

Top 100 Classic Movies According to TV

By Randy Bechtel

(This report is based on data collected throughout 2018 during the first year of an ongoing study. Email rbechtel@rkbechtel.com to contact its author.)

What is a classic movie? Dictionaries agree that a classic is a work judged over time to be a superior example of its kind. However, how this definition is applied to motion pictures depends on the eye of the beholder. One person's "Rear Window" is another's "RoboCop."

If we look to literature for an objective metric, a classic is an older work "still in print," that is, a work available for purchase as a new book. The early decades of cinema did see a parallel in the profitable rereleases of box office hits. However, in the 1950's, television presentations of films began to supplant theater rereleases. Television's growing demand for content soon led to presentations of forgotten A-movie box office flops such as "Citizen Kane" (1941) and "It's a Wonderful Life" (1946). The demand for content grew exponentially with cable television and today that demand ensures practically any movie that can be shown will be shown. A little patience and one can watch every film that stars Huntz Hall.

To identify movie classics quantitatively, we must rely on a fundamental principle of the motion picture industry: That which is watched is shown; that which is shown is watched. When applied to new film releases, this means the number of screens devoted to a film after its opening weekend will be adjusted according to the film's box office. A new release can only be a box office hit if it is screened more than most of its competition.

When applied to older films, the principle means a classic film is one televised significantly more than most older films. To be a classic, a film must continually be seen and appreciated more than other films by those who have never seen the film before. When televised less, a film is discovered by fewer people, which lessens demand for the film, which results in even fewer presentations.

Of course, older films are also streamed on the Internet or viewed “on demand.” Although comprehensive data for this is unavailable, sources for these films are largely the same networks surveyed for this study. It follows that the frequency with which a network presents a film reflects its streaming and on-demand popularity.

What, then, do we mean by “older films?” This study defines older films as those released from 1927 (when sound was introduced) through 1989. A generation in time, 29 to 30 years, seems the appropriate minimum period for a film to be considered older.

Surveyed for this study were pre-1990 films televised nationally by Turner Classic Movies (TCM), American Movie Classics (AMC), IFC, FX Movie Channel (FXM), Paramount, Syfy, This TV, Movies! TV Network, and the multiple channels of Home Box Office (HBO), Showtime, Cinemax, Starz and The Movie Channel (TMC). In all, our data includes 4,779 movies that accounted for 24,196 presentations during 2018. (A list of these films and their respective presentations is available at <http://www.hollywoodlexicon.com/classics2018.pdf>.)

Not all networks which present movies were included in our survey. However, those excluded present movies sporadically and pre-1990 releases sparingly. At best their presentations might alter the rankings within our top 100 list, but not the list itself.

We begin below by listing films whose numbers of presentations during 2018 (noted in parentheses) placed them in the top three among films released the same year. Also included for comparison are each year’s top box office film (designated by “\$”) and the film that would win the Academy Award for best picture (designated by “O”). More often than not, today’s classics are not yesteryear’s box office and critical hits.

<p><u>1989</u> Number of Films: 96 Total Presentations: 1,602 Average: 16.7</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Born on the Fourth of July (125) 2. Back to the Future Part II (91) 3. Road House (82) <p>\$: Batman (11) O: Driving Miss Daisy (30)</p>	<p><u>1988</u> Number of Films: 102 Total Presentations: 1,189 Average: 11.7</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coming to America (150) 2. Scrooged (120) 3. Die Hard (68) <p>\$: Rain Man (63) O: Rain Man (63)</p>	<p><u>1987</u> Number of Films: 84 Total Presentations: 907 Average: 10.8</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Beverly Hills Cop II (104) 2. Predator (68) 3. Planes, Trains and Automobiles (67) <p>\$: Three Men and a Baby (0) O: The Last Emperor (0)</p>
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<p><u>1986</u> Number of Films: 77 Total Presentations: 768 Average: 10.0</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Platoon (76) 2. Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home (67) 3. Aliens (56) <p>\$: Top Gun (55) O: Platoon (76)</p>	<p><u>1985</u> Number of Films: 75 Total Presentations: 794 Average: 10.6</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Back to the Future (123) 2. Weird Science (48) 3. Fletch (47) <p>\$: Back to the Future (123) O: Out of Africa (0)</p>	<p><u>1984</u> Number of Films: 76 Total Presentations: 881 Average: 11.6</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Footloose (66) 2. Star Trek III: The Search for Spock (65) 3. Tightrope (60) <p>\$: Beverly Hills Cop (7) O: Amadeus (0)</p>
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<p><u>1983</u> Number of Films: 60 Total Presentations: 589 Average: 9.8</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Flashdance (62) 2. Psycho II (52) 3. Christine (50) <p>\$: Return of the Jedi (0) O: Terms of Endearment (35)</p>	<p><u>1982</u> Number of Films: 56 Total Presentations: 998 Average: 17.8</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial (99) 2. Conan the Barbarian (83) 3. John Carpenter's The Thing (82) <p>\$: E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial (99) O: Chariots of Fire (0)</p>	<p><u>1981</u> Number of Films: 50 Total Presentations: 448 Average: 9.0</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nighthawks (42) 2. Friday the 13TH Part 2 (36) 3. An American Werewolf in London (34) <p>\$: Raiders of the Lost Ark (14) O: Ghandi (0)</p>
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<p><u>1980</u> Number of Films: 50 Total Presentations: 629 Average: 12.6</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Blues Brothers (82) 2. Nine to Five (65) 3. Raging Bull (47) American Gigolo (47) <p>\$: The Empire Strikes Back (0) O: Ordinary People (8)</p>	<p><u>1979</u> Number of Films: 55 Total Presentations: 589 Average: 10.7</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Star Trek: The Motion Picture (64) 2. The Electric Horseman (51) 3. The Warriors (50) <p>\$: Kramer vs. Kramer (2) O: Kramer vs. Kramer (2)</p>	<p><u>1978</u> Number of Films: 53 Total Presentations: 580 Average: 10.9</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grease (109) 2. The Deer Hunter (64) 3. National Lampoon's Animal House (43) <p>\$: Grease (109) O: The Deer Hunter (64)</p>
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<p><u>1977</u> Number of Films: 48 Total Presentations: 313 Average: 6.5</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Spy Who Loved Me (30) 2. Annie Hall (26) 3. Slap Shot (24) <p>\$: Star Wars (0) O: Annie Hall (26)</p>	<p><u>1976</u> Number of Films: 54 Total Presentations: 456 Average: 8.4</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rocky (54) 2. The Omen (33) 3. The Return of a Man Named Horse (28) <p>\$: Rocky (54) O: Rocky (54)</p>	<p><u>1975</u> Number of Films: 57 Total Presentations: 413 Average: 7.2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Eiger Sanction (58) 2. Jaws (44) 3. Rooster Cogburn (36) <p>\$: Jaws (44) O: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's</p>
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<p><u>1974</u> Number of Films: 48 Total Presentations: 234 Average: 4.9</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Man with the Golden Gun (23) 2. Young Frankenstein (23) 3. Death Wish (17) <p>\$: Blazing Saddles (5) O: The Godfather, Part II (13)</p>	<p><u>1973</u> Number of Films: 81 Total Presentations: 492 Average: 6.1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High Plains Drifter (53) 2. Serpico (34) 3. Live and Let Die (33) <p>\$: The Sting (17) O: The Sting (17)</p>	<p><u>1972</u> Number of Films: 67 Total Presentations: 407 Average: 6.1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Joe Kidd (50) 2. The Poseidon Adventure (28) 3. Blacula (25) <p>\$: The Godfather (12) O: The Godfather (12)</p>
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<p><u>1971</u> Number of Films: 64 Total Presentations: 533 Average: 8.3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Willard (44) 2. The Beguiled (31) 3. The French Connection (29) <p>\$: Fiddler on the Roof (8) O: The French Connection (29)</p>	<p><u>1970</u> Number of Films: 48 Total Presentations: 220 Average: 4.6</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Two Mules for Sister Sara (49) 2. Adios, Sabata (23) 3. Beneath the Planet of the Apes (20) <p>\$: Love Story (2) O: Patton (8)</p>	<p><u>1969</u> Number of Films: 74 Total Presentations: 536 Average: 7.2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. True Grit (71) 2. Once Upon a Time in the West (58) 3. The Italian Job (34) <p>\$: Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (29) O: Midnight Cowboy (16)</p>
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<p><u>1968</u> Number of Films: 72 Total Presentations: 337 Average: 4.7</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Night of the Living Dead (37) 2. Rosemary's Baby (27) 3. Bandolero (22) <p>\$: 2001: A Space Odyssey (4) O: Oliver! (3)</p>	<p><u>1967</u> Number of Films: 87 Total Presentations: 537 Average: 6.2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Guess Who's Coming to Dinner (53) 2. Hombre (40) 3. El Dorado (30) <p>\$: The Graduate (9) O: In the Heat of the Night (19)</p>	<p><u>1966</u> Number of Films: 73 Total Presentations: 396 Average: 4.7</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Night of the Grizzly (30) 2. Batman (24) 3. The Appaloosa (20) <p>\$: The Bible (2) O: A Man for All Seasons (1)</p>
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<p><u>1965</u> Number of Films: 95 Total Presentations: 397 Average: 4.2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thunderball (27) 2. The Great Sioux Massacre (25) 3. Arizona Raiders (24) <p>\$: The Sound of Music (0) O: The Sound of Music (0)</p>	<p><u>1964</u> Number of Films: 85 Total Presentations: 376 Average: 4.4</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Goldfinger (29) 2. Rio Conchos (26) 3. The Quick Gun (26) <p>\$: My Fair Lady (2) O: My Fair Lady (2)</p>	<p><u>1963</u> Number of Films: 65 Total Presentations: 270 Average: 4.2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Birds (35) 2. From Russia With Love (30) 3. McLintock! (28) <p>\$: Cleopatra (10) O: Tom Jones (1)</p>
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<p><u>1962</u> Number of Films: 81 Total Presentations: 204 Average: 2.5</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence (40) 2. Dr. No (30) 3. Requiem for a Heavyweight (14) <p>\$: Lawrence of Arabia (8) O: Lawrence of Arabia (8)</p>	<p><u>1961</u> Number of Films: 68 Total Presentations: 334 Average: 4.9</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. West Side Story (46) 2. The Last Sunset (46) 3. The Hustler (16) The Second Time Around (16) <p>\$: West Side Story (46) O: West Side Story (46)</p>	<p><u>1960</u> Number of Films: 68 Total Presentations: 361 Average: 5.6</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Psycho (65) 2. From the Terrace (23) 3. One Foot in Hell (22) <p>\$: Spartacus (2) O: The Apartment (10)</p>
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<p><u>1959</u> Number of Films: 87 Total Presentations: 342 Average: 3.9</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Gunfight at Dodge City (22) 2. Holiday for Lovers (21) 3. The Oregon Trail (18) <p>\$: Ben-Hur (2) O: Ben-Hur (2)</p>	<p><u>1958</u> Number of Films: 104 Total Presentations: 372 Average: 3.6</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Bravados (32) 2. Vertigo (20) 3. Cattle Empire (16) <p>\$: South Pacific (0) O: Gigi (2)</p>	<p><u>1957</u> Number of Films: 104 Total Presentations: 409 Average: 3.9</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Lonely Man (21) 2. The True Story of Jesse James (21) 3. Man in the Shadow (19) <p>\$: The Bridge on the River Kwai (13) O: The Bridge on the River Kwai (13)</p>
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<p><u>1956</u> Number of Films: 100 Total Presentations: 330 Average: 3.3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The King and I (23) 2. The Man Who Knew Too Much (21) 3. 23 Paces to Baker Street (17) <p>\$: The Ten Commandments (0) O: Around the World in 80 Days (9)</p>	<p><u>1955</u> Number of Films: 91 Total Presentations: 348 Average: 3.8</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. House of Bamboo (18) 2. Destry (17) 3. The Trouble with Harry (16) <p>\$: Cinerama Holiday (0) O: Marty (4)</p>	<p><u>1954</u> Number of Films: 81 Total Presentations: 381 Average: 4.7</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rear Window (33) 2. River of No Return (19) 3. Taza, Son of Cochise (18) <p>\$: Rear Window (33) O: On the Water Front (5)</p>
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<p><u>1953</u> Number of Films: 89 Total Presentations: 338 Average: 3.8</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shane (51) 2. Seminole (18) Hondo (18) 3. Stalag 17 (15) <p>\$: The Robe (0) O: From Here to Eternity (13)</p>	<p><u>1952</u> Number of Films: 93 Total Presentations: 238 Average: 2.6</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High Noon (15) 2. Way of the Gaucho (13) 3. Kansas City Confidential (11) <p>\$: The Greatest Show on Earth (0) O: The Greatest Show on Earth (0)</p>	<p><u>1951</u> Number of Films: 86 Total Presentations: 337 Average: 3.9</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rawhide (28) 2. Let's Make It Legal (19) 3. The Day the Earth Stood Still (16) <p>\$: Quo Vadis (2) O: An American in Paris (4)</p>
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<p><u>1950</u> Number of Films: 94 Total Presentations: 314 Average: 3.3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rio Grande (33) 2. Branded (21) 3. Sunset Boulevard (16) <p>\$: King Solomon's Mines (6) O: All About Eve (0)</p>	<p><u>1949</u> Number of Films: 99 Total Presentations: 284 Average: 2.9</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sands of Iwo Jima (29) 2. The Fighting Kentuckian (20) 3. Thieves' Highway (14) <p>\$: Samson and Delilah (8) O: All the King's Men (3)</p>	<p><u>1948</u> Number of Films: 96 Total Presentations: 228 Average: 2.4</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yellow Sky (22) 2. My Dear Secretary (17) 3. That Lady in Ermine (11) <p>\$: The Red Shoes (1) O: Hamlet (1)</p>
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<p><u>1947</u> Number of Films: 96 Total Presentations: 277 Average: 3.3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Red Stallion (39) 2. Captain from Castile (15) 3. Miracle on 34th Street (14) <p>\$: Unconquered (0) O: Gentleman's Agreement (0)</p>	<p><u>1946</u> Number of Films: 95 Total Presentations: 291 Average: 3.1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Down Missouri Way (20) 2. My Darling Clementine (16) 3. The Dark Corner (13) <p>\$: The Best Years of Our Lives (5) O: The Best Years of Our Lives (5)</p>	<p><u>1945</u> Number of Films: 87 Total Presentations: 171 Average: 2.0</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dakota (18) 2. Sherlock Holmes and the Woman in Green (17) 3. Flame of the Barbary Coast (12) <p>\$: The Bells of St. Mary's (2) O: The Lost Weekend (0)</p>
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<p><u>1944</u> Number of Films: 76 Total Presentations: 184 Average: 2.4</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pin Up Girl (12) 2. Can't Help Singing (12) 3. Jane Eyre (10) <p>\$: Going My Way (0) O: Going My Way (0)</p>	<p><u>1943</u> Number of Films: 87 Total Presentations: 192 Average: 2.2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shadow of Doubt (16) 2. Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman (9) 3. Crash Dive (7) <p>\$: For Whom the Bell Tolls (1) O: Casablanca* (Released 1942)</p>	<p><u>1942</u> Number of Films: 100 Total Presentations: 234 Average: 2.5</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Spoilers (25) 2. Flying Tigers (12) 3. Casablanca (8) Holiday Inn (8) <p>\$: Mrs. Miniver (2) O: Mrs. Miniver (2)</p>
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<p><u>1941</u> Number of Films: 116 Total Presentations: 265 Average: 2.3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Shepherd of the Hills (23) 2. Penny Serenade (15) 3. Riders of the Purple Sage (11) <p>\$: Sergeant York (3) O: How Green Was My Valley (8)</p>	<p><u>1940</u> Number of Films: 67 Total Presentations: 255 Average: 3.8</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Dark Command (20) 2. The Blue Bird (13) 3. His Girl Friday (9) <p>\$: Rebecca (0) O: Rebecca (0)</p>	<p><u>1939</u> Number of Films: 120 Total Presentations: 253 Average: 2.1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Destry Rides Again (16) 2. The Three Musketeers (13) 3. They Made Me a Criminal (10) <p>\$: Gone with the Wind (3) O: Gone with the Wind (3)</p>
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<p><u>1938</u> Number of Films: 88 Total Presentations: 156 Average: 1.8</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Lady Vanishes (9) 2. The Baroness and the Butler (8) 3. Holiday (5) <p>\$: Alexander's Ragtime Band (0) O: You Can't Take It with You (4)</p>	<p><u>1937</u> Number of Films: 101 Total Presentations: 185 Average: 1.8</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make Way for Tomorrow (7) 2. Born Reckless (7) 3. Maytime (6) <p>\$: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1) O: The Life of Emile Zola (2)</p>	<p><u>1936</u> Number of Films: 99 Total Presentations: 203 Average: 2.1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rhythm of the Range (16) 2. The Trail of the Lonesome Pine (12) 3. Stowaway (9) <p>\$: San Francisco (1) O: The Great Ziegfeld (3)</p>
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<p><u>1935</u> Number of Films: 93 Total Presentations: 208 Average: 2.2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bride of Frankenstein (24) 2. Call of the Wild (11) 3. The Lawless Frontier (7) <p>\$: Mutiny on the Bounty (1) O: Mutiny on the Bounty (1)</p>	<p><u>1934</u> Number of Films: 89 Total Presentations: 162 Average: 1.8</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Blue Steel (9) 2. Bright Eyes (6) 3. The Thin Man (6) <p>\$: The Merry Widow (5) O: It Happened One Night (5)</p>	<p><u>1933</u> Number of Films: 91 Total Presentations: 159 Average: 1.7</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cavalcade (7) 2. Little Women (6) King Kong (6) 3. Riders of Destiny (5) <p>\$: Cavalcade (7) O: Cavalcade (7)</p>
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<p><u>1932</u> Number of Films: 65 Total Presentations: 103 Average: 1.6</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Mummy (7) 2. Love Affair (5) 3. NA <p>\$: Shanghai Express (4) O: Grand Hotel (3)</p>	<p><u>1931</u> Number of Films: 43 Total Presentations: 95 Average: 2.2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Frankenstein (28) 2. Dracula (14) 3. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (5) <p>\$: Frankenstein (28) O: Cimarron (1)</p>	<p><u>1930</u> Number of Films: 28 Total Presentations: 34 Average: 1.2</p> <p>NA</p> <p>\$: Tom Sawyer (0) O: All Quiet on the Eastern Front (2)</p>
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<p><u>1929</u> Number of Films: 24 Total Presentations: 34 Average: 1.4</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Virginian (8) 2. Piccadilly (3) 3. NA <p>\$: The Broadway Melody (1) O: Wings (0)</p>	<p><u>1928</u> Number of Films: 7 Total Presentations: 8 Average: 1.1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. West of Zanzibar (2) 2. NA 3. NA <p>\$: The Singing Fool (0) O: NA</p>	<p><u>1927</u> Number of Films: 14 Total Presentations: 18 Average: 1.3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Spring Fever (2) The Unknown (2) 2. NA 3. NA <p>\$: The Jazz Singer (0) O: NA</p>
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The above data begs the question: How could popular films such as “Rebecca” (1944), “The Sound of Music” (1965), “Ben Hur” (1959), “Star Wars” (1977) and “Ghostbusters” (1984) barely register in this survey if at all?

Reasons vary:

1) Films Were Presented on Networks Not Surveyed

As noted, networks not included in this survey occasionally present films, but none to the extent that would impact this study. This is true even for networks that depart from their usual programming to televise film “marathons.” These include the repetition of a series of films and even the repetition of a single film, such as TNT’s 24-hour repetition of 1983’s “A Christmas Story.” The latter consisted of 12 presentations. By contrast, the 1983 film “Flashdance” was presented 62 times.

2) The TCM Business Model

Turner Classic Movies (TCM) repeats movies far less frequently than other networks. Instead, the network draws on its vast film library to feature a certain star, director, subject, theme, time and/or place. “The Maltese Falcon,” for instance, may be presented as one of several movies starring Mary Astor, or directed by John Huston, or set in San Francisco, or representative of film noir, etc. Although TMC does emphasize familiar titles in its programming, it rarely repeats a film in the same month let alone the same week.

Also, TCM’s business model extends to sponsoring film festivals, rereleases and CD sales. TCM, for instance, did not televise “The Sound of Music” in 2018 in order to sponsor the film’s rerelease in theaters. Unfortunately, the network’s additional profit centers do little to feed their films’ popularity. Most people who pay for CDs, festivals and rereleases of older films have seen the films already.

3) Franchise Profitability

Old but still active franchises best build viewer interest in new films by

televising recent films. Such is the case with Star Wars, which plans to release “Star Wars: Episode IX” in 2019. The franchise was dormant from 2008 until it released films in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018. This left little promotional need for films released in 1979, 1981, 1983, etc. Moreover, Star Wars benefits from deemphasizing its initial trilogy because all three films were produced before the advent of computer-generated imagery (CGI). This visual-effects technology has led science fiction and fantasy to become Hollywood’s top box office genres and makes Star Wars’ first three films prime remake candidates. But also important is the matter of tie-in revenue. Star Wars’ first six films grossed \$20 billion in tie-in merchandise sales. The franchise’s merchandise today is tied mostly into recent sequels.

4) **Remake Competition**

Rarely is a remake thought to be a classic. On the other hand, the popularity of films once thought classics usually suffer when remade. One reason is that remakes often are occasioned by technological advancement—silence to sound, black-and-white to color, special effects to CGI visual effects—which appeals to the younger audience. Also, a remake will feature stars with whom younger moviegoers better identify.

A remake can benefit an original when it debuts on television and the original is presented, usually by a competing network, to invite comparison. On the other hand, when HBO televised the 2016 remake of “Ghostbusters,” the 1984 original was nowhere to be seen save for CD. Of course, the Ghostbusters franchise was contemplating sequels to the 2016 version.

5) **Out-of-Favor Genre**

The popularity of a genre fluctuates. For instance, today’s least popular genre appears to be the ancient history epoch. This genre was the rage following World War II with films such as “Quo Vadis” (1951), “The Robe” (1953), “The Ten Commandments” (1956), “Ben Hur” (1959), “Sparticus” (1960), “King of Kings” (1961) and “Cleopatra” (1963). Investing heavily in

“production value”—CinemaScope, technicolor, multiple stars, casts of thousands, period costumes, lavish sets—these widescreen extravaganzas were Hollywood’s foremost answer to competition from television. It appears today that television is taking its revenge.

None of these explanations, however, alter the fact that a classic must be seen more than other films, and to be seen by more than other films, it must be presented more than other films. The one legitimate qualification to this rule is that presentation numbers should be adjusted to take into account our bias for films released during our lifetimes. Clear evidence of this bias is the fact that presentation numbers generally decline relative to the ages of films. Specifically, presentations of films released from 1980 to 1989 totaled 8,805, compared to 4,235 from 1970 to 1979, 3,748 from 1960 to 1969, 3,409 from 1950 to 1959, 2,381 from 1940 to 1949, and 1,558 from 1930 to 1939.

To assess a film’s “classic value,” we must adjust its number of presentations according to the number lifetimes today that existed at its release. To do this, we first look to the United States Census, which recorded population growth of 7.3 percent from 1930 to 1940, 14.5 percent from 1940 to 1950, 18.5 percent from 1950 to 1960, 13.4 percent from 1960 to 1970, 11.4 percent from 1970 to 1980 and 9.8 percent from 1980 to 1990. We will assume the bias factor between 1927 and 1930 is negligible.

The question now is: How should we compute incremental growth within each decade? Our solution is to divide each decade’s percentage growth by 10 and assign tenths of growth commensurate with a year’s second digit. For example, dividing by 10 the percentage growth between 1980 to 1990 gives us 0.98 percent. Therefore, the presentation numbers of films released in 1989 would be adjusted .98 percent lower than the presentation numbers of films released in 1988. Downward adjustments, of course, would also include the percentage of population growth between 1930 to 1980.

However, population growth alone does not give us the number of new lives added to the population. For a population to grow, it must first replace lives lost to death. Accordingly, the population growth percentage must be added to the death rate percentage to give us the percentage growth of new lives. Accordingly,

our formula for classics value is: $CV = \text{Presentation \#} \div \% \text{ Population Growth since 1930} + \% \text{ of Death Rate since 1930}$.

For instance, presentations of the 1931 film "Frankenstein" totaled 28. The preceding year, 1930, saw a death rate of .0113. This added to 1931's population growth of .0073 gives us an increase of .0186. This reduces 28 presentations to 27.4887 . . . $(28 \div 1.0186)$ or 27.49 when rounded off. (A table showing the figures used to calculate new lives appears at the end of this article.)

Here then are the 100 top American film classics according to 2018 film presentations. Those that were top-grossing films are designated with a \$. Those that won Oscars for best picture are designated with an O.

1. **Coming to America**
(1988) Comedy
Director: John Landis
Cast: Eddie Murphy, Arsenio Hall, James Earl Jones
CV: 65.46

2. **Back to the Future \$**
(1985) Science Fiction/Adventure
Director: Robert Zemeckis
Cast: Michael J. Fox, Christopher Lloyd, Lea Thompson
CV: 55.00

3. **Born on the Fourth of July**
(1989) Biography/War
Director: Oliver Stone
Cast: Tom Cruise, Kyra Sedgwick, Raymond Barry
CV: 54.11

4. **Scrooged**
(1988) Comedy
Director: Richard Donner
Cast: Bill Murray, Karen Allen, John Forsythe
CV: 52.37

5. **Grease \$**
(1978) Musical/Romance

Director: Randal Kleiser
Cast: John Travolta, Olivia Newton-John, Stockard Channing
CV: 51.80

6. **Beverly Hills Cop II**
(1987) Crime/Suspense
Director: Tony Scott
Cast: Eddie Murphy, Judge Reinhold, Jurgen Prochnow
CV: 45.75
7. **E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial \$**
(1982) Science Fiction/Family
Director: Steven Spielberg
Cast: Dee Wallace, Peter Coyote, Henry Thomas
CV: 45.39
8. **Back to the Future Part II**
(1989) Science Fiction/Adventure
Director: Robert Zemeckis
Cast: Michael J. Fox, Christopher Lloyd, Lea Thompson
CV: 39.16
9. **Psycho**
(1960) Horror/Mystery
Director: Alfred Hitchcock
Cast: Janet Leigh, Anthony Perkins, Vera Miles
CV: 37.99
10. **The Blues Brothers**
(1980) Musical/Comedy
Director: John Landis
Cast: John Belushi, Dan Aykroyd
CV: 37.78
11. **Conan the Barbarian**
(1982) Fantasy/Adventure
Director: John Millius
Cast: Arnold Schwarzenegger, James Earl Jones, Sandahl Bergman
CV: 37.60

12. **John Carpenter's The Thing**
(1982) Science Fiction/Suspense
Director: John Carpenter
Cast: Kurt Russell, Wilford Brimley, T.K. Carter
CV: 37.60

13. **Grease II**
(1982) Musical/Romance
Director: Patricia Birch
Cast: Michelle Pfeiffer, Maxwell Caulfield, Lorna Luft
CV: 37.14

14. **True Grit**
(1969) Western
Director: Henry Hathaway
Cast: John Wayne, Kim Darby, Glen Campbell
CV: 37.03

15. **Road House**
(1989) Action/Thriller
Director: Rowdy Herrington
Cast: Patrick Swayze, Kelly Lynch, Sam Elliott
CV: 35.50

16. **Platoon O**
(1986) War
Director: Oliver Stone
Cast: Tom Berenger, William DeFoe, Charlie Sheen
CV: 33.71

17. **Shane**
(1953) Western
Director: George Stevens
Cast: Alan Ladd, Jean Arthur, Van Heflin
CV: 33.65

18. **Annie**
(1982) Musical/Family
Director: John Huston
Cast: Aileen Quinn, Albert Finney, Ann Reinking
CV: 33.01

19. **Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan**
(1982) Science Fiction
Director: Nicholas Meyer
Cast: William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, DeForest Kelley
CV: 33.01

20. **The War of the Roses**
(1989) Romance/Comedy
Director: Danny DeVito
Cast: Michael Douglas, Kathleen Turner, Danny DeVito
CV: 32.03

21. **Leviathan**
(1989) Action/Thriller
Director: George Cosmatos
Cast: Peter Weller, Richard Crenna, Amanda Pays
CV: 31.17

22. **The Deer Hunter**
(1978) Drama/War
Director: Michael Cimino
Cast: Robert De Niro, John Cazale, John Savage
CV: 30.42

23. **Nine to Five**
(1980) Comedy
Director: Colin Higgins
Cast: Lily Tomlin, Dolly Parton, Dabney Coleman
CV: 30.32

24. **Once Upon a Time in the West**
(1969) Western
Director: Sergio Leone
Cast: Claudia Cardinale, Henry Fonda, Jason Robards
CV: 30.25

25. **Star Trek: The Motion Picture**
(1979) Science Fiction
Director: Robert Wise
Cast: William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, DeForest Kelley

CV: 30.13

26. **Predator**

(1987) Science Fiction, Action, Adventure

Director: John McTiernan

Cast: Arnold Schwarzenegger, Carl Weathers, Jesse Ventura

CV: 29.92

27. **Footloose**

(1984) Drama/Romance

Director: Herbert Ross

Cast: Kevin Bacon, Lori Singer, John Lithgow

CV: 29.76

28. **Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home**

(1986) Science Fiction

Director: Leonard Nimoy

Cast: William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, DeForest Kelley

CV: 29.72

29. **Die Hard**

(1988) Crime/Action

Director: John McTiernan

Cast: Bruce Willis, Alan Rickman, Bonnie Bedelia

CV: 29.67

30. **Planes, Trains, and Automobiles**

(1987) Comedy

Director: John Hughes

Cast: Steve Martin, John Candy, Kevin Bacon

CV: 29.48

31. **Weekend at Bernie's**

(1989) Crime/Adventure

Director: Ted Kotcheff

Cast: Andrew McCarthy, Jonathan Silverman, Catherine Stewart

CV: 29.44

32. **The Verdict**

(1982) Drama

Director: Sidney Lumet

Cast: Paul Newman, James Mason, Charlotte Rampling
CV: 29.35

33. Star Trek III: The Search for Spock

(1984) Science Fiction

Director: Leonard Nimoy

Cast: William Shatner, DeForest Kelley, James Doohan

CV: 29.31

34. Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

(1967) Drama

Director: Stanley Kramer

Cast: Spencer Tracey, Sidney Poitier, Katharine Hepburn

CV: 28.32

35. The Red Stallion

(1947) Western/Sports

Director: Lesley Selander

Cast: Robert Paige, Noreen Nash, Ted Donaldson

CV: 28.20

36. Flashdance

(1983) Romance/Drama

Director: Adrian Lyne

Cast: Jennifer Beals, Michael Nouri, Lilia Skala

CV: 28.19

37. Star Trek V: The Final Frontier

(1989) Science Fiction

Director: William Shatner

Cast: William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, DeForest Kelley

CV: 28.14

38. The Eiger Sanction

(1975) Action/Adventure

Director: Clint Eastwood

Cast: Clint Eastwood, George Kennedy, Vonetta McGee

CV: 27.89

39. RoboCop

(1987) Crime/Science Fiction

Director: Jose Padilha
Cast: Joel Kinnaman, Gary Oldman, Michael Keaton
CV: 27.72

40. **Frankenstein** \$

(1931) Science Fiction/Horror
Director: James Whale
Cast: Colin Clive, Mae Clark, Boris Karloff
CV: 27.49

41. **Rain Man** \$ O

(1988) Drama
Director: Barry Levinson
Cast: Dustin Hoffman, Tom Cruise
CV: 27.49

42. **Tightrope**

(1984) Crime/Mystery
Director: Richard Tuggle
Cast: Clint Eastwood, Genevieve Bujold, Dan Hedaya
CV: 27.06

43. **West Side Story** \$ O

(1961) Crime/Musical
Director: Robert Wise, Jerome Robbins
Cast: Natalie Wood, Richard Beymer, Rita Moreno
CV: 26.53

44. **The Last Sunset**

(1961) Western
Director: Robert Aldrich
Cast: Rock Hudson, Kirk Douglas, Dorothy Malone
CV: 26.53

45. **High Plains Drifter**

(1973) Western
Director: Clint Eastwood
Cast: Clint Eastwood, Verna Bloom, Marianna Hill
CV: 26.47

46. **Crimes and Misdemeanors**
(1989) Comedy/Drama
Director: Woody Allen
Cast: Alan Alda, Woody Allen
CV: 26.41
47. **Rocky**
(1976) Drama/Sports
Director: John Avildsen
Cast: Sylvester Stallone, Talia Shire, Burt Young
CV: 26.16
48. **The Mighty Quinn**
(1989) Crime/Mystery
Director: Carl Schenkel
Cast: Denzel Washington, James Fox, Mimi Rogers
CV: 25.97
49. **The Princess Bride**
(1987) Fantasy/Romance
Director: Rob Reiner
Cast: Cary Elwes, Mandy Patinkin, Chris Sarandon
CV: 25.96
50. **La Bamba**
(1987) Biography/Drama
Director: Luis Valdez
Cast: Lou Diamond Phillips, Esai Morales, Danielle von Zerneck
CV: 25.96
51. **Two Mules for Sister Sara**
(1970) Western
Director: Don Siegel
Cast: Clint Eastwood, Shirley MacLaine
CV: 25.26
52. **Joe Kidd**
(1972) Western
Director: John Sturges
Cast: Clint Eastwood, Robert Duvall, John Saxon
CV: 25.23

53. **Major League**
(1989) Sports/Comedy
Director: David Ward
Cast: Charlie Sheen, Tom Berenger, Corbin Bernsen
CV: 25.11
54. **The Great Outdoors**
(1988) Family/Comedy
Director: Howard Deutch
Cast: Dan Aykroyd, John Candy, Catherine Stewart
CV: 24.87
55. **Aliens**
(1986) Science Fiction
Director: James Cameron
Cast: Sigourney Weaver, Carrie Henn, Paul Reiser
CV: 24.84
56. **Top Gun \$**
(1986) Action/Drama
Director: Tony Scott
Cast: Tom Cruise, Kelly McGillis, Val Kilmer
CV: 24.40
57. **Conan the Destroyer**
(1984) Fantasy/Adventure
Director: Richard Fleischer
Cast: Arnold Schwarzenegger, Grace Jones
CV: 24.35
58. **The Electric Horseman**
(1979) Romance
Director: Sydney Pollack
Cast: Robert Redford, Jane Fonda, Valerie Perrine
CV: 24.01
59. **The Warriors**
(1979) Crime/Suspense
Director: Walter Hill

Cast: Michael Beck, James Remar, Dorsey Wright
CV: 23.54

60. **Psycho II**

(1983) Crime/Mystery
Director: Richard Franklin
Cast: Anthony Perkins, Vera Miles, Meg Tilly
CV: 23.43

61. **Revenge of the Nerds**

(1984) Comedy
Director: Jeff Kanew
Cast: Robert Carradine, Anthony Edwards
CV: 23.30

62. **Dracula**

(1979) Horror/Romance
Director: John Badham
Cast: Frank Langella, Lawrence Olivier, Kate Nelligan
CV: 23.07

63. **Rio Grande**

(1950) Western
Director: John Ford
Cast: John Wayne, Maureen O'Hara, Ben Johnson
CV: 23.06

64. **Alien**

(1979) Science Fiction/Horror
Director: Ridley Scott
Cast: Tom Skerritt, Sigourney Weaver
CV: 23.07

65. **Tron**

(1982) Science Fiction/Adventure
Director: Steven Lisberger
Cast: Jeff Bridges, Bruce Boxleitner, David Warner
CV: 22.93

66. **The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence**

(1962) Western

Director: John Ford
Cast: James Stewart, John Wayne, Vera Miles, Lee Marvin
CV: 22.77

67. **Christine**

(1983) Horror
Director: John Carpenter
Cast: Keith Gordon, John Stockwell, Alexandra Paul
CV: 22.74

68. **The Golden Child**

(1986) Fantasy
Director: Michael Ritchie
Cast: Eddie Murphy, Charlotte Lewis, Charles Dance
CV: 22.18

69. **Bride of Frankenstein**

(1935) Science Fiction/Horror
Director: James Whale
Cast: Boris Karloff, Elsa Lanchester, Colin Clive
CV: 21.99

70. **Raging Bull**

(1980) Sports Biography
Director: Martin Scorsese
Cast: Robert De Niro, Kathy Moriarty, Joe Pesci
CV: 21.92

71. **American Gigolo**

(1980) Crime/Mystery
Director: Paul Schrader
Cast: Richard Gere, Lauren Hutton, Hector Elizondo
CV: 21.92

72. **Overboard**

(1987) Romance/Drama
Director: Garry Marshall
Cast: Goldie Hawn, Kurt Russell, Edward Herrmann
CV: 21.56

73. **Jaws** \$
(1975) Adventure/Suspense
Director: Steven Spielberg
Cast: Roy Scheider, Robert Shaw, Richard Dreyfuss
CV: 21.53
74. **Weird Science**
(1985) Science Fiction
Director: John Hughes
Cast: Anthony Michael Hall, Ilan Mitchell-Smith, Kelly LeBrock
CV: 21.47
75. **Rear Window** \$
(1954) Crime/Mystery
Director: Alfred Hitchcock
Cast: James Stewart, Grace Kelly, Wendell Corey
CV: 21.38
76. **Hombre**
(1967) Western
Director: Martin Ritt
Cast: Paul Newman, Fredric March, Richard Boone
CV: 21.37
77. **The Natural**
(1984) Sports/Drama
Director: Barry Levinson
Cast: Robert Redford, Robert Duvall, Glenn Close
CV: 21.19
78. **Fletch**
(1985) Comedy/Mystery
Director: Michael Ritchie
Cast: Chevy Chase, Dana Wheeler-Nicholson, Joe Don Baker
CV: 21.02
79. **Urban Cowboy**
(1980) Western/Romance
Director: James Bridges
Cast: John Travolta, Debra Winger, Scott Glenn
CV: 20.99

80. **Willard**
(1971) Science Fiction/Horror
Director: Daniel Ward
Cast: Bruce Davison, Elsa Lanchester, Ernest Borgnine
CV: 20.91
81. **The Fabulous Baker Boys**
(1989) Romance/Drama
Director: Steve Kloves
Cast: Jeff Bridges, Beau Bridges, Michelle Pfeiffer
CV: 20.78
82. **D.A.R.Y.L.**
(1985) Science Fiction/Family
Director: Simon Wincer
Cast: Mary Beth Hurt, Michael McKean, Kathryn Walker
CV: 20.57
83. **The Naked Gun: From the Files of Police Squad**
(1988) Comedy
Director: David Zucker
Cast: Leslie Nielsen, Priscilla Presley, Ricardo Montalban
CV: 20.51
84. **National Lampoon's Animal House**
(1978) Comedy
Director: John Landis
Cast: Tim Matheson, John Belushi, John Vernon
CV: 20.44
85. **Sands of Iwo Jima**
(1949) War
Director: Allan Dwan
Cast: John Wayne, John Agar, Forrest Tucker
CV: 20.61
86. **Fletch Lives**
(1989) Mystery/Comedy
Director: Michael Ritchie
Cast: Chevy Chase, Hal Holbrook, Julianne Phillips

CV: 20.35

87. The Breakfast Club

(1985) Comedy/Drama

Director: John Hughes

Cast: Molly Ringwald, Judd Nelson, Anthony Michael Hall

CV: 20.13

88. Private Benjamin

(1980) Comedy

Director: Howard Zieff

Cast: Goldie Hahn, Eileen Brennan, Robert Webber

CV: 20.06

89. Cocktail

(1988) Family Comedy

Director: Roger Donaldson

Cast: Tom Cruise, Bryan Brown

CV: 20.04

90. Dead Calm

(1989) Suspense/Horror

Director: Phillip Noyce

Cast: Sam Neill, Nicole Kidman, Billy Zane

CV: 19.91

91. The Spoilers

(1942) Western

Director: Ray Enright

Cast: Marlene Dietrich, Randolph Scott, John Wayne

CV: 19.87

92. The Birds

(1963) Mystery/Horror

Director: Alfred Hitchcock

Cast: Rod Taylor, Tippi Hedren, Jessica Tandy

CV: 19.66

93. Night of the Living Dead

(1968) Horror

Director: George Romero

Cast: Judith O'Dea, Duane Jones, Keith Wayne
CV: 19.64

94. **Psycho III**

(1986) Mystery/Horror
Director: Anthony Perkins
Cast: Anthony Perkins, Diana Scarwild, Jeff Fahey
CV: 19.52

95. **Invasion of the Body Snatchers**

(1978) Science Fiction/Horror
Director: Philip Kaufman
Cast: Donald Sutherland, Brooke Adams, Leonard Nimoy
CV: 19.48

96. **The Bravados**

(1958) Western
Director: Henry King
Cast: Gregory Peck, Joan Collins, Stephen Boyd
CV: 19.44

97. **Nighthawks**

(1981) Crime/Suspense
Director: Bruce Malmuth, Gary Nelson
Cast: Sylvester Stallone, Billy Dee Williams, Rutger Hauer
CV: 19.41

98. **Rawhide**

(1951) Western
Director: Henry Hathaway
Cast: Tyrone Power, Susan Hayward, Hugh Marlowe
CV: 19.31

99. **Fast Times at Ridgemont High**

(1982) Comedy/Drama
Director: Amy Heckerling
Cast: Sean Penn, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Judge Reinhold
CV: 19.26

100. **The Shepherd of the Hills**
 (1941) Western/Romance
 Director: Henry Hathaway
 Cast: John Wayne, Betty Field, Harry Carey
 CV: 18.66

—The End—

Data Below

Table for Calculating New Lives

Year	Base	Death Rate (Prev. Year)	Pop. Growth	Divisor
1930:	1 +	.0000 +	.0000 =	1.0000
1931:	1 +	.0113 +	.0073 =	1.0186
1932:	1 +	.0224 +	.0146 =	1.0370
1933:	1 +	.0333 +	.0219 =	1.0552
1934:	1 +	.0440 +	.0292 =	1.0732
1935:	1 +	.0551 +	.0365 =	1.0916
1936:	1 +	.0660 +	.0438 =	1.1098
1937:	1 +	.0776 +	.0511 =	1.1287
1938:	1 +	.0889 +	.0584 =	1.1473
1939:	1 +	.0995 +	.0657 =	1.1652
1940:	1 +	.1101 +	.0730 =	1.1831
1941:	1 +	.1209 +	.0875 =	1.2084
1942:	1 +	.1314 +	.1020 =	1.2334
1943:	1 +	.1417 +	.1165 =	1.2582
1944:	1 +	.1526 +	.1310 =	1.2836
1945:	1 +	.1632 +	.1455 =	1.3087
1960:	1 +	.3082 +	.4030 =	1.7112
1961:	1 +	.3177 +	.4164 =	1.7341
1962:	1 +	.3272 +	.4298 =	1.7570
1963:	1 +	.3367 +	.4432 =	1.7799
1964:	1 +	.3463 +	.4566 =	1.8039
1965:	1 +	.3557 +	.4700 =	1.8257
1966:	1 +	.3651 +	.4834 =	1.8485
1967:	1 +	.3746 +	.4968 =	1.8714
1968:	1 +	.3840 +	.5102 =	1.8942
1969:	1 +	.3937 +	.5236 =	1.9173
1970:	1 +	.4032 +	.5370 =	1.9402
1971:	1 +	.4127 +	.5484 =	1.9611
1972:	1 +	.4220 +	.5598 =	1.9818
1973:	1 +	.4314 +	.5712 =	2.0026
1974:	1 +	.4407 +	.5826 =	2.0233
1975:	1 +	.4498 +	.5940 =	2.0438

1946: $1 + .1738 + .1600 = 1.3338$	1976: $1 + .4586 + .6054 = 2.0640$
1947: $1 + .1838 + .1745 = 1.3583$	1977: $1 + .4674 + .6168 = 2.0754$
1948: $1 + .1939 + .1890 = 1.3829$	1978: $1 + .4760 + .6282 = 2.1042$
1949: $1 + .2036 + .2035 = 1.4071$	1979: $1 + .4845 + .6366 = 2.1241$
1950: $1 + .2133 + .2180 = 1.4313$	1980: $1 + .4930 + .6510 = 2.1440$
1951: $1 + .2229 + .2365 = 1.4594$	1981: $1 + .5017 + .6608 = 2.1635$
1952: $1 + .2326 + .2550 = 1.4876$	1982: $1 + .5103 + .6706 = 2.1809$
1953: $1 + .2422 + .2735 = 1.5157$	1983: $1 + .5188 + .6804 = 2.1992$
1954: $1 + .2518 + .2920 = 1.5438$	1984: $1 + .5274 + .6902 = 2.2176$
1955: $1 + .2610 + .3185 = 1.5795$	1985: $1 + .5360 + .7000 = 2.2360$
1956: $1 + .2703 + .3290 = 1.5895$	1986: $1 + .5447 + .7098 = 2.2545$
1957: $1 + .2797 + .3475 = 1.6275$	1987: $1 + .5534 + .7196 = 2.2730$
1958: $1 + .2893 + .3660 = 1.6553$	1988: $1 + .5621 + .7294 = 2.2915$
1959: $1 + .2988 + .3845 = 1.6833$	1989: $1 + .5709 + .7392 = 2.3101$