stations anyway. Yeah, sure, we made the attempt.

QUESTION: How do the economics of that work?

KOTLOWITZ: Well, each station is pro-rated on the basis of the size of its market. I think that's what it is. Naturally, we're always paying the biggest price for any program, and we would have had to have bought the *Wiseman* from ourselves with the way this thing is set up. Then, every year, there is a Program Fair at which the stations gather and screen programs that all the stations are offering. There may be a hundred million dollars' worth of programs for perhaps thirty million dollars in actual funds. So it's very competitive and it's sort of hustle and flash. And it's horrible.

QUESTION: Is a *Wiseman* film at that stage finished, or is it sort of—

KOTLOWITZ: I don't remember that we showed any footage. We don't do it anymore.

QUESTION: How would that be done?

KOTLOWITZ: We may have shown, what we would have done—and I'm almost sure that in one instance we did it—is that we take a seven-minute excerpt and show it to the stations. The whole Program Fair is structured so that each station has a room to itself, each major production center, and they show a memo reel.

QUESTION: So, it's just a seven-minute excerpt? It's nothing like a trailer? He has never prepared trailers of any sort?

KOTLOWITZ: No, no, no, he hasn't, although we have for a series. The *Great Performances* material we put together in an attempt to excerpt as many programs coming up that season as possible, so the stations get a sense of the variety. But it would be too expensive for Fred to sit down and put together a real trailer. That's another ten or fifteen thousand. So, we just take some few minutes out of it.

QUESTION: Then how long before a broadcast would you know? What kind of commitment would they have to make?

KOTLOWITZ: The Program Fair for the '86-'87 season will take place in October in Philadelphia. That ought to keep them off the streets and then there's a long voting process that will continue until about January or February. There are a lot of voting rounds, in which programs get eliminated, when they don't get enough votes. It's enormously complicated. But by February we will all know what has been bought for the following season.

QUESTION: So those who would buy *Racetrack* have already—



KOTLOWITZ: Well, nobody bought *Racetrack*. We didn't sell *Racetrack*. We committed monies to it and it's going out.

QUESTION: So, they can just have that, if they're willing to make time for it?

KOTLOWITZ: They'll get it. Right. Yeah.

QUESTION: And is it three hours long?

KOTLOWITZ: You know, that's a good question. I don't think it's three hours at all. I think it's two and a half, but I forget, I forget. [*Racetrack* is 119 minutes long]. I think, ultimately, the length of Fred's films would be an almost undiscussed question. It will be irrelevant almost, but now you know that the stations that have—

QUESTION: A programmer looks at those things differently.

KOTLOWITZ: And justifiably. Sometimes Fred would say "It's three-and-a-half hours" or whatever and my heart would turn over and I would—this is going to be a battle. But I didn't really want to be involved in those battles. If I had known in the beginning that Fred likes to fight so much, so feisty, I would have—

QUESTION: So you weren't involved in the *Law and Order* [1969] battle about the language? That was before you came?

KOTLOWITZ: The first hassle I had was *Juvenile Court* [1973]. It was a question of clearances. That was the first one that I had a problem. Then there were others that we had language problems. In those years, between '71 and '76, they had a problem with almost everything and anything.

QUESTION: You were there for the *Primate* [1974] problem?

KOTLOWITZ: That's right. I was there for *Primate*. It's almost impossible now to raise any kind of controversy over anything anymore. You can put anything on the air, and it just doesn't matter. So we haven't been picketed in years, you know how quiet it is.

QUESTION: Is Wiseman partly responsible for that? Or is he just sort of riding along with—

KOTLOWITZ: No, just riding along. I think that what happened is that the so-called revolution that was going on in the sixties and seventies really did have a permanent effect, or at least permanent enough to last our lifetimes, in various areas. Many, many things are absolutely acceptable. And then the minority groups in this country no longer see us, public television, as politically useful, viable, so they're not taking over the station, as they were. We had to fight some terrific battles. That's all gone. We haven't had a confrontation with a Latino group, a Black group, a woman's group, a gender group, or whatever, in so long. And that used to be an absolutely normal part of my life around here, daily. You just put anything on the air, and that's it.

QUESTION: As you say, Wiseman's films are unique. From a programming point of view, do you have any sense that his films have attracted other filmmakers or even attracted counter-movements in documentary? There's little enough documentary on television, public or otherwise.

KOTLOWITZ: Well, you do get youngish documentarians who make a point of saying, "I'm not going to do Wiseman stuff," you know. "You're going to get a documentary from me that really has something to say, that really has a point of view." And, you know, an endless voice-over—words. And there's usually a political content of some kind of another, mainly leftist in origin. But it exists in a whole other universe, a whole other realm from Fred's work. It has nothing to do—we broadcast that work on Thursday night. It's dead on Friday, usually.

QUESTION: Hard work to imitate.

KOTLOWITZ: Well, you know, you can't imitate Fred. You can't outdo him in that particular way and a certain number of young documentarians are angry at him that he doesn't pick up young filmmakers and stroke them and all the rest of that. They've got to find their way, too.

QUESTION: Is he still working with John Davey as cinematographer?

KOTLOWITZ: You know, I don't—I've seen some of Fred's crew, but I don't know.

QUESTION: So those are all his choices, and you have nothing to do with that?

KOTLOWITZ: No. Fred makes; we give. We would give the money to Fred and then he made it and would deliver us the program, the film that would be broadcast.

QUESTION: You're speaking of it in the past tense?

KOTLOWITZ: That's because we've been doing it on a year-to-year basis now. I don't know whether we can go on raising money, or whether Fred himself can raise money.

QUESTION: You're trying to raise money now for the Alabama film?

KOTLOWITZ: Well, for the Alabama thing, Fred had gone down to CPB [Corporation for Public Broadcasting] and made impassioned speeches to that board for independents, while I would say that he spoke for all independents, not just for himself, and for the process that he had to go through in making application to CPB. Talking about spelling your name. It was ludicrous. But, in fact, I don't cash my chips in at CPB very often and I don't like to—I don't enjoy that particular kind of manipulation—but I told Fred that I would call, and I picked up the phone and called the head of program fund and said, "I want you to know that the footage on this material is wonderful. It's going to be one of the most moving and powerful programs." And Fred got a lot of money the next day, at the board meeting, surprising me. I'll tell you, I felt very powerful.

QUESTION: Is that typically where the funds would then come from on the year-to-year basis, from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting?

KOTLOWITZ: CPB or PBS, yes.

QUESTION: So it's not common to go outside [for] foundation support?

KOTLOWITZ: We've tried, but it's just desperately slim pickings. There are no corporations, no foundations, and you've got to have somebody who cares, or is embarrassed into giving you the money.

QUESTION: You mentioned that with *Juvenile Court* you ran into problems with the releases of minors. How exactly was that worked out? There were objections from the parents of the minors or from others who spoke for the minors and thought maybe there'd later be objections?

KOTLOWITZ: There were objections from a set of parents in the film.

QUESTION: Whose child went before the juvenile court?

KOTLOWITZ: Whose child appeared in the film. I'm trying to get it right.

QUESTION: This objection came before the broadcast?

KOTLOWITZ: This is pre-broadcast. We dealt with it right up until broadcast time. That was the first kind of hassle like that, that I remember in broadcasting one of Fred's films. The *Primate* thing was different. That was on different grounds.

QUESTION: Could you talk a little about that?

KOTLOWITZ: Well, as I say, there was so much activity here between '71 and '79 and '80 that it's all kind of a blur. I mean, everything was confrontation. You know that was the style of the times. I just remember a lot of groups out there coming in on [a] moral basis, objecting to his film in which I didn't see anything to object to at all. I mean, you deal with everybody; take calls; see them; meet them. But that was on moral grounds on how these poor animals were being treated, as though if the film hadn't been made and broadcast, it wasn't happening to the animals.

QUESTION: Didn't Yerkes [the research site where *Primate* was filmed] also lodge complaints against PBS and WNET?

KOTLOWITZ: I think that's possible. I think that rings a faint bell. In fact, yes.

QUESTION: Many of the scientists themselves were objecting to his treatment of them, rather than the treatment of the animals.

KOTLOWITZ: Yeah, I think there was some of that, but that was not something we—that was just an annoyance. I think Fred was more disappointed that that was directed at Fred personally.

QUESTION: And there was even a discussion on a PBS station—

KOTLOWITZ: Yes, that's right. We used to do that all the time and we were always doing follow-ups.

QUESTION: Does Fred then come down when the film is about to be released and brief your station people?

KOTLOWITZ: He comes down when we see the commercial advertisers, and interviews are being set up. Fred's very effective and very aware of all of the benefits it—I'm sure it's all a circle. The contract with Fred was very good for Fred.

QUESTION: To have a five-film contract is really a luxury for a documentary filmmaker.

KOTLOWITZ: We have public television rights and Fred has the film. Fred has established some kind of business for himself [Zipporah Films, Inc.], that has its ups and downs, of course. But it's all his. He ended up owning it all and I'm glad. I'm glad that it worked out that way.

QUESTION: Is Fred the kind of filmmaker that you have to ever call him and say, "When are we going to see it?" Do you get nervous about deadlines?

KOTLOWITZ: No, I don't.

QUESTION: Because there hasn't been a documentary now for two years.

KOTLOWITZ: That's right. We don't set a broadcast date until I've seen something. And so we always, Fred and I, always assume there's going to be at least a six-month lapse between my viewing and the earliest broadcast date, so you're not actually meeting a deadline. The *Racetrack* thing is late because it cost more than the budget, I think, and Fred's been trying to raise money and shooting the Alabama thing. And we did not push him on that. It's a new year and we really didn't push him. We were aware of it, but we didn't push him.

QUESTION: Do you see a completed print before you actually make a final commitment?

KOTLOWITZ: I see it very close. Well, on the Alabama thing, I picked up the phone to CPB on the basis of just, I just felt very strongly about it.

QUESTION: Do you think he's going to run into release problems, consent problems, with this film?

KOTLOWITZ: My assumption is that, based on Fred's experience—and the man knows that he can't fool around with that kind of thing—and I've asked him about the release question, and

it's all taken care of. And that's the first thing that occurs to you when you look at this program.

QUESTION: Does he simply make a contractual guarantee to you and the station that he's settled all those problems?

KOTLOWITZ: I don't know whether it exists in the contract. I'm not even sure that I've ever read that contract word for word. It's like death reading those things. But it's not a very long contract. It's just an agreement.

QUESTION: It's not the sort of situation where your people go over his releases and that sort of thing?

KOTLOWITZ: Well, if there's a problem; however, if we think there might be a problem, our legal people screen it and then there's a phone call with Fred and it's very simply resolved.

QUESTION: And so, he doesn't file his correspondence with those institutions with you?

KOTLOWITZ: Not with me, no. The only other person is the legal counsel, and I don't think he files it with legal counsel, either. I'm virtually sure of that.

QUESTION: How lucky he is to have found you. All of us are very lucky he found you—to have been granted the time.

KOTLOWITZ: It would have happened the same way, except he would have had, I think, more anguish, that's all. I think the films, the problems, would have been the same. I think there might have been a little more hesitation in his second five-year contract, but, you know, it's Fred's work and there's no two ways about that. And it would have been anyway, that's the kind of filmmaker he is.

## *Notes*

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<sup>1</sup> “Robert Kotlowitz, a Shaper of Channel 13, Dies at 87.” Obituary, *New York Times* (August 28, 2012).

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