

This Day in History... September 8, 1966

Star Trek Premieres

On September 8, 1966, the first episode of *Star Trek* premiered on television.

In the 1950s and 60s, Gene Roddenberry worked on a number of successful television shows, including several series about the Old West. A long-time fan of science fiction, he began to think about the idea of combining these two interests.

On March 11, 1964, Roddenberry created the first draft of a science fiction television show about a space crew in the 23rd century that explored the Milky Way. It combined the action of a Western with the adventure of space. He called it a "wagon train to the stars," which nearly became the name of the show.

Inspired by the *Horatio Hornblower* novels and *Gulliver's Travels*, Roddenberry envisioned *Star Trek* as more than just science fiction. He believed it was an example of what humanity could become if it learned from its past mistakes and put an end to violence.

Roddenberry presented his new idea to Herb Solow of Desilu Productions in April 1964. Solow thought it was a unique idea and signed the show up for a three-year contract. Roddenberry's idea was developed and changed extensively in the coming months. They filmed the first pilot, "The Cage," later that year.

However, the executives at NBC were unhappy with the pilot, calling it "too cerebral." But they were impressed with the idea and offered to allow for a second pilot to be created. The only character to remain from the original pilot was Spock. The new pilot was called "Where No Man Has Gone Before" and introduced Captain Kirk as well as a host of now-famous characters.

The show was nearly cancelled before it aired in February 1966. Desilu Productions had gone from making just one half-hour show (*The Lucy Show*), to producing two expensive hour-long shows (*Star Trek* and *Mission: Impossible*). However, Solow personally convinced owner Lucille Ball that both shows were worth the risk and should continue production.

The first episode of *Star Trek*, "The Man Trap," premiered on September 8, 1966. Initial reviews were mixed, with some critics praising the show and others claiming it wouldn't work. However, it premiered against mostly reruns and managed to easily win its time slot. The next week it dropped to number two and much lower in the coming weeks. The show proved popular with younger audiences, though, and continued to film new episodes.

Star Trek was ahead of its time. In the midst of the Civil Rights Movement and tensions with communist nations, the multi-racial cast included African Americans, Asians, and Soviets – which was unheard of at the time. Though set in space and on alien planets, the storylines directly reflected events of the time – war and peace, imperialism, class warfare, and human rights. Quickly, the cast of unknown actors rocketed to cult stardom in what became one of the most popular TV shows of all time.

With "Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before," the crew of the starship *Enterprise* traveled the galaxy, bringing the future into our living rooms. These adventures included encounters with aliens, discoveries of new planets and the use of technologies far beyond what anyone thought was possible at the time. Some technology, such as cell phones and personal computers, eventually became reality. Transporters, phaser guns, and warp drives also became common in other science fiction TV shows and movies.

Though the original *Star Trek* lasted just three seasons (a total of 79 episodes), it found renewed popularity when it went into reruns in 1969. In 1979, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* made its successful debut. That success has sparked more than ten additional series, more than a dozen movies, comics, games, books, and more. To date, there have been more than 850 episodes of *Star Trek* between the different TV shows.



Star Trek stamp from the Celebrate the Century Series



US stamps issued in 2016 to mark the 50th anniversary of *Star Trek*.

games, books, and more.



One studio representative said, "If it were not for Lucy, there would be no *Star Trek* today."



When Nichelle Nichols, who played Uhura, considered leaving the show, Martin Luther King Jr. convinced her to stay.

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