



# The Columbia History of American Television (Columbia Histories of Modern American Life)

By Gary Edgerton

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## **The Columbia History of American Television (Columbia Histories of Modern American Life) By Gary Edgerton**

Television is a form of media without equal. It has revolutionized the way we learn about and communicate with the world and has reinvented the way we experience ourselves and others. More than just cheap entertainment, TV is an undeniable component of our culture and contains many clues to who we are, what we value, and where we might be headed in the future.

Media historian Gary R. Edgerton follows the technological developments and increasing cultural relevance of TV from its prehistory (before 1947) to the Network Era (1948-1975) and the Cable Era (1976-1994). He begins with the laying of the first telegraph line in 1844, which gave rise to the idea that images and sounds could be transmitted over long distances. He then considers the remodeling of television's look and purpose during World War II; the gender, racial, and ethnic components of its early broadcasts and audiences; its transformation of postwar America; and its function in the political life of the country. He talks of the birth of prime time and cable, the influence of innovators like Sylvester "Pat" Weaver, Roone Arledge, and Ted Turner, as well as television's entrance into the international market, describing the ascent of such programs as *Dallas* and *The Cosby Show*, and the impact these exports have had on transmitting American culture abroad.

Edgerton concludes with a discerning look at our current Digital Era (1995-present) and the new forms of instantaneous communication that continue to change America's social, political, and economic landscape. Richly researched and engaging, Edgerton's history tracks television's growth into a convergent technology, a global industry, a social catalyst, a viable art form, and a complex and dynamic reflection of the American mind and character. It took only ten years for television to penetrate thirty-five million households, and by 1983, the average home kept their set on for more than seven hours a day. *The Columbia History of American Television* illuminates our complex relationship with this singular medium and provides historical and critical knowledge for understanding TV as a technology, an industry, an art form, and an institutional force.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

A useful overview... [that] captures the technological, economic, and cultural sweep of an industry that influenced... what would become the Global Village.

(Bill Ruehlmann *The Virginian-Pilot*)

An extensive, readable... informative, well-written study... Recommended.

(CHOICE)

A tour-de-force narrative of more than six decades of American television and its impact on U.S. society.... An important contribution.

(Christopher H. Sterling *Communication Booknotes Quarterly*)

An excellent addition to any undergraduate library and also a nice addition to public libraries.

(Linda W. Hacker *American Reference Books Annual*)

A marvelous, detailed, and comprehensive narrative... This remarkable book, unquestionably one-of-a-kind, belongs in every reference library.

(Robert Fyne *Film & History*)

Positioned with the monumental works of Erik Barnouw, Asa Briggs, Christopher Sterling and John Kittross, Edgerton contributes a comprehensive study of American television's popular culture.... *The Columbia History of American Television* should be on the shelf of every television historian and popular culture scholar, as well as the non-specialist.

(Donald G. Godfrey *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*)

A seminal work of meticulous scholarship... Welcome and highly recommended.

(James A. Cox *The Midwest Book Review*)

Highly informative... eminently readable... Edgerton tells a compelling history of the medium. His book would work well as a primer for general readers, as well as for scholars (particularly international readers) wanting to gain an understanding of the history, forms, and economics of the U.S. television system as well

as pointers for further research from his meticulous referencing.

(Faye Woods *Journal of American Studies*)

[The book] is meticulous and inspired. Devoted to television, it is richly resourced, eloquently written, and nicely illustrated.

(Craig Allen *American Journalism*)

This book is best seen as an update of Erik Barnouw's widely read and concise history, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*. Moving beyond Barnouw, Edgerton has attempted to craft a unified narrative that simultaneously engages some of the more fine-grained scholarship in the field.... A highly readable account of the development of a complex industry and cultural form.

(Michael Kackman *Journal of American History*)

A monumental and definitive account of American television.

(Jason Jacobs *Media International Australia*)

Review

Gary Edgerton's book has wisely told a story that focuses on single and representative events rather than trying to be encyclopedic. And he pulls it off. This is an accessible and compelling narrative of the complicated forces that went into creating our most enigmatic of mediums.

(Ken Burns, filmmaker)

Concise, complete, readable, and up-to-date, following television from its inception to its role in a global media age and placing it in cultural context. Destined to become a classic in the field.

(Kathy Merlock Jackson, editor of the *Journal of American Culture*)

Gary Edgerton covers an astonishing amount of material, examining with great intelligence and insight the dynamic growth and development of television. His work is all the more noteworthy for the skill in which he covers politics, economics, sociology, technology, aesthetics, and cultural impact in a highly readable and deftly organized manner.

(Brian Rose, professor of communication and media studies, Fordham University)

With a sweeping narrative and a close eye for detail, Gary Edgerton has written a compelling, scholarly history of America's favorite art form, which will surely set the standard in the years to come.

(Ron Simon, curator, television and radio, The Paley Center for Media)

About the Author

Gary R. Edgerton is professor and chair of the communication and theater arts department at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. He has published eight books and more than seventy book chapters and journal articles on a wide assortment of television and media history topics, and is coeditor of the *Journal of Popular Film and Television*. In 2004 he received the American Culture Association Governing Board Award for Outstanding Contributions to American Cultural Studies.

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#### **Delores Breedlove:**

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