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**VIC3002— Visual Design for Media**  
**Module 9 Lecture Notes**  
**History of Saturday Morning Cartoons**

Your professor grew up in an age when the three original broadcast television networks battled for ratings supremacy, offering a rich line of cartoons and children's programming on Saturday mornings. On a day that my parents didn't work, and wanted to sleep in late, sounds of intergalactic battles and wild cartoon car chases from the living room would guarantee their early rise. No punishment they ever came up with could keep me from my cartoon shows week after week.

This is the history of Saturday morning cartoons—a story of battles for ratings, pressure to curtail screen violence and include educational material, and struggles to stay profitable amid high production costs.

In 1962, all three of the original broadcast television networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) began showing Saturday morning re-runs of popular live-action prime-time shows such as *The Lone Ranger* and *Roy Rogers*. But in 1965, ABC began showing Saturday morning's first animated cartoon, *The Beatles*. The British band had 12 hit singles the previous year, so their cartoon show was guaranteed to be a huge ratings success. It gave the networks a clue to the significant revenue-generating potential of children's programming (particularly animated cartoons) on Saturday mornings.

**1966**

The success of the live-action prime-time ABC series *Batman*, starring Adam West, assured lots of superheros and cartoon violence would be on Saturday mornings in 1966. The networks began their cartoon lineups at 9 AM.

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1966: <http://tvparty.com/sat66.html>

**1967**

In 1967, *Jonny Quest*, a well-written, well-animated and often very violent cartoon show, debuted on CBS. It was highly successful and ran for five years. Other violent shows that year included *Spiderman*, *Fantastic Four*, and *Frankenstein Jr. and the Impossibles*.

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1967: <http://tvparty.com/sat67.html>

**1968**

Saturday morning cartoons were so popular that in 1968, the three networks extended programming two additional hours, by starting at 8 AM and ending at 1 PM. This was the heyday of Saturday morning programming. In addition to lots of superheros, the networks also aired *The Flintstones*, *Bugs Bunny/Road Runner*, and *The Banana Splits*, a variety show blending animated shorts with live-action sketches about a musical band of animal characters. Although expensive to produce, it was the star of NBC's 1968 lineup.

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1968: <http://tvparty.com/sat68.html>

## 1969

Parent and teacher groups such as Action for Children's Television (ACT), complained about excess cartoon violence on Saturday mornings, and pressured networks to offer kinder, gentler shows. *The Jetsons*, *Bugs Bunny* and *The Pink Panther* aired, as well as a new cartoon character, *Scooby-Doo*, that would prove so successful, he would be on the air continuously for the next 20 years!

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1969: <http://tvparty.com/sat69.html>

## 1970

Live-action shows were popular, including *Lancelot Link*, *The Bugaloos*, and *H.R. Pufnstuf*. No superhero cartoons aired in 1970, thanks to pressure from the lobbyists.

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1970: <http://tvparty.com/sat70.html>

## 1971

Giving in to pressures to offer more educational content, the three networks began running live-action shows combining adventure stories with science, history and ecology. CBS's *In the News* ran eight 2½-minute news segments throughout Saturday morning.

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1971: <http://tvparty.com/sat71.html>

## 1972

Continuing with the trend of offering educational programs, ABC began airing *Multiplication Rock*, short animated segments between programs that set the times tables to music. CBS launched the very successful *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*, which would run for 12 years! In each episode of the series, produced by Bill Cosby, Fat Albert and the gang wrestle with a moral dilemma that they must solve before the end of the show.

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1972: <http://tvparty.com/sat72.html>

## 1973

Following the success of *Multiplication Rock*, ABC continued creating similar short, educational cartoons set to music and running between programs. The topics included grammar, history and science. Titled *Schoolhouse Rock*, they ran from 1973 to 1985.

*The CBS Children's Film Festival*, hosted by Kukla, Fran and Ollie, presented hour-long foreign films in the early afternoon.

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1973: <http://tvparty.com/sat73.html>

## 1974

By 1974, cartoons were becoming too expensive to produce, so the networks began airing mostly live-action children's programs such as *Shazam*, *The Harlem Globetrotters*, *The Hudson Brothers' Razzle Dazzle Show*, *Land of the Lost* and *Sigmund and the Sea Monsters*. Networks began to fight back against the lobbyists, hiring psychologists as consultants to write press releases for the cartoons, promoting their educational "value."

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1974: <http://tvparty.com/sat74.html>

## 1975

The networks aired more live-action shows, such as *The Lost Saucer*, *Shazam/Isis Power Hour*, *Far Out Space Nuts* and *Ghost Busters* to save money on production costs.

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1975: <http://tvparty.com/sat75.html>

## 1976

The trend of running live-action shows continued with *The Kroft Supershow*, *Monster Squad* and *Ark II*. The rock band KISS was popular in 1976, so *The Kroft Supershow* featured a similar makeup-wearing rock band called “Kaptain Kool and the Kongs.”

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1976: <http://tvparty.com/sat76.html>

## 1977

*Star Wars* premiered in theaters in 1977, so Saturday morning programming didn’t fail to capitalize on the growing popularity of science fiction by running shows like *Space Academy*, starring Johnathan Harris of *Lost in Space* fame.

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1977: <http://tvparty.com/sat77.html>

## 1978

The science fiction wave continued with such live-action shows as *Jason of Star Command*, featuring *Star Trek*’s Jimmy Doohan. Christopher Reeve’s highly-successful *Superman: The Movie* sparked *Challenge of the SuperFriends*, in which DC Comic heroes Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman pitted themselves against Lex Luthor and the Legion of Doom.

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1978: <http://tvparty.com/sat78.html>

## 1981

The ’80s brought us *Smurfs*, a 90-minute cartoon on NBC about little blue people living in a medieval forest. The series ran for nine years, won an Emmy in 1983 for Outstanding Children’s Entertainment Series, and came to be known as a totally eighties icon.

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1981: <http://tvparty.com/sat81.html>

## 1984

Video games were a burgeoning pop culture phenomenon, so Saturday morning cartoons followed suit, airing series based on popular video games. CBS aired *The Saturday Supercade*, featuring Donkey Kong and Q\*Bert. *Dungeons and Dragons*, based on the popular role-playing game, ran for three years, also on CBS. In 1985, it was cited by The National Coalition on Television Violence as one of the most violent shows on network television due to a story where the major characters plotted to kill the series’ villain.

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1984: <http://tvparty.com/sat84.html>

## 1985

During the Ronald Reagan era, cartoon violence wasn't as big a deal as it was during the more liberal-minded '70s. With the increasing popularity of wrestling, CBS debuted *Hulk Hogan's Rock and Wrestling*.

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1985: <http://tvparty.com/sat85.html>

## 1986

Saturday morning ratings were falling in 1986, and the most memorable cartoons of the year ran on weekday afternoons after school—*The Transformers*, *G.I. Joe*, *Jem* and *My Little Pony*. Saturday morning's king was Pee Wee Herman of *Pee Wee's Playhouse*.

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1986: <http://tvparty.com/sat86.html>

## 1988

Locally-syndicated and cable cartoon shows offered up the kind of violent programming little boys craved, drawing them away from the networks with such titles as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *G.I. Joe*, *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* and *Thundercats*. These cartoons were actually 30-minute commercials promoting toy lines, further distressing ACT and other lobbyists.

Saturday Morning Cartoons, 1988: <http://tvparty.com/sat88.html>

The broadcast networks began selling their Saturday morning time slots to cable networks—NBC to the Discovery Channel and CBS to Nick, Jr.—because they couldn't compete with the kinds of cartoons aired on cable, so 1988 became the beginning of the end of Saturday morning cartoons on the broadcast networks.

Today, syndicated networks such as The CW Network and independent stations like My33 air cartoons weekend mornings and weekday afternoons featuring superheros, cartoons inspired by Japanese anime, and cartoons based on the latest successful movie. The Cartoon Network runs cartoons 24 hours a day, while other children's oriented cable channels air generous helpings of cartoons throughout the week.

Sometimes, I still get up early on Saturday mornings, make a bowl of cereal, turn on CW South Florida and watch cartoons. Surprisingly, the animation style and story lines have gotten better over the years, and old favorites like Scooby-Doo and Superman are still around, albeit in more modern and stylized forms. The animated characters bring me back to a simpler time, before all the stresses of adulthood, when my main concern was getting up early on Saturday morning to watch the latest episode of *Hong Kong Phooey*.

But the cartoon shows inspired my love of drawing, and I attribute my eventual career decision to those galaxy-hopping, ray gun-firing, wise-cracking, adventure-seeking two-dimensional anthropomorphized characters that made me look forward to Saturday mornings all week long.