

Top 10 Televised Events of All Time



Chapter 6

Television and Cable: The Power of Visual Culture



- Since replacing radio in the 1950s as our most popular medium, television has sparked repeated arguments about its social and cultural impact.
- During the 1990s, for example, teachers, clergy, journalists, and others waged a public assault on TV's negative impact on children.

- **“Television is the medium from which most of us receive our news, sports, entertainment, cues for civic discourse, and, most of all, our marching orders as consumers.”**
–Frank Rich, *New York Times*, 1998

- In this age of increasing market specialization, television is still the one mass medium that delivers content millions can share simultaneously

- **In times of crisis, our fragmented and pluralistic society has turned to television as a touchstone, as common ground.**
- everything from the Super Bowl to a network game show to the coverage of natural disasters.

- In 1948, only 1 percent of America's households had a television set;
- by 1953, more than 50 percent had one; and by the early 1960s, more than 90 percent of all homes had a TV set.
- With television on the rise throughout the 1950s, many feared that radio—as well as books, magazines, and movies—would become irrelevant and unnecessary.
- What happened, of course, is that both radio and print media adapted to this new technology.
- In fact, today more radio stations are operating and more books and magazines are published than ever before; only ticket sales for movies have flattened and declined slightly since the 1960s.

Early TV Technology

- ““There’s nothing on it worthwhile, and we’re not going to watch it in this household, and I don’t want it in your intellectual diet.””
 - > –Kent Farnsworth, recalling the attitude of his father (Philo) toward TV when Kent was growing up



Fiddling with Frequencies and Freezing TV Licenses

- ◉ In the 1940s, the FCC began assigning certain channels to specific geographic areas to make sure there was no interference. (One effect of this was that for years New Jersey had no TV stations because those signals would have interfered with the New York stations.)
- ◉ The FCC also set aside thirteen channels (1–13) on a [VHF](#) (very high frequency) band for black-and-white television.
- ◉ However, by 1948, the FCC had issued nearly a hundred television licenses.
- ◉ Due to growing concern about the allocation of a finite number of channels and with growing frequency-interference problems as existing channels “overlapped,” the FCC declared a freeze on new licenses from 1948 to 1952.

- In 1954, RCA's color system, which could also receive black-and-white images, usurped CBS to become the color standard.

- Although NBC began broadcasting a few shows in color in the mid-1950s, **it wasn't until 1966 that all three networks broadcast their entire evening lineups in color.**

- By the mid-1950s, there were more than four hundred television stations in operation—a 400 percent surge since the pre-freeze era.

- Today, about seventeen hundred TV stations are in operation, including more than three hundred nonprofit stations.

Television Programs & Storytelling

- ◉ *Situation Comedy*
- ◉ *Domestic Comedy*
- ◉ *Anthology Drama*
- ◉ *Episodic Series*

- **Situation Comedy.** Over the years, the major staple on television has been the half-hour comedy series, the only genre represented in the Top 10-rated programs every year between 1949 and 2005,
- Traditionally, sitcoms don't give their characters transformational arcs within episodes because they're meant to be watched differently.
- Sitcoms - unlike dramas - are not meant to be emotional.
- They're supposed to be funny. And while change is dramatic, it's definitely not funny.



- In most sitcoms, character development is downplayed in favor of zany plots.

- Characters are usually static and predictable, and they generally do not develop much during the course of a series.

- Such characters “are never troubled in profound ways.” Stress, more often the result of external confusion rather than emotional anxiety, “which is almost always funny.”

- Much like viewers of soap operas, sitcom fans feel just a little bit smarter than the characters, whose lives seem wacky and out of control.

- ◉ **domestic comedy:** a TV hybrid of the sitcom in which characters and settings are usually more important than complicated situations;
- ◉ it generally features a domestic problem or work issue that characters have to solve.



The most durable genre in the history of television has been the half-hour comedy. Until 2005-06, it was the only genre that has been represented in the Nielsen rating Top 10 lists every year since 1949. Below is a selection of top-rated comedies at five-year intervals, spanning fifty years.

1955-56

I Love Lucy (#2)
Jack Benny Show (#5)
December Bride (#6)

1960-61

Andy Griffith Show (#4)
The Real McCoys (#8)
Jack Benny Show (#10)

1965-66

Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C. (#2)
The Lucy Show (#3)
Andy Griffith Show,
Bewitched, *Beverly Hillbilies* (tie #7)
Hogan's Heroes (#9)

1970-71

Here's Lucy (#3)

1975-76

All in the Family (#1)
Laverne & Shirley (#3)

Maude (#4)
Phyllis (#6)
Sanford and Son, *Rhoda* (tie #7)

1980-81

*M*A*S*H* (#4)
The Jeffersons (#6)
Alice (#7)
House Calls, *Three's Company*
 (tie #8)

1985-86

Cosby Show (#1)
Family Ties (#2)
Cheers (#5)
Golden Girls (#7)
Who's the Boss? (#10)

1990-91

Cheers (#1)
Roseanne (#3)
A Different World (#4)
Cosby Show (#5)
Murphy Brown (#6)

Empty Nest (#7)
Golden Girls, *Designing Women* (tie #10)

1995-96

Seinfeld (#2)
Friends (#3)
Caroline in the City (#4)
The Single Guy (#6)
Home Improvement (#7)
Boston Common (#8)

2000-01

Friends (#3)
Everybody Loves Raymond
 (#4)
Will & Grace (#10)

2005-06 and 2006-07

For the first time in TV history, a half-hour comedy series did not rate among the season's top ten programs.

Sources: Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows*, 7th ed. (New York: Ballantine, 1999); *Times Almanac 1999* (Boston: Information Please LLC, 1998), 716; and A. C. Nielsen Media Research, 2005-06.

Televised Drama: Anthologies vs. Episodes

- anthology drama: a popular form of early TV programming that brought live dramatic theater to television; influenced by stage plays, anthologies offered new teleplays, casts, directors, writers, and sets from week to week.
- In the 1952–53 season alone, there were eighteen anthology dramas competing on the networks.
- The commercials that interrupted the drama, however, told upbeat stories in which problems were easily solved by purchasing a product: “a new pill, deodorant, toothpaste, shampoo, shaving lotion, hair tonic, car, girdle, coffee, muffin recipe, or floor wax.”
- By probing the psychology of the human condition, complicated anthologies made the simplicity of the commercial pitch ring false. Another aspect of the sponsors’ dilemma was that these dramas often cast “non-beautiful heroes and heroines,” unlike the stars of the commercials.



Televised Drama: Anthologies vs. Episodes

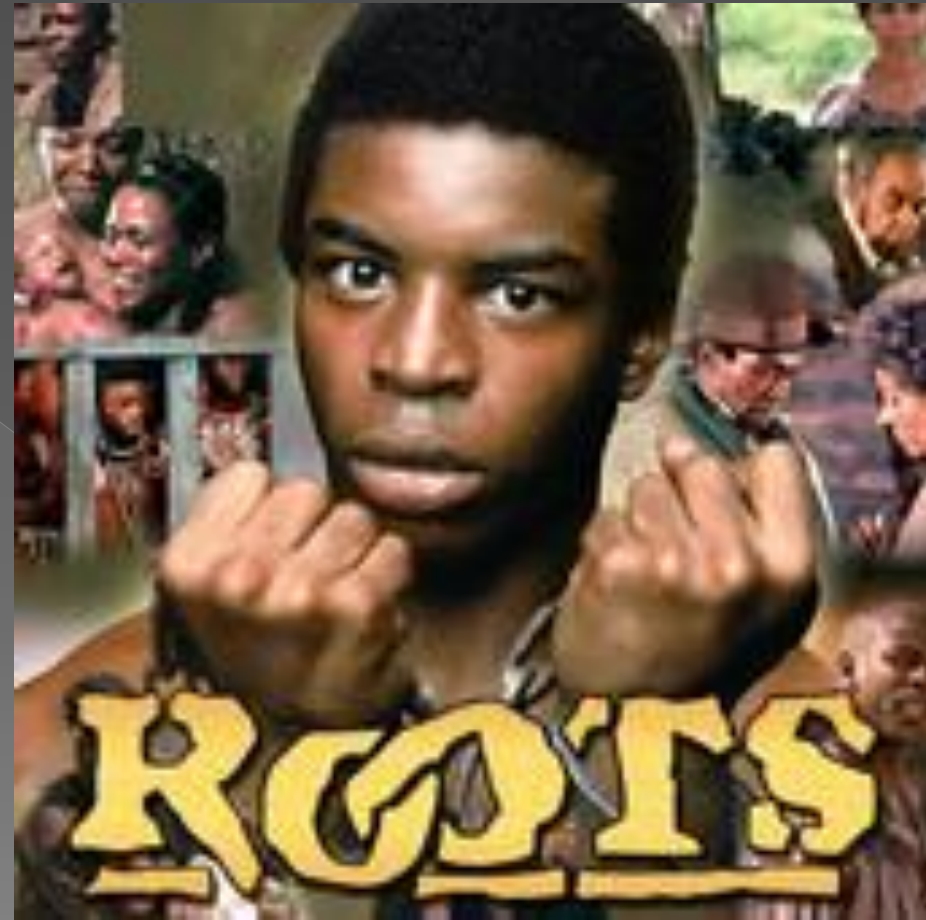
- ◉ The commercial networks eventually stopped producing anthologies for economic and political reasons.
- ◉ Anthologies often presented stories that confronted complex human problems that were not easily resolved.



Episodic Series. Abandoning anthologies, producers and writers increasingly developed episodic series

- The episodic series comes in two general types: chapter shows and serial programs.
- Chapter shows employ self-contained stories that feature a problem, a series of conflicts, and a resolution. This structure can be used in a wide range of dramatic genres
- serial programs are open-ended episodic shows; that is, in these series, most story lines continue from episode to episode.
- Cheaper to produce, usually employing just a few indoor sets, and running five days a week, daytime soap operas are among the longest-running serial programs in the history of television.

- ◉ In the 1970s, however, with the popularity of the network *miniseries*—a serial that runs over a two-day to two-week period, usually on consecutive nights—producers and the networks began to look at the evening serial differently.
- ◉ The twelve-part *Rich Man, Poor Man*, adapted from an Irwin Shaw novel, ranked number three in national ratings in 1976.
- ◉ The next year, the eight-part *Roots* miniseries, based on writer Alex Haley's search for his African heritage, became the most-watched miniseries in TV history.



- These miniseries demonstrated to the networks that viewers would watch a compelling, ongoing story in prime time.

- Mixing comic situations and grim plots, this multiple-cast show looked like an open-ended soap opera.

- On occasion, as in real life, crimes were not solved and recurring characters died.



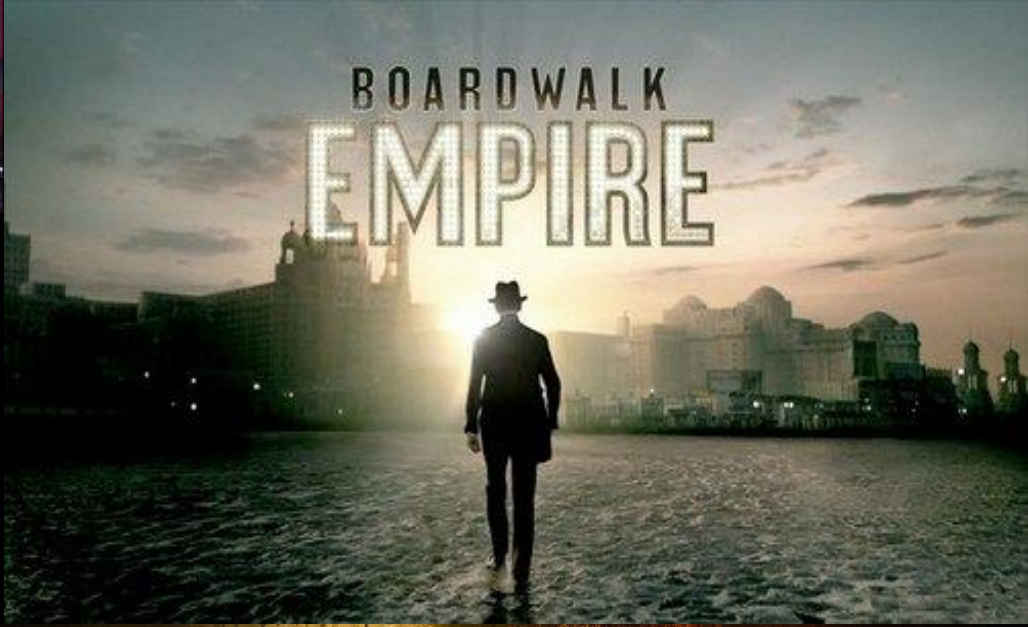
- *Hill Street Blues* (top, 1981-87) began the hybrid form of dramas with its mix of comic and serious plot lines.

- Among the most popular dramas in TV history, *ER* (middle) premiered in 1994 and was the No. 1 rated program for several years.

- > *ER* made history in 1998 when NBC agreed to pay the program's producers a record \$13 million per episode.

- In 2005-06, *Grey's Anatomy* (bottom) emerged as the *ER* for a new generation, and in 2007 it finished No. 5 in the overall ratings and received 10 Emmy nominations.





The 3 Types of Character Arc Change, Growth and Fall

- ◉ **The Change Arc** – this is our good old “hero’s journey”, which basically has the protagonist change from an unlikely fellow into a savior and hero.
- ◉ This transformation is quite radical, and despite some inner strength that was “always within him”, pretty much all else about the protagonist changes drastically by the end of the story.

The 3 Types of Character Arc Change, Growth and Fall

- **The Growth Arc** – in this character arc, the protagonist overcomes an internal opposition (weakness, fear, the past etc.) while he faces an external opposition, and as a result he becomes a fuller, better person.

The 3 Types of Character Arc Change, Growth and Fall

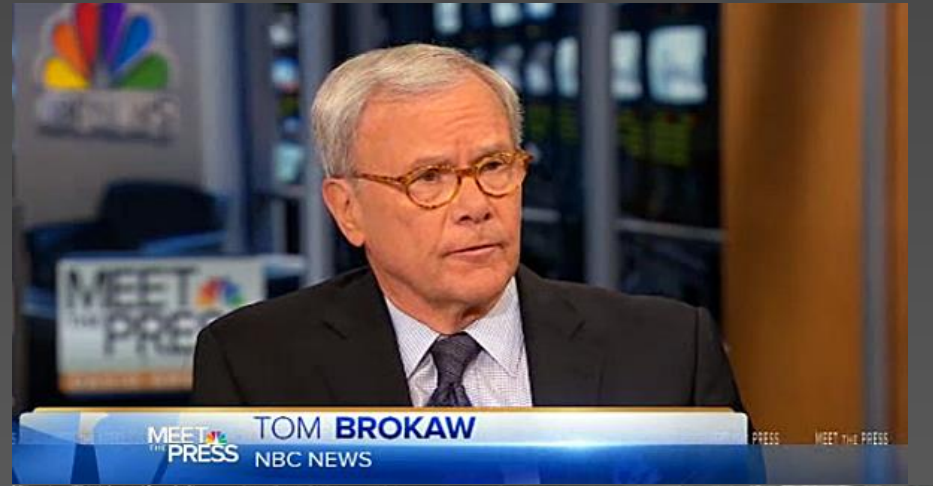
- **The Fall Arc** – commonly known as a “tragedy”, the Fall Arc follows the protagonist as he dooms himself and/or others, and declines into insanity, immorality or death.

TV Information: Our Daily News Culture

- Since the 1960s, broadcast news, especially on local TV stations, has consistently topped print journalism in national research polls that ask which news medium is most trustworthy.
- Most studies suggest this has to do with television's intimacy as a medium—its ability to create loyalty with viewers who connect personally with the news anchors we “invite” into our living rooms each evening.

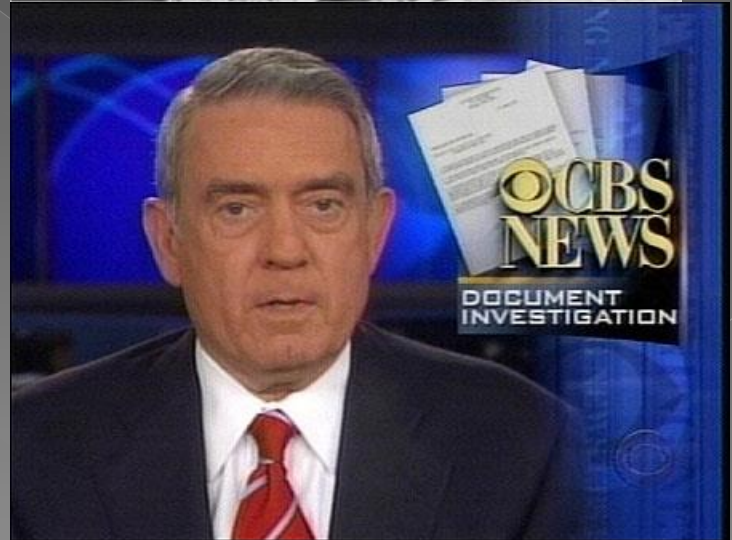
NBC News

- Originally featuring a panel of reporters interrogating political figures, NBC's weekly *Meet the Press* (1947–) is the oldest show on television.
- In 1956, the *Huntley Brinkley Report* debuted with Chet Huntley in New York and David Brinkley in Washington, D.C.
 - > This co-anchored NBC program became the most popular TV evening news show at the time and served as the dual-anchor model for hundreds of local news broadcasts.
 - > A series of anchors and co-anchors followed before Tom Brokaw settled in as sole anchor in September 1983. He passed the chair to Brian Williams following the 2004 presidential election.



CBS News

- Walter Cronkite became the news anchor in 1962, starting a nineteen-year run as anchor of the renamed *CBS Evening News*. In 1963,
- Cronkite anchored the first thirty-minute network newscast on which President John Kennedy appeared in a live interview—twelve weeks before his assassination.
- Cronkite gave way to Dan Rather, who despite a \$22 million, ten-year contract could not sustain the program as the highest-rated evening newscast (as it was since the 1970s).
 - > After a scandal in 2005, Rather was forced out;



ABC News

- In 1983, Peter Jennings became the sole anchor of the broadcast.
- After Jennings's death in 2005, his spot was shared by co-anchors Elizabeth Vargas and Bob Woodruff until Charles Gibson—from ABC's *Good Morning America*—took over in 2006.



Cable News Changes the Game

- ◉ The first 24/7 cable TV news channel, Cable News Network (CNN), premiered in 1980 and was the brainchild of Ted Turner).
- ◉ offering viewers information and stories in a 24/7 loop. Viewers no longer have to wait until 5:30 or 6:30 p.m. to watch the national network news stories.
- ◉ It wasn't until Turner launched the **Headline News** channel (now called HLN) in 1982, and turned a profit with both it and CNN in 1985, that the **traditional networks began to take notice of cable news.**
- ◉ Cable news also challenges the network program formulas.
 - > Daily opinion programs such as MSNBC's *Countdown*, and Fox News Bill O'Reilly show often celebrate argument, opinion, and speculation over traditional reporting based on verified facts.



Contemporary Trends in Network and Cable News

- In an effort to duplicate the financial success of *60 Minutes*, the most profitable show in TV history, the Big Three networks began developing relatively inexpensive [TV newsmagazines](#).
- Copying this formula, ABC's *20/20* and *Primetime Live* became moneymakers, and *20/20* aired three or four evenings a week by 2000.
- NBC's newsmagazine *Dateline* was appearing up to five nights a week by 2000—airing so often that critics accused NBC of trivializing the formula.



The Economics of Television

- Prime-Time Production
- The key to the television industry's appeal resides in its ability to offer programs that American households will habitually watch on a weekly basis.
 - > **deficit financing:** in television, the process whereby a TV production company leases its programs to a network for a license fee that is actually less than the cost of production; the company hopes to recoup this loss later in rerun syndication.
 - > **rerun syndication:** in television, the process whereby programs that stay in a network's lineup long enough to build up a certain number of episodes (usually four seasons's worth) are sold, or syndicated, to hundreds of TV markets in the United States and abroad.

- Production costs in television generally fall into two categories: below-the-line and above-the-line.
 - > *Below-the-line* costs, which account for roughly 40 percent of a new program's production budget,
 - > include the technical, or "hardware," side of production: equipment, special effects, cameras and crews, sets and designers, carpenters, electricians, art directors, wardrobe, lighting, and transportation.
 - > More demanding are the *above-the-line*, or "software," costs, which include the creative talent: actors, writers, producers, editors, and directors.
 - > These costs account for about 60 percent of a program's budget, except in the case of successful long-running series (like *Friends* or *ER*), in which salary demands by actors drive up above-the-line costs.

Measuring Television by Ratings and Shares

- **rating:** in TV audience measurement, a statistical estimate expressed as a percentage of households tuned to a program in the local or national market being sampled.

The Nielsen logo is displayed on a white rectangular background. The word "nielsen" is written in a lowercase, serif font. The letter "n" is blue, while the remaining letters "ielsen" are dark grey. Below the text, there is a horizontal line of eight dark grey dots, each centered under a letter: "n", "i", "e", "l", "s", "e", "n", and a final dot under the space between the last two letters.

Measuring Television by Ratings and Shares

- **RATING** - A rating is the percent of households tuned to a particular program from the total available TV households in a designated area.
- In this example there are 500 households tuned to program "A" out of a possible 2,800 (all of the TV households represented in the pie).
- By dividing the larger number (2,800) into the smaller (500) we get a percent; in this case 17.86. So the rating of program "A" is (rounded off) 18.



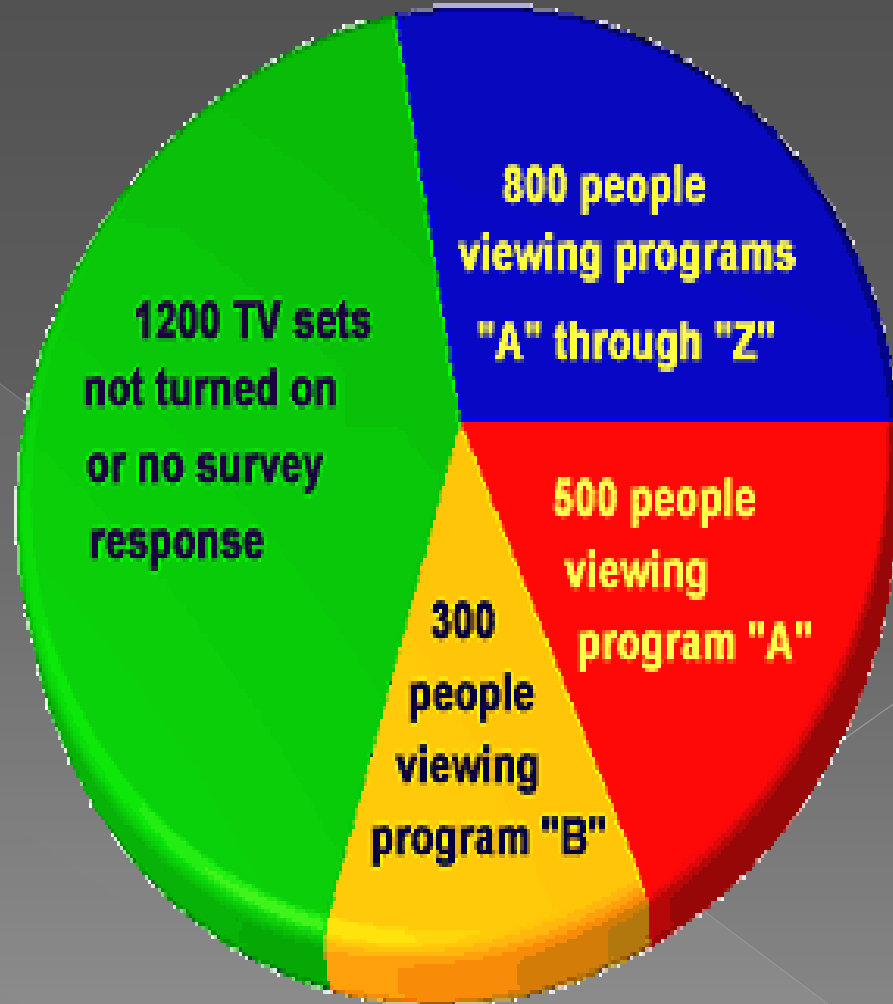
Measuring Television by Ratings and Shares

- **share:** in TV audience measurement, a statistical estimate of the percentage of homes tuned to a certain program, compared with those simply using their sets at the time of a sample.

The Nielsen logo is displayed in a stylized, lowercase serif font. The letter 'n' is highlighted in a vibrant blue, while the remaining letters 'ielsen' are in a dark grey. Below the main text, a series of seven small, dark grey dots are arranged horizontally, each positioned directly beneath one of the letters in the word 'nielsen'.

Measuring Television by Ratings and Shares

- **SHARE** - A share is the percentage of TV households *with sets turned on* that are watching your program. In the case of program "A" you divide 1,600 into 500 and get 31 as the audience share for program "A". The share for program "B" would be 18.75 or 19.
- In the above example 1,600 represents the **HUTS**, or Homes Using Television, out of the total TV households in the designated area. In this case $HUTS = 57\% (1,600 / 2,800)$.



DBS: Cable without Wires

- Offering a new distribution method, direct broadcast satellite (DBS) services present a big challenge to cable—
 - > especially in regions with rugged terrain and isolated homes, where the installation of cable wiring hasn't always been possible or profitable. Instead of wires, DBS transmits its signal directly to small satellite dishes near or on customers' homes.
- By 1994, full-scale DBS service was available. Today, DBS companies like DirecTV and the DISH Network offer consumers most of the channels and tiers of service that cable companies carry

Technology and Third Screens Change Viewing Habits

- new online viewing experiences are often labeled third screens, usually meaning that computer-type screens are the third major way we view content (movies and traditional TV sets are the first and second screens, respectively).

These options mean that we are still watching TV, but at different times, places, and on different kinds of screens.



- The impact of home video has been enormous. More than 90 percent of American homes today are equipped with DVD or DVR players
 - > Video rental, formerly the province of walk-in video stores like Blockbuster, have given way to mail services like Netflix or online services like iTunes.

- **time shifting:** the process whereby television viewers tape shows and watch them later, when it is convenient for them.
 - > **“No old media form ever disappears. They just get reinvented into a new purpose. TV is about to go through a profound reinvention.”**

Convergence: TV and the Internet—the Third Screen

- YouTube is at the center of video consumption online. But it's got some competition.
- While a site like iTunes may charge \$0.99 to \$2.99 per episode for shows like *Mad Men*, other sites like Hulu.com (a partnership among NBC, Fox, and Disney) allow viewers to watch TV shows or movies that are free—but that contain ads.
- In addition, cable TV giants like Comcast and Time Warner (and cell phone giant Verizon) are making programs available as part of their *video-on-demand* (VOD) services through sites like Fancast, TV Everywhere, and Xfinity.

The Public, Television, and Democracy

- As the television industry works to reimagine itself in the new century, it is important to remember that in the 1950s, television carried the antielitist promise that its technology could bypass traditional print literacy and reach all segments of society.
- In such a heterogeneous and diverse nation, the concept of a visual, affordable mass medium, giving citizens entertainment and information that they could all talk about the next day, held great appeal.
- However, since its creation, commercial television has tended to serve the interests of profit more than those of democracy.
- And networks have proved time and again that they are more interested in delivering audiences to advertisers than in providing educational and provocative programming to citizens and viewers.