

# The PTC Presents THE 2001-2002 TOP 10 BEST AND WORST SHOWS ON NETWORK TV

## TOP 10 BEST

### 1) *Doc* (Pax/ranked #2 last season)



*Doc* is a fish-out-of-water story about a country doctor who moves to New York City and gets a job at a busy HMO. Dr. Clint Cassidy's homespun values and friendly disposition provide a contrast to the jaded and impersonal city environment, but he refuses to let the harsh world in which he lives harden him, or make him forget the values of kindness and compassion instilled in him as a child. Instead, he spreads those life lessons to all with whom he comes in contact, making *Doc* an uplifting and inspirational program.

Episodes abound with themes of patriotism, brotherly love, and hope. On Veteran's Day, *Doc* paid tribute to the heroes of 9-11 and to America's veterans with a special episode entitled "Some Gave All." On Mother's Day, the series paid tribute to mothers everywhere with a special, life-affirming episode.

*Doc* has been recognized for its pro-faith themes, earning Movieguide's "Faith and Freedom" award for consistently teaching Biblical principles.

### 2) *Touched By an Angel* (CBS/ranked #1 last season)



*Touched By an Angel's* overarching themes of faith and God's love for all people continue to be the cornerstones of this wonderful family series about angels who have come to earth to help mortals.

For seven seasons, *Touched by an Angel* has dealt with complex family and social issues with grace, dignity, and a strong moral sense. Although episodes deal with topics ranging from alcoholism to school violence to the dangers of teen rave parties, each is dealt with responsibly, and every episode concludes with a message of hope and the promise of God's unceasing love and forgiveness. Other issues addressed this season include foreign adoption, caring for elderly parents, the life-saving benefits of organ donation, and the aftermath of 9-11.

### 3) *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch* (WB/ranked #4 last season)



Sabrina is a wholesome, inoffensive, and entertaining half-hour series centering on a cheerful teenaged girl who just happens to have been born a witch. Unlike *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and other dark teen-targeted series in which normal, mortal teenagers become involved with witchcraft and the occult, Sabrina's innocent treatment of magic is reminiscent of *Bewitched*, *Mary Poppins*, or even *My Favorite Martian*.

Episodes rarely (if ever) contain any material that parents might find objectionable and generally conclude with a lesson or moral that reinforces positive values such as honesty, responsibility, the value of education, and the importance of family.

### 4) *7th Heaven* (WB/ranked #3 last season)



*7th Heaven* continues to be the WB's highest-rated program, even after six seasons. This drama, which focuses on life in the nine-member Camden household, provides a refreshing look at a functional, traditional American family. The Rev. Eric Camden and his wife, Annie, have created an atmosphere conducive to honesty, which proves especially helpful as their seven children, who range from college age to toddlers, are confronted with difficult issues and circumstances. While addressing topics such as premarital sex and peer pressure, these parents are eager to

provide wise counsel along with love and understanding.

One particularly moving episode this season paid tribute to a real American hero, Staff Sgt. Dwight J. Morgan, who died in the war on terror. Each member of the Camden family honored Sgt. Morgan's memory by serving others: Lucy and Mary laid flowers on forgotten graves, Eric gave the shoes off his feet to a homeless man, and Simon brought breakfast to a Marine recruiter.

### 5) *Baby Bob* (CBS/first season)



In spite of its silly premise -- the infant Bob shocks his parents by speaking like a middle-aged man -- *Baby Bob* is a warm, inoffensive family show that parents can feel comfortable letting their children watch. Episodes are devoid of foul language and violence, and only once have contained mild sexual innuendo. In addition, episodes frequently conclude with a moral that is as relevant for adult viewers as it is for children.

## 6) *Smallville* (WB/first season)



*Smallville* provides a twist on the traditional teen coming-of-age drama. In this series, the teenager is the young Superman, who fell to earth during a meteor shower and is endowed with superhuman powers.

*Smallville* presents a positive picture of family life. Clark Kent's loving adoptive parents, Jonathan and Martha, provide him with wise counsel and guidance, and instill in him the morals and values that guide him as a hero. By contrast, Clark's friend, Lex

Luthor, the man who will eventually become his nemesis, has been raised by the emotionally distant, even cruel, Lionel Luthor, who teaches his son only to be selfish and avaricious.

Although episodes have contained mild sexual innuendo and comic-book-style violence, the overall themes of good triumphant over evil, the importance of helping others, and the moral imperative for those who are strong to aid the weak is unique in today's television landscape.

## 7) *Reba* (WB/first season)



Country superstar Reba McEntire stars in this sitcom about an all-American dysfunctional family. The Hart family was shaken to the core when Reba's husband Brock left her after 20 years of marriage to marry Barbara Jean, his pregnant girlfriend. The family was further shaken when Reba's 17-year-old daughter, Cheyenne, became pregnant and married her dimwitted high school boyfriend, Van. Reba tries to remain in control of her situation while raising her younger son and daughter and giving advice to the newlyweds, who also live with her.

Despite the themes of adultery and teen pregnancy that make this series inappropriate for younger viewers, *Reba* does contain some positive messages. Reba is a strong, responsible mother, providing Cheyenne and Van with advice on marriage and parenting. Although no longer living with his children, Brock is still very much involved with them, and treats his ex-wife with love, care, and respect.

## 8) *The Ponderosa* (Pax/first season)



*The Ponderosa* is a prequel to the classic western series *Bonanza*, which aired on NBC from 1959 to 1973, and follows the early years of the Cartwright family on their ranch, the Ponderosa, in 1840s Nevada. Ben Cartwright heads the family as the widowed father of three boys: Hoss, Adam, and a pre-teen Little Joe. Ben is an upstanding citizen who tries to give his sons a solid moral foundation.

### **9) *George Lopez* (ABC/first season)**



This series centers on *George Lopez*, a manager at a Los Angeles airplane parts factory. George and his wife, Angie, are loving parents to their two children, Carmen and Max.

*George Lopez* stands out for its positive depiction of a minority family, its strong family values, and the important lessons imparted in each episode. Although episodes have contained some mild sexual innuendo and mild foul language, the overriding themes are overwhelmingly positive.

### **10) *Bernie Mac* (Fox/first season)**

Inspired by series star Bernie Mac's life, *The Bernie Mac Show* is a half-hour sitcom about a man with unique views on parenting. Bernie Mac and his wife, Wanda, have been so absorbed by their successful careers as a stand-up comedian and a corporate executive that they've never thought seriously about having children. When Bernie has to take care of his sister's kids, his world turns upside down. Bernie believes in "tough love" parenting, but when he tries to put his ideas into practice, the children make him realize there are better options.

*The Bernie Mac Show* is different from many Fox shows in that it actually portrays strong family values. Although the series is occasionally marred by mild profanities and sexual innuendo, the overriding themes stress the importance of family.

# TOP 10 WORST

## 1) *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (UPN/ranked #3 last season)



*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* chronicles the adventures of Buffy Summers, the latest in a long line of women endowed with exceptional strength and agility in order to fight vampires and demons.

*Buffy* ranks number one on the worst list because of its graphic violence and sex, often mixing the two with an underlying occultist element. In one episode near the end of the season, Willow murdered the man who shot and killed her lover, Tara.

Willow, furious at the loss of her companion, bound the man to a tree, cast a spell that skinned him alive, and then incinerated him in a burst of flame.

*Buffy's* sexual content has also become more explicit. Buffy and Spike (a vampire) were shown having sex numerous times this season. In one episode, their lovemaking was so violent that the house they were in literally fell down around them. In the musical episode, oral sex was strongly suggested between Tara and Willow.

Adding insult to injury, *Buffy* airs during the family hour to a core audience of teenaged fans.

## 2) *Off Centre* (WB/first season)



From the creators of the teen sex comedy *American Pie* comes *Off Centre*, a sex-charged sitcom featuring roommates Euan and Mike. Euan is a British charmer with a reputation for sleeping with women, then casting them aside. Mike is more down-to-earth and has a steady girlfriend.

Episodes have contained plot lines centering on three-way sex and pornography, vulgar anatomical references (one episode, in which Euan wonders if he should be circumcised, employed the

word “penis” ten times, in addition to various euphemisms for the body part), and frank sexual discussions.

## 3) *Will & Grace* (NBC/not ranked last season)



This comedy centers on the close friendship between Will Truman, a gay lawyer, and Grace Adler, a straight interior designer.

Given the series' basic premise, sexual content, both homo- and hetero-, is common. This season, *Will & Grace* continued its track record of pushing the envelope for sexual content on broadcast TV to the limits. Episodes this season included references to masturbation (Grace's boyfriend tells her, “I even

looked through your underwear drawer. Found where you hide my, uh, competition”); genitalia (When Grace’s boyfriend and Will have drinks at a gay bar, a waiter asks them, “Who ordered the Penis Colossus?”); and oral sex (Jack ties an apron featuring the phrase “Kiss the Cook” around his waist so that the words are directly in front of his groin. When Grace reads aloud what’s printed on the apron, Jack says, “What? Cook? That’s an ‘o’? That doesn’t make any sense. Who goes on a date hoping someone will kiss their cook?”).

#### **4) *Friends* (NBC/ranked #6 last season)**



*Friends* focuses on six friends -- three men, three women -- in their thirties as they stumble through relationships and marriage in Manhattan. *Friends* continues to be one of the raciest sitcoms in prime time.

Much of the show’s humor stems from sexual references or sexual situations. Episodes contain frequent references to the characters’ promiscuous lifestyles, and frequently refer to pornography and kinky sexual practices. In one episode from early this season, Monica hired a stripper for her husband, Chandler, and later discovered that the stripper was a prostitute. In another, Monica rented pornography for Chandler as a Valentine’s Day present. Unmarried Rachel had a baby with Ross, the result of a one-night stand. In addition, *Friends* frequently features foul language, making this series entirely inappropriate for its early time slot.

#### **5) *WWE Smackdown!* (UPN/ranked #2 last season)**

As documented in the PTC’s 2001 study, *The Seamy Squared Circle: Pro Wrestling: Less Offensive, But Still Offensive*, the WWE has toned down some of the more offensive elements of *Smackdown!* since the program’s debut in 1999. But that doesn’t mean that this family-hour show is now appropriate for its time slot.

Sexual content on *Smackdown!* this season has included winking references to oral sex and prostitution as well as sexual innuendo and vulgar anatomical references. In and out of the ring, an aggressive tone runs through all the matches and storylines. Episodes of *Smackdown!* contain frequent non-wrestling violence and, occasionally, blood, though such material has been less graphic than in seasons past. Non-wrestling violence currently consists primarily of the use of foreign objects, such as folding metal chairs and folding tables.

Foul language is frequent on *Smackdown!* The most frequently used words are “hell” and “damn.” Stronger words are usually bleeped out, but on one broadcast, the word “ass” was used 43 times, unedited.

## 6) Big Brother II (CBS/ranked #10 last season)



Summer 2001 brought the return of CBS's voyeuristic reality show, Big Brother. Although the first incarnation of Big Brother included frequent foul language and sex talk, Big Brother 2 raised the bar for vulgarity on this reality series. The contestants liberally used words like "ass," "bitch," and were constantly bleeped saying "s--t" and "f--k." Sexual activity was commonplace in the house, too. The contestants have participated in topless hot-tubbing, eaten strawberries and whipped cream off of each others' bodies, taken co-ed showers,

and have even been shown having sex under the covers.

The most notorious incident from last season involved two drunken contestants, Krista and Justin. Justin, who was later found to have a police record for assault, held a butcher knife to Krista's throat and asked her, "Seriously, would you get mad if I killed you?"

## 7) C.S.I. (CBS/not ranked last year)

Las Vegas crime scene investigators lead the charge on each episode of C.S.I., using state-of-the-art science and technology as well as good-old-fashioned detective work, to determine the cause of death and the identity of the killer.

As with any show about violent crime, episodes of C.S.I. contain graphic depictions of death: decaying bodies, grisly crime scenes, and violent murders. C.S.I. earned its place on this list for dealing graphically with themes of incest and sadomasochism – even though reruns of this program have been shown during the family hour. In one episode, investigators walk in on a man and woman during sex; the viewer later learns that the couple are brother and sister.

In another episode, a dead woman is shown lying on the coroner's slab. The camera zooms in on her exposed breast, focusing on her nipple. In the course of investigating the murder, detectives were sent to a sadomasochistic sex club, where a woman was shown beating a man's naked buttocks.

## 8) Temptation Island II (Fox/not ranked last season)



*Temptation Island II* is a reality show in which unmarried (but committed) couples are sent to an exotic locale to test the strength of their relationship. Once they arrive, they are separated from their loved ones and introduced to attractive singles who try to seduce them away from their partners. Temptation Island boasts more than a repugnant premise, which promotes a promiscuous lifestyle while devaluing true love and commitment. Episodes of Temptation Island II included two male participants receiving lap dances from female temptresses; male

and female participants cavorting naked in the pool and on the beach (the nudity was barely obscured for broadcast); and implied sex.

### 9) **That '70s Show (Fox/ranked #5 last season)**



Set in a small Wisconsin town during the 1970s, *That '70s Show* follows a group of teens as they struggle with life's pressures, such as parents, sex, and drugs. The characters include Eric, an average kid from a blue collar family, and his friends Hyde, the political radical; Donna, Eric's girl-next-door love interest; the handsome but dimwitted Kelso; the pretty and snobbish Jackie; and Fez, a sexually frustrated foreign exchange student.

*That '70s Show* earns a spot on our "worst" list this year for its casual and irresponsible treatment of teen sex and drug use, which are depicted as risk and consequence-free. In one episode Hyde invites his high school coach to smoke pot with him. Another episode featured Kelso making regular visits to a sperm bank to earn money.

### 10) **Boston Public (Fox/ranked #1 last season)**



*Boston Public's* descent from first to tenth place on the "worst" list is a testament to how much the show has toned down.

*Boston Public*, which centers on the students and faculty of an inner city high school, caught our attention last year because of over-the-top story lines centering on student-teacher relationships. Even early in the 2001-2002 season, the show continued to exhibit the same level of raunchy sexual content and foul language.

In the second half of the year, however, *Boston Public* changed tone dramatically. The series began to deal with issues such as eating disorders, the use of performance-enhancing drugs, drunk driving, sociolinguistics, and street violence with greater restraint, sensitivity, and responsibility. Some sexual innuendo, occasional violence, and foul language still are present in the show, but are not as common as they were earlier in the season.