

# Television reshaping american culture essay examples

[Media](#), [Television](#)



A generation of Americans called "baby boomers" (born midway of WWII era into the late 1950s) culturally influenced by television. According Henretta, "By the mid-1950s nearly every household in the country had a television"(691) thus, making way for advertising using the new medium creating and shaping American purchasing habits as no other medium before. In fact, "by 1950 Americans owned 7.3 million sets" (Henretta 796). Discourse in this academic investigation shows the decade of the 60s, the influence on the 87 percent of American homes owning at least one television set saw advertising and marketing, the Cold War, as well as music and fashion, and the Viet Nam War culturally change America forever.

America's love affair with the television began before satellite dishes and fiber-optic cable. Long before camcorders and videocassette recorders, and before the dominion of NBC, CBS, and ABC over prime-time programming, "American television was a different kind of creature comfort" (Doherty 1) and television was a different looking creature. Americans joined around "the serious pieces of furniture, mammoth in girth, encased in walnut or mahogany, molded to dominate a living room and displace the upright radio from the family hearth" (Doherty 1).

Andreasen explains how the television contributed to evolution of American culture leading "humankind along a new path" (3). The development of the technology associated with the advent of television influence on the American family and social structures was so rapid and adaptable the changes took place with many Americans finding them change unfathomable. With television becoming "a living room fixture, ascendant not only over radio but motion pictures and, so it seemed, all of American

culture" (Doherty 4) houses sprouted the aerial antennae " like noxious weeds from apartment rooftops and suburban homes while video-born catchphrases spread like viruses through the vocabulary of children" (Doherty 4).

Rapidly, whether in the schoolyard, by the water cooler, or waiting for bus, few conversations between Americans were without the commonality of some item seen on their small screens. By the 1960s, television was, " No longer an exotic new appliance but basic survival gear, television became an artery as vital to the pulse of American life as the refrigerator humming in the kitchen" (Doherty 5). So much was the television a part of the American lifestyle, Doherty likens it to a question of priorities, as simple as if " forced to choose between fresh food and home entertainment, a solid majority of Cold War Americans opted to jettison the ice box for that other box" (5).

The American culture of business no less impacted by television found visionaries even in the early years, like 1954 NBC president Sylvester " Pat" Weaver advising how television importance deemed it " would soon become 'the shining center in the home'" (Doherty 5). Little did Weaver know how the business of television in the 21st century has its own prerogative and supremacy with unrestricted injection " into every nook and cranny of mortal existence" (Doherty 5) in American lifestyle, putting programming serving the diversity of the 300 million plus population of America in valuable and rewarding broadcasts. The visionary Weaver surely saw something of the potential of the financial boon to networks even over half a century ago. Thus, from the onset according to Doherty, " A simple statistic suggests the scale of the invasion: in 1949 television was a luxurious indulgence in one

out of ten American homes; in 1959, television was essential furniture in nine out of ten American homes" (4). The impact of television on the American culture reveals, " As early as 1951, guilt-mongering advertisements warned parents that their children would 'suffer in school and be shunned by their friends" if the family resisted buying a television set" (Doherty 4).

Cold War era American television viewers saw television " not as a lesser order of moving imagery, but as a thrilling new household appliance" (Doherty 3). In fact, looking at the washed out images in monochromatic black and white, flickering, often static riddled and the occasional snowy picture did not hinder the enthusiasm Americans held in their hearts for the medium. " Unjaded as yet to the miracle of light and sound, Cold War Americans looked upon television not as a lesser order of moving imagery, but as a thrilling new household appliance" (Doherty 3).

The most significant of the ways television transformed American culture and American life looks at the family, leisure, friendships, consumer habits, literacy, and even common memories. Consequently, among its most beneficial legacies was " the expansion of freedom of expression and the embrace of human difference must be counted among its most beneficial legacies" and those long years " during the Cold War, through television, America became a more open and tolerant place" (Doherty 2).

America's loss of innocence came in 1964 while watching television saw the assassination of one of its most beloved and youngest U. S. Presidents John F. Kennedy. Television's impact on the philosophical changes in American culture came with the " liberal 'rights revolution'" (Henretta 882) challenging American ideology. New ideas emerged about racial and gender equal rights.

The foundation of the family changed with a new sexual morality and the rise of divorces in the late 1960s and peaking by 1981 with 5.3 per 1000 Americans (USAToday.com 2007).

American home entertainment went from CBS and NBC radio to televisions with an entire new world multiplying the experience of both entertainment and news making. The effect of the simultaneous nature of television as a "new category of experience-at-a-distance would transform American life more radically than any other modern invention except the automobile" (Sicilia 8). The television reflected the working class American with popular shows like "All in the Family", "Good Times", and "Sanford and Son". Music moved from the radio into television with Elvis Presley, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and nearly every chart topping music star during the 1950s and 1960s appearing on the popular "Ed Sullivan Show" (Henretta 882, 905).

Baby boomers grew up with the idealized view of the American family portrayed on the syrupy functional engagement of "Ozzie and Harriet", "I Love Lucy", "The Donna Reed Show", "Father Knows Best", and of course the "Leave it to Beaver" program. With the end of the 1970s, into the second decade of the Viet Nam War, Americans' jaded view of life changed while the 5 o'clock news showed body bags of young Americans killed in a country most had no idea where located. Later, with the U. S. forces pulling out of the Southeast Asian country's capital called Saigon, viewers' watched panicked Vietnamese people scrambling for seats on the last American helicopters. This was the first taste of reality TV, few Americans knew was the trend of the future of television in ways no one could imagine (Doherty

2003).

Dow explains how reality television today taking root as a new genre in 1973, arises from the American television viewer outgrowing the Public Broadcasting Station (PBS). Reality television status in the 21st century as a cultural phenomenon continues tasking networking to come up with ambitious programming. In fact, " reality shows still provide a fat target for anyone seeking symptoms or causes of American idiocy" (xi) and obsession with the unscripted program succeeds " ennobling its scripted counterpart" (xi). Reality TV unfortunately, for some critics looks like it is here to stay and connects to the framing of a large portion of today's American television culture. Others found television particularly troubling early on, but for different reasons like the late Marshal McLuhan.

Sterling explains, " Changing social mores (of at least some Americans) and rising competition from other media have served to lower the bar as to what we can and should be able to see and hear" (434). Similar to the problematic aspects of popular culture icons like professional football, some of the most popular video games, some critics feel the same about television entertainment programming today. At the same time, these same individuals point out the peculiar contemporary bandwagon of the Right, and increasing numbers of Democrats, joining the melee' for attacking television, they blame it for the moral decay of America (Dow 1996).

Conversely, the same critics look at the ceaseless focus blaming and naming television an American social problem remains ludicrous. It is this type of attitude they explains that unavoidably screens the public to the complexities of television programming offering a forum for ideologies, art,

and importantly as a means for public discussion about social change led by social issues (Dow 1996).

There are those believing television now exhibits an apex of development and that there is more to come. " Alas, the final destination of television must remain an open question, but the history of the medium— what it once was and what it once meant—is more readily answered" (Doherty 3). The ability for television to retain its dominant status in the next century it held in the last, looks at the widescreen framing, high definition imagery, and computer hybrid capabilities lends to the status of the 21st century as the greatest age of technology since the Industrial Revolution. An update of Ben Franklin's " the written word remains" now becomes " the television text remains" so that the loving, incessant transmission of television texts remains always the " concern of television itself" (Doherty 260).

In conclusion, as posited in the introduction, the discourse in this academic investigation revealed how the decade of the 60s, showed the influence of 87 percent of American homes owning at least one television set. Today, the American culture looks at a television literally in every room of the house including the kitchen, and even the bathroom. Baby boomers, some of whom remember only the radio as the most reliable technology for news and entertainment, admittedly say life is better with television since it is this generation that continues the tradition leaving its legacy for the generations following.

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