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Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age

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From Ken Burns's documentaries to historical dramas such as *Roots*, from A&E's Biography series to CNN's coverage of such events as the fall of the Berlin Wall, television has become the primary source for historical information for tens of millions of Americans today. Why has television become such a respected authority? What falsehoods enter our collective memory as truths? How is one to know what is real and what is imagined -- or ignored -- by producers, directors, or writers?

Gary Edgerton and Peter Rollins have collected a group of essays that answer these and many other questions. The contributors examine the full spectrum of historical genres, as well as institutions such as the History Channel and production histories of such series as *The Jack Benny Show*, which ran for fifteen years.

The authors explore the tensions between popular history and professional history and the tendency of some academics to declare the past "off limits" to nonscholars. Several of them point to the tendency for television histories to embed current concerns and priorities within the past, as in such popular shows as *Quantum Leap* and *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*. The result is an insightful portrayal of the power television possesses to influence our culture.



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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Brem, president and CEO of two automobile dealerships in Texas, was named one of Avon's Women of Enterprise in 2001. As a young mother, she overcame cancer and a divorce to achieve success in a field dominated by men. Here she argues that women's attributes as well as their shortcomings all conspire to make them adept at entrepreneurship. Brem details the seven unique strengths and weaknesses (or "truths") that she feels are key to women's personal and professional fulfillment, illustrating them with stories of contemporary women in the business world. Unfortunately, these truths are little more than clichés, e.g., women are nurturing and want to help while men want to fix problems. It's too bad that Brem didn't focus more on the details of her own inspirational story and how she made it to the top. Recommended primarily for those public libraries that have a "women in business" collection. Stacey Marien, American Univ., Washington, DC

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Review

"As an example of well-researched, original research, TELEVISION HISTORIES makes an important contribution to the study of the medium." -- *Anthony Slide, Classic Images*

About the Author

GARY R. EDGERTON is Associate Professor and Chairperson of the Communications Department at Goucher College.

Peter C. Rollins is Regents Professor of English and American Film Studies at Oklahoma State University and editor in chief of the scholarly journal, *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* (www.filmandhistory.org).

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