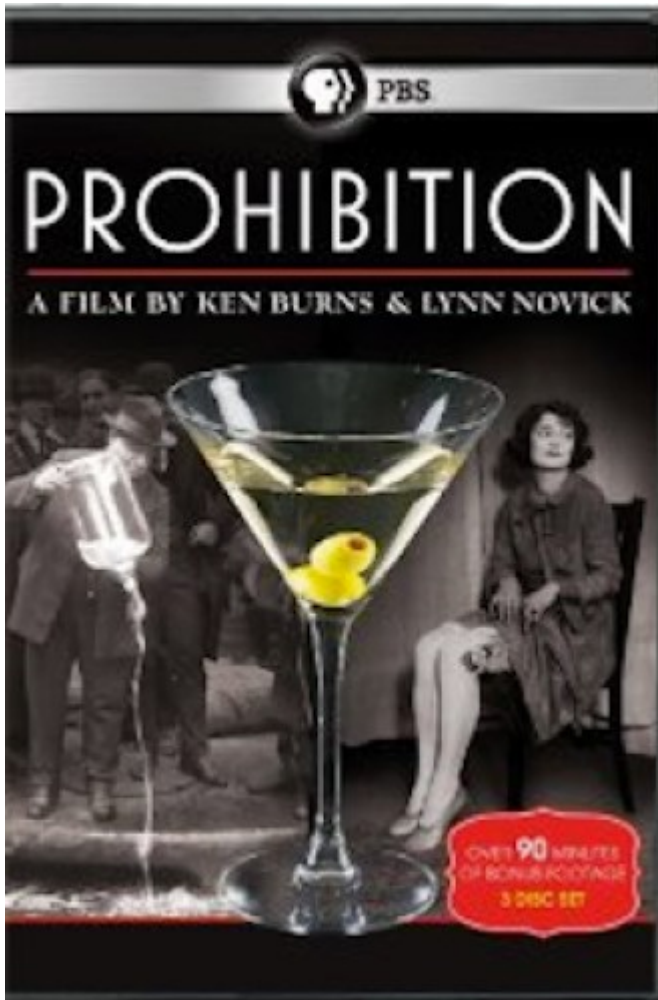


CC recommends: TV on DVD

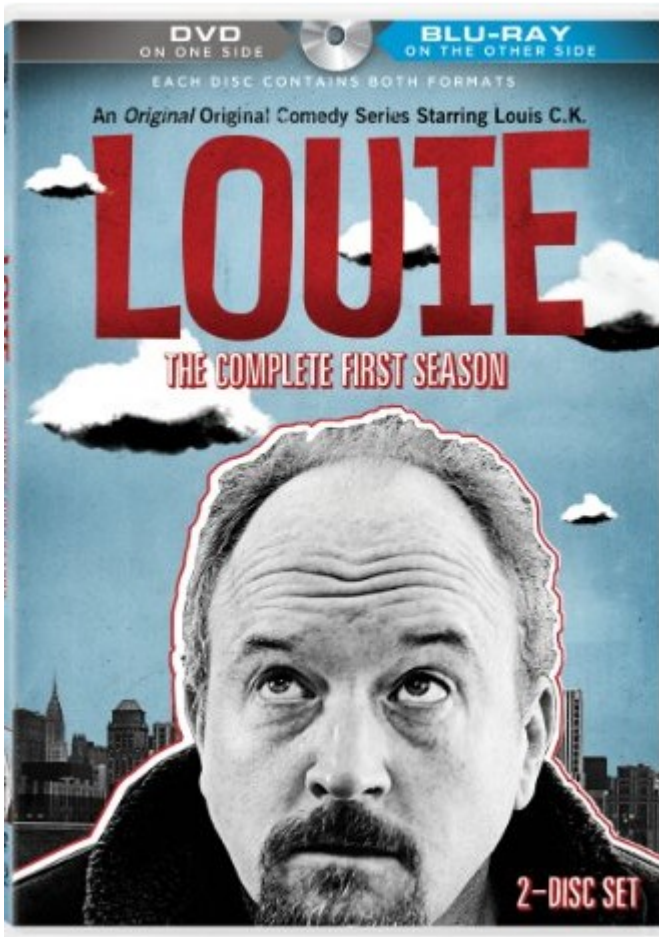
selected by [Ruth Graham](#) in the [December 13, 2011](#) issue

In Review



Prohibition

PBS



Louie

FX



The Middle

Warner

modern **family**
the complete second season



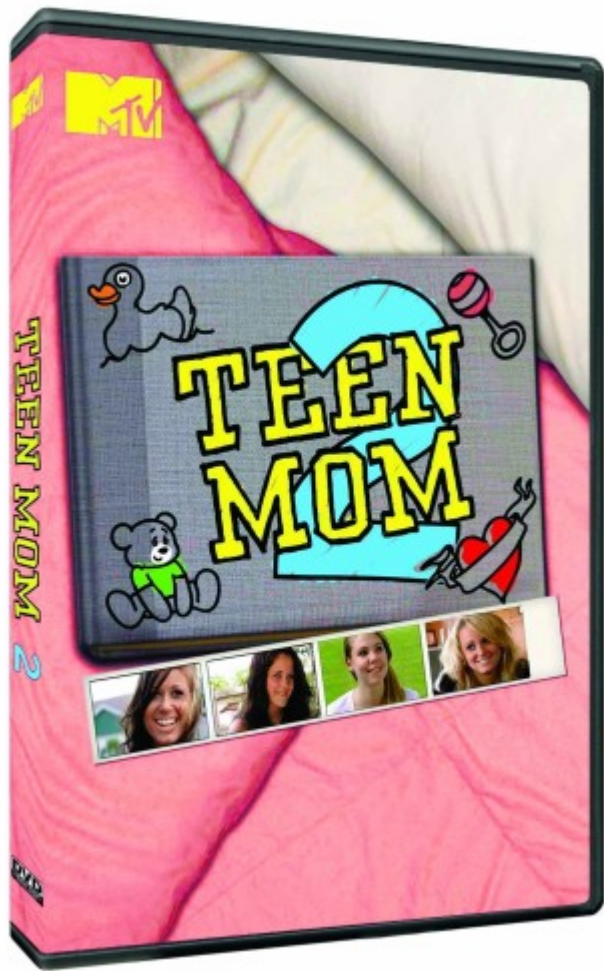
Modern Family

20th Century Fox



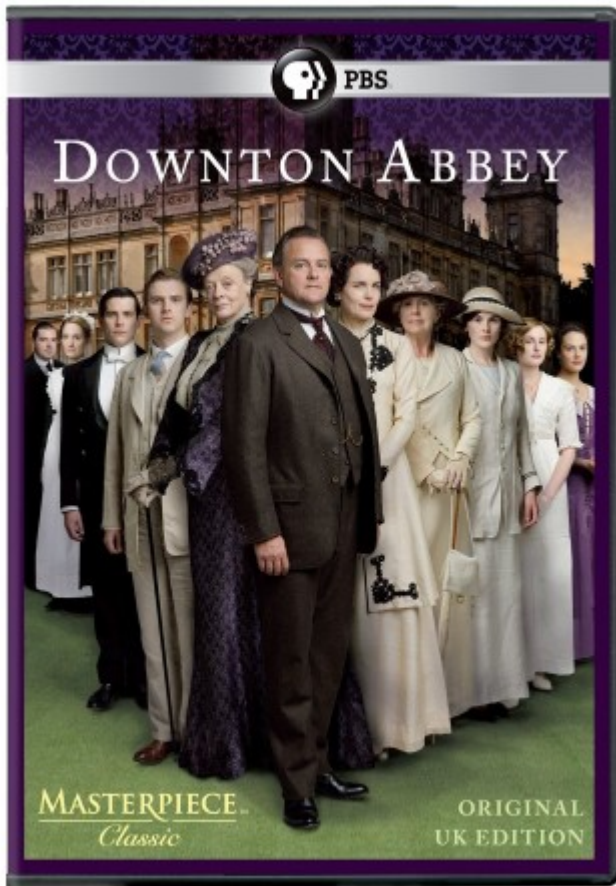
Portlandia

Video Service Corp.



Teen Mom 2

MTV



Downton Abbey

PBS

Prohibition. Ken Burns's three-part, five-hour PBS documentary on America's misguided experiment with enforced teetotaling deftly explores the conflicts between rural and urban, native and immigrant, Protestant and Catholic, women and men. It's also swift and lively from start to finish: compared to some of the filmmaker's other long-form forays into big American subjects, *Prohibition* goes down as easy as Tennessee whiskey.

Louie (Season One). Comedian Louis C.K. serves as creator, director, sole writer and star of the gloomy comedy that bears his name. Like his namesake, onscreen Louie is a stand-up comic and devoted single father in New York City. The camera follows him as he works, trades crass jokes with his comedian friends and takes care of his two daughters. It's the darkest, sweetest show about parenting on TV.

The Middle (Season Two). Like syndication staple *The King of Queens*, ABC's *The Middle* is a solid, gentle family sitcom that can't get no respect from tastemakers. And in contrast to, say, *Everybody Loves Raymond*—which also starred *The Middle* mom Patricia Heaton—the members of the struggling middle-class Heck family actually seem to like each other. The series isn't edgy or buzzed about, but it's funny and slightly weird—and refreshing in its portrayal of a family that works.

Modern Family (Season Two). Unlike its network neighbor *The Middle*, *Modern Family* gets plenty of critical recognition—and for good reason. The whip-smart sitcom follows three branches of an extended family that is diverse in age, race, sexual orientation and parenting style. The show uses a loose mockumentary style to construct a tight half hour jam-packed with jokes, including plenty of old-fashioned physical comedy. *Modern Family* is what the phrase "fun for the whole family" was created for.

Portlandia (Season One). A loving send-up of earnest West Coast progressivism at its most self-satisfied, *Portlandia* skewers its subject via sketches that veer into the absurd: a couple so concerned with the provenance of their meal that they abruptly leave the restaurant to visit a farm; a pair of hipsters so desperate to prove their cultural savvy that they just end up shouting "Did you read ___?" "Yes, did you read ___?" at each other over coffee. The IFC show's creators and stars are Fred Armisen, who plays President Obama on *Saturday Night Live*, and Portland musician Carrie Brownstein, whose new band, Wild Flag, is just what the residents of *Portlandia* would be talking about down at the feminist bookstore. Well, that and *Portlandia*.

Teen Mom 2 (Season One). Don't be thrown by the *Reefer Madness*-esque title or the fact that *Teen Mom 2* is a reality show produced by MTV. It's also a riveting and respectfully told cautionary tale. Over the course of the season, the producers follow four young mothers as they struggle with motherhood, school and work—and with relationships with their parents and the almost universally feckless fathers of their children. Why do some girls seem destined for stability, while others linger in cycles of irresponsibility and abuse? To its credit, the show doesn't spell out an answer, but it also doesn't shy away from issues of class and character. The series, the second spinoff from the show *16 and Pregnant*, features slightly more extreme story lines than its predecessors—it includes a couple with twins who rush into marriage and then divorce—but it's still worth watching as that rarest of specimens: reality television that makes you cry with, not laugh at, its stars.

Downton Abbey (Season One). This ITV series aired in the States on *Masterpiece Classic*; appropriately enough, it's a masterpiece and an instant classic. Created and mostly written by *Gosford Park* scribe Julian Fellowes, *Downton Abbey* takes place in a rambling English mansion at the start of the Great War. One thread of the upstairs-downstairs plot follows the Earl of Grantham, who is noble in both senses of the word, and his three daughters, whose gender prevents them from inheriting the property. Meanwhile, the house's huge staff struggles with its own dramas of work and love. Psychologically complex and beautifully modern, this is costume drama at its best.