

# MTV launches

*History.com Editors*

6–8 minutes

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On August 1, 1981, MTV: Music Television goes on the air for the first time ever, with the words (spoken by one of MTV's creators, John Lack): "Ladies and gentlemen, rock and roll." The Buggles' "Video Killed the Radio Star" was the first music video to air on the new cable television channel, which initially was available only to households in parts of [New Jersey](#). MTV went on to revolutionize the music industry and become an influential source of pop culture and entertainment in the United States and other parts of the world, including Europe, Asia and Latin America.

In MTV's early days, its programming consisted of basic music videos that were introduced by VJs (video jockeys) and provided for free by record companies. As the record industry recognized MTV's value as a promotional vehicle, money was invested in making creative, cutting-edge videos. Some directors, including Spike Jonze (*Being John Malkovich*, *Three Kings*) and Michel Gondry (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*), worked on music videos before segueing into feature films. In the 1980s, MTV was instrumental in promoting the careers of performers such as Madonna, Michael Jackson, Prince and Duran Duran, whose videos played in heavy rotation.

By the late 1980s, MTV started airing non-video programming,

geared toward teenagers and young adults. Its popular reality series *The Real World* launched in 1992 and was followed by such highly rated shows as *The Osbournes*, *Newlyweds: Nick and Jessica*, *Laguna Beach*, *My Super Sweet 16* and *The Hills*. MTV also debuted animated series including *Beavis and Butthead* and *Celebrity Deathmatch*, as well as documentaries, news, game shows and public service campaigns on topics ranging from voting rights to safe sex. MTV developed a reputation for pushing cultural boundaries and taste; the airing of Madonna's 1989 "Like a Prayer" video is just one famous example. In 1984, the channel launched the MTV Music Video Awards, which were followed in 1992 by the MTV Movie Awards.

**READ MORE:** [10 of Madonna's Most Controversial Moments](#)

Simmering racial tensions and economic frustrations boil over in New York City on the night of August 1, 1943, culminating in what is now known as the Harlem Riot of 1943. During an altercation in the lobby of the Braddock Hotel, a white police officer shoots a Black soldier, [...read more](#)

On August 1, 1943, 177 B-24 bombers take off from an Allied base in Libya, bound for the oil-producing city Ploiești, Romania, nicknamed "Hitler's gas station." The daring raid, known as Operation Tidal Wave, resulted in five men being awarded the Medal of Honor—three of them [...read more](#)

Anne Frank, the young Jewish girl hiding out in Nazi-occupied Holland whose diary came to serve as a symbol of the Holocaust, writes her final entry three days before she and her family are arrested and placed in concentration camps. Frank, 15 at the time, received the diary on [...read more](#)

As more than 5,000 athletes from 51 countries march into a

stadium packed with 100,000 onlookers, Adolf Hitler makes his only public statement of the Berlin Olympics at its opening ceremony on this day in 1936: “I proclaim the Games of Berlin, celebrating the eleventh Olympiad of [...read more](#)

On August 1, 1996, “A Game of Thrones,” an epic fantasy novel by George R.R. Martin, is released. The book was the first in Martin’s “A Song of Ice and Fire” series, about feuding medieval noble families on an imaginary continent called Westeros.

Although not initially a [...read more](#)

On August 1, 1943, a Japanese destroyer rams an American PT (patrol torpedo) boat, No. 109, slicing it in two. The destruction is so massive other American PT boats in the area assume the crew is dead. Two crewmen were, in fact, killed, but 11 survived, including Lt. John F. [...read more](#)

Explorer Christopher Columbus sets foot on the American mainland for the first time, at the Paria Peninsula in present-day Venezuela. Thinking it an island, he christened it Isla Santa and claimed it for Spain. Columbus was born in Genoa, Italy, in 1451. Little is known of his [...read more](#)

During World War II, an advance Soviet armored column under General Konstantin Rokossovski reaches the Vistula River along the eastern suburb of Warsaw, prompting Poles in the city to launch a major uprising against the Nazi occupation. The revolt was spearheaded by Polish [...read more](#)

Four days after Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, Germany and Russia declare war against each other, France orders a general mobilization, and the first German army units cross into Luxembourg in preparation for the German invasion of France. During the next three days, [...read more](#)

On August 1, 1961, amusement park lovers “head for the thrills”

as Six Flags Over Texas, the first park in the Six Flags chain, has its soft opening. 5 days later, on August 5, the park had its grand opening. Located on 212 acres in Arlington, Texas, the park was the first to [...read more](#)

On August 1, 1996, sprinter Michael Johnson breaks the world record in the 200 meters to win gold at the Summer Olympics in Atlanta. Three days earlier, Johnson had also won the 400 meters, making him the first man in history to win both events at the Olympics. Four years earlier [...read more](#)

On August 1, 1972, future President George Walker Bush, son of former president George Herbert Walker Bush, is suspended from flying with the Texas Air National Guard for missing an annual medical examination. Bush's military-service record became a source of controversy during [...read more](#)

Charles Whitman takes a stockpile of guns and ammunition to the observatory platform atop a 300-foot tower at the University of Texas and proceeds to shoot 46 people, killing 14 people and wounding 32. Whitman, who had killed both his wife and mother the night before, was [...read more](#)

The United States, the Soviet Union, Canada and every European nation (except Albania) sign the Helsinki Final Act on the last day of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The act was intended to revive the sagging spirit of detente between the Soviet Union [...read more](#)

Union General Ulysses S. Grant appoints General Philip Sheridan commander of the Army of the Shenandoah. Within a few months, Sheridan drove a Confederate force from the Shenandoah Valley and destroyed nearly all possible sources of Rebel supplies, helping to seal the fate of the [...read more](#)

