



# Season Finale: The Unexpected Rise and Fall of the WB and UPN

*Susanne Daniels, Cynthia Littleton*

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In the mid-1990s, two major Hollywood studios, Warner Bros. and Paramount Pictures, each launched their own broadcast television network with the hope of becoming the fifth major player in an industry long dominated by ABC, CBS, NBC, and, more recently, Fox. Despite the odds against them, the WB and UPN went on to alter the landscape of primetime television, only to then merge as the CW network in 2006—each a casualty of conflicting personalities, relentless competition, and a basic failure to anticipate the future of the entertainment business.

Unfolding amid this backdrop of high-stakes business ventures, fanatical creative struggles, and corporate power plays, *Season Finale* traces the parallel stories of the WB and UPN from their prosperous beginnings to their precipitous demise. Following the big money, big egos, and big risks of network television, Susanne Daniels, a television executive with the WB for most of its life, and Cynthia Littleton, a longtime television reporter for *Variety*, expose the difficult reality of trying to launch not one but two traditional broadcast networks at the moment when cable television and the Internet were ending the dominance of network television.

Through in-depth reportage and firsthand accounts, Daniels and Littleton expertly re-create the creative and business climate that gave birth to the WB and UPN, illustrating how the race to find suitable programming spawned a heated rivalry between the two but also created shows that became icons of American youth culture. Offering insider stories and never-before-published details about shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Dawson's Creek*, *7th Heaven*, *Gilmore Girls*, *Smallville*, *Felicity*, *Girlfriends*, *Everybody Hates Chris*, and *America's Next Top Model*, Daniels and Littleton provide an exhaustive account of the two creative teams that ushered these groundbreaking programs into the hearts, minds, and living rooms of Americans across the country.

But in spite of these successes, the WB and UPN unraveled, and here the authors elucidate the corporate miscalculations that led to their undoing, examining the management missteps and industry upheaval that brought about their rapid decline and the surprising teamwork that united them as the CW. The result is a cautionary and compelling entertainment saga that skillfully captures a precarious moment in television history, when the dramatic transformation of the broadcast networks signaled an inevitable shift for all pop culture.

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