1980s: A transformative decade of change, says CNN
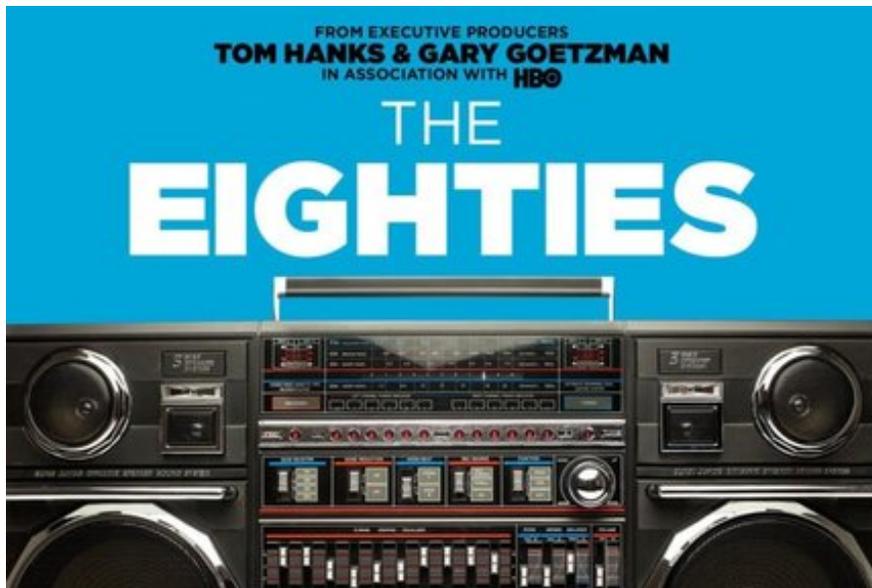
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By Kenneth Wells

As CNN airs the television special, "The Eighties," on Thursdays, Director Tom Hanks resurrectsnostalgia of '80s babies all around the world.

During the early portions of **"The Eighties,"** cable television appeared in millions of homes across the nation. Under the guidance of billionaire Ted Turner, Turner Network was established creating numerous networks such as CNN, TNT, and TBS.

Van Dora Williams, a Hampton University associate professor, believes CNN was a true groundbreaker in the cable industry: "With the introduction of CNN came the introduction of 24-hour news," she said. "CNN showed different coverage in comparison of the three main networks."

Within the first few years, CNN made groundbreaking achievements before establishment networks ABC, CBS, and NBC. On March 30, 1981, then-President Ronald Reagan was shot outside of the Washington Hilton Hotel. Press Secretary James Brady was critically wounded in the shooting and taken to a nearby hospital. Some news networks were quick to declare Brady dead, but not the upstart cable network. CNN anchorman **Bernard Shaw** said that the sources that gave the other news were "the same as ours."

Like CNN, other news organizations have made an impact in the news world. The creation of USA Today made nationwide news as Gannett and founder Al Neuharth launched the newspaper on Sept. 15, 1982. By 1984, daily editions of **USA Today** were the second-leading newspaper behind the New York Times, circulating 1.4 million issues daily.

USA Today's breakout issue was in 1988 advertising Super Bowl XXII. The issue covered over 44 pages and sold over 2.4 million issues nationwide. Currently, USA Today is stationed in Tysons Corner, Virginia along with its parent company Gannett.

Just as news dominated cable television, so have television programs. Among

the big three networks, NBC made some of the largest splashes on television as David Letterman made his debut in 1982 hosting "Late Night" that followed Johnny Carson's the "Tonight Show."

Another show that took America by storm was "The Cosby Show." The sitcom, which was directed by Bill Cosby, ran for eight seasons running for an average of 25 episodes each year. In the next several years, other shows such as "The Golden Girls," "Cheers" and other sitcoms rose to primetime prominence.

The rise of movies was also a notable feat during 1980s as several titles such as "E.T.: The Extraterrestrial" won four Oscars and a Golden Globe in different categories. "The '80s was known as the Sci-Fi age to many people," said Kenneth Wells of Northern Virginia, the father of this writer. "The Terminator," featuring Arnold Schwarzenegger, was a high-grossing movie that gained $34 million from box-office sales.

One of the most famous directors of '80s that made early success in his movies was Spike Lee. In 1983, Lee produced his first movie "Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads" as his senior thesis in college. Lee would produce different works such as "School Daze" (1988) and **"Do the Right Thing** (1989). "Lee was only getting started," said Wells. "Looking at his early movies showed that he bound for great things."

Music was on a rise in the '80s as the introduction of MTV was exposed to cable television. On Aug. 1, 1981, Music Television or MTV launched on cable and became one of the first 24-hour music stations. Montess Wells, schoolteacher and mother of the writer, remembers MTV as "great exposure" for young artists, she said. Some musicians and groups Montess remembers are Michael Jackson, Public Enemy, and **Afrika Bambaataa** as early favorites of MTV.

The 1980s was known as an expansion for cable television across the United States. From the creation of CNN to the revival of primetime sitcoms, the 1980s will be forever remembered as a decade of change.

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